



April 2004

Dear Friends,

A tenor, two sopranos and a director

We can now tell you about some of the most important people who will be in our production of *Orfeo* in December.

Mark Tucker



We are very excited that English tenor Mark Tucker will sing the role of Orpheus. Mark is, we believe, the leading tenor performing Monteverdi's music in the world today. You might remember him from John Eliot Gardiner's famous Monteverdi recordings – including *The Vespers* and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* and from Gardiner's TV production, now on DVD, of the *Vespers* from St Marks in Venice.

Over the past 10 years Mark has also worked with most of the early music performances leaders, including René Jacobs and Nikolaus Harnoncourt. He has made many recordings, ranging from Britten, Shostakovitch, Percy Grainger and Bach, as well as Monteverdi. Most recently, Mark sang the role of Orpheus in a London production directed by Jonathan Miller. Opera magazine said, of that performance :

“...his voice contains a formidable range of colours...his timbre has rare and rich resonance...he is a seriously gifted actor...he did not so much perform as live the role...This was a massive achievement by any measurement.”

Mark has performed in Sydney once before, in the Netherlands Opera production of Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* at the 1999 Sydney Festival. We will have more information about Mark and an interview in a later newsletter.

Sara Macliver

We're also very pleased to announce that soprano Sara Macliver will be rejoining us for *Orfeo*. Sara was absolutely delightful in the *Fairy Queen*, and was praised by critics and audience alike – “ ... Sara Macliver - clear, thrilling and brilliantly precise” (Sydney Morning Herald 12.03) was a universal comment.

For *Orfeo* Sara is taking on the roles of La Musica, Proserpina and Messagiera, and is very much looking forward to this as Monteverdi is a big favourite of hers. She tells us she's been waiting many years to sing in a Monteverdi opera.

We're thrilled that Sara will be back with us, and we'll bring you an interview with her in a later newsletter.



Penelope Mills



Penelope Mills is a young Sydney soprano who will take on the small but crucial role of Euridice. Penny trained at the Sydney Conservatorium and then graduated from the Royal Northern College with a master of music. Her operatic roles in the UK and Australia include Tatyana, Susanna, Nedda and Zerlina, and she was won several lieder and recital prizes and performs regularly as a recitalist. This year she'll be singing Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel* for Pacific Opera, as the soprano soloist in the Bach B minor Mass with Willoughby Symphony, and in the winter season of *Dido and Aeneas* for Opera Australia. We're delighted that Penny will be joining us for *Orfeo*.

Mark Gaal

The director of *Orfeo* will be Mark Gaal. Mark is a graduate of the University of Queensland and NIDA. Though young, Mark has a great range of experience including theatre and musicals as well as opera. He was Artistic Director of the Australian Theatre for Young People for three years and then directed the original production of Berg's *Lulu* and *Simon Boccanegra* for the Australian Opera (as it then was). Following that, Mark worked overseas for a number of years with Andrew Lloyd Webber's Really Useful Company and directed productions of *Sunset Boulevard* in Germany and back in Australia. Then, in another change of genre, last year Mark wrote and directed *Such a Storm* for Hothouse Theatre in Albury-Wodonga, based on the *Kindertotenlieder*, by Gustav Mahler.

We are very glad to have Mark join the Pinchgut team and are looking forward to his interpretation of the Orpheus legend and Monteverdi's glorious music. An interview with Mark will be in the next newsletter.

In our next newsletter too we'll be telling you about the other cast members.

Other News

Antony Walker has had a wonderful success with his Washington Concert Opera performance of Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux*. The Washington Times said "Washington Concert Opera made its triumphant return to Lisner Auditorium Sunday with a dazzling concert performance of Gaetano Donizetti's "Roberto Devereux." Concert opera simply doesn't get any better than this ... under the baton of Antony Walker ... the entire company delivered an electrifying evening ..." In the audience for this performance was Justin Way, who is in Washington directing Rossini's *Cenerentola* for Washington Opera. After a lighting visit back to Australia Antony is now at Pittsburgh Opera where he's conducting Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse*.

Cantillation are performing with the Sydney Symphony at the end of April in two works – Haydn's *Nelson Mass* and Jonathan Mills' *Sandakan Threnody*. Taking place immediately after Anzac Day the program is a reflection on war, and will be conducted by Richard Gill. More info on (02) 9334 4600.

The Name

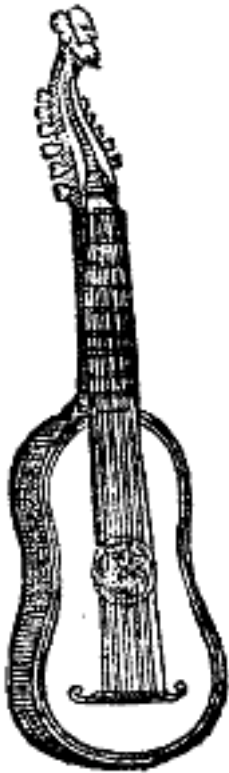
The correct name, in Italian, of Monteverdi's opera is *L'Orfeo, Favola in Musica* – The Orpheus Fable in Music. So, if you are looking for a recording or any other entry for the work, look for *L'Orfeo*. In the newsletter we will continue to use the short name *Orfeo*.

