



November 2003

Dear Friends

First the commercial...



We are well into rehearsals for *The Fairy Queen* and (biased though we are) we are terrifically happy with what Justin Way and Antony Walker have created. The music – soloists, chorus and orchestra – is wonderful and the production will be great fun. Justin has a knack, as we saw in *Semele*, of producing an opera that is true to the composer and his music, while providing great entertainment for today's audiences. Antony, with his operas in Europe and the US and his recordings for ABC Classics, is becoming a leading conductor of the baroque and classical repertoire.

In a few years, you will be saying with pride: "You know, I first came across Justin Way and Antony Walker when they worked with Pinchgut Opera in Sydney..."

The *Fairy Queen* opens on Wednesday 3 December. The full schedule of performances is

Wednesday 3 December 7:30 pm
Saturday 6 December 7:30 pm
Sunday 7 December 2:00 pm
Monday 8 December 7:30 pm

All performances are at City Recital Hall, Angel Place Sydney.

Bookings online at www.cityrecitalhall.com or by phone on (02) 8256 2222.

Seats are selling very well. As Pinchgut depends primarily on box-office to finance our productions, we are hoping for a sell-out. So, if you haven't booked, or have friends who you think will enjoy it, please act now!

Semele CD

The live recording of our 2002 production of Handel's *Semele* will be released in a 3-CD box set on 3 December by ABC Classics. It will be available at ABC shops and leading record stores as well as in the lobby at City Recital Hall at performances of *The Fairy Queen*. Also on sale will be *The Sixteen's* recording of *The Fairy Queen* (which will have to do until ours comes out in twelve month's time) and other recent recordings by our soloists and Cantillation.

Meantime Sara and Sally's Bach Arias and Duets CD continues to be a run away best seller, and topped the ARIA selling charts for several weeks in a row. It's a lovely disc and you can get this at any ABC shop or good record store. And Antony's and Cantillation's ABC TV broadcast of *Messiah* is being replayed on ABC TV on Christmas Day this year in the afternoon. You can also see Sara and Paul McMahon in this performance as well.

Director's Note : The Fairy Queen: A Semi-Opera

We have explained that The Fairy Queen has no plot. But the production has a very interesting theme. For those who like to do some preparation, here is Justin Way's note that will appear in the programme.

Suspicious of the new continental form of opera, contemporary English taste of 1692 accepted sung music in a dramatic story only in scenes involving entertainments, masques, the supernatural and fantasy. So the semi-opera form was born, with musical suites decorating spoken-word plays – in songs, dances and choruses they reflected the themes and atmosphere of the drama, but rarely advanced the plot, telling no story of themselves.

On hearing the music for the Fairy Queen we were struck by its extraordinary dynamic range, and so, being an opera company, we decided to go out on a limb and leave out the three hours of play attached to the two hours of music.

So the question arises as to how to approach it. What would we do if this appeared as a new score through the letterbox this week? What would we make of it? As far as characters and locations are concerned, the libretto first introduces two lovers who want to escape a town, followed by a drunken poet tormented by two other-worldly creatures. Subsequently a group assemble in a wood in attendance on the fairy queen, and we are later informed that the birthday of King Oberon is being celebrated. For those even with un-brushed-up Shakespeare, the extent of the liberties taken will be becoming apparent... Otherwise the score calls for allegories of Night, Secrecy, the Four Seasons and a miscellany of gods, nymphs and haymakers abounds. A riddle indeed. The themes of love, marriage, coupling and dreaming come from the play and the music. The themes of music and song, from the score.

And thus we approached it. Like a crossword puzzle where the answers are filled in and it's the questions to be assembled.

The starting point was the title. Who or what would a 'fairy queen' have suggested when Purcell and his librettist were creating this music? Obviously a fairy queen who inhabits a wood at midnight is the antithesis of a real queen who inhabits the town by day. And what is so striking about Queen Mary II – whose legacies, incidentally, are principally the music composed for her birthdays and funeral by Purcell himself, and the vogue for collecting porcelain which she brought from Holland – is her piety, her devotion to her husband, with whom, for the first time in British history, she *shared* the throne, and the sense of order and duty which regulated her short life. Ample fodder for the creation of Titania, her negative forest-dwelling version.

Like the musical spectaculars of the 1930s, the escapism of Purcell's forest conceals a very traumatised age. Docile, industrious, loyal Mary was forced to choose between supporting her Dutch Protestant husband, William, or her Catholic father, King James II, when the English parliament invited her and William to invade in order to prevent James from dismantling the parliamentary system. To the public mind Catholicism meant being ruled by a foreigner – the Pope in Rome. Thus the natural order was being overthrown – an anointed king betrayed by subjects and daughter alike, a monarchy appointed (with terms and conditions applying) by parliament. After civil war, plague and fire, Shakespeare's England was being rebuilt in the image of the Age of Reason courtesy of Wren, Newton and Locke. Perhaps Purcell's forest is the last hurrah of Merrie England – a world rendered obsolete by the onslaught of rationalism.

