



September 2003

The Fairy Queen

City Recital Hall Angel Place, Sydney
3, 6, 7 (matinee) & 8 December 2003
Tickets now on sale at 8256 2222

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the September edition of the newsletter. December is approaching and we have a number of things to tell you, and some more people to introduce. So let's start with our designers Kimm Kovac and Andrew Hays.

The designers of the Fairy Queen



Working with director Justin Way and Lighting Designer Bernie Tan are set and costumer designers Kimm Kovac and Andrew Hays.

Kimm and Andrew are young Sydney based designers who often work as a team designing both sets and costumes for theatre, film and television. Both are graduates of NIDA in design, but Kimm also has a degree in design from the University of Technology Sydney and Andrew has previously studied Architecture.

Kimm's design experience is broad, working in theatre, film and television. Since graduating she has designed extensively for such companies as the Sydney Theatre Company, Belvoir St Theatre, Griffin Theatre Co, Ensemble, ABC TV, SBS and the Australian Film Commission. Her most recent theatre job was costumer designer for STC's production of David Williamson's play "The Club" currently at the Drama Theatre at Sydney Opera House. Kimm has also worked in exhibition, event and jewellery design.

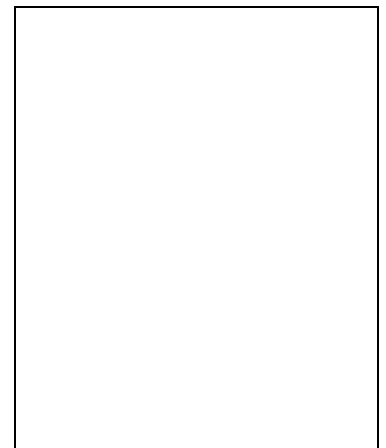
Andrew has worked extensively in film and television designing projects funded or produced by ABC television, Channel 7, SBS and the Australian Film Commission as well as independent film companies. He has designed theatre for The Queensland Theatre Company and Griffin and also works in exhibition, event and television commercial design.

For Pinchgut Opera's *The Fairy Queen* they will work as a team, not dividing up the job but using two heads for all aspects of the job. We are delighted to have them on board and look forward to the surprises that will no doubt come.

Stephen Bennett

We asked bass Stephen Bennett what he has been doing since *Semele*:

After the enjoyable experience of *Semele* and a series of Messiahs in Sydney and Melbourne, we had a large family Christmas in the Blue Mountains. Then in March I performed Leporello in *Don Giovanni* for Opera Australia. Leporello was followed by a demanding engagement that took seven months of solid learning- understudying the roles of the Animal Trainer and the Athlete in *Lulu* for the Melbourne and Sydney performances. This was an exciting challenge and I relished the opportunity to learn new repertoire.



At Easter I sang in Sydney Philharmonia Choir's performance of Bach's *St Mark Passion*, a rarely performed piece. Winter saw me crossing the Tasman to sing Polyphemus, the monster in NZ Opera's production of Handel's *Acis and Galatea* in Auckland and 'windy' Wellington. This was the first time I had worked with NZ Opera and I enjoyed the experience immensely.

I've just spent six weeks in Adelaide where I appeared as the Motorcycle Cop and First Guard in *Dead Man Walking* for SA Opera. It was wonderful to be involved in this project. The composer Jake Heggie and Sister Helen Prejean, the author of the book on which the opera is based, came over from the USA to attend opening night. It is a fabulous work and the opera's focus on the moral issues surrounding the death penalty was both informative and confronting.

My next engagement is with Opera Australia in Sydney - covering Lulu once more. The Melbourne Festival brings *Pulcinella* (Stravinsky) and the Haydn *Nelson Mass* with the MSO, which brings me to November and Pinchgut Opera again.

In addition to my 'away from home' engagements, I am involved with the new Conservatorium of Music in Armidale. I will also be performing in a series of recitals of opera and lieder with my wife, Scarlet.

Working with Pinchgut Opera last year was a very rewarding experience; the team was great fun and very professional, and the musical standard was excellent. Having worked in many different venues with many opera companies, I enjoyed performing at the City Recital Hall as it is a great venue to sing in. I particularly like the sense of intimacy with the audience. I'm looking forward to *The Fairy Queen*!

What are period instruments?

Sirius Ensemble, the orchestra playing in Pinchgut's production of *The Fairy Queen*, uses "period instruments". We asked Anna McDonald, director of Sirius and a baroque violin specialist, and her partner, Simon Brown, a Cremona-trained string instrument maker, to explain.

Anna: In the late 17th and early 18th Centuries (when *The Fairy Queen* was composed) music was played on instruments strung with gut (sheep's guts, actually) played with a shorter, lighter outward-curved bow (which was perfect for fast articulated dance music and slow languishing melodies). Because it curved outwards, it applied pressure to the string unevenly, shaping each note soft-loud-soft.

Modern instruments and bows, as we know them today, were developed around 1800 as music moved into larger concert halls. At the leading edge of this trend, Francois Tourte established a bow design which was to prove so perfect that it remains unchanged even today. It allowed a full, powerful tone that could sustain all the way through the bowstroke, although players didn't necessarily make full use of this for some generations. The cult of powerful tone, especially in the hands of the new instrumental superstars, like Paganini, gradually took over public taste. We are the inheritors of this sound-ideal, taken to greater extremes with the modern use of steel and other metals in string making (which came in after the First World War) and making more and more use of vibrato to soften and sweeten the metal strings.

