



Orfeo

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

May 2004

Dear Friends,

We've had a fantastic response to our announcements in the last newsletter about our cast and director, particularly about Mark Tucker. This exciting news was written up in the Sydney Morning Herald in late April. If you missed this - our last newsletter is up on the website at www.pinchgutopera.com.au.

Orchestra

Anna McDonald, who led Sirius in our first two productions and who was one of our founding artistic directors, has decided to take a break from professional music making to spend more time with her daughter. We all thank Anna for her contribution and look forward to seeing her again before long.

Meanwhile we are delighted to announce that award winning Australian violinist Sophie Gent will return to Australia to lead the orchestra for *Orfeo*. Sophie, who is a graduate from the University of Western Australia has been studying in The Hague for the past few years. Described as "exceptional" in many recent reviews we are very much looking forward to welcoming her to Sydney and to *Orfeo*.

As Sirius Ensemble was very much Anna's creation, we will instead be working with Orchestra of the Antipodes for *Orfeo*. OoTA was set up by Antony Walker and Alison Johnston a few years ago, mainly for recording with ABC Classics. It has now made quite a number of recordings, including *Messiah*, the best-selling Bach Aria and Duets album with Sara Macliver and Sally-Anne Russell, and the soon to be released complete Bach *Brandenburg* concertos. Antony and Alison have wanted to give the band a life outside the recording studio so we expect you will have a chance to hear it in concert as well as in the pit for *Orfeo*. Many of the members of OoTA also played in Sirius, so you will see many familiar faces.

Thank you

Thanks to all of you who have made donations to the Pinchgut Public Fund. Your generosity confirms our belief that Sydney music lovers care about what we are doing. There is still time to get a tax deduction for the 2004 year. You may send a cheque to PO Box 239 Westgate 2048 and a receipt will be issued in time for your tax return. And there is another way you can help: full houses will make sure Pinchgut becomes a permanent part of Sydney. So, tell your friends, bring your friends - even bring your enemies. As one of our supporters says "Pinchgut is a great way to start the summer." The box office will open in early July with a special offer for newsletter readers. Details in the next newsletter.

Norman Platt

The program for *The Fairy Queen* included some thoughts written for us by Norman Platt: singer, actor, opera director and founder of Kent Opera, which has been one of our sources of inspiration for Pinchgut. Sadly, Norman died on the 4th of January this year at the age of 83. One of Kent Opera's early productions was Monteverdi's *Orfeo* in 1985 directed by Jonathan Miller who was given his first opera job by Norman a couple of years earlier. To complete the circle, Miller directed another production of *Orfeo* in London earlier this year in which Mark Tucker sang the role of Orpheus. And Mark will sing that role with us in December. With permission of Johanna Platt Norman's wife and support for 40 years we will dedicate our production to Norman Platt and Kent Opera.

Antony Walker has recently finished conducting Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno d'Ulisses* for Pittsburgh Opera. As well as conducting Antony also played chamber organ in the larger continuo sections, and helped out with harpsichord tuning (he says he now has a much greater appreciation of what harpsichordists have to go through). The production got wonderful reviews - "Pittsburgh Opera Center's current production of "The Return of Ulysses" is a triumph of artistic recreation ..." (*Pittsburgh Tribune* 4.5.04) and "the outstanding production of "The Return of Ulysses" on Sunday evening" (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 4.5.04). While rehearsing the opera Antony was delighted to run into Neal Peres da Costa and members of the Australian Chamber Orchestra who were in Pittsburgh as part of their USA tour.

Australia Council

With the latest funding round announcements having just been made we are pleased to report that Pinchgut has been successful in obtaining a grant of \$12,000 from the Australia Council. With very little funding available and many applicants we think this is a very encouraging sign.

Our two main articles for this newsletter are on Monteverdi himself, and in instruments of the baroque band we bring you the cornetto. Were holding off on the interview with Mark Gaal until next time.

