



Pinchgut Does Technology

At Pinchgut, we have always tried to be at the cutting edge of new communications technology - or, as Liz puts it, Ken is a sucker for new techie toys. Our website and our newsletter were the first methods we used to communicate with and involve our audience in what is happening in the company. Both are still going strong.

The newsletter now goes to close to 3000 people and the website has recently been visited by people in China, India, Brazil, Finland and Madagascar. Last year we set up a weblog (the verb is "to blog" and the Latin would, I think, be "blogo, blogare, blogavi, blogatum" though I am still trying to work out the active pluperfect subjunctive) in which we reported on the rehearsals of *Idomeneo*.

This year we have started earlier, covering the preliminary stages of the production with almost daily posts containing news, photos, interviews, gossip and such. We will keep going at least until closing night. It is a frank behind the scenes look at the creation of an opera production.

Please have a look - you can find it here or follow the link from the News section of the website. You can also subscribe, using an RSS feeder such as Bloglines. Read more about RSS [here](#).

Also new this year are audio interviews that Ken has done with people involved in the production. Chats he had with Sally-Anne Russell, Fiona Campbell and Attilio Cremonesi are available for you listening pleasure on the website as well as the blog. Others will be added.

We enjoy telling our story. If you know anyone who you think would be interested in us, suggest that they sign up for the newsletter through the website or, with their permission, send their email or postal address to liz@pinchgutopera.com.au or PO Box 239, Westgate NSW 2048.

The website is at www.pinchgutopera.com.au and the blog at <http://www.pinchgutopera.typepad.com>.

Timetable

The Pinchgut team gets even busier from now on.

Andrew is working on the set. Hamish is designing costumes in detail. Bernie is thinking about lighting. Mark is working through the production in detail.

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Juditha triumphans

BOX OFFICE

The box office for **Vivaldi's *Juditha Triumphans*** is open!

The prices are:

A Res \$110 B Res \$90 C Res \$70

Group booking for over 10 people on any night:

A Res \$99 B Res \$81 C Res \$58

Under 27 Years prices any night are:
B Res \$45 C Res \$30

(We don't offer a senior/pensioner's price.)

You can book:

~ **In person** at the book office in Angel Place (near the Pitt Street entrance).

Hours are 9-5 weekdays and extended hours if there is a concert in the Hall.

~ **By phone** to (02) 8256 2222 or 1300 797 118 (for the cost of a local call).

~ **Online** at www.cityrecitalhall.com or [here](#).

The performances are:

Wednesday 5 December 7:30 pm

Saturday 8 December 7:30 pm

Sunday 9 December 5:30 pm

Monday 10 December 7:30 pm

The soloists are learning their arias. Anna is organising publicity and advertising so no-one in Sydney can say that they did not know about the show. Liz is talking to a number of opera appreciation and other groups about the production. She usually won't allow members to leave the room until they have promised to buy tickets. Alison is fine-tuning the rehearsal schedule and travel plans for singers and players. Craig and his box office team at City Recital Hall are busy selling tickets. There is a rumour (unconfirmed as this newsletter went to press) that on Monday the queue stretched all the way up Angel Place and around the corner into Pitt St.

Rehearsals start 8 November with the soloists and some continuo players working through their arias (with Attilio). The production rehearsals start on the 10th (with Mark), while the chorus start their music calls. The chorus comes in from time to time sometimes at night or weekends, as the chorus have other jobs and these have to be fitted in too!

Large instruments that look like giraffes



Deb Fox and her theorbo

Those of you who saw our production of *L'Orfeo* will remember the large plucked instruments spread across the back of the orchestra. That was the lute section and the instrument with a very long neck was the theorbo - the largest of the lutes.

This year we will have three theorbos, played by Deb Fox, Samantha Cohen and James Holland, and one archlute, played by Tommie Andersson (who is also playing the mandolin).

Deb was with us for *L'Orfeo* and will travel from her home in Rochester New York for the start

wrote this piece for us on her favourite instrument.

Although the theorbo may be an unusual sight and sound for today's audiences, it was actually quite a common instrument during the 17th and 18th centuries. I am often engaged in conversation by audience members wanting to know more about this wonderful sounding instrument, and I try to remind them that it wasn't always a curiosity. In fact, there are engravings of French operas in the 17th century where the orchestra pit looks practically like a forest, there are so many theorboes! At an opera I was playing in Montreal last year, a woman in the front row of the audience was complaining to me that the long neck of my theorbo was in her way, and I gratified her perhaps only slightly by telling her that it was lucky she wasn't at the opera in Versailles, where there may have been a dozen or more to obstruct her view.

