



February 2003

Dear Friends,

## News

- We're very pleased to announce that Justin Way will direct *The Fairy Queen* and Samantha Paxton will design the set and costumes. They did such a great job with *Semele* that we decided to see what they could do with Mr Purcell. Justin says that the production will be "quite different" to *Semele*. We are not sure whether to be excited or worried ... !
- With Sara Macliver, Sally Anne Russell and Stephen Bennett we have chosen 3 of the 4 main soloists. The tenor part is under negotiation and will be announced soon.
- Although we originally titled the work *The Faerie Queen*, Erin Helyard has been researching the work's history and tells us that the original name was *The Fairy Queen* and that the other spelling used later. We will therefore spell it *The Fairy Queen*.
- You might have noticed a change in the performance dates. We have moved the Friday performance to a Sunday matinee, which many people have asked for. So the performances will be Wednesday 3 December 7:30 PM, Saturday 6 December 7:30 PM, Sunday 7 December 2:00 PM and Monday 8 December 7:30 PM
- Miriam Allan, part of *Cantillation* and whom you will remember as a wonderful rag doll in the *Somnus* scene in *Semele*, is currently overseas studying and has a job as early music soprano Emma Kirkby's PA. She and Simon Lobelson, another member of *Cantillation* (one of the celestial servants), ran into Justin in London, and he got them into the general rehearsal of *Falstaff* with Bryn Terfel. A fine time was had by all!
- As we said in our last newsletter Antony Walker is now in Washington DC and just about to do his first production with Washington Concert Opera of Berlioz' *Beatrice and Benedict*. 2003 is the bicentenary of Berlioz' birth. It has been snowing a lot in Washington, and Antony says about 60 cms of snow fell in about 24 hours very recently, causing untold chaos, and forcing WCO to cancel some of their early rehearsals. Antony will be making two more opera visits to the USA this year – he'll be conducting the North American premiere of Poul Ruders' *The Handmaid's Tale* for Minnesota Opera based on the novel by Margaret Atwood, and then he'll be conducting Rameau's *Dardanus* for Wolf Trap Opera in the middle of the year.

Musica Viva has asked us to let you know about the arrival of Andreas Scholl, for his national tour with the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra. Scholl will sing ravishing vocal works by Vivaldi and Handel, including Vivaldi's beautiful *Stabat Mater*. As supporters of Pinchgut opera (and connoisseurs of Handelian Opera). Musica Viva thinks that you will love these concerts at 8pm on Friday 14 March and Saturday 15 March, so is making available a 10% discount on full priced tickets to Pinchgut Opera newsletter subscribers. Call the City Recital Hall on 8246 2222 and quote "Scholl Special Offer".

## Fairy Queen Score

You might remember that, as well as a modern edition of *Semele*, our artistic directors used a score in Handel's handwriting that we found in the British Library. The story of *The Fairy Queen* score is more interesting. It disappeared at the time of the 1693 production. In 1701 the Theatre Royal advertised a reward of 20 guineas for anyone returning it or a copy. This does not seem to have been claimed because the manuscript, partly in Purcell's hand, did not turn up until early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when it was found at the Royal Academy of Music in London. The RAM library is sending us a microfilm of that score.

## Sally-Anne Russell

Several people have asked what Sally Anne is doing this year. Here is her reply:



“ I'm leaving on Saturday to sing Ursule in *Beatrice & Benedict* for Washington Concert Opera (Antony's new group), back to Australia mid March to sing Respighi's *Ill Tramonto* with Melbourne Symphony, April will be in Singapore performing *Hansel in Hansel & Gretel* for Singapore Lyric Opera, back to Sydney in May to sing *Elijah* for Sydney Phil, a concert of Baroque works for *Musica da Camera/Adelaide Baroque* in Adelaide and Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* with Christopher Hogwood and Adelaide Symphony. July/Aug is back in America with Bruno Weil at the Carmel Bach Festival, singing *St John Passion*, *Magnificat*, *Cantata 30* and a solo recital of early Italian Baroque pieces.

Late August I have a live broadcast for ABC in Goosens Hall with Andrew Greene of *Brahms Lieder* including my favourite Brahm's *Zwei gesange* with Viola!! More recital work in Melbourne with the team of pianists doing Poulenc/Ravel and some English folk Songs (probably Britten) and then Haydn's *Nelson Mass* with Marcus Stenz and Melbourne Symphony. Then it's back up to you guys to sing the *Fairy Queen* which will be fun as I haven't sung it before!!”

