



March 2004

Orfeo

City Recital Hall Angel Place, Sydney
1, 3 & 6 December 2004
Tickets on sale from July

Dear Friends,

Welcome to all the new newsletter subscribers – lovely to have you with us for the journey. We thought we'd start this newsletter by letting you know where everyone is after *The Fairy Queen*.

Where are they now?

- Justin Way has gone back to London and is working on many and various things at the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden. He's very much looking forward to working on their new Ring cycle later in the year. He's just finished working on the world premiere of *The Tempest* by Thomas Adès, which Adès himself conducted. The Guardian described the opening of the work as “.... a real achievement, for which the Royal Opera and the composer must share the credit.”
- Meantime Antony Walker has been doing a number of different things in a few different places (as is his wont). He stayed on in Australia until January to direct Cantillation in concerts for the Sydney Festival, and then went to Honolulu where he has conducted performances of *Così fan tutte* for Hawaii Opera Theatre. Having never been to Hawaii before he was delighted to find it as beautiful a place as it reported to be. He then had a quick trip back to Sydney to record some of Ross Edwards' music for ABC Classics, and is now in Washington DC about to begin rehearsals for Washington Concert Opera's first production for the year Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux*. In doing his continent hopping he's been through a variety of climates and is now pretty cold.
- Sally-Anne Russell is currently rehearsing at West Australian Opera in the title role of Rossini's *Cenerentola*. With the performances at the end of March, she'll be taking a break on the weekend after next to sing in the Mozart Requiem with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra, where she'll be joined by fellow Pinchgutees Sara Macliver and Stephen Bennett. Sara is also very busy this year – watch out for her in a major Musica Viva project in September on the life and works of Jane Austen. Jamie Allen started the year at the Perth Festival as Van Huyssen in Richard Mills' opera *Batavia*, and is currently singing in Opera-Australia's *Merry Widow*. He'll be rejoining Cantillation – and Stephen Bennett – in April for Sydney Symphony concerts of Haydn's *Nelson Mass* and Australian composer Jonathan Mills' *Sandakan Threnody*. Paul McMahon has a busy year of concerts coming up in Sydney, Melbourne and New Zealand and look out for a CD of lute songs with Paul and Tommie Andersson that will be out soon.
- From Cantillation singers Miriam Allan (one of the young lovers) and Simon Lobelson (the poet) have both gone back to London where they are resuming their studies and singing careers. Josie Ryan has returned to her hectic performance schedule in the Netherlands, and Alison Morgan and Jenny Duck-Chong are busily planning their Halcyon series for 2004.
- Amongst the players Neal Peres da Costa has just started a lectureship at NSW University Music Department; Anna McDonald recently played at the Armidale Bach Festival, as did Kirsty McCahon, Tommie Andersson and Neal, and Deborah Fox has returned to a very snowy and cold Rochester in New York state. Danny Yeadon has been offered more work with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and will be going to the UK mid year to take this up before coming back to us! There are too many singers and players to mention individually here – but they are all doing wonderful things – and we'll bring you updates as we can.

And what has Erin Helyard been up to recently?

We're delighted to announce that Erin will be back for *Orfeo*, and here's what Erin has to say on what he's been doing over the past six months

As some readers may have gathered from previous newsletters, I arrived in Montréal in September 2003 to pursue a PhD with Professor Tom Beghin of McGill University. And boy it's cold! I mean REALLY cold ... I keep dreaming of beaches, the bats in Woolloomooloo, frosted beer glasses, cicadas ... Although I was absent for Pinchgut's production of *Fairy Queen*, I was intimately involved with the preparation of a new edition for performance and I am very much looking forward to experiencing an Aussie summer again in December when I return to assist Antony Walker on *Orfeo*.

At the moment I am writing a paper that seeks to unravel the connections and influences that differing modes of audience behaviour in 18th century opera houses potentially had on compositional craft, dramatic flow and operatic reform. Much of my study has its roots with research I conducted in connection with Pinchgut's inaugural production of Handel's *Semele* and readers of my program notes might notice with interest some points I brought up in regards to the differing attitudes of audience behaviour Handel experienced in London during the War of the Spanish Succession (there's a longer version of my note in the *Semele* CD). I am constantly impressing people in nightclubs with my intimate and geeky knowledge of opera house architecture ... (well, no I'm not really).

