

## 2005 NEWSLETTER #2

Dear Friends,

### Introducing Paul Agnew!

We can now tell you, with great pride, that tenor Paul Agnew will be singing the title role in our production of Rameau's *Dardanus* at The City Recital Hall Angel Place on 30 November and 3, 4 & 5 December. Paul is the leading interpreter of French haute-contre roles singing today and therefore perfect for the role of Dardanus. He has sung four of the major Rameau operas in productions at the Paris Opera, but this will be his first performance of *Dardanus*.



Paul was born in Scotland, studied as a Choral Scholar at Magdalen College Oxford and now lives in France (all indicating great wisdom and taste, it seems to us). As a soloist he has sung in concert and opera with all the leading baroque conductors: John Eliot Gardiner, Marc Minkowski, Ton Koopman, Emmanuelle Haïm, Philippe Herreweghe and, perhaps most notable of all, William Christie and Les Arts Florissants. Christie rediscovered and recreated the French Baroque and Paul has played a vital part in that project.

His recordings are many and for our money, his performances on the recently released Gardiner Bach Cantatas (Monteverdi Productions SGD 101) stand out. Two of his Paris Opera performances of Rameau operas are on DVD: *Platee*, conducted by Marc Minkowski and *Les Boreades* with William Christie.

Paul has been to Australia twice before: in 1990 with *The Consort of Musick* and in 1992 with *The Tallis Scholars*, both in tours for Musica Viva. We will have a more detailed profile and, we hope, an interview with Paul in a later newsletter. We will also explain what a haute-contre singer is and why that voice is so special.

All of us in the Pinchgut team are very excited about Paul and his involvement in our next production.

### Antony Has Form

When Antony Walker conducts the Australian premiere of *Dardanus* it will be his second time with the work. In 2003 he conducted the American premiere with the Wolf Trap Opera Company. The Washington Post, after commenting that the music is magnificent, went on to say "Walker conducted an orchestra of period instruments with a sure grasp of the elusive French Baroque style". The Washington Times also liked it and added that Antony "led his orchestral forces in a brilliantly authentic re-imagining of this old score, which will become a wonderful addition to the Wolf Trap Opera's rapidly expanding and innovative repertoire."

The Washington Post also commented that "Talk about neglected genius! Jean-Philippe Rameau's opera "Dardanus," which dates from 1739, had its American professional premiere at the Barns of Wolf Trap last weekend. This was a long delay for an acknowledged masterpiece by one of the most important composers of the

18th century ... French Baroque repertoire is a genre with many subtleties that make it different from the more popular Italian style. It has the expected French elegance, a lot more emphasis on dancing, more attention to low voices than the castrati-obsessed Italian baroque and a penchant for fantasy." The Washington Times also said " Its delightful music is based on the composer's harmonic theories, which distinguishes it from sometimes run-of-the-mill baroque stuff. It's also chock-full of raucous and stirring martial music that's surprisingly heavy on percussion, and it boasts ravishing arias that seem at times almost to anticipate Schubert's lieder of another era."

Antony himself says of the music "I first came to know the music of *Dardanus* through a suite of some of the dances that I put together for an orchestral concert some years ago. At the time I was blown away by the freshness and the invention of this wonderful music, and very much wanted to do the full work. When I got to know the opera I was even more in awe of Rameau; the harmonic inventiveness, the rhythmic variety, the wonderful melodic writing, and the sheer beauty of the score. I find it astonishing that Rameau isn't as well known as Handel or Purcell, and I'm looking forward to sharing the man and his amazing music with you all."

### **Bach Cantata Feast**

Unfortunately, J S Bach did not write any operas. If he had, Pinchgut would certainly be performing them. He did write three hundred wonderful cantatas, of which two hundred have been found. Sydney Philharmonia will be performing thirty two of these in ten concerts this year, starting with

### **The Heavens Laugh**

Cantatas for Easter: BWV 31, 6, 4 & 66

24 March at 7 pm

Eugene Goossens Hall

ABC Centre

700 Harris Street Ultimo

Repeated 26 March at 7 pm

Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House

The other dates are

29-30 April

27-28 May

24-25 June

22-23 July

26-27 August

22-24 September

28-29 October

25-26 November

16-17 December

All these are at Eugene Goossens Hall at 7 pm.

Many musicians you will recognise from Pinchgut's productions will be performing, including soloists Sara Macliver, Sally-Anne Russell, Paul McMahon and Stephen Bennett.

Brett Weymark will conduct a period instrument orchestra.

We heartily recommend these concerts. We'll be there.

Further information and bookings on 9251 3115 or [www.sydneyphilharmonia.com.au](http://www.sydneyphilharmonia.com.au)

### **Do You Have a Thousand Friends Who Like Opera? A plea for help.**

When we set up Pinchgut about four years ago we decided that we would make the box office our major source of income. We knew that we could not expect substantial government funding – the Commonwealth and State governments are stretched already supporting Opera Australia and the other established arts organisations. We believed that, if we kept our expenses very tight and our shows were very good, we could cover the largest part of our costs from box office.

The target was 75% from box office and the balance from donations, government grants and sponsorship. As it happens, OA receives about 75% of its budget from box office. Frankly, we thought that if we could not build up an audience of around this size it would mean that there was not a need for our kind of music in Sydney. As things have turned out, we received slightly over \$100,000 in 2004 from donations and government grants. That was close to 25% of our \$430,000 expense budget for that year.

Box office, however, has fallen short of what we expected. For the production of *Orfeo* we sold about 2200 seats producing about \$200,000 in box office. This was about the same as the previous year. We had forecast 15-20% growth. We can think of a number of reasons why some people did not come to *Orfeo*, including the possibility that the Adelaide Ring exhausted people's opera budget for the year. But there will always be reasons and we really want to get to the stage when people will put Pinchgut on their "must not miss!" list each year.

We cannot afford to spend much more on advertising – another of our original rules was to spend most of our budget on the artists – and we believe we have done quite well in generating publicity.

So ... we are asking you for help.

If you have enjoyed our productions and want us to continue, can you persuade some more friends to come? Another 500 ticket buyers in 2005 and the same increase the following year will put us in good shape. Even better, if you do have 1000 friends who will come to see *Dardanus* that would be wonderful. And it would ensure the health and continuation of Pinchgut.

If you would be able to help, ask your friends to put the dates of the *Dardanus* performances in their diaries (in ink, not pencil) now and ask them to email us to be put on the newsletter list.

You know they won't be disappointed.

We think Pinchgut is valuable and important, but we are biased. We would like you to show that you agree.

PS If you are interested in seeing more detail on our financial position of plans, please let us know. We have no secrets from our supporters.

### **Rameau Resources**

There is not a lot on the internet in English about Rameau. In fact, much less than there is in French on Henry Purcell. A pity. The best site seems to be <http://jp.rameau.free.fr/jpr-map.htm>, and the excellent [www.classical.net](http://www.classical.net) has a page <http://www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/rameau.html> with bibliography and discography. We use this site as a first stop in any online music research.

### **A new sponsor**



We are delighted that KLM will join us as a sponsor for our artists flying from Europe to Sydney. We welcome KLM aboard and we are proud to have them as a sponsor.

### **And a few more snippets before we finish**

We had a lovely email from Anna Ryberg (who you will remember as Semele from our 2003 production of Handel's Semele). She's working on Orfeo at Frankfurt Opera, but in a setting that sounds very different to ours! She has this to say "Our Orfeo is wonderful. A German baritone lieder superstar Christian Gerhaher. What a musician he is. And the musos are also great. Cleverly, the orchestra sit in the middle of a constantly rotating stage, so they are always on show and kind of in the performance as well. The rest of us playing Ninfa, and Pastores are robotic-creatures from StarTrek who seek to join the rockstar underworld, where Elvis, Freddie Mercury, Curt Cobain and Bob Marley are! Yes, Orfeo is a grunge-rock-star-wanna-be."

Antony's opening performance of Handel's Orlando at New York City Opera is on this coming weekend. All is going very well, and Antony is looking forward to making his debut in New York. Amongst the cast the title role of Orlando is being sung by counter-tenor Bejun Mehta, who is the nephew of conductor Zubin Mehta. It's good to see that musical talent can run in the family!

Bass Damian Whiteley will be singing Bartolo in Paisiello's Il Barbiere di Siviglia in Konstanz this northern summer (which makes a trifecta of well-known subjects but composed by lesser-known composers for him as he's previously performed in Salieri's Falstaff and Gazzaniga's Don Giovanni). And so ends another newsletter. Best wishes from Liz, Alison, Ken, Antony, Erin, Anna & Andrew. "His (Rameau's) music enfolds a great wealth of beauty of the highest order which is almost unknown and totally unexplored." Clive Girdlestone in the preface to his book Jean-Philippe Rameau: his life and work. (This is still the best book in English on Rameau.)

