

PINCHGUT OPERA

## Cavalli's Venice



Detail: Site of the Teatro San Cassiano near the Rialto Bridge, Venice, where *L'Ormindo* was premiered.

Liz has been talking to music and other community groups exciting them about Cavalli, *L'Ormindo* and Pinchgut. We asked her to write a piece about Venice in the second half of the 17<sup>TH</sup> Century, as Cavalli experienced it. Liz has qualified her writing by pointing out that she is not a historian and what she has written is a lay person's impressions based on various sources, particularly Ellan Rosand's excellent book *Opera in 17<sup>TH</sup> Century Venice: the making of a genre*. Liz will welcome corrections, nit picking or otherwise.

Alex Ross wrote in a recent New Yorker article 'In 1637, a travelling troupe set off a fad for opera in the Republic of Venice, and the art underwent a mutation.'

Opera's roots in Venice were in the Carnival season with its established theatrical performances and troupes of itinerant performers. Venice was cosmopolitan and exotic, and its population doubled during Carnival. As opera developed within Carnival its audience was a mix of patrician, tourist, traveller, Venetians and foreigners who were prepared to pay to be entertained.

Leading families invested in opera for profit. The nobility in Venice was of a more

fluid construction than elsewhere and they were usually involved in commerce. Opera was a business in 17<sup>TH</sup> century Venice.

It was expected to play to large audiences and run for a season, night after night. This was very different to its origins in the Court with works commissioned for auspicious occasions. Monteverdi remained aloof from this form of opera.

Cavalli would have known personally all the heady ingredients that were to influence Venetian opera. He came to Venice as a teenager under the patronage of Frederico Cavalli, whose name the young Francesco took on (having been born Francesco Caletti) and was accepted to the choir at St Mark's under the maestro de cappella, Claudio Monteverdi. Perhaps because he had been taken from his family at such an early age, he was without guidance and became drawn into the decadent areas of Venetian life. From about 1620 he seems to have been seduced by the highly intoxicating life Venice had to offer. He gambled and accumulated many debts and was rescued by his patron paying off his debts.

He also had the good fortune to marry a wealthy widow and so gained financial

security (yet another case of a man at risk saved by a good woman). In the administration of his wife's estates Cavalli showed the flair for organization, discipline and efficiency that remained throughout the rest of his long life.

In 1637 the Teatro San Cassiano reopened as an opera venue and started the fad for opera that swept Venice for the rest of the century. Cavalli was one of the first to take advantage of this opportunity and formed a company to present operas at San Cassiano, writing nine operas for the theatre in ten years, including *L'Ormindo*. Rapidly theatres opened and dramatists, composers, singers and choreographers came together to present this outpouring of public opera.

In the forty year span from the opening of San Cassiano in 1637 to the opening of the last opera theatre in 1678 all the important elements of opera had been laid down. In 9 different theatres 150 operas were staged.

Opera in Cavalli's time responded to the urban nature of Venice and commercial opera was created. That tricky balance of drama, music and spectacle that gives opera its vitality was forged here.

## Box office

Liz is happy (not ecstatic, but happy) with ticket sales so far. Over the 4 houses, we have sold 1600 seats, 40% of the total available. The Sunday 5 PM performance is getting tight, with very few A Reserve left. On past experience, the rate of sales will increase from late September through to opening night. Like most presenters of musical events, we find that we have a group of people who buy as soon as the box office opens and another group who wait until the last few weeks.

We believe that the best form of advertising is a recommendation from a friend. We know that many have already brought friends to Pinchgut productions and we have quite a few groups that come each year. That is great—but surely there must be someone else who you think would enjoy Pinchgut if they would give us a try? Or give your friends or clients tickets as a Christmas present?

Perhaps you know one of those 'But I don't like opera' people. We have decided to renew our Pinchgut Virgins money-back offer this year, to help you persuade anyone who is hesitating. Anyone who has not been to a Pinchgut production yet and who comes to see *L'Ormindo* and doesn't enjoy it, will get their money back. They just have to write to us enclosing the ticket and we'll send a cheque straight back. This year we will add \$5 to cover a bus or train fare. (But we won't pay for the interval icecream, sorry). We would like to hear what they did not like, but if they would rather not say (or the answer is 'everything') that is quite OK. Pinchgut is, we are pretty sure, the only opera company in the world to make this offer.

You might remember that last year Liz and Ken promised to buy Anna a new surf board if we had at least one full house. She missed it by fewer than 30 seats for the Sunday performance. Now we know that Anna's family did buy her a new board so for this year Liz and Ken are promising Anna her choice from the new Apple iPod range just announced if we have a full house. (Sadly, Apple is not a sponsor, but we all use and are very happy with their products).

Bookings: [www.cityrecitalhall.com](http://www.cityrecitalhall.com) to book online or you can also book by phone on (02) 8256 2222 or in person at City Recital Hall Angel Place.

Ticket prices range from \$30 to \$115.

