



04 Newsletter No. 6

L'Orfeo

City Recital Hall Angel Place, Sydney
 1, 3 & 6 December 2004 at 7.30 pm
 5 December 2004 at 5.00 pm
Tickets now on sale at 8256 2222 or
www.cityrecitalhall.com

August 2004

Dear Friends,

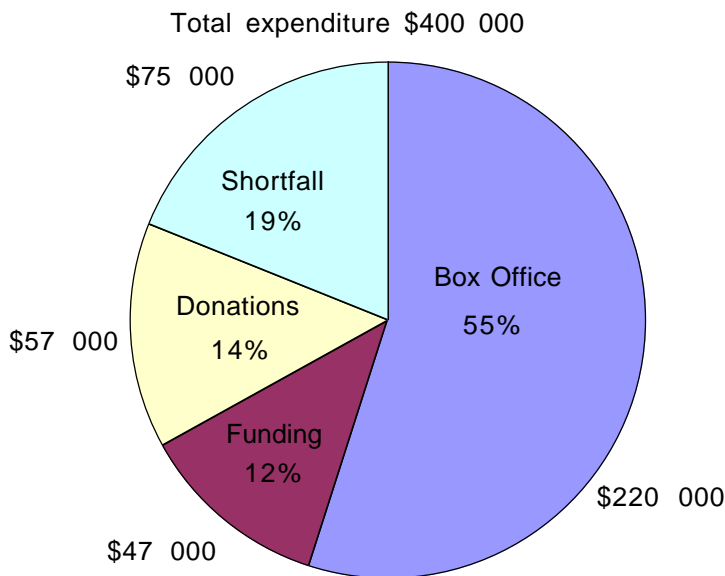
News

We are pleased to report that Pinchgut has been successful in obtaining a grant of \$20,000 from the City of Sydney. This is to help with the cost of hiring the City Recital Hall. This is a very encouraging sign for us.

With this in mind we thought you might be interested in a few figures on our financial position. When we began in 2002, a small group of music lovers agreed to underwrite our first two production by contributing any shortfall. At the start of this year they agreed to cover us for any shortfall for another year. Our hope has always been that after the third production we will be close to being able to cover our costs from box office, sponsorships, donations and government funding. We don't want to be dependent on any single source of money.

As things stand, these are the latest estimates for Orfeo:

Projected Orfeo budget



We believe that our box office forecasts are conservative. Four full houses would mean that we would produce a small surplus. And, of course, that would also give about 4400 people great pleasure. So, if you have any friends who have not been persuaded to come, how about giving them another try?

As you can see the many very generous donations we have received from you make up a very substantial proportion of our income. We are very grateful indeed and would like to acknowledge this on all of our advertising material with a logo to represent these donors. We're going to call you 'Heroes of Pinchgut' and have a look at the logos at the end of the newsletter to see this.

In other news Anna Ryberg, whom many of you will remember as Semele, was out showing off Australia to her fairly new husband. It was lovely to see her again. Angus Wood, our Jupiter in *Semele*, has been singing in Opera Australia's double bill of Monteverdi's *Combattimento di Tancredi* and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, so it has been something of a Semele reunion.

Simon Lobelson, who was the poet in *The Fairy Queen* last year, has made a quick trip out to Sydney from his studies in London to take part in Sydney Philharmonia's concerts of Rameau Motets which were held last weekend. Also taking part were Pinchgut favourites Sara Macliver and Stephen Bennett.

Damian Whiteley

We haven't yet introduced you to Damian Whiteley who is going to sing the joint roles of Charon and Pluto in *Orfeo*.

Damian is a Sydney boy and as a child studied piano and violin. He began singing when studying for a degree in music and languages at the University of Sydney. He sang in some local productions, before going overseas in 1994 to study in London with Yvonne Minton, and then at the Royal Northern College in Manchester. Damian joined British Youth Opera and appeared in Simon Callow's production of Rossini's *Il Turco in Italia* and in the Opera Works series with Jonathan Miller shown on BBC-TV and ABC in Australia. He has since sung with L'Academie Europeene de Musique, Broomhill Opera, the Internationales Opernstudio at Opernhaus Zurich and Kammeroper Schloss Rheinsberg in many different productions ranging from Handel to Weill.