My French is still limited to buying cigarettes and ordering beer (ah! the essentials) but is rapidly improving. I am also studying fortepiano with Prof. Beghin and recently held my *Récital de Maîtrise*. Playing on my Professor's wonderful Maene copy of a Viennese Walter piano of the 1790s I presented a program of Haydn, C. P. E. Bach, Steffan and Hummel (the works of the last two worthy composers I am actively seeking to revive). In November of last year I was musical assistant for the head of the Early Music Faculty, Professor Hank Knox, in a student production of Monteverdi's *Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*. So I'm all Monteverdied up!

It is interesting to note the standard of early music performing and research in different cities around the world and Montréal is no exception. Time and time again I come to the realisation that Australian musicians are absolutely world-class. I was talking with a native the other day and she said "Why are all you Australian early musicians just so damn good??" Must be the water. I'm really looking forward to seeing you all at the end of the year.

Semele CD

While on the subject of the *Semele* CD we're pleased to report that CD is doing really well; it's been very favourably reviewed in *The Age* and *The Australian* newspapers, and in *Limelight* magazine. If you'd like to see these we'll put links up on our website – so have a look at www.pinchgutopera.com.au. Meantime you can buy the three CD set at any ABC or good record store, or online from Buywell Just Classical at <http://www.buywell.com> or the ABC shop at <http://shop.abc.net.au>

Orfeo CDs

We've been asked to recommend some *Orfeo* recordings, and there are a couple that are readily available – one conducted by René Jacobs, which is on Harmonia Mundi #901553, and one conducted by John Eliot Gardiner on Deutsche Grammophon #419250. Check with your local music store – we recommend Fish Records in Martin Place or Michael's Music Room in the Town Hall Arcade.

The *Orfeo* legend in Opera

“Why did anyone else bother to write an opera afterwards? Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo* is so consummately perfect that every other attempt seems flawed by comparison.” Shirley Apthorp in a review for the Financial Times of the Jacobs/Kosky production of the work at the Innsbruck Festival last year.

Orfeo is certainly an amazing work. Perhaps the third or fourth opera ever composed – and certainly Monteverdi’s first – it is so wonderful musically and dramatically that you must wonder where it came from. How did an art form just appear perfectly developed at the beginning of the 17th Century? Erin Helyard will write some notes on early opera for a later newsletter. Meanwhile, some background of Monteverdi, Orpheus and the opera.

Monteverdi was a musician in the Court of the Duke of Mantua – one of the independent Italian provinces – around the turn of the 17th Century. The times were peaceful and affluent in the years before the Thirty Years War and culture flourished in Florence, Venice and Mantua. Opera seems to have grown from a combination of madrigal and Greek drama.

The first opera was probably by Peri in 1600 and the second by Caccini in 1602. Both used the Orpheus and Eurydice story. The Duke of Mantua saw the Peri version and, in the spirit of competitive opera, returned home to commission Monteverdi to compose an opera and Alessandro Striggio, a musician and poet in the Court, to write the libretto.

The Monteverdi/Striggio work had its first performance in a gallery in the Duke’s Palace on 27 February 1607. It cannot have had an elaborate set, because of the limited space and it is thought that the story was illustrated by a few screens. But it was undoubtedly the first work successfully to combine drama and music. And as Shirley Apthorp suggests, not much has been done since to improve on Monteverdi’s invention. (Wagnerians, no correspondence will be entered into).

The story of Orpheus has fascinated composers, writers and film makers over the past 400 years. There were about 26 operas using the myth in the 17th Century and 29 in the 18th, including works by Telemann, Handel, and Haydn. The best known is Gluck’s *Orfeo et Euridice*, which is part of the repertoire of many opera companies, including Opera Australia. On film, we have Cocteau’s *Testament d’Orphee* from 1960 and *Black Orpheus* from 1959, setting the story at the carnival in Rio. (A personal note: The chair of Pinchgut and the writer saw this film on one of their first dates. It was very effective).

The myth is Greek, though there is no Greek version in existence. Writers have relied on the Latin versions by Ovid and Virgil.

A synopsis of the opera will appear in a later newsletter. Meanwhile, here is an outline.

Orpheus, son of Apollo, is the greatest musician the world has ever seen. Returning from travels with the Argonauts, he falls in love with and marries Eurydice. He has a very short period of happiness before Eurydice, frolicking in the garden, is bitten by a snake and dies. Orpheus goes to Hades – the underworld – to try to get her back. His music, which can charm the rocks and trees, persuades the guardians of that lonely place to allow him to take Eurydice back on one condition: that as he is leading her through the dark tunnels, he must not look back until they reach the surface. But he cannot resist the urge to check that she is still behind him (well, could you?) and with that backward glance, she is lost a second time.