## Pinchgut at the Art Gallery



David Walker will be performing in the Art Gallery Society of NSW's, Resonate concert series. Photo by Sara Puttock.

### *A delightful way of spending a couple of hours on a Sunday evening*

On Sunday 15<sup>TH</sup> November some of our singers and players from *L'Ormindo*, led by Erin Helyard will perform in the Art Gallery Society of NSW Resonate concert series. They will perform pieces from *L'Ormindo* as well as other works from that period. If you have not been to one of these Art Gallery concerts before, you will find that they are a delightful way of spending a couple of hours on a Sunday evening. Starting at 7 PM, there is a champagne reception and a private viewing of the Dobell Prize for Drawing.

You can book online here: [www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/member](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/member) or by phone at (02) 9225 1878

## Geography, imagination and music

*L'Ormindo* is set in Fez, now in Morocco but then in the Berber kingdom of Mauretania which ran along the Mediterranean coast from what is now Western Algeria and through Morocco. Giovanni Faustini who wrote the libretto for this (and most of Cavalli's operas) was born in Venice in 1619 and it is most unlikely that he visited North Africa or anywhere very far from Venice, where he died in 1651. But then Gottlieb Stephanie had not visited Constantinople when he handed Mozart the final libretto of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* nor had Shakespeare been to Venice or Elsinore when he wrote his great plays set in those places.

Theatre, including opera, in those days was an art form of fantasy and romance, where works were often set in faraway places of which the audience knew little but were good starting points for imagination. It is more difficult these days. We have all seen TV documentaries on almost every place on earth and a few off it. There is not much room, geographically anyway, for imagination these days.

But please try to go where Cavalli—and Talya—want to take us. Talya's Fez will not be quite like a TV documentary on North Africa but nor will it be like a space in a small hall between Pitt and George streets in Sydney. It will be a place for us all to exercise our imaginations as well as to hear beautiful music.

## What's on

Cantillation is appearing with the Sydney Symphony in a program of English composers Elgar, Britten and Vaughan Williams. Cantillation are singing in Vaughan Williams' wonderful *Flos Campi*, with Roger Benedict solo viola, and then the beautiful *Serenade to Music*.

The performances are on 1, 2 and 3 October at the Opera House and tickets can be bought at [www.sydneysymphony.com](http://www.sydneysymphony.com) or (02) 8215 4644. If you buy tickets you will also automatically go into a draw to win two tickets to London on Emirates! This concert is in tribute to the late Richard Hickox.

## We know something you don't know

Each year, sometime in August, we see the set and costume design ideas from the director and the designer. This is our first chance to see and hear the creative team talk about how they plan to produce the opera that the audience will see in December.

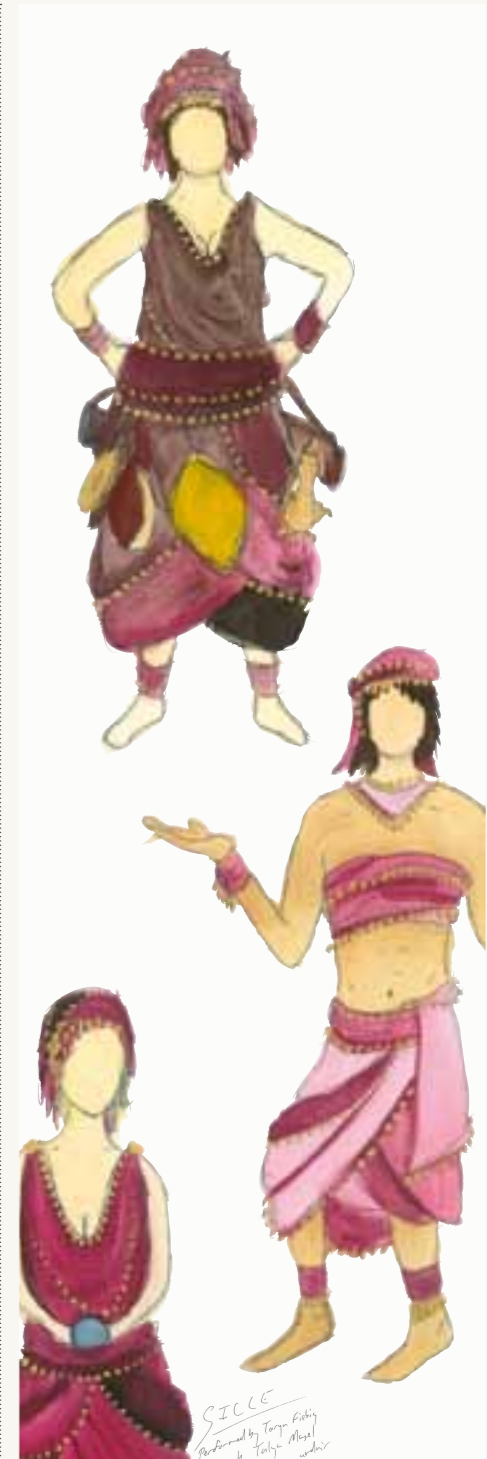
Our firm policy is that we—Pinchgut management—does not change or modify the work. We can reject a design outright but that would only happen if there was a serious problem. We have never had to exercise that power.

