

PINCHGUT OPERA

Bring a friend

Many people are planning to come to *L'Ormino* with a group of friends. If you have a friend who has not discovered Pinchgut yet, tell them about our money-back offer for Pinchgut virgins.

Anyone who has not seen one of our productions yet and who buys a ticket and is disappointed for any reason, will get a full refund of the ticket price.

We are pretty sure that we are the only opera company in the world confident enough about our productions to make this offer!

Bookings at City Recital Hall Angel Place:
Telephone: 02 8256 2222; Online at:
www.cityrecitalhall.com/book/id/538

Anna is blogging!

For the last couple of years we have written a blog during the rehearsal period in November and December passing on news, gossip and photos about the show as it came together.

This year, Anna has taken over this task and started a few weeks ago.

She will write something about Pinchgut and what is happening most days at www.pinchgutopera.typepad.com

You can use what is called a 'news aggregator' like www.bloglines.com to catch and keep entries on our blog or any other news service until you have time to read them.

L'Ormino microsite now online

We have just launched a microsite, specifically for and about December's production of *L'Ormino* which can be found at www.lormindo.com. We will be posting information regularly that we think will help you enjoy and understand the production. The site has been designed by our good friends at This is Real Art — London's most creative creative agency.

You are wonderful



The response to our fundraiser, our raffle and our plea for donations was very generous. Total donations are ahead of last year and, though we cannot say we are in a comfortable financial position, we are breathing much easier. (Of course, if you have not made a donation yet or can help even more, we will be happy to issue a tax receipt for your gift.)

Ticket sales are running at a faster rate than any previous year — 1000 seats — 25% of the four houses — were sold in the first two weeks. The Sunday matinee is selling particularly fast and we expect to have a full house for that performance.

The cocktail evening was wonderful and a terrific time was had by everyone. The foyers of the Australian Museum were an excellent place to hold our event, and we enjoyed meeting and talking to everyone. The Governor, Professor Marie Bashir made some very kind remarks to open the event and we heard Fiona Campbell, David Greco and Jane Sheldon and Cantillation sing some pieces from Purcell's *King Arthur* with members of our orchestra. Thank you to everyone who came, performed, helped, donated and bought raffle tickets. A full list of raffle prize winners can be viewed online at www.pinchgutopera.com.au/raffle.



Top Fiona Campbell / *Above* Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir ACCVO, Governor of NSW and Antony Walker /
Photos Bridget Elliot

Building Australia's first lira da gamba for Pinchgut

Laura Vaughan normally plays viola da gamba but when asked to join the orchestra for L'Ormino she had an idea. She wrote this for us.



Detail of the lira da gamba

When I first heard that the Pinchgut Opera production for 2009 was going to be Cavalli's *L'Ormino*, my first thought was 'wouldn't it be fantastic if we could have a lira da gamba for the continuo section'? A what? As many of you would have read in the last newsletter, a lira da gamba, (or lirone, lyra, lira, liure, lyre, lire...) is an extraordinary looking fellow, a bit like a small bodied cello or bass viol upon which a veritable forest of strings has sprung up. With a distinctive leaf-shaped peg box and up to 16 strings, including some 'bordons' (longer strings that are off to the side of the finger board) the lira da gamba was developed in Italy, and was rarely found outside its borders. Its job was, like the lyre of Orpheus, principally to accompany the human voice. One can think of it almost like a lyre that is played with a bow. The sound that results is unique, a bit like you might imagine would result if you were to throw a consort of viols, an organ and a piano

accordion into a magic box and mix them all together.

Tuned in a very clever fashion, with a basic pattern of 'down a fourth, up a fifth' as you go up string by string, the lira is designed with a very flat bridge so the bow sits on four strings most of the time, or up to six if you press harder with the bow. So, you basically constantly have four-to six-note bowed chords, which you as the player are able to control with (ideally!) all the same shades of colour and dynamic as if you were playing a beautiful melody on a violin. Teamed with theorbos, a cello, harpsichord or organ, the colouristic possibilities from the continuo section are heavenly.