Since 2001 Damian has worked at Zurich Opera, and has also made his conducting debut there with Rossini's *La Pietra del Paragone*.

We're very much looking forward to welcoming Damian back to Sydney for the *Orfeo* performances.

Interview with Mark Gaal

We recently were able to interview Mark, who as you know is the director for *Orfeo*, about his very interesting working life.



Some directors of theatrical productions are attached to a company, but you work freelance.

Being freelance gives you the opportunity to work with a range of companies, and with very different materials. I did have 3 years as Artistic Director of ATYP, which was rewarding, but in the last year, for example, I've directed stage shows for 'Hi-5', I've just directed a fin de siècle symbolist drama at UNSW and I'm in preparation for a touring theatre circus production.

You directed the Australian premiere production of Alban Berg's Lulu.

My background in directing plays, and my interest in 20th Century music equipped me well for it. It's a breathtaking three hours of dramatic music and complex characters.

After Lulu, you went overseas for a number of years.

I had quite an extended involvement with Andrew Lloyd Webber's 'Really Useful Company, here and overseas, yes.

You worked with Trevor Nunn, the legendary Director of the 'Royal Shakespeare Company' and more recently, The National Theatre.

Trevor had directed the West End and Broadway premieres of the musical *Sunset Boulevard*, but was unavailable to direct the German premiere, so I was lucky enough to be brought on board.

And you directed Hugh Jackman and Debra Byrne in the Australian première.

We were really proud of the Australian production. I'd seen versions all round the world - we had an

outstanding company. Trevor was able to join us once we were on stage at the Regent in Melbourne. It was terrific working alongside one of the world's greatest theatre directors.

Do you have a preference – plays, musicals or opera?

It's productions that are either good or bad. Personally, I don't really value or judge one genre over another – each potentially rewards its audience.

Last year you wrote and directed Such A Storm for 'Hothouse Theatre' in Albury-Wodonga, based on the Kindertotenlieder, by Gustav Mahler.

I interwove a series of scenes around the *deadkidsongs* and several other Mahler songs that related emotionally to the music and poetry. The poems on which the songs are based are as much about personal growth and change as they are about loss and death. Like Mahler's music – they're haunting and inspiring. The songs were sung and played beautifully, and the young cast was excellent and brought an innocence and vulnerability to its darker sides.

Orfeo has equally dark qualities. What can we expect from your production?

Despite being 400 years old, *Orfeo* has the possibility of giving us an experience that's very immediate, particularly because of its music, but also because of the potential resonances a fable can afford.

Will it be traditional in approach?

I don't believe there's a singularly authentic, or appropriately traditional way, to stage a work from the classical repertoire. You can't ignore the intervening years. Staging needs to reflect the world of the performers and the audience. We will be contemporary in our interpretation, yet 100% faithful to the material... *Orfeo's* is a delicate, fragile world where beauty and suffering coexist, and where human experience is pushed past redemption. It presents a complex look at the nature of grief – do we dwell in our memories and get consumed by them, or do we find a way to integrate and live alongside our memories. Also, there's an irony here in that *Orfeo's* suffering begets art – we use art to structure and express experience, yet simultaneously the space created by art is, in our world at least, outside life and to some extent a negation of everyday experience.

You've worked a lot with actors, and in actor training. Do you think there are particular challenges in getting good performances in opera?

The approach has to be different – the rehearsal processes in theatre and opera have differing needs. I see it as essential, however, to give the audience performances that are truthful, where like the best actors, the singers are able to fully connect with their material and give honest, believable performances. The cast that's being assembled for this production excites me.

You're looking forward to working with Pinchgut Opera?