Orpheus tries to persuade the guardians to allow him to return to Hades but fails. In the original myth, the Thracian maidens, followers of Bacchus, are so upset that he is not interested in them that they tear him apart, throwing his head and lyre in the river, where they continue making music. Monteverdi preferred a happy ending so we will see Apollo taking pity on his son and inviting him to join the immortals in heaven where he can gaze upon Eurydice in the stars.

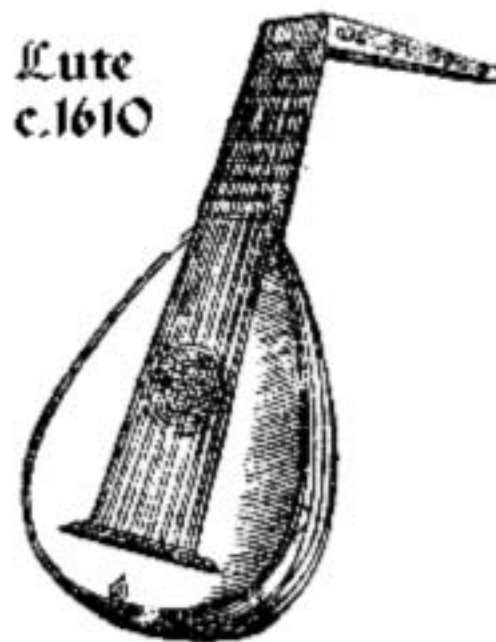
Shirley Apthorp finished her review with: “Jacobs and Kosky have crafted a *L’Orfeo* so satisfying that it hurts when the music finally stops”. We hope Pinchgut’s production will have the same effect on you.

Instruments of the Baroque Band

Many people at *The Fairy Queen* commented on the fabulous continuo section, and the wonderful string instruments played so beautifully by Tommie Andersson and Deborah Fox. As there are more unusual and not widely known instruments in *Orfeo* we thought that we would run a series on some of the instruments that you will see in our next production. And we'll start with the lute family.

The lute originally came from Arab countries and the name comes directly from the Arabic Al'Ud. Like many instruments, it spread throughout Europe in medieval times, probably as a result of the Crusades. The early medieval lute had just four single strings (usually called courses) and was often plucked with a feather. But by the fifteenth century, a typical lute would have five double-strung courses (two strings tuned to the same note) and was increasingly plucked with the fingers, which meant that more complicated music could be played.

By the sixteenth century most lutes had six courses, and this remained standard for most of the century. It was until around 1580 that the seven course lute became common enough for music to be published for it. This is now usually regarded as the 'classical' lute, for which most of the greatest composers wrote. John Dowland is probably the most famous. The lute was incredibly popular, and was everywhere, from courts to taverns. Lutes were made in several sizes, and played in lute consorts.



By the seventeenth century new types of lute – called archlutes, theorbos and chitarroni - were being developed. These instruments varied, but their common feature was an extended neck. Part of the neck now held the standard fingerboard, having six or seven courses, and a pegbox was inserted in its usual place to tune these strings. The rest of the neck carried on past the first pegbox, and held at least seven bass strings, which were played as open strings. Another pegbox was placed at the top of the neck to tune these bass strings. The extensions on archlutes were quite modest, but some lutes had very long necks indeed. It was not uncommon for Italian chitarrone, used as a continuo instrument in the new opera bands, to extend well beyond two metres. These longer members of the lute family were louder and were better suited to opera performances whereas the lute (being softer) was rarely encountered 'in the pit'.

At the start of the eighteenth century, lutes were firmly divided into the big continuo instruments, which were slowly going out of fashion in favour of the harpsichord, and the smaller, fairly standardised, chamber lute - what we now call the 'baroque lute'. An enormous amount of technically very demanding chamber music was written for this instrument in the early eighteenth century, most of which was unknown until very recently. J.S. Bach wrote several lute suites and Haydn occasionally wrote for the lute, but the instrument gradually died out until it was revived in the twentieth century with the popularity of Elizabethan music.

And that's it for this newsletter. Best wishes from the newsletter team - Liz, Alison, Ken, Erin & Anna C.

“It should be most unusual, as all the actors are to sing their parts”
- a courtier at Mantua before the first performance of *Orfeo*.