

# PGO Newsletter No 2

October 2001

Dear Friends,

Pinchgut Opera -  
Sydney's new chamber  
opera company announces  
its first production  
December 4, 6, 7 & 9 2002  
- Handel's *Semele*

Our preparations for the December 2002 production of *Semele* are moving along at a great pace. Yes, 2002 is the correct date. We had a few inquiries after the first newsletter, about whether 2002 was a misprint and other inquiries about how to buy tickets! The Recital Hall is booked and we will let our newsletter people know about tickets before anyone else, but not just yet! Building a new opera company needs at least two years work and we thought you might like to enjoy sharing the adventure with us. So we are letting you know about all the preparations. Singers, players and production need a long lead time and we have many things just about in place now.

We'll tell you a bit about our principal artists in each newsletter and what better way to start than with *Semele* herself.

## Anna Ryberg



We are delighted to announce that Anna Ryberg will sing *Semele*. Anna, born in Sweden, grew up in Sydney and studied at the Conservatorium. She graduated in 1995 and left for the UK where she studied at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. She has just sung *Barbarina* with the Nederlands Opera under Edo de Waart. This is her first engagement back in Australia and we are very excited to let Australian audiences hear her again. Viewers of Jonathan Miller's *OperaWorks* series – screened on ABC TV and SBS - may remember her as *Susanna*, *Poppea* and *Carmen*.

Anna will make a vibrant *Semele* and is already working towards this. The role needs a singer of agility, flexibility and heaps of personality with a beautiful warm voice and an ability to send herself up!

In each newsletter we will also bring you some details about one of the principal creative people in the production.

## Anna McDonald



Anna McDonald leads *Sirius*, the period instrument orchestra that will be playing in *Semele*. Anna is one of Australia's leading freelance violinists and with, Erin Helyard is co-artistic director of Pinchgut Opera.

Anna returned to Australia in 1998 after living and playing in London for 10 years. While in the UK, Anna toured and recorded with most of the well-known period instrument orchestras, including Sir John Eliot Gardiner's English Baroque Soloists.

By the time Anna decided to return to Australia, she was leader of both the Hanover Band and Paul McCreesh's *Gabrieli Consort and Players*. She returns to the UK most years to work with McCreesh in one of the *Gabrieli* group's major projects. In April 2002 Anna will lead the ensemble in a European tour and recording of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*.

When Anna decided to come home, she wanted very much to help broaden the baroque and classical music scene in Australia. But she also wanted to teach and pass on her passion for playing on period instruments. "Although I had been playing violin for many years before I picked up a baroque instrument" Anna explains,

"suddenly music began to make sense to me in a way that it never had before. Certainly Bach, Handel and the wealth of baroque composers sound more exciting on period instruments, but even Beethoven's quartets open up new insights when played with gut strings and a classical, rather than a modern setup."

It is no surprise, then, that one of Anna's projects is to establish a period instrument string quartet.

Anna plays a 1690 Grancino violin but is impatiently looking forward to working with a new classical instrument being made for her by her partner, violin maker Simon Brown. She lives in Sydney with Simon and their daughter Charlotte.

If you want to get to know Semele here are the available existing recordings :-

John Nelson with English Chamber Orchestra

John Eliot Gardiner with Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists

These can be ordered from Fish Fine Music at 350 George St, City, or Michael's Music Room in the Town Hall Arcade (near Town Hall station). Remember that the best recording is going to be made after this production!

## *Pinchgut hits the press*

You may have seen a very nice article about us in the Sydney Morning Herald recently. For those of you who didn't see it we re-print some of the story.

“Opera company drops the subtitles, oozes sex appeal to lure home a lost generation”

The founders of Sydney's newest opera company have a dream. Opera becomes the sexy and accessible art form of choice for a generation of young concert-goers. The audience won't need opera glasses and tickets will be cheap. It will lure home young Australian classical singers to sing the works of the lesser masters. It will be funky, flamboyant and, above all, fun.

Erin Helyard, 23, intends Pinchgut Opera, Sydney's newest chamber opera company, to fulfil this brief. The acclaimed harpsichordist, co-founder of the new period orchestra Sirius Ensemble, is part of a cabal of musicians and music lovers who have set up the company to bring opera into smaller, more intimate and accessible settings.

With his co-musical director, the baroque violinist Anna McDonald, the conductor Antony Walker, the chairwoman Elizabeth Nielsen and the arts administrator Alison Johnston, Helyard will bring Handel's Semele to Sydney audiences at the City Recital Hall at Angel Place next year. It is a fun, sexy work, just right for the city's temperament, says the group, which has a dual rescue mission to revive a lost repertoire of 18th century work and bring young Australian talent home to sing.

Helyard, in particular, is passionate about baroque opera, something Sydney audiences see little of. He wants to inject more fun and accessibility into opera culture, bringing the 30-piece period orchestra out of the pit and on to the stage, and doing away with subtitles and opera glasses. Then there's the enjoyable challenge of breathing life back into the works of less well-known composers such as the German master Johann Hasse.

If you would like to see the whole article – read it at <http://www.smh.com.au/news/0110/23/text/national20.html>

In the next newsletter we'll introduce you to our Jupiter, and to Erin Helyard – Anna McDonald's co-artistic director in Sirius.

Please stay in touch with us if you have any questions, suggestions or comments.

Please relay this newsletter to any friends who might be interested or, better still, let us have their email addresses so we can add them to the list. Keep an eye on our website – [www.pinchgutopera.com.au](http://www.pinchgutopera.com.au) as we get it up and running.

With best regards,  
Elizabeth Nielsen,

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