The theorbo is one of the many members of the lute family. A professional lutenist these days has to play at least 4 or 5 plucked instruments in order to deal with the huge variety of repertoire being performed. For example, I play the renaissance lute, the ba-

roque guitar, the theorbo, and the archlute, all on a regular basis in concerts. Some people also play the baroque lute, the medieval lute, and others such as the mandolino (which is different from the modern mandolin)(and which you will hear in *Juditha*). And remember that most of the instruments are tuned differently from one another!

The theorbo is perhaps my favorite of all the lutes I play, for several reasons. First, the quality of the sound is a resonant combination of very low bass notes mixed with a clarity provided by the upper strings. We can play chords, melodies, fast trills across the strings (called 'campanella', like bells), long lines of slurs (with the delicious Italian name of 'straschini'), scales, and arpeggios. Also, it is a very satisfying instrument to play, physically, despite its cumbersome size; we can strum, pluck, and wail away on the booming bass strings.

In addition, and most importantly, playing the theorbo requires a lively interaction with the music. When I am playing the theorbo in opera or ensembles, I am playing a form of "baroque jazz", which is based on knowing a certain historical style and improvising in it, like conversing in a specific language.

Theorbists (there's a new Scrabble word for you!) do have a large solo repertoire, but the majority of our work is as continuo players in ensembles. We do what harpsichordists and organists do: we read from a bass line, deduce the harmonies that will make the music sound good and that go with what everyone else is doing, and we improvise an accompaniment that helps to elucidate the text, underscore the emotional message of the music, and relate to the overall texture and sound of the ensemble. We must be spontaneous, able to respond to both the message in the music and to the soloist's or conductor's interpretations, and still provide the solid bass foundation of the music. It is challenging, expressive, and fun, and never exactly the same.

The score for *Juditha Triumphans* asks for four theorboes—in this day and age a very unusual gathering due to arts economics and the rarity of the breed. Pinchgut is doing a great thing by engaging four lute players, as Vivaldi indicated, so you will get the full effect of that beguiling plucked sound.



An archlute for comparison



Juditha Synopsis

We haven't given you a proper synopsis of *Juditha* as yet - so here's one so you can familiarise yourself with the action before you see it.

Judith Triumphant

Part One

Holofernes, the Assyrian general, and his army are besieging the town of Bethulia. Holofernes exhorts his soldiers to honour and glory through battle. Vagaus, Holofernes' captain, tells Holofernes that a noble woman of Bethulia is asking for him and that if he "simply gazes on her they will be on intimate terms".

Judith, accompanied by her faithful companion Abra, prays for safe passage and tells the soldiers she comes "to sue for peace and not to wage war". Vagaus advises the Bethulian widow Judith to trust Holofernes "with love and faith".

Holofernes is dazzled by Judith's beauty; Judith asks for mercy and justice, telling Holofernes that clemency for her people will be nobler than their defeat. Deeply smitten with Judith, Holofernes promises an end to the siege in the name of his love for her. He invites her to a banquet to celebrate this love, and instructs Vagaus to prepare it. Left alone, Judith and Abra pledge their support for each other.

Part one ends with a choral plea for peace, and for Judith to "return victorious, warrior-like".

Part Two

Ozias, spiritual leader of the people of Bethulia, predicts the fall of Holofernes, and prays for the destruction of the enemy and for Judith's safe return.

Judith and Holofernes enjoy the prepared feast; Holofernes speaks of his love for Judith, and she urges him to "temper the heat of his desire". They share wine, Holofernes eventually falling into drunken stupor. Vagaus congratulates Judith on having "triumphed over such a bold leader" and invites Judith to retire with Holofernes to his tent.

Gaining support and strength from Abra, Judith uses Holofernes' sword to cut off his head: "In the name of the Lord God". Judith and Abra flee, taking the head of Holofernes with them. Vagaus returns to discover the slaughter, expressing grief and craving vengeance.

Judith and Abra present the head of Holofernes, and Ozias and the people of Bethulia give thanks to God, for their triumph.

The Design of Juditha

A few months before opening night of our productions, the director and designer present the design concept to the rest of the team.

This is an exciting stage - the first time that we get an idea of how the show will look. Will it be set in the 18th century, with baroque dancing and all? Or will Mark and Hamish take us into the future, showing Judith using a Doctor Who sonic screwdriver to cut off Holofernes' head?

Well, neither of the above, I am glad to say. But I cannot tell you yet how the work will be presented. We think that being surprised as you walk into City Recital Hall and see the set is an important part of the Pinchgut experience.