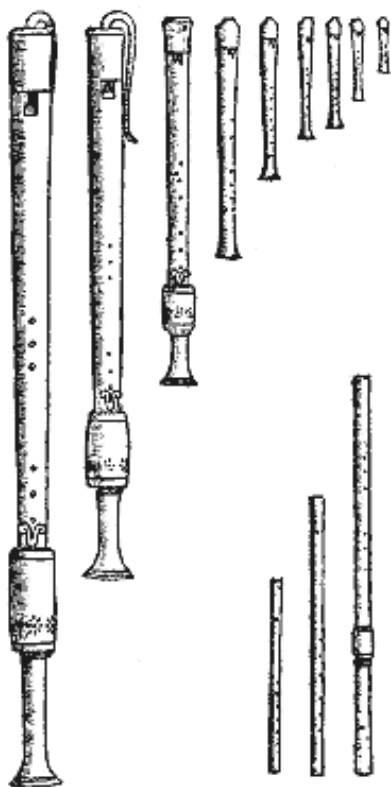
Absolutely. Pinchgut is a vital addition to the Sydney cultural scene. The company presents a repertoire that would not otherwise be offered.

A terrific musical event

If you want to catch another great musical event this year, as well as *Orfeo*, we suggest the complete cycle of Beethoven's String Quartets from our friends of the Goldner Quartet. It is the first performance of the cycle by an Australia group in thirty years. It's also in honour of Ken Tribe who is a Patron of Pinchgut. Six concerts, starting Thursday 19 August at Verbrugghen Hall. Information from Musica Viva on 8394 6666 or <http://www.musicaviva.com.au/2004/concerts/performer.asp?id=14>.

Next we're going to have a look at that most misunderstood and underrated instrument – the recorder.

More instruments of the Baroque Band - the Recorder



There is a perception that the recorder is just an easy instrument used for teaching children music. When the player is reasonably competent, they move onto proper instruments, like the flute. There's very little 'actual' music written for the recorder.

This couldn't be further from the truth. Byrd wrote consort music for recorders, Handel wrote recorder sonatas, Bach used it extensively in his cantatas and chamber music, and it made regular appearances in operas. Until the late 18th century, it was regarded as a professional instrument. It's played on the professional concert circuit today by some amazingly talented performers. The smaller sizes in particular are difficult to play in tune, even for professionals.

Flutes, whistles and recorders are all derived from the same easily made source. Both flutes and whistles were extensively used pre 1500, but the true recorder only came into widespread use around 1500. With its versatility and wide chromatic range, it quickly established itself as the 'polite' whistle, for use by professionals and courtiers, whereas the old type of whistle was regarded as a country instrument fit only for shepherds. Henry VIII had a particular affection for recorders, and when he came to the throne in 1509, imported a family of makers and players (the Bassanos) to use their skills at his court.

As the recorder grew in popularity the flute got a bit sidelined. But by Elizabeth I's reign, fashion had changed, and the flute was more popular. Operas, which were written from about 1600, used both. The recorder was very much associated with pastoral subjects and the flute was the more mainstream orchestral instrument. This continued until the late 17th century, when the recorder once more came into vogue as a concert instrument in England - so much so that it was known as the English Flute or even just the Flute in England. The cross-blown version (which we now call the flute) was known as the German Flute. During the first half of the 18th century, the German flute gradually displaced the English Flute until by 1800 the recorder had virtually disappeared from the professional scene. It was revived around 1900 by Arnold Dolmetch and other members of the growing early music movement.

Because it disappeared around 1750, the recorder never underwent the major structural changes that were imposed on the flute, oboe and bassoon. The modern recorder only has essential keys on the larger sizes, and is virtually the same instrument as it was in the early 18th century.

Looking forward to seeing you next time.

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

“Orfeo with his golden lyre charms Heaven.”
Giulio Caccini after hearing of the performance of L'Orfeo.

Pinchgut Opera Ltd ABN 67 095 974 191; email : liz@pinchgutopera.com.au
PO Box 239 Westgate NSW 2048 ph. (02) 9518 1082 fax (02) 9572 8881

Sponsors

