

## 2006 NEWSLETTER #2

Dear Friends,

### Idomeneo People

In our first newsletter of this year we announced the director and several of the soloists for our December production of *Idomeneo*. Here are some more of those involved.



**Dan Potra** will be the designer for *Idomeneo*. Dan has worked with Lindy Hume on many productions including *Carmen*, *Batavia* and *Barber of Seville*. As well as all of the Australian opera companies, Dan has worked with Houston Grand Opera, Mariinsky Opera of St Petersburg, Theatre St Gallen Switzerland and Museiktheatre Belgium. In theatre he has designed for Bell Shakespeare Company, Australian Theatre for Young People, Sydney Theatre Company and Company B. He also designed this year's new Opera Australia production of *The Magic Flute* and elements of the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics and the Melbourne Commonwealth Games.

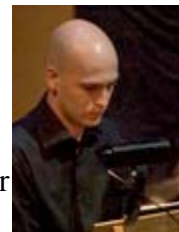
**Paul McMahon** will sing Arbace. Paul is one of Australia's busiest tenors. He sang with Pinchgut in *Semele*, *The Fairy Queen* and *l'Orfeo* and has performed with all the Australian Symphony Orchestras as well as the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Christchurch Philharmonia, the Australian Chamber Orchestra and the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra. Paul teaches voice at the University of Newcastle. Paul has recently sung his first Evangelist in Bach's *St Matthew Passion* at the City Recital Hall last weekend.



**Anna McDonald** will lead the Orchestra of the Antipodes. Anna was one of the founders of Pinchgut and played in *Semele* and *The Fairy Queen*. The demands of motherhood persuaded her to take a break from full-time music but this year she will go the UK to lead Paul McCreesh's Gabrieli Consort – with who she played for four years in London – in a performances of some Mozart symphonies and the concerto for two pianos (with the Labeque Sisters) at the Salzburg Whitsun Festival as well as re-joining Pinchgut. Anna is being sponsored by Grosvenor Financial Securities.

### Where's Erin?

Erin Helyard will, sadly, not be with us this year. After helping found Pinchgut and playing harpsichord and working with Antony as assistant conductor in *Semele* and *l'Orfeo*, and preparing performance editions for *The Fairy Queen*, *l'Orfeo* and *Dardanus*, he went to Montreal to study for a PhD at McGill University. He is, nevertheless, still an Artistic Director of the Company and contributes from a distance to the preparation of our productions.



### The Trans-Pacific Antony Walker



As most know, Antony is one of the Artistic Directors of Pinchgut and has conducted all our productions so far. Much of his work these days is in the US where he is Artistic Director and Conductor of Washington Concert Opera in Washington DC. He recently conducted a performance of Rossini's *Tancredi* about which the Washington Post said "thanks to Antony Walker, the artistic director and conductor of WCO, not only for choosing a glorious work and a worthy cast and coordinating a sumptuously blended performance, but for his part in reviving one of Washington's musical treasures." Other 2006 US engagements include *The Elephant Man* for Minnesota Opera, *Semele* for New York City Opera, *Tosca* for Hawaii Opera Theatre and Samuel Barber's *Vanessa* for Chautauqua Opera.

### **Cantillation has been busy**



Cantillation was formed in 2001 originally to make recordings for ABC Classics. It is Australia's only large professional chorus outside the opera companies. Cantillation has provided the chorus for all Pinchgut productions and has also performed several times a year with the Sydney Symphony, Musica Viva and other companies. This year's activities include *The Bells* with Vladimir Ashkenazy, *Daphnis & Chloe* and *The Shock of the New* all with the Sydney Symphony, music for the Commonwealth Games and a recording of the Mozart Requiem.

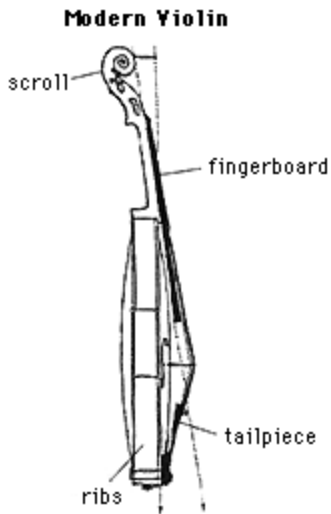
### **News of Dardanus' cast and crew**

Justin Way is now in Chicago directing Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* for Chicago Opera Theatre. With him as the production team are the designers from The Fairy Queen - Andrew Hays and Kimm Kovac. Jane Glover is the conductor. *Seraglio* opens on May 3rd and we are sure it will be wonderful.