And so, using our Young Lovers as a white rabbit, our Poet as Alice and Shakespeare's play as our wonderland, we set off to follow the path on a midsummer night through one of the richest and dreamiest scores of any era.

Justin Way

An Acrobat copy of the libretto, with the soloists identified, can be downloaded from <http://www.pinchgutopera.com.au/productions/fairy/story/libretto.pdf>

Other parts in *The Fairy Queen*

When you see the show you'll see that a number of parts in the *Fairy Queen* are being sung by members of Cantillation. We'd like to introduce you to these very fine singers, starting with the sopranos



You'll remember us talking about **Miriam Allan** winning prizes and generally doing very well in the London Handel Society's Singing Competition. Miriam has been in the UK for the past year working and studying, and has flown home for these performances. She has appeared with Australia's leading orchestras and choirs in all sorts of performances, and last year covered the role of Semele for our production. This year she has appeared in the world premiere of *Dreaming Transportation*, for the Sydney Festival. In the past year she's earned a surprising number of frequent flyer miles and her adoption of British phrases annoys her sister enormously.



Belinda Montgomery you'll also remember from her portrayal of Iris in *Semele*, a wonderful double act with Juno. This year she gave the world premiere performance of Andrew Ford's song cycle, *Learning to Howl*, (which is not as scary as the title would suggest!) and was the solo soprano in the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra's Coronation concert series. She is also now a repentant non-Volvo driver.



Alison Morgan was born in England and migrated at thirteen to Western Australia. After exploring the country for several years, singing won over and a successful career developed, with a particular commitment to the promotion and performance of new works for voice. She has appeared on stage with various fabulous musicians and has featured in numerous broadcasts and recordings. She is co-director and founder of acclaimed Sydney new music ensemble Halcyon and mother to ten year old son Liam, the Cantillation mascot.

Mezzo soprano **Jenny Duck-Chong** works in many spheres - from early music and opera to art song and contemporary compositions. Since university, where she spent many days happily buried in the library stacks poring over Baroque facsimiles, she has had a richly varied career working with many different ensembles and is the other co-director of Halcyon, has been a foundation member of baroque vocal ensemble The Tall Poppeas and has recently joined forces with the Kevin Hunt Jazz Trio in arrangements of J.S. Bach.



Tenor **Brett Weymark** studied singing at the University of Sydney and conducting at the Sydney Conservatorium of music. For many years he played the harpsichord with Sounds Baroque and for the past five years has taught singing and ensemble in the acting department of Theatre Nepean. When not onstage performing a gastronomically inspired cabaret with some of his friends from NIDA called Words, Wine and Wassail, Brett has a real job as the Musical Director of Sydney Philharmonia and Pacific Opera. He is looking forward to one day driving around Sydney without his P-plates on display.

Baritone **Corin Bone** has sung with almost every Sydney Choir, along with Sounds Baroque, and the Song Company in their Schools programme. When not singing, he works at the Conservatorium researching scatological children’s songs from Norway, and spends much of his spare time drinking beer; his current tally of beers tasted stands at 1150. Recent triumphs include 2nd prize in the NSW homebrewing championships, a glorious 129th place in an AFL tipping competition, and finally beating the computer at chess.



And finally – a most important person in the Fairy Queen – the poet. Baritone **Simon Lobelson** is currently studying in London at the Royal College of Music on a scholarship. Simon has also flown back to be part of these performances. In Sydney Simon studies under John Pringle, and future engagements include Plunkett in Flotow’s *Martha* in Scotland and baritone soloist in Rameau’s *Les Grands Motets* with Sydney Philharmonia. Simon has exceedingly enjoyed undertaking serious research into his character of the Drunken Poet in some of London’s most reputable pubs.



We also have two actors – Thomasin Litchfield and Christopher Tomkinson – and show you these photographs of rehearsals to tantalise you.

We’d rather not say anything else about these shots at present!



A few final thoughts

We are using a chamber organ in the production for which the hire has been generously funded by Northside Opera Study Group and John Lamble AO. The Study Group is a wonderful group of people who meet each Monday at St David’s Church Lindfield at 10.00 am. For information phone 9929 7522.

This is the last Pinchgut newsletter for 2003. Thank you all for reading and for your support for what we are trying to achieve. We appreciate hearing your comments (and suggestions) so please write to liz@pinchgutopera.com.au or PO Box 239 Westgate 2048.

With best wishes from Liz, Alison, Anna C, Anna Mc, Antony, Justin and Ken.

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“Purcell – what a bloody genius.” - Justin Way, Sydney November 2003

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