

## 2005 NEWSLETTER #6

Dear Friends,

### What's Happening

We know that many of you like to know what the Pinchgut team is up to. Here is a quick summary:

A couple of weekends ago we took six singers and eight players, with Antony Walker, to Rothbury Estate in the Hunter Valley where David Constable and the Goldner Quartet present a delightful music festival each year. Pinchgut gave a preview of *Dardanus* with Antony outlining the story. We were made very welcome and, we hope, convinced many in the audience to come to the show. Here's a photo of a rehearsal in situ so that you can see what it looked like. Antony has since gone back to the US for WCO concerts, but is back out here soon.



Rothbury was a great opportunity for us to have a go at some of the music, and to find out just how beautiful it is, and also some of the things that we'll have to look out for later on. Simon and Lisa, our bassoonists, are busily working on the instruments that we have borrowed and coming to grips with the complexities of 392 bassoons. We are also now seriously thinking about and comparing the special strings we are going to need for the string instruments for the performances.

We recently had the design presentation from Hamish Peters and, through him, from Justin Way, the director who is in London. We are not about to tell you how they will dress and present *Dardanus* – some things must be kept as a surprise. We can promise you that the production will be glamorous, stunning and very French.

Production manager Andrew Johnston is now busy getting together all the things that we are going to need to make Justin's, Hamish's and lighting designer Bernie Tan's vision happen. Construction is getting under way, and costumes and lights are being thought about.

Soloists coming from overseas - Paul Agnew, Kathryn McCusker, Paul Whelan, Damian Whiteley and Miriam Allan arrive about the end of October. Rehearsals start on 3 November and the production moves into City Recital Hall on Friday 25 November.

And Anna is working hard on getting the word out about how terrific *Dardanus* is going to be. As we work on very limited budgets we do rely a lot on things in this

area that we can do ourselves or cost little. If you have an ideas do let us know - you can contact Anna on 0412 093 063 or [acerneaz@pinchgutopera.com.au](mailto:acerneaz@pinchgutopera.com.au).

### **Spear Carriers Wanted**

In many opera companies there is a tradition of inviting volunteers to appear in a production as supernumeraries - often known as "spear-carriers". These are non-singing, non-speaking support roles. They are also, by tradition, unpaid but lots of fun. In accordance with our attention to accuracy and authenticity with our music and instruments, we're not satisfied with mere imitations - we're after the real deal. So if you or anyone you know have had some armed-services training (or cadets) we'd love to hear from you. Unfortunately, while Pinchgut is an equal opportunity employer, the Phrygian army sadly was not - so we're just looking for blokes.

If you are interested phone Andrew Johnston on 0431 898 045 or email [andrew@pinchgutopera.com.au](mailto:andrew@pinchgutopera.com.au).

### **Meet Penelope Mills - do you remember the snake?**



Our Euridice from *Orfeo* is taking part this year in *Dardanus* as the goddess Vénus. We were able to talk to Penny recently, and would like to take this opportunity to (re-)introduce her to you.

Penny was trained at the Sydney Conservatorium, and then gained a Master of Music in Operatic Performance from the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. Since her return from the UK Penny has been very busy in various performances around Sydney including Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel* for Pacific Opera, performing Kaija Saariaho for The Seymour Group for their Michael Tippett celebration, Bach's Mass in B minor for Willoughby Symphony, the Poulenc Gloria for the Beethoven Society, and last week at short notice in Sydney Philharmonia's Immortal Bach cantata series. Between now and when *Dardanus* is on Penny will be singing Fiordiligi in Pacific Opera's *Così fan tutte* and *Carmina Burana* with Sydney Philharmonia, so she's very busy indeed.

How did you get into singing in the first place?

It feels as though I have always been singing. Discovering and understanding music is a great privilege and joy and a process that I hope will never end!

When did you know a singer was what you wanted to be?

Singing just seemed to choose me, it was never a conscious decision at all. I was always interested in music and growing up in a musical church family, I played cello for many years and performed a lot of musical theatre as a young singer?