## Kent Opera

One of the sources of inspiration for Pinchgut is Kent Opera, which produced over 75 operas and toured around the UK between 1969 and 89. Kent Opera was a “composer's opera company” and it put the music first. It also used young and undiscovered performers. Its founder and General Director was Norman Platt who was, over his career, an actor, singer (he was a member of the Deller Consort) and opera director. Roger Norrington was the first permanent conductor and Jonathan Miller directed many of its early works. Some Australians got their start with Kent Opera including Jonathan Summers.

Kent Opera died when the Arts Council withdrew its grant, after encouraging it to expand. When we told Mr Platt about our plans to produce *The Fairy Queen* his comment was “Not easy. I recorded a concert performance many years ago with the Alfred Deller and his consort.” We hope to meet Mr Platt in June and will see if we can interview him about Deller, Kent Opera and music for the Newsletter.

## A Short Introduction to Purcell



Henry Purcell was probably born in 1659, though the exact date is unknown. His parents were probably Henry and Elizabeth Purcell. He joined the choir at the Chapel Royal at age 6 or 7, Charles II having been restored to the throne in 1660 after the death of Cromwell.

The first confirmed sighting of the young Henry Purcell was in 1673 when he left the choir with broken voice and was given 2 suits of clothes to face the adult world. He became an apprentice to the keeper of the royal musical instruments and by 1679 was organist at Westminster Abbey as well as the Chapel Royal. In 1680 or 1681 he married Frances and they went on to have eight children, only two of who survived to adulthood.

Most of Purcell's early composing was of church music – anthems and works for organs as well as songs and odes for the Royal court. The death of Charles and the ascension of the Catholic James reduced the status of the Anglican Chapel Royal though Purcell composed an anthem for the coronation ceremony and in 1687 the glorious birthday ode for James, “Sound the Trumpet, Beat the Drum”.

When William and Mary came to the throne in 1689 (I'll bet you haven't thought about all these dates since you left school) the court ceased to be the important musical centre it had been under the Stuarts. He continued to write birthday odes. The ode “Come Ye Sons of Art” (1694) is, to us, one of the most beautiful works of the early baroque. (Listen to the Deller Consort recording: I dare you to be unmoved.)

It was around this time that Purcell seems to have made a career change and started seriously to compose for the theatre. Between 1688 and 1695 Purcell wrote 5 works for the stage, all except *Dido and Aeneas* being semi-operas, that is a mixture of song, masque, pantomime and dance. *Dido* was the only fully-sung opera.

*The Fairy Queen* was produced in 1692. It was an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. In today's language it is better described as “inspired by” Shakespeare's comedy because little of Shakespeare's text was used by the anonymous librettist. The audiences of the time wanted colour, movement and fantasy. The wordiness of Shakespeare was out of fashion. The diarist Samuel Pepys thought *Midsummer Night's Dream* “the most insipid, ridiculous play that I ever saw in my life”.

*The Fairy Queen* was well received: “The court and the Town were wonderfully satisfied with it; but the expenses in setting it out being so great, the company got very little by it” a contemporary source wrote and it was revived the following year.

Purcell died in 1795 at the age of 36. According to one report, his wife had told the servants not to let him into the house after midnight when he had been out drinking. Returning an hour past the deadline, he spent the night outside in the cold and caught a chill which quickly developed into a serious infection. But this is probably a myth. Certainly he died quite suddenly, as his will (leaving all to Frances) was made the night he died. Purcell died on 21 November, the night before St. Cecilia's Day (see below) and was buried in Westminster Abbey near the organ, where he remains.



It is estimated that, on average, Purcell wrote a page of music each day of his working life. For such a short life, we are lucky to have so much wonderful music. Just imagine, though, what music we would have if he had lived as long as Handel.

Ken Nielsen, who is still not a musicologist.

## St Cecilia's Day

Purcell wrote several Odes to St Cecilia. Handel, Dryden, Pope and Britten also wrote in her honour, though she may not have existed. But then, Santa Claus probably did not exist either.

St Cecilia was adopted in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century as the patron saint of musicians, probably as a result of a mistranslation of an early work which gave her credit for inventing the organ. Her birthday – taken as 22 November - became St Cecilia's Day. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the day was celebrated with concerts and performances throughout Britain.

Historical or not, it is a nice custom to have a day when everyone thanks musicians for the joy they bring into our lives. Perhaps we should restore it.

*Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions to all musicians, appear and inspire: Translated Daughter, come down and startle composing mortals with immortal fire.* W.H. Auden Hymn to St Cecilia

There is not as much material on the Web about Purcell as there is about Handel. However these sites are interesting :

<http://www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/purcell.html>

[http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/1790/p\\_main.htm](http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/1790/p_main.htm)

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**And all that we expect, is but to find  
Equal to our expense, an audience kind.**

- from the Prologue to The Fairy Queen. All of us at Pinchgut share that hope.

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