So together with the fabulous Pinchgut team, the decision was made to procure a lira da gamba for us to use in *L'Ormino*. Hmmm, not so easy, these things are rare creatures! There are only a handful of instrument makers worldwide who make liras da gamba, and there had never been

one made in Australia before. I decided to talk to expert Melbourne luthier Ian Watchorn, who expressed great enthusiasm for the project, and together we set to making the first Australian made lira da gamba.

Immediately it was apparent that deciding exactly what to build was not going to be easy. Unlike most other historical instrument such as the viola da gamba, lute, recorder etc, there are very few surviving original liras da gamba — only about five in museums in total and only two that seem like they might possibly have been real working instruments. Apart from these surviving instruments, liras da gamba are depicted in woodcuts within treatises such as Praetorius and Mersenne, and in a number of Italian paintings. Ian was not convinced that the surviving instruments would be the best things to copy, as in many ways they did not seem to have been designed to be practical, working instruments. We had some very interesting discussions about the



'There are only a handful of instrument makers worldwide who make liras da gamba, and there had never been one made in Australia before.'

issue of authenticity in original instruments. I had no idea previously how many old instruments there are around that were either cannibalised from other genuine old instruments to fulfil 19th century collectors' demands, or surviving old instruments made in the 17th century for almost purely decorative purposes. The upshot was, owing to things such as the arrangement of pegs (they would be physically almost impossible to tune) and body shape (too unlike the shape of any other working Northern Italian string instruments of the time) we decided not to copy either of the potentially viable surviving liras da gamba.

This, of course, left us with the question of what would we build? Ian came up with the suggestion that we look to the lira da gamba's cousin, the lira da braccio for inspiration. Another chordal bowed string instrument, but one that was held on the shoulder, it was used by Italian poet-musicians in court to accompany their recitations of lyric and narrative poetry and was around a bit earlier than the lira da gamba.

Like the lira da gamba, it had a leaf-shaped peg box with front-facing pegs, numerous strings and bordons, and also had the added advantage for us of there being more surviving instruments around to look at. Ian had drawings of a beautiful lira da braccio by Giovane Maria de Brescia that he thought had beautiful geometric proportions that could be modified and enlarged to create a lovely and historically appropriate lira da gamba.

How many strings did I want? Er, back to the books. Liras da gamba were known to have anywhere from 9 to 16 strings, and there are historical (and quite varying) tunings for all of those different setups. I'd played on liras with 13 and 14 strings in the past, and we made the decision to go with 13 strings, as this would be enough to cover all the notes I'd need but not too many strings to clutter up the finger board. We also needed to decide how many 'bordons' strings I'd want. These are strings off the side of the fingerboard (you should be able to see the one on my lira in the photo) and their use is quite mysterious. A number of different tunings (including some octaves) survive for these slightly longer strings that can just be tuned to a single pitch, like the big long strings on a theorbo. Personally, I think the bordons were probably a hangover from the lira da braccio, where they would have been

used like drones underneath the poetry or singing. While we decided to set our lira da gamba up to leave room for potentially two 'bordons' strings (because I think some of the more whacky tunings that would give a big, booming sound to some common chords like C or G major could sound very cool!) we set it up initially with just one bordon string, as the most harmonically flexible choice. For the arrangement of the pegs around the pegbox, we decided to put them all in a circle — many of the paintings showed this arrangement.

All of our design decisions made, all that was left for me to do was wait and let Ian set about making it all happen. About six months later, after a few visits along the way to check on the progress of our 'baby lira' Ian called me to say it was finished, and it was time for the real test — how was it going to sound? Arriving at Ian's studio I was a little nervous but thrilled with how the instrument looked, it had turned out just gorgeously. We tuned it up, I took a deep breath and put my bow to the strings... Ah! Lovely! Beautiful! What a pleasure — and huge relief! It sounded just as good as it looked, resonant and ringing and with many subtleties of tone. A most satisfying conclusion to our project, and one that I am really looking forward to sharing with everyone in the audience with *L'Ormino* opens.

