

# PGO Newsletter No 4

February 2002

Dear Friends,

2002 The year of Pinchgut Opera!

All the singers and players are engaged and the director and designer have presented their ideas. Some people have asked if this is a concert version. The answer is no. How will it be staged in an intimate hall without a proscenium? You will have to wait and see. Tantalizing?

## *Semele*

City Recital Hall, Angel  
Place Sydney on 4, 6, 7  
and 9 December 2002 at  
7.30 pm

## News

We are very happy to announce that the roles of Cadmus and Somnus will be sung by Stephen Bennett. These roles are written for a true bass and need someone with great stage presence. Have a look at Somnus's very funny half awake- aria "Leave me, loathsome light, Receive me, silent night" for an idea of the role of the god. Stephen has, as well as a glorious voice, has a wealth of experience in opera and the concert hall and we are delighted that he will be joining us.

This month we profile Sally-Anne Russell and Angus Wood.

## Sally-Anne Russell – Juno/Ino



Eagle-eyed concert goers will have noticed that Sally-Anne has had her Pinchgut Opera engagement listed in the programme notes for her concerts since half way through last year. Most of the action in *Semele* is seen from Juno's point of view, and so she is in many ways the chief protagonist in the work.

Sally-Anne came to singing via early training as a dancer. Enrolled in a Children's Theatre Company in Adelaide, the then Musical Director encouraged her to learn after hearing her sing. A knee injury when she was fourteen put an end to her dancing career, but she kept on with the singing – reluctant to lose touch

with the world of musical theatre. She studied singing at Adelaide University, and at the end of her B.Mus auditioned for and was accepted into Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera* as a 'swing' which meant that she covered seven roles during her run with the show (about two and a half years). A chance encounter with Linnhe Robertson earned her a place in the Young Artists Program at the Victoria State Opera, and culminated in her winning an award to study in Vienna for a year.

Her interest in early music dates from around this time, when she became interested in the different performing skills needed for different kinds of repertoire.

Sally-Anne's ideal existence would be to spend six months working in Australia, and six months working overseas – something that she is already very close to achieving. This year she will be working with Bruno Weil in America, and she has engagements in the Netherlands and Canada, as well as with many of the major musical organizations in Australia.

We are looking forward to seeing the dual roles of Juno and Ino in her very capable hands.

## *Angus Wood - Jupiter*



Semele-goers will be able to witness something very interesting at the first performance - Angus Wood's Australian debut as a tenor. Australian audiences have been used to seeing him in many successful baritone roles - Count Boni, Figaro, Schaunard and Pelleas to name a few; so his debut in the role of Jupiter will be something to remember.

Wood describes himself as "a real multicultural Australian". His Sri Lankan mother was born in Malaysia, his father is a Scot and the family lives in Melbourne, where Angus was born. In between, he and his brothers grew up in London, where Angus learned to play

violin from his mother and eventually won a singing scholarship to the Royal College of Music. He graduated as a Bachelor of Music from Melbourne University, spent two years with the Victoria State Opera, before moving to Sydney with Opera Australia's Young Artists program.

Angus describes the process of change as "more psychological than anything else. It's a bit of a rebalancing act - tenors think very differently from baritones. I'm not a natural tenor, I'm right in-between voice types, but in opera there aren't that many in-between roles and I prefer to have a greater range to choose from. You can't just jump from one to the other, so I've had to go away, take time out and learn to push my voice up. But I like a good challenge and I'm at the right age. If I left it too much longer the transition would have been more difficult."

Currently studying in the USA where he is completing a Master of Music from the University of Michigan, Angus describes himself "a bit nerdish - I read science fiction and play computer games", shrugging off the pin-up boy status that he has sometimes been accorded. He gets the best known aria in the piece "Where 'er you walk" and we're really looking forward to hearing it.

## **Semele – the Story**

Here's a quick plot summary of the story, so you can start to think about this. We'll be discussing the story in more detail later.

**Act 1** - Semele, although about to be married to a mortal, loves the god Jupiter. She is swept up to the heavens by Jupiter.

**Act 2** - Juno, Jupiter's jealous wife plots to destroy Semele with the help of the god of sleep, Somnus. Semele has dangerous aspirations to be immortal.

**Act 3** - Juno, disguised as Semele's sister, Ino, tricks Semele by appealing to Semele's narcissism and ambition. Semele convinces Jupiter to appear to her as a god and is consumed in his fire and dies but not before conceiving Bacchus, the god of wine and things pleasurable.

You can read the libretto on <http://www.uoregan.edu/~rbear/congrevel.html>

## **Semele - The music**

Here are some of the highlights for your listening :-

### **Act 1**

There is a brilliant quartet of the angry King Cadmus, (Semele's father), a frustrated Athamas (the bridegroom Semele leaves in the lurch), a despairing Ino (in love with Athamas and a confused Semele (the reluctant bride). This quartet precedes any of Mozart by half a century.

The Act ends with the Semele's joyous gavotte "Endless pleasure, endless love"

### **Act 2**

Juno's aria sung to convince Iris to fly with her to plot against Semele is a virtuosic mezzo aria "Hence, Iris, hence away"

In Jupiter's Arcadia created for Semele's amusement the best known aria of haunting simplicity is sung by Jupiter to reassure Semele, "Where'er you walk".

### **Act 3**

The aria sung by the half asleep Somnus "Leave me, loathsome light" is remembered for its humour and clever construction. The god falls asleep before he can finish his aria.

## **Marketing**

Please keep telling people about us and getting them on the email newsletter list. Do send us an email if you have any questions about Pinchgut or Semele.

All kinds of interested people have been contacting us to say how happy they are about a chamber opera company to fill this gap in Sydney's music life. There are many devoted Semele fans out there too who are delighted to be able to see it staged. How has such wonderful music been ignored for so long?

Expect to see some more articles in the arts pages of various publications; and on radio as we get closer.

## **Web Site**

Our web site is under construction at the moment and should be up and running at the beginning of February. The address is [www.pinchgutopera.com.au](http://www.pinchgutopera.com.au).

## **Postcard**

We have a fine looking postcard for Pinchgut and Semele. You may have seen them around town. If you need some to give to friends just send us an email so we can get them to you.

In the next newsletter we'll give you profiles of the conductor Antony Walker and Stephen Bennett.

Stay in touch and spread the word,

The Pinchgut team. Pinchgut Opera Ltd ABN 67 095 974 191 Email : [liz@pinchgutopera.com.au](mailto:liz@pinchgutopera.com.au)

And finally an endorsement for Handel from someone else other than Pinchgut Opera –

***"He is the master of us all".... Haydn.***