What are some of the skills that you've had to learn that you never thought you'd have to?



Most recently, befriending a snake in *L'Orfeo*! I first met the snakes (there were actually two of them) in a publicity photo session we had a little while before *Orfeo* was on, and that was a rather terrifying but exhilarating experience. During rehearsals we used a stuffed toy, and the snakes were only brought in during the final calls at Angel Place. In one of the performances I walked towards Yuri who (as Fate) was holding the snake ready for my death scene, and the snake who had always been moving around at this moment, actually leant towards me and the tip of it's tongue touched the tip of my nose. It was rather confronting - but perfect for the scene - and all in the name of drama of course...

What has been like having to learn to sing early music?

The challenge of singing music of all styles and from all centuries is very exciting. *Dardanus* is my first Rameau opera and quite different from all other early music I have sung. Rameau writes so beautifully for the voice and I have enjoyed studying the French baroque style with all the challenges it brings. The ornamentation and Rameau's dramatic interpretation of emotions is exquisite and I am thrilled to be exploring this amazing music.

Which composer would you like to sing more of?

I look forward to singing any music which is challenging, dramatic, beautiful, collaborative and uplifting. I think that covers almost all of it!

### **And just in case you were wondering ....**

For those of you who've been studying the Minkowski recording, or a libretto - we are not doing the Prologue. It's very beautiful, and does have more for Vénus to sing, but adds considerably to the overall length of the opera, without adding to the story. And the Dreams, who are Vénus' attendants, are being sung by Miriam Allan, Dan Walker and Corin Bone.

## Recordings

We have mentioned that we like the recording of *Dardanus* by Marc Minkowski on Archiv. John Mark Ainsley is the tenor soloist. Paul Agnew has not yet sung or recorded *Dardanus*. The Minkowski CD should be available at Michael's Music Room and Fish Fine Music in Sydney or online from amazon.

If you would like to explore Rameau, beyond the operas, we suggest a lovely recording from Christophe Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques called *Six Concerts en Sextuor* on Decca. These are transcriptions of some of Rameau's works for harpsichord. They were probably done by Jacques-Joseph-Marie Decroix, a great collector of Rameau's work in the late 18th Century. Also a little unusual is Minkowski's *Une Symphonie Imaginaire*, a recent release on Archiv. Rameau never wrote a symphony so Minkowski has created one, but using only Rameau's music. It works and we recommend a listen.

Paul Agnew's discography is very large. He has recorded much Rameau and Lully with William Christie and Les Arts Florissants. As well as the French repertoire for which he is very well known, Paul has recorded a lot of Bach and Handel. He sang in many of the John Eliot Gardner Bach Cantata cycle recorded in 2000 and now being released on Gardiner's Soli Dei Gloria label. We especially like SGD101 which includes Cantatas for the Feast of St John the Baptist and for the First Sunday after Trinity. This has been very recently been chosen by Gramophone as the best Baroque vocal recording of the year. If you have not yet discovered the Cantatas, these CDs are a wonderful place to start. We must warn that they can be addictive.

We have also been listening to an interesting recording by Paul of *Love Songs and Sonnets of John Donne and Philip Sidney*, accompanied by Christopher Wilson on lutes. It is on the Metronome label and might be a bit hard to find, but is worth the effort. His voice is, we think, as perfect for these English songs as it is for French baroque opera.

We realize that all these might blow your music budget for the rest of the year. But please leave room for Pinchgut's CD of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* with Mark Tucker and Sara Macliver, which ABC Classics assure us will be available before year-end.

### **And while we are on the subject of recordings ....**



We said, in our last newsletter, that we would tell you about our preview CD. As we mentioned a couple of newsletters ago a group of players and singers went into the studio, with the kind assistance of ABC Classics and Paul McMahon, and recorded some tracks from *Dardanus* for promotional and ticket-selling purposes. Tracks from the CD have been played a number of times now on radio, and will be again between now and November 30. If you know of anyone yet to be convinced about buying

tickets to *Dardanus*, and you think this preview CD will help - please contact Liz Nielsen on 02 9908 1962, or at [liz@pinchgutopera.com.au](mailto:liz@pinchgutopera.com.au).