Paul Agnew is reviving his memorable performance of Rameau's *Platée* at Opera National de Paris with Mark Minkowski conducting on April 14. This performance is available on DVD if you haven't seen it. It's hard to believe it's the same person underneath the costume!

Paul Whelan was recently in New Zealand singing Amfortas in the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra's performance of *Parsifal*. The New Zealand Herald said "... Whelan emerges here as a potentially great Wagnerian, with intelligence, sobriety and demeanor able to encompass an not entirely sympathetic role with the right vocal talent, musical expression and acting skills."

Kathryn McCusker returned to London via her home-town of Perth where she performed in concerts of Mozart's arias and chamber music with the Australian Classical Era Orchestra.



Damian Whiteley is currently in Australia again working on a lieder CD with pianist Tamara-Anna Cislowski and doing some concerts in country NSW.

Hamish Peters will be the Associate Designer for Opera Queensland's performances of Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* in May of this year.

### Music With a View

Annie Whealy runs music courses in her apartment at Kirribilli by the Harbour. Later in the year, Annie will give a five week course on Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. The lessons will run for two hours a week, with a maximum of ten people per class. If you would like a leisurely introduction to the magical world of The Ring, in the comfort of a private home, please make enquiries on [awhealy@bigpond.net.au](mailto:awhealy@bigpond.net.au). Annie will also run a course on the Classical Era leading up to *Idomeneo*. A great way to prepare for our production in December.

### Are you a Hero?

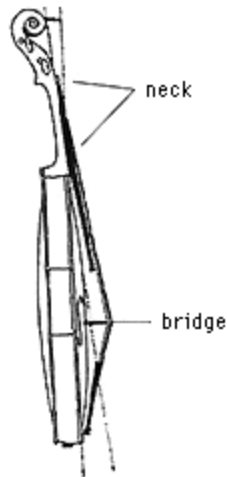
Pinchgut's main source of money is box office. After that, in size, come donations from supporters – our Heroes. We are very happy about this because it shows that there are many people who believe we are doing worthwhile work and deserve to be encouraged. Each cheque we receive is worth more to us than the money it contributes. If Pinchgut is to survive and become an important part of Australian music – which is what we all want – we will need more donations as well as increased box office. The Pinchgut Opera Public Fund is on the Register of Cultural Organisations and is a Deductible Gift Recipient under the Income Tax Assessment Act. That means that donations over \$2 are tax deductible to the donor. May we remind you that the tax year ends 30 June so this is a very good time to consider a donation to Pinchgut as well as to other organisations you want to support? All donors will be acknowledged as Heroes in our programs. For more info phone Liz on 9908 1962 or email [liz@pinchgutopera.com.au](mailto:liz@pinchgutopera.com.au). Cheques may be sent to Pinchgut Opera Public Fund PO Box 239 Westgate NSW 2048.

### Mozart on Classical Instruments

We'll be performing *Idomeneo* on classical instruments and at classical pitch. We asked Anna McDonald about what this will mean for the players and the audience and how classical string instruments differ from modern ones.

Mozart's writing for his opera orchestra is full of gesture and colour. Every single detail is emphasizing the drama – the characters and the story. When Mozart is played on modern instruments, the players need to 'tone down' their sound a lot. With classical instruments, the orchestra is already perfectly balanced. The strings play on gut strings, and everything is at a lower pitch (about a quarter of a tone), which means all the stringed

### Classical Violin



instruments sound mellower, softer and sweeter. The players can use all the range of colours – from something highly dramatic and loud to an exquisitely soft and blended sound, and everything in between. The wind players also play on the highly colourful instruments for which Mozart composed his score. Every interjection or melody on oboe, flute, bassoon or horn comes across in perfect balance and with the specific colour he wanted. The score absolutely comes alive! This also goes for the far greater subtlety of the trumpets, trombones and timpani, who can blend or make an impression at will.

As well as all this, classically trained players use ‘authentic’ performance techniques. This kind of knowledge means that phrases are played with tremendous attention to detail – every phrase contains a gesture of some kind. Players think about these gestures all the time ... it is a highly involving process playing this music.

The string players will use a wide palette of bowings, and much less vibrato than in a modern orchestra. It is a very beautiful affect, hearing such transparency of sound, and will be quite revelatory.

