

# DIVA OPERA

## NEWSLETTER

January 2010

Dear Friend,

As we begin our 14th season we can reflect on 2009 with a great sense of achievement. Our three productions, *Così fan Tutte*, *Orphée aux Enfers* and *La Bohème* were received with great enthusiasm and the tour was as enjoyable and successful as ever. We began the season at the wonderful Wiltons Music Hall in March with the premiere of *Così fan tutte* and were delighted by the response from the critics:

- 'No other opera-with-piano company does it so well, with such panache, such style, or such a sense of serving you the whole world of an opera, personally, on a small plate'. 'Opera Now', November 2009
- 'the singing was excellent, and this small production, with a single piano replacing Mozart's orchestra, staged one of the most enjoyable Cosis I have ever seen'. 'The Economist – Correspondent's Diary', 17th April 2009
- 'Being used to seeing Mozart performed on a large stage one realises that the intimacy of his work can actually be better served in a chamber format'. 'Remotegoat.co.uk', Friday 27th March 2009

*Orphée aux Enfers* premiered in the Théâtre du Passage, Neuchâtel, Switzerland in May and finally in June *La Bohème* had its premiere in Lulworth Castle, Dorset in aid of the British Red Cross. We toured all three productions to all of regular festivals across the UK, France and the Channel Islands and again finished the year at the Théâtre du Passage with more performances of *Così fan tutte*.

## 2010 SEASON

2010 promises to be another excellent year for Diva Opera with performances for all of our regular festivals, theatres and charities and the addition of two unique and exciting opportunities for us: In March we will perform the Party scene from *Die Fledermaus* with the internationally acclaimed soprano Dame Kiri Te Kanawa as special guest and in June we will be joined for the 8th time by tenor José Carreras, again in the party scene.

We will produce Verdi's *Falstaff* for the first time along with our third new production of *Carmen* since 1998. *Falstaff* will be directed by David Edwards, who directed several productions for us in our early years and returned in 2007 to direct our critically acclaimed production of *La Traviata*. Wayne Morris will direct *Carmen* and collaborates with flamencan choreographer Nuria Garcia for an authentically Spanish production.

We are delighted to welcome several new faces to Diva Opera this year including:

- Sarah Power who recently completed a year at the National Opera Studio joins Diva Opera to sing Nannetta in *Falstaff*.

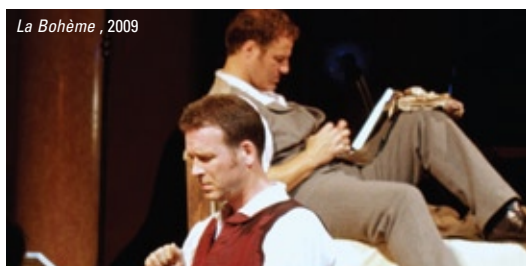


*Così fan tutte*, 2009

- Rowan Hellier who trained at the Guildhall and has recently sung at Glyndebourne and for Welsh National Opera, joins us to sing Mercedes in *Carmen*
- Louise Mott who has sung for companies including English National Opera, Welsh National Opera and Opera North will sing Meg Page in *Falstaff*
- Peter van Hulle who has sung for English National Opera and La Monnaie sings Dr. Caius in *Falstaff* for Diva Opera, before returning to the role of Hotel Porter in *Death in Venice* at La Scala Milan.

We are also delighted to welcome the following singers who are returning to Diva Opera after a short break:

- Karine Godefroy to sing the title role in *Carmen*
- Linda Richardson as Alice Ford in *Falstaff*
- Cameron Rolls as Don José in *Carmen*
- Antonia Sotgiu as Mistress Quickly in *Falstaff*



## A NOTE FROM A FRIEND FRIEND OF DIVA OPERA, BRIAN HORNE, ASKS THE QUESTION 'IS THERE A PERFECT OPERA?'

It is, of course, a silly question to ask – operas come in such an extraordinary and wonderful variety. But, for each one of us, there will probably always be an opera, which, more than any other, seems to be able to draw us into its world with greater intensity than any other. That opera, for me, is Verdi's *Falstaff*.

First there is the sheer brilliance of the work. Verdi was nearly eighty years old when it was composed but his creative powers were undiminished and the music and action are driven forward by a kind of ferocious energy. Next it is, I believe, the most perfectly achieved opera that has ever been created. By this I mean that we find in it the most perfect union of libretto and score that can be imagined: each is fitted to the other in so concentrated a combination that there is not a redundant note or word. Verdi's sublime melodies are as evident as they are in any other opera by him, but here, in *Falstaff*, there is a difference: they are usually introduced only fleetingly, often broken off by laughter or conversation. These fragments, however swiftly and tantalisingly removed from us the listeners, nonetheless stay with us through all the rumbustiousness of the action, reminding us of the beauty and sadness beneath the surface of the comedy.

And it is a comedy. But what a comedy. It is not farce, an entertaining confection that is forgotten the minute the music stops: it is the musical equivalent of Don Quixote or Twelfth Night. