



# The Fairy Queen

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

October 2003

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the October edition of the newsletter. Time is really moving very fast towards *The Fairy Queen* now. The question we get most often asked is “what’s happening now?” So to let you know this and other interesting things ...

### WHAT’S HAPPENING NOW?

- The board of PGO saw and approved the model box prepared by designers Kimm and Andrew from Justin’s concept. The model box is a three dimensional model of the set which is presented along with costume concepts. “Amazing” was the adjective used by Liz and Alison.
- Material for the set and costumes is being tracked down. Opera Australia and other theatre companies are being very helpful.
- The rehearsal schedule is almost finalized. Soloists will start rehearsals on 4 November (although they will already know their music), Cantillation on 8 November and the orchestra will come together on 25 November. Once again, NIDA and Opera Australia have been very helpful in letting us use their facilities for rehearsals.
- Erin Helyard left for his postgraduate studies at McGill University in Montreal a couple of weeks ago. He has now finished preparation of the score, using the original manuscript from Royal Academy of Music London. He has also had some time to research Montreal’s micro breweries.
- Cellist Danny Yeadon is back on the London shuttle, this time playing in the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment in the pit at Covent Garden for Handel’s *Orlando* starring Barbara Bonney and Jonathan Lemalu. This is the OAE’s first gig at Covent Garden, although it has played at Glyndebourne a number of times.
- Three of the Pinchgut team – Anna McDonald, Antony Walker and Neal Peres da Costa recently performed at the Barossa Festival. Antony conducted a new ballet – Amanda Lee Faulkenberg’s *Edge of the World* and works by Ross Edwards – while Anna and Neal performed a concert of works by Mozart, Hullmandel and Gavinies.
- Tenor Jamie Allen is currently singing in Benjamin Britten’s setting of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for Opera Australia in Sydney. It will be interesting to hear his comments on the two works, composed 260 years apart.
- And from one kind of face-painting to another: Cantillation demonstrated its versatility by singing at the opening ceremony of the rugby world cup at the Olympic stadium last Friday night. A fine time was had by all; and if you are watching any of the games over the next six weeks Cantillation sings the national anthems before each of the matches, pre-recorded in arrangements done by Cantillation member Dan Walker. With twenty countries participating in the competition that’s a lot of languages to get around!

## ENGLAND'S GREATEST COMPOSER?

Our advertising is making the claim that *The Fairy Queen* is the greatest work of music theatre by England's greatest composer. We don't think the ACCC will challenge this claim, although some musicologists will have their own favourites.

If you exclude Handel, who was not really English (many of the verses in *The Messiah* are very difficult to sing, probably because Handel, wonderful composer though he was, never had a great grasp of the English language) the contest is easier. Certainly Benjamin Britten and Michael Tippett, two 20<sup>th</sup> Century contenders for the crown, had great admiration for Purcell.

"I had never realised, before I first met Purcell's music, that words could be set with such ingenuity, with such colour" wrote Britten. Britten conducted several productions of Purcell works, including a recording of *The Fairy Queen*. Tippett was actually the discoverer of Purcell in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Tippett's biographer, Meirion Bowen writes:

Tippett discovered Purcell's music by accident. In 1940, Morley College - the adult education college in London where Tippett had recently become Director of Music - was hit by a bomb during an air-raid. Amid the rubble, Tippett discovered some volumes of the old Purcell Society Edition and took them away to study. Immediately, he sensed a composer of extraordinary individuality..... What Tippett found most riveting... was Purcell's dramatic treatment of words. So also did Benjamin Britten, who participated, along with the tenor Peter Pears and countertenor Alfred Deller (another Tippett discovery at this time), in the revivals of Purcell's Odes and church music that became a regular feature of Tippett's renowned wartime concerts at Morley College.

Still not convinced? OK. Come along to the production and make your own judgment.

## SALLY-ANNE RUSSELL TALKS ABOUT HER YEAR AND FAIRY QUEEN



Having seriously trained as a classical singer from the age of around 15 I have been exposed to many different styles of music and performance. Even then I had a natural leaning towards Handel. It seemed to sit in a good part of my voice and I found it fun to sing. I suppose my love of early music developed from there. I then graduated to Bach, (which is still my first choice on the stereo) the Passions, oratorios and then lieder, song repertoire and finally opera. At such a young age I was lucky to have guidance and was given and explored repertoire that was healthy for the voice to grow into.

Now as a freelance artist my repertoire really varies from year to year. I perform 2-3 operas, 40% Symphony/Concert works and then the final 20% being recitals, broadcasts and recordings. I spend 3-4 months overseas each year (sometimes more) and the rest of my time here in Australia. This is a great thing about being a freelance you have the possibilities to move around experiencing new people, places and best of all amazing musicians.

This year my annual excursion to the wonderful Carmel Bach Festival in California and the amazing Bruno Weil brought me *St John Passion*, Magnificat, Cantatas 163 and 30A and recitals of early Italian works.

I was thrilled to be invited back to sing with Pinchgut Opera and explore what will be a new work for me in this new production of the *Fairy Queen*. My knowledge of Purcell is obviously *Dido* and some of the song repertoire which I have sung in Japan with Nicholas McGegan. So it will be great to revisit this wonderful composer.

At the Carmel Bach Festival some of the incidental music of *The Fairy Queen* was led by Elizabeth Wallfisch and it is fabulous stuff, I think the audience is in for a real treat. I am really looking forward to hearing what Antony, Anna and the fantastic Sirius Ensemble will do with the score. It's quite addictive, with lots of bouncy rhythmic treatment and a multitude of different colours. Purcell is difficult to sing, it requires much breath control, crisp rhythms, large dynamic changes so that hopefully the end product sounds effortless.

Pinchgut provides a wonderful working environment, with room to explore the drama of the piece and the whole process is fun, which is what music should be all about. I had such a great time performing in *Semele* last year. It reminds me of my time with the Victoria State Opera which was like being part of a family, it's the same sort of feel, everyone at Pinchgut striving for the best possible product and having a ball while it's happening. Pinchgut has filled a vital gap in the market; it is such a good quality chamber opera group. I can just see with this work we will be dancing our way through rehearsals and the audience will be dancing out of the theatre!!

## SO, WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT

We promised in the last newsletter to give you some idea of what happens in *The Fairy Queen*. As you know, it was based on Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which has a rollicking plot involving Oberon, Titania, some magic juice that when squeezed into someone's eyes, makes them love madly the first person (or animal) they see, a pair of lovers fleeing Athens to elope and Bottom who wears an ass's head. And a few other Shakespearean twists and turns. After mistaken identities, use of the magic juice on the wrong people and much confusion, it all ends happily.

When Purcell decided to present the play as a musical, Shakespeare's play was considered too dull and wordy for a Restoration audience wanting music and fantasy. A new (and, frankly, dreadful) narrative was written by someone who fortunately is now not identified. Stripping away the forgettable narrative, Purcell's work consists of five masques, largely drawn from Shakespeare's play but on their own presenting no plot or story line. And a wonderful character – a drunken poet – unknown to Shakespeare but comparable to some of Shakespeare's great comic characters makes a very funny appearance.

Justin Way, our director, was presented with this challenge.

Some productions have used actors speaking Shakespeare's words, with the music as interludes. But this results in a very long night and, we think, does not do justice to Purcell's glorious music. Justin decided that, as listening to the score uninterrupted is such a musical feast, he would set the company and the audience a challenge by not inserting dialogue to explain the music. Rather he is looking to express the musical and thematic ideas independently so, as he puts it "the work becomes the dream, the production an Alice-in-Wonderland adventure where a pair of lovers are Alice and Shakespeare's play is the wonderland".

## HALCYON DAYS



Two members of Cantillation, soprano Alison Morgan and mezzo Jenny Duck-Chong, present concerts of mostly new music under the name Halcyon.

Their final concert for 2003 is ***RAISING SPARKS***, at Verbrugghen Hall, Conservatorium of Music, Macquarie Street 7.30pm, Friday 7 November. The programme includes two major international chamber works for voice; *Raising Sparks* by James Macmillan and *9 Settings of Celan* by Harrison Birtwistle. They have also commissioned a new Australian work from Jane Stanley, called *Maiden Aunts*. Jane has chosen poetry by esteemed Australian writer David Malouf.

Bookings on 0425 211 543. Tickets normally \$35 but if you mention that you are a Pinchgut subscriber you pay \$20. Strongly recommended.

### Coming soon ....

There is a cover story, with a photo of Antony Walker, in the November issue of the 2MBS magazine *Fine Music*. Not a subscriber to 2MBS? Shame! Phone 9439-4777 to remedy that. Watch out too for articles in the *Bulletin* and the *Sydney* magazine. And our posters have gone up in the Recital Hall, so next time you are there have a look and whet your appetite.

### Special Accommodation Offer from The Blacket Hotel

The Blacket is a boutique hotel in a quiet restored bank building just 3 mins walk from the City Recital Hall at 70 King Street. The Blacket, a major sponsor of Pinchgut Opera, offers the following discounted package to our audience :- 2 course pre-opera dinner at Minc restaurant, 1 nights accommodation in a Deluxe Room and continental breakfast for 2 next morning for \$249 per night (twin/double share & subject to availability) To book ring The Blacket on 9279 3030.

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

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[“He \(Purcell\) was superior to all his predecessors, that his compositions seemed to speak a new language yet, however different... it was universally understood.”](#)

Charles Burney, (1726-1814) organist, composer and musicologist, whose son Rear Admiral James Burney sailed with Captain Cook.

Major sponsor