www.lauravaughan.com

Calendar

December 2009

Wednesday 2 December 2009

Performance #1 — 7:30 pm

Saturday 5 December 2009

Performance #2 — 7:30 pm

Sunday 6 December 2009

Performance #3 — 5:00 pm

Monday 7 December

Final night performance — 7:30 pm

Pinchgut Opera

ABN 67 095 974 191

PO Box 309, Edgecliff 2027

Telephone 02 9389 8117

Email info@pinchgutopera.com.au

Online www.pinchgutopera.com

More Bach

Another of our friends, Martin Randall Travel, describes their Bach tour next year through many of the places Bach lived and worked. Ken and Liz took this tour in 2004 and recommend it highly, even if you are not as Bach-obsessed as Ken is.

For more details, visit:

www.martinrandall.com

Contest

We have not had a contest for newsletter readers for a while and the BIS Records offer gives us a chance to restart the tradition. The Glyndebourne Festival Opera program for 1967 (when *L'Ormino* was produced for the first time in 320 years) listed among the company's personnel a perruquiere. Pinchgut does not have a perruquiere. Please write, in fifty words or less, why we should hire one.

The prize will go to the most original, creative or, possibly, funniest proposal.

Email to ken@pinchgutopera.com.au

or to PO Box 309, Edgecliff NSW 2027.

Closing date is Friday 4 September 2009.

We wish Bach had written an opera



BIS Records Bach boxsets

Johann Sebastian Bach and Georg Frideric Handel were born in the same year just two hundred kilometres apart. Handel went on to live in London, write operas and oratorios and become rich. Bach did not travel more than a couple of hundred kilometres in his life, concentrated almost entirely on sacred music and when he died left only a few musical instruments and books. Handel was an excellent composer but Bach was simply the greatest composer who has ever lived. (This is Ken's opinion and not necessarily the official opinion of Pinchgut, but he says that anyone who disagrees has no taste in music whatever).

So, we were very happy to see that BIS Records have released in four box sets, one hundred and forty two of Bach's cantatas (the most glorious series of music works ever written) performed by Masaaki Suzuki's Bach Collegium Japan. Suzuki has been recording the cantatas over the past eighteen years and the recordings are considered by many to be now the definitive recordings of the cantatas. (Apologies to JEG). BIS Records have given us Set One of the series, (containing thirty two cantatas) which we will award as a prize to the winner of our contest, described to the left. (Ken, his family and close associates are ineligible to enter).

If you have not heard any of Suzuki's cantata series, we do recommend that you buy a box set from your favourite record store (Fish Fine Music in Sydney stocks them) or listen here: www.savd.com.au/ecards/bach/index. You might not be able to resist the temptation to buy them all.

Radisson Plaza Hotel



When seeing the wonderful *L'Ormino* make a night of it and stay overnight in the city with our friends Radisson Plaza Hotel Sydney. For only \$210 per couple you can stay in style with a complimentary upgrade to a chic Premier room. This package is available the entire performance season from 1st December to 8th December. Bookings can be made by calling 02 8214 0000 and quoting 'Opera'.

Radisson Plaza Hotel Sydney have also created some fabulous dining offers for us. During the *L'Ormino* season every evening Bistro-Fax restaurant will be offering a special main course served with a glass of wine and followed by dessert for only \$35 per person. To take advantage of this offer simply present your concert ticket upon arrival at the restaurant. If you would like to reserve a table in advance please call 02 8214 0400.

The ABX Bar at Radisson Plaza Hotel Sydney also have something special for us. Visit the bar before the performance between 5pm and 7pm and take advantage of 'It's Our Shout', for a different special drink offer each night. Alternatively, you can also present your *L'Ormino* concert ticket and receive 10% off your total bill.

The hotel is located diagonally opposite City Recital Hall; what a terrific opportunity to take up these offers.

Sponsors



SUPPORTED BY
HEROES OF PINCHGUT



Australian Government



Australian Council of the Arts



New South Wales Government