So, when Talya Masel and Adam Gardnir came to Sydney a couple of weeks ago with a model box—a scale model of the City Recital Hall stage—and some sketches we were a little nervous. We have never worked with Talya or Adam before. When we heard them talk through what they were planning and saw the model and costume sketches we were very excited. They have done a great job.

You will see the result on opening night and we won't try to describe it in advance. We can say that it is a visually naturalistic production. We also believe that when the stage artist has done his or her job (Andrew has not chosen one yet) it will be a striking and quite beautiful set.

Talya explained that to get to this stage she and Adam had listened to a recording of *L'Ormindo* several times and had been through the libretto carefully, taking into account the cuts that she and Erin had decided to make. Talya showed us some photos she had taken some years ago on an overseas trip that captured the visual feeling she wanted. (They were not of London, Paris, New York, Moscow or Auckland).

Now Andrew takes the designs and turns them into reality. He is confident he can do it within budget—a question we always ask—and within the time. Bernie Tan, the lighting designer, could not be at the presentation (he does have other theatrical commitments) and Andrew will brief him so he can start thinking about lighting effects. The rest of us can sit back, worry a little and keep convincing people to buy tickets.



Talya Masel's costume sketches.

## 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

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## Pinchgut online

The *L'Ormino* website, [www.lormindo.com](http://www.lormindo.com), reveals all the relationships in this intriguing comedy in 3D – lot's of fun! The Pinchgut Blog, [www.pinchgutopera.typepad.com](http://www.pinchgutopera.typepad.com), is going strong – please tell us what you think and post a comment.

## Ensemble Theatre 2010 Season

We were interested to see that our friends at the Ensemble Theatre have just announced details on their 2010 season. As usual at the Ensemble, lots of interesting plays but in particular a new one by David Williamson with a musical theme – Rhinestone Rex and Miss Monica, 'a romantic comedy about two people whose respective tastes in music helps them to go from intense dislike to friendship'.

Subscription sales are now open, please contact (02) 9956 6466 to request a brochure or go to [www.ensemble.com.au](http://www.ensemble.com.au) for more information.

## Pinchgut shop



### Limited edition Pinchgut T-shirt.

#### *Pinchgut T-shirts.*

Limited edition Pinchgut T-shirts with every season listed are now available. Great presents for all those Pinchgut lovers and they come in a range of sizes (S, M, L, XL).

Please call Anna on (02) 9389 8117 or [anna@pinchgutopera.com.au](mailto:anna@pinchgutopera.com.au) to order. \$25 (inc gst) and add \$6 postage. Credit Card available.

#### *Pinchgut CDs*

Every production that Pinchgut has produced is available on CD and makes a fine addition to your collection or a great gift. Pinchgut would like to offer a special discount of \$30 for *Juditha Triumphans*, *Idomeneo*, *Dardanus* and *The Fairy Queen*.

The special offer is through Pinchgut only, so call Anna on (02) 9389 8117 or [anna@pinchgutopera.com.au](mailto:anna@pinchgutopera.com.au) to order (add \$6 postage). Credit Card available.

Go to our website to check out the complete list of CDs and other merchandise:  
[www.pinchgutopera.com.au/shop](http://www.pinchgutopera.com.au/shop)

## L'Ormino Libretto

As a comedy, *L'Ormino* is full of twists and turns. The complete libretto and its translation is now available from the website – it's a great read! Go to:  
[www.pinchgutopera.com.au/productions](http://www.pinchgutopera.com.au/productions)

*And that's it for us. Best wishes Ken, Alison, Anna, Liz, Andrew, John, Antony & Erin.*

## Radisson Plaza Hotel



When arranging your night at *L'Ormino* don't forget about the special offer that our friends at Radisson Plaza Hotel Sydney have provided. During any night of the performance season enjoy an overnight stay in style with a complimentary upgrade to a chic Premier room for only \$210 per couple. This is proving to be quite popular so don't miss out, reservations can be made by calling (02) 8214 0000 quoting 'Opera'.

The Sydney International Food Festival happening this October is a great time to sample both Bistro-Fax restaurant and ABX Bar at the hotel. Bistro-Fax features in the *Let's Do Lunch* program which offers a main course with a glass of Brown Brothers wine or Coopers beer and coffee for only \$35 per person. The restaurant is open for lunch Monday to Friday and reservations can be made by calling (02) 8214 0400. ABX Bar has joined in the Festival's special *High Tea* program. A selection of delectable finger sandwiches, classical cakes and delicious old style slices complemented with a glass of sparkling Brown Brothers Prosecco and a delicate box of chocolates. This is \$45 per person and tables can be reserved by calling (02) 8214 0333. Both of these offers are available during the month of October as part of the Sydney International Food Festival. Anna, Liz and Ken plan to sample them.

## Sponsors



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