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)



Claudio Giovanni Antonio Monteverdi was born in Cremona, in 1567. He was the son of a doctor and the eldest of five children. Not much is known about his youth, but Claudio started as a choirboy in the Cremona cathedral and he studied with a Marc Antonio Ingegneri who was the cathedral composer.

Monteverdi was something of a prodigy, publishing his first work, *Cantiunculae sacrae*, a volume of sacred songs as a 15-year-old choirboy. His second book was published the following year and in 1584 his third book was published by the Venetian house which would become his main publisher (Vincenti & Amadino). Three years later, aged 19, he published his First Book of Madrigals.

In 1592, aged 25 Monteverdi was hired as a viol player to Vincenzo I, Duke of Mantua. Mantua was under the protection of the powerful Gonzaga family, and Monteverdi's lot depended very much on the character of the ruling duke. The first Gonzaga Duke Guglielmo was wise, cultured, educated, talented, and progressive; Vincenzo I, Guglielmo's successor and Monteverdi's boss, fell short of the ideal Renaissance monarch. An inconsistent, brutish ruler, he did however have a great love for drama and music and kept a stable of virtuoso performers to gratify his passion for display. Duke Vincenzo promoted Monteverdi from viol player to singer (a much more senior position). The next year Monteverdi was disappointed when the maestro di cappella died and the vacancy was filled by Benedetto Pallavicino, an older well-published musician whom Monteverdi nevertheless considered his inferior. Despite his own growing fame and the fact that he was the highest paid court singer - and next in line for promotion - Monteverdi began to feel discontent. With permission of the duke, he married court singer Claudia Cattaneo in May 1599 and when Pallavicino died in 1601, Monteverdi again applied for his position and was awarded the post, the same year that his son Francesco was born.

As he became more famous his music was attacked by Bolognese theorist Giovanni Maria Artusi, who in 1600 and 1603 pointed to Monteverdi as a perpetrator of crimes against music. When the Fifth Book of Madrigals appeared in 1605, perhaps in reply to Artusi, opinion sided with Monteverdi. Not only was this fifth volume reprinted within a year, the publisher also reprinted all of Monteverdi's earlier books.

Two more children were born to Claudio and Claudia and with their debts mounting, Monteverdi complained about irregular payment of his salary. In 1607 he presented *Orfeo* (commissioned for a Mantua carnival), but had little opportunity to enjoy the triumph of his first opera. Claudia died in September of that year, after a long illness, and Monteverdi was left a widower with his two surviving children, sons aged six and three. He was 40 years old.

He stopped composing, but was coaxed back by a letter promising fame and a prince's gratitude. He buried his sorrows in work - a new opera (*Arianna*), an intermezzo and a ballet for the celebration of a royal wedding. Despite extremely stressful working conditions his music was a great success. However, this could not alter his depression and Monteverdi went home to Cremona in such a collapsed state that his father wrote to the Duchess of Mantua with a request that Claudio be released from his duties.

The request was denied and Monteverdi was summoned to return but with a substantial pay rise. By 1610 he was back in Mantua and obviously casting about for another job. The need to find this became urgent when Vincenzo died in 1612 and his son Francesco ascended the throne and suddenly dismissed Monteverdi. After more than twenty years of service in the Gonzaga ducal court Monteverdi returned to Cremona with the equivalent of one month's salary in his pocket; his life savings.

The following year the maestro di cappella at San Marco in Venice died. Monteverdi applied for the post and was appointed on the spot. Monteverdi's new job was huge. The Basilica at San Marco was the largest musical establishment in Italy, with regularly employed singers, instrumentalists and many others for special events. Music had to be provided - composed, rehearsed, performed - for about forty festivals per year. In his mid 40s, he was in his prime not only in his own composition but also in how he took on his new job. He reorganized the chapel band, brought the choir up to strength, hired more musicians for more services and expanded the music library. After three years he was granted a 10 year contract. He was happy - financially comfortable, famous, appreciated by his employers, and loved by the public.