As we have said in previous years, the design presentation is a slightly nervous event also. Our policy is that we do not change or modify what the director and designer want to do. We can veto it, I suppose, if we take violent objection but we believe that having chosen talented people we should trust them. Andrew knows about the concept in advance because as production manager he has to be comfortable that it can be done in time and within budget. This year, he is confident.

Some of us were wondering about livestock. In *L'Orfeo* the last production Mark did for us he told us that he wanted a snake in the cast. After all, the whole disaster had started when Euridyce was bitten by a serpent. Mark was willing to compromise and use a non-venomous python that time. So far, he has not found a need for any livestock in *Juditha*.

The tricky bit will be the scene when Judith does remove Holofernes' head. We do believe in realism, but we cannot afford multiple cast members for the Holofernes role. Some recycling will be necessary.

Forthcoming performances

Pinchgut followers will get the chance to hear a couple of our *Juditha* soloists in concerts coming up in Sydney soon. Sally-Anne Russell will be singing in the Sydney Symphony's performances of Isaac Nathan's *Don John of Austria* at the City Recital Hall on October 18 and 20 (more info [here](#)). *Don John* was the first opera composed in Australia, and Isaac Nathan is a forebear of the musically famous Mackerras family.

Sara Macliver will be singing in Sydney Philharmonia's performances of Haydn's *Creation* on October 19 and 21 at the Opera House conducted by Richard Hickox (more info [here](#)). Also in the cast is Pinchgut regular Paul McMahon, and bass John Wegner.

What's Erin up to?



Erin Helyard has been in Montréal for quite a while now but he is still in touch. This is his latest note:

It seems that summer turns to autumn in the blink of an eye over here - just yesterday Mont Royal appeared as verdant as ever, but now it's all brown, gold and red and chilly winds are drifting in from

the North. Lucky for me that I return to a summery Australia for a month's vacation over Christmas! Even though you may not have seen me performing in more recent productions, I continue to maintain strong consultive ties with Pinchgut's hard-working artistic and administrative personnel. In the four years since I left Sydney for McGill University here in Montréal, I've completed my masters in fortepiano performance and am currently undertaking a PhD in musicology, specializing in music of the eighteenth century. I've also been supplementing my educational and pedagogical activities with performing and recording, recently conducting [Les Violons du Roy](#) for a tour of Québec in addition to playing in concert with [Ensemble Caprice](#). I look forward to working on Pinchgut's 2007 production, after my comprehensive exams (phew!) are over. My best to all of the performers of *Juditha*, and many thanks to all our supporters for allowing these extraordinary projects to come to fruition.

Amora Hotel Jamison Sydney

Stay at the same hotel as our soloists. The Amora Hotel Jamison Sydney is in Jamison Street near the City Recital Hall and Circular Quay. The Amora is offering our audience \$260 for a Deluxe King room including breakfast for two between 1-16 December. Ring reservations manager Martine Wittholz on 02 9696 2631.



More on the Vivaldi Film

It seems that the film on Antonio Vivaldi, directed by Boris Damast is about to go into production. The studio blurb explains:

A youthful pastor hired in as the music master at a school for the abandoned and illegitimate daughters of Venice nightwalkers forms a powerful bond with the children that eventually leads him to perform

before the Pope in director Boris Dasmata's screen biography of "Four Seasons" composer Antonio Vivaldi. Jacqueline Bisset, Malcolm McDowell, and Zuleikha Robinson star in a film featuring Joseph Fiennes as the acclaimed violinist and baroque composer. (Jason Buchanan, All Movie Guide) There is a rumour that Canadian folk-violinist Ashley MacIsaac (who once said that his goal was to become weirder than Michael Jackson) will be contributing to the sound track.

May we suggest that you do not wait for the film and instead come to see Pinchgut Opera's production of *Juditha Triumphans*? We won't have Jacqueline Bisset but we will have live and onstage Sally-Anne Russell, David Walker, Sara Macliver, Fiona Campbell and Renae Martin. And the music will be much better.

Latin Test

The answer to the last test: "She who must be loved" was Amanda. It is (as you all know) the gerundive form of the verb "to love".

Something different this time:

What does David Beckham have tattooed on his left forearm?

What case is used in the expression?

And for a bonus prize:

Why was the Centurion in *The Life of Brian* wrong?

The prize is a copy of *Virent Ova! Viret Perna! a Doctore Seuss* and the bonus prize is something else.

There will be two prizes again, one for those who receive newsletters by email - send your answer to ken@pinchgutopera.com.au - and one for those who prefer snailmail - send your answers to Pinchgut Opera Box 239 Westgate 2048 or to the email address, but indicating that you are on the snail list.

Best wishes - Ken, Alison, Liz, Anna and Andrew.

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