Classical string instruments are different from those in a modern orchestra. These instruments, like baroque ones, will mostly have lighter fingerboards and tail pieces, although we will probably have a bit of a mixture, as in Mozart's day modernization was already occurring and in the 1790's some experimentation was happening. The bow is probably the most important feature that affected style. Bows became curved inwards, as instrumentalists sought to imitate the new bel canto style that sustained long elegant phrases. An inwardly curving bow sounds naturally more even throughout its length. Classical bows feel extremely light to use, and it's impossible to make a heavy sound. Leopold Mozart, Amadeus' dad, describes our bowing style perfectly, when he writes in his treatise for violin players: "Every tone, even the strongest attack, has a small, even if barely audible, softness at the beginning of the stroke ... this same softness must be heard also at the end of each stroke. Hence one must know how to divide the bow into weakness and strength, and therefore how by means of pressure and relaxation, to produce the notes beautifully and touchingly."

Music in Mozart's day was meant to stir the heart by means of rhetorical devices. Think of the bow as being the equivalent of an orator's voice, with declamatory pauses, gentle inviting tones, sudden attacks, and the constant use of emphasis and de-emphasis. Despite bows advancing towards our modern ones, we will still use a lot of light and shade, and far more articulation than a modern orchestra would. Our vibrato will be minimal, as it was still used as an expressive device.

The size and acoustic of the City Recital Hall are ideal for this music, as we will not need to make the sort of volume of sound a large concert hall requires. Compared to a string player in a modern orchestra, we enjoy enormous freedom in playing expressively and rhetorically, simply because we do not need to play so loudly.

The drawings showing the differences between the classical and modern violins come from a website [www.arttowermito.or.jp/music/badiarov99.html](http://www.arttowermito.or.jp/music/badiarov99.html). There is also a good description of the differences between these and the baroque violin.

### **Mozart and Idomeneo**

The later years of Mozart's life – he died in 1791 at the age of 35 – are not well documented. That is no doubt why myths have grown up, included the one used in Peter Schaeffer's play and subsequent film *Amadeus* that he was poisoned by Salieri.

But the years around 1781 when *Idomeneo* was composed and first performed are quite fully recorded. The work was commissioned by the Bavarian Court and so Mozart arrived in Munich in November 1780 to start work. The libretto had already been written by the Abbate Gianbattista Varesco, an Italian living in Salzburg and Mozart had 10 weeks to turn what was an unwieldy text into a great work of opera seria. Negotiations for changes, mostly cuts, were conducted by letter between Mozart and his father Leopold acting an intermediary with Varesco. Those letters are still in existence and so we have one of the most complete blow by blow descriptions of how an early opera was wrestled into existence.

Tenor Anton Raaff, singing *Idomeneo*, was 66 years old and past his prime, so Mozart wrote "his grey hair deserves some consideration" and asked for a couple of difficult arias to be deleted. He was unhappy with the castrato Del Prato, who sang Idamante "He is simply not able to come into an aria with a good strong tone; and then there's his uneven voice!"


Leopold warned his son to remember the audience: "Let me suggest that in your work you think not only of the musical cognoscenti but also of listeners who are unmusical...don't forget to bring in the so-called popular style which tickles the long-ears".

Mozart replied: "As far as the so-called popular style is concerned, don't worry about it; in my opera you'll find musick for every kind of listener – except for those with the long ears".

Leopold went to Munich for the opening night – 29 January – and so there were no letters or any other report about the performance or how it was received. There were only two other performances of *Idomeneo* that year: 3 February and 3 March.

The quotes from the letters are from an excellent book *Mozart's Letters Mozart's Life* edited and translated by Robert Spaethling.

## What Next?

 Some of you have written to us with suggestions of works we should perform. We are beginning to plan further into the future since that is becoming necessary to engage soloists. If there are works that you believe we can do well and that deserve to be performed, please get in touch. No promises, but we do like to hear what you think. There are no fixed criteria for what we do though we want to stay away from large scale Romantic repertoire and other material that other companies do well. Our main intention is to do works not frequently performed that benefit from the special size and acoustic of small spaces like City Recital Hall Angel Place.

## Herschel Sponsorship

We are delighted to announce that Herschel Asset Management Ltd returns this year as the major sponsor of Pinchgut Opera. They will sponsor the production of the Preview CD for Idomeneo which will be recorded in May. They will also sponsor Mark Tucker in his role as Idomeneo. We enjoyed their support last year and look forward to this year's partnership. Herschel, based in Melbourne, is an independent investment firm with over AU\$1 billion funds under management. Their key product is the Individually Managed Account and they are shortly launching two new products - The Absolute Return Fund and the Australian Equities Fund. Please contact them on 03 9671 4855 or visit [www.herschel.com](http://www.herschel.com).

And that's it from us. Best wishes from Ken, Alison, Liz, Anna and Andrew.

“ It may be that when the angels go about their task praising God, they play only Bach. I am sure, however, that when they are together en famille they play Mozart.” Karl Barth

## Sponsors