By 1620 Venice was a hotbed of music composition - there were six composers employed by the Basilica itself. Monteverdi was in his fifties, secure in his job and venerated at home and abroad. As well as his church composition he composed solo motets, duets, and other more easily performed works for various anthologies of church music. Heinrich Schütz visited from Germany in 1628 to learn from Monteverdi the new art of opera and church music. In 1630 the plague swept through Venice, killing 40,000 but sparing Claudio. He was worn down by the strain however and in 1632 was ordained a priest.

Just when it seemed that his career was beginning to fade, Venice was evolving into a city of opera. In 1637 the first public opera house opened with Manelli's *Andromeda*. Soon after, several others were opened and Monteverdi was not one to be left out. Aged seventy Monteverdi's composing took on a new life. *Arianna* was revived in 1639 (though was subsequently lost); a series of new works followed including *Il ritorno d'Ulisses*. He published his Eighth Book of Madrigals and a collection of church music. In 1642, at the age of 75, he composed *L'incoronazione di Poppea*.

He died in Venice of a malignant fever on November 29, 1643. The city mourned him with an impressive funeral ceremony held in two churches, San Marco and Santa Maria dei Frari, where he was buried. His publisher Vincenti collected the manuscripts of all his unpublished church music and published them in 1651. Also that year, *L'incoronazione* was performed in far-away Naples. Sadly, though typically, Monteverdi's name quickly disappeared and by the end of the century, he and his music were forgotten.

In our next newsletter we'll talk about the history of opera and where *Orfeo* fitted in and just how revolutionary it was.

More instruments of the Baroque Band - the Cornetto



The name comes from the Italian ‘little horn’ and the instrument is a hybrid with a small trumpet-like mouthpiece and finger holes like a recorder. It is usually made in wood and covered in leather. Like the recorder the cornetto was made in several sizes, the most popular being the treble. Usually the instrument has an slight curve and has six finger holes and a thumb hole. Today it can be referred to as the cornett (with two t's to differentiate it from the modern brass instrument, with which it has no connection).

It's thought that the cornetto was originally modelled on medieval horns. These fairly basic instruments lacked finger holes and could typically play only one pitch and were used for hunting and signalling. By the beginning of the fifteenth century finger holes were added, and the instrument rocketed from relative obscurity to become the preferred soprano wind instrument in the first half of the 16th century.

Its heyday was the 16th and early 17th centuries. It was prized for the resemblance of its sound to that of the human voice (which was considered to be the most perfect instrument) and for its capability for performing elaborate ornamentation. Always considered a difficult instrument, virtuoso players were highly regarded and highly paid. Two such players were Giovanni Bassano and Girolamo Dalla Casa, both of whom worked at San Marco in Venice in Monteverdi's time.

As well as *Orfeo* the other very famous work that calls for cornetto is Monteverdi's Vespers of 1610, but there are also important cornetto parts in music by Giovanni Gabrieli, Schütz and Michael Praetorius. It was used in both sacred and secular music, and its flexibility in the hands of a good player made it suitable for virtuoso display, and at its height of popularity it was expected to do anything a violin or a human voice could do; many works of the early seventeenth century were marked violin or cornetto.

The difficulty of the instrument meant that even at the height of its popularity there were relatively few really accomplished players, and the instrument went into decline during the second half of the 17th century as violin technique developed and as other wind instruments - such as oboes - became more sophisticated. It has also been suggested that several of the leading players died during the great Venetian plague of 1630, leaving few people to teach the instrument. The use of the cornetto survived longest in Northern Europe; J S Bach calls for it in some of his cantatas, but by this time it would have been considered rather old-fashioned, and by the end of the 18th century it had more or less died out.

See you next time and best wishes from the newsletter team - Alison, Ken, Liz, Anna C and Erin.

“The music, moreover, observes the poetry so well that nothing more beautiful is to be heard anywhere.”
Monteverdi's colleague Ferrari on seeing the first performance of *Orfeo*.

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