Hades and Hell

We have been looking into the Greek myths on which the Orpheus story was based.

The underworld, to which our hero went to recover Eurydice, was the domain of the god Hades, after whom it came to be known. He is assisted by the ferryman Charon and the three-headed dog Cerberus. But Hades was not hell. The closest equivalent to our idea of hell was Tartarus “as far below earth as earth is from heaven”. Originally a place for defeated gods, Tartarus became in later myths a place of punishment for sinners. One of its inhabitants was Tantalus - a son of Zeus who was invited to share the food of the gods but who committed some undisclosed but obviously serious breach of table manners. Tantalus was sent to Tartarus where he was punished by hunger and thirst: he was up to his neck in water but as he tried to drink it drained away and as he tried to grab fruit from a tree the branch blew away. Which, of course, is the origin on the verb “to tantalize”.

More instruments of the Baroque Band



Following up on the lutes from our last newsletter, this time around we’re introducing to another instrument you may have seen the lute players playing in *The Fairy Queen* – the baroque guitar.

The story of the guitar is one of change. So many different instruments have been called ‘guitars’ that it makes one wonder if the invention of a few new names wouldn’t be a good idea. The first true guitar, with the characteristic hourglass body shape, appeared in the early sixteenth century. It seems to have replaced an older instrument called the cittern (or gittern as it was sometimes spelt). The name cittern survived for quite some time though.

The renaissance guitar was much smaller than the modern guitar (it’s often mistaken for a ukulele), and had only four sets of strings, which as you’ll remember are called courses - three doubles and a single top. The renaissance guitar could be fingered like a lute, but didn’t have the bass range to be a successful solo instrument and was probably used to provide strummed chords for ballads and dances.

The renaissance guitar was played throughout Europe, and was especially popular in France. Spain, meanwhile, was playing something much larger, with six courses, called a Vihuela (which was guitar-shaped but it was tuned and played like a lute).

During the rest of sixteenth century the guitar acquired a fifth course, which was nothing at all compared to what was happening to the lute during the same period of time! In the seventeenth century, the guitar gradually acquired a larger body, and became fashionable as a ladies' instrument. By the end of the century, the top course had changed from single to double, the instrument was tuned differently and was mostly in use as a continuo instrument (supporting the bass line). This is what we now call the baroque guitar. Stradivarius made many guitars in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and one of his survives in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

And just as an afterword - it was only in the nineteenth century that the guitar became particularly associated with Spain. By then it was normally single strung, a sixth course had been added and the tension on the strings was increased. The Spanish classical guitar was probably a successful combination of the guitar and vihuela, though there were other styles that were tried unsuccessfully.

Box Office

Bookings for *Orfeo* will open mid July at the City Recital Hall. The date and prices will be in the next newsletter. There will be a two and a half week booking period exclusively for newsletter subscribers with a discount offer.

Meanwhile, please note the performance dates in your calendars : Wednesday 1, Friday 3 and Monday 6 December 2004.

Angels

Thank you very much to those who answered our call for donors to help support Pinchgut. In the next newsletter we will publish a list of those who are willing to be named. We will also mention one or two things we want to do for our generous supporters to thank them for their help.

Meanwhile, if anyone else is able to make a donation to Pinchgut, please send cheques to PO Box 239 Westgate 2048 or phone Anna Cerneaz on (02) 9362 5711 for further information. Donations are tax deductible and receipts will be issued well in time for your tax returns.

Incidentally, our friends at the Song Company have pointed out that they use the name “Angels” for donors. So we have decided to find another honorific. Any ideas? We thought of names associated with Pinchgut in the convict days, like “ten lashes” or “lifer” but maybe not. Good suggestions will receive a copy of the sampler CD of music from *Orfeo* that we are recording at the ABC next month.

The Blacket



We are pleased to announce The Blacket Hotel will again be a major sponsor of Pinchgut Opera by providing rooms for our out of town artists. This boutique hotel in King Street, just a few minutes walk from the City Recital Hall, is in a refurbished 1850's bank building originally designed by Edmund Thomas Blacket. Watch future newsletters for information about accommodation and pre- and post-opera supper at The Blacket.

Looking forward to your company next time around.

Best wishes from the newsletter team - Ken, Alison, Liz, Anna C and Erin.

“It is said on all sides that it will be a great success. No doubt I shall be driven to attend out of sheer curiosity, unless I am prevented from getting in by lack of space ...”

- Carlo Magno, a court official at Mantua before the first performance of *Orfeo*.

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