Simon: Instruments were physically modified to meet the new standards; violins, violas and 'celli had their necks lengthened and angled back; fingerboards were replaced with longer ebony ones. Instruments thought to be too big were "cut down" - a process so drastic that to our modern sensibilities it seems barbaric, and compromised the perfect proportions of the original instrument.

Anna: The Grancino I play, which was made in 1690, is very unusual in that it was never modernised. But most of the period instruments used today are reproductions, made to the precise measurements of old ones. Simon has made me a classical violin that I have used on some of the ABC Classics recordings



I have done. It is based on a Guarnerius. And it sounds wonderful, especially on recordings. I was trained on modern instruments and still often play them for classical or modern works, but it was not until I discovered period instruments in London that I began to really understand Bach, Handel, Purcell and the other greats of the baroque period. Somehow it all began to make sense. Instead of concentrating on projection, I could become immersed in the subtle difference between a down-bow and the following up-bow. Music became a kind of detective work – finding out

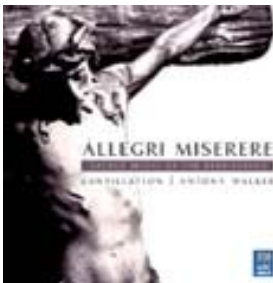
exactly what mood the composer was trying to depict, and how to create it in our playing. Period instruments don't work very well in the Concert Hall of the Opera House, or the Opera Theatre because those spaces are too big. But in the City Recital Hall, with its excellent acoustic, they are perfect.

Simon: When I make a reproduction baroque instrument I use information about the set-up - the fingerboard, bridge, tailpiece, sound post, finger nut, strings and neck shape – from those rare surviving instruments which escaped modification in the 18th century. I also like to look at period paintings which show the details on stringed instruments. Luckily there are many, although making life easier for 21st century instrument makers was certainly not the artists' main concern! A few scantily written accounts and some wonderful working drawings and templates have survived from Stradivarius' workshop. Recent advances in the analysis of old varnishes even allow me to apply oil varnish to my instruments similar in composition to those of the 17th and 18th Centuries. The timbers, glues and all the tools used to build the instrument are exactly the same as those originally employed.

Anna: It's another interesting take on the name Pinchgut too.

Recordings

There are a number of good recordings of the Fairy Queen; in an earlier newsletter we recommended a recording of *The Fairy Queen* by The Sixteen, conducted by Harry Christophers. It is on the Coro label and Fish Fine Music 350 George Street (near Martin Place) and Michael's Music Room in the Town Hall Arcade both have it in stock at the moment. You will enjoy the production even more if you know the music. Of course, next year you will be able to buy Pinchgut's version which will be recorded in the ABC studios straight after the last performance. And we expect that the live recording of Pinchgut's *Semele* will be released by ABC Classics by November.



And on the subject of recordings look out for two new releases on the ABC Classics label. Cantillation has just had a new CD released featuring music of the Renaissance and called *Allegrì Miserere*.

Being released next week is a disc of Bach arias and duets with Sara Macliver, and Sally-Anne Russell – two of our principals for the Fairy Queen, and many of the Sirius players including Anna McDonald, Neal Peres da Costa and Danny Yeadon.



Fairy Queen CD sampler

We have a CD with four tracks from *The Fairy Queen* recorded by our soloists, orchestra and chorus. You should hear it on the radio soon. And if you do persuade a friend to buy tickets, you or they can pick up one of the CDs for free at the City Recital Hall box office. Personal shoppers only and stocks are limited.

December approaches

And not all of you have bought your tickets for *The Fairy Queen* at City Recital Hall Angel Place on Wednesday 3 (7:30 pm) Saturday 6 (7:30 pm) Sunday 7 (2:00 pm) and Monday 8 (7:30 pm). No, we're not checking names but we do know that sales so far do not quite equal the number of subscribers we have.

Can we ask a favour? A lot depends on the box office success of this production. Our production expenses are guaranteed by generous supporters but the future of Pinchgut depends on whether we can build a large and loyal audience. If Sydney needs us, we will carry on.

So, please suggest that your friends join you this year. Tell them what fun *Semele* was. You can promise them that *The Fairy Queen* will be at least as good and (we think) better. Please bring them along.

One of the best things you can do for a friend is to introduce them to something you enjoy.

Bookings are open at City Recital Hall box office on 8256 2222 or through their website www.cityrecitalhall.com

What's it about? is the question several people have asked of *The Fairy Queen*. In the next newsletter, we will try to answer. Prepare to be surprised. And, by the way, "How many lovers do you dream of on a midsummer night?"

And finally



Justin Way working the phones at Covent Garden

Until next time,
The newsletter team - Liz, Anna C, Alison & Ken.

Pinchgut Opera Ltd ABN 67 095 974 191
Email : liz@pinchgutopera.com.au
PO Box 239 Westgate NSW 2048 ph. (02) 9518 1082 fax (02) 9572 8881

"Who e'er like Purcell could our passions move, Whoever sang so feelingly of love?"
Henry Hall, fellow student.

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