**Did you know that our CD of The Fairy Queen has been nominated for the inaugural ABC Classic FM Listeners' Choice Award?** Only fifteen CDs have been selected to choose from so we are feeling very pleased about this. This award is going to be presented at the Fine Arts ARIAs at the Sydney Conservatorium on Oct 11. If you'd like to vote the web address is [www.abc.net.au/classic/aria/vote.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/classic/aria/vote.htm).

For those of you who don't yet own the CD of *The Fairy Queen* you can buy this from ABC CD shops, or at [www.buywell.com](http://www.buywell.com). "It is all marvellously clear, energetic and invigorating ... they are clearly a band of virtuosos ... sheer pleasure." (*International Record Review*, May 2005)

### **Book Soon!**

We know that many of you have booked for *Dardanus*. Thank you. If you have not reserved your seats yet, we suggest that you do so as soon as you can. Sales, especially for Wednesday 30 November (opening night) are going very well. As a percentage of the house, we are quite a bit further on than at this stage in previous years. There are good seats still available for all dates, though Wednesday and the Sunday 5 pm matinee are getting tight.

Bookings can be made at City Recital Hall Box Office either in person, on 02 8256 2222 or online at [www.cityrecitalhall.com](http://www.cityrecitalhall.com).

## **THE GRACE**

The Grace Hotel is a well-loved landmark right in the heart of Sydney, classified by the Australian National Trust. But go beyond the classic art-deco foyer and you will find 382 spacious and elegant rooms, and a warm and homely atmosphere with the accent on intimacy and personal attention.

Built in 1930 on the site of the original Sydney Opera House, the hotel was originally headquarters for department store impresarios the Grace brothers. In 1997 the building was renovated and transformed into the Grace Hotel, with many original features retained and restored.

The Grace Hotel is offering a number of packages starting from \$195 for a Superior room. The Heritage Floor has also been packaged to include full buffet breakfast for two and sparkling wine on arrival for \$285 per room.

Rooms are subject to availability. Reservations can be made by contacting The Grace Hotel on 02 92726890. Email [reservations@gracehotel.com.au](mailto:reservations@gracehotel.com.au)  
Website [www.gracehotel.com.au](http://www.gracehotel.com.au)



### **What other people have said about the music of Rameau**

We've been thinking about the best way to give you a verbal description of why the music of Rameau is so terrific, and as always with this kind of thing it's very hard to describe. So we've instead decided to report comments made by some wonderful and respected performers on performing the music of Rameau :

Trevor Pinnock - "I was first introduced to my hero Jean-Philippe Rameau as a teenager. During subsequent years I learned more of Rameau as composer and theorist, and experienced his mastery as an operatic composer. On each return I found new riches and appreciated all the more his sure sense of architecture and the ever strong bass lines which provide the possibility of expressive freedom to both composer and performer. Rameau's character pieces display his vivid imagination, theatrical nature and ability to use instruments in a myriad of ways. How did listeners react two hundred and eighty years ago, I wonder? What was the effect of the pounding bass, 'batteries' and arpeggios, the harmonic daring or the abandoned dancing?"

Marc Minkowski - "Rameau was a profound innovator in terms of his orchestration and composition, which is full of harmonic innovation. He gave French opera density and complexity that hadn't been there up to that time. His abilities as an orchestrator are so clear. He wrote in every opera genre: tragédie en musique with *Hippolyte et Aricie* and *Dardanus*, opéra-ballet with *Les Indes galantes*, comédie-lyrique with *Platée*."

William Christie - "Rameau introduced a new sensitivity. Rameau seeks out a different balance, one where the music rather than the text reveals the deeper sense of the plot, the richness of the little, unforgettable melodic figures which make up the airs. What dominates in Rameau, obviously, is the divertissement. He is the greatest composer of ballet music before Stravinsky. To a large extent this is thanks to his particularly brilliant orchestration: a palette of infinite colours and rhythms reigns. The writing for woodwind reveals Rameau's virtuosity in this realm. A brilliant aesthetic mastery flows from Rameau's operas."

And there's this interesting comment from John Eliot Gardiner on why it's necessary to use a period instrument orchestra for Rameau : "You simply cannot do justice to the palette of 18th-century French music, particularly Rameau, using modern instruments. They don't have that refinement of colour and the sensuality that is implicit in Rameau's music. Using period instruments wasn't ever in my case an

antiquarian aim. It was more a question of what clothes the music needs to wear in order to make it current and attractive to today's audience."

## **Lapérouse**

One of our eagle-eyed and interested readers, Don Walker, has sent us the following interesting corrections on our mentioning the great French explorer :- "Historians have recently decided that Lapérouse's own preferred spelling was in one word - as above, which explains the name of the Lapérouse Museum (which is at La Perouse!) A minor error - thirty years ago you would have been correct. His full name was Jean-François de Galaup, comte de Lapérouse. He was a count which is comte in French, not compte as you had it, which is the account (bill) you settle in a restaurant, a calculation." Thanks for passing this on Don. Our readers do have a terrific amount of knowledge on so many interesting subjects.



Pinchgut Opera wants you to know about KLM Royal Dutch Airlines sponsorship of the production of Dardanus. KLM will fly Paul Agnew from Paris, Paul Whelan, Kathryn McCusker, Miriam Allan and Justin Way from London and Damian Whiteley from Zurich for the start of rehearsals on November 3rd. This is a very important sponsorship for us as it has made the assembly of this wonderful cast possible.

## **The Search for Rameau (continued)**

In our newsletter #5 we told you of our search for Rameau artefacts in Paris. We did not find many. Our friend, well known Sydney organist Pastor de Lasala, has sent us a couple of photographs he took in France of things pertaining to Rameau. The first is Notre-Dame de l'Assomption in Clérmont-Ferrand where Rameau was an organist.



Pastor says of this cathedral "The cathedral was started in the 13th century and was completed in the 19th. The original organ on which Rameau played is no longer extant, and there is only a modest and fairly modern brass plaque which records Rameau as organist at the Cathedral."

The other photo is of a statue of Rameau in Dijon.



Pastor takes a great interest in historical and restored organs in Australia and Europe. He has a website at <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~tormus/index.htm> which has material on many of the old organs still being played.



We are very pleased that The City of Sydney is again supporting us this year, and that many of the Councillors will be attending performances.

### **Forthcoming performances**

You can see Pinchgut artists in a number of different concerts over the next few weeks : Cantillation are singing in the Sydney Symphony's concerts Shock of the New with Gelmetti on October 13 & 15 in the Sydney Opera House (more info - [www.sydneyphilharmonic.com](http://www.sydneyphilharmonic.com) or 02 8215 4600); Brett Weymark, Penelope Mills and Myee Clohessy are performing in Pacific Opera's performances of *Così fan tutte* on October 13, 15, 18, 20 & 22 at the Independent Theatre in North Sydney (more info - [www.pacificopera.com.au](http://www.pacificopera.com.au) or 02 9872 9975); Miriam Allan and Pinchgut favourites Sally-Anne Russell, Paul McMahon and Stephen Bennett are singing in Sydney Philharmonia's Bach series on October 28 and 29 at the Eugene Goossens Hall at the ABC (more info - [www.sydneyphilharmonia.com.au](http://www.sydneyphilharmonia.com.au) or 02 9251 2024); Rachael Beesley, Stephen Freeman, Nicole Forsyth and Valmai Coggins are playing in Salut!'s concerts on 10, 11 & 13 November in Sydney and Canberra (more info - [www.baroque.com.au](http://www.baroque.com.au) or 02 6251 6522).

Until next time. Best wishes from Ken, Alison, Liz, Anna, Andrew, Antony & Erin.

"What could be closer to the sophistication of the 21st-century musical than Rameau's magical marriage of dance, drama and divertissement? And the music is so much better." Nicholas Kenyon, director BBC Proms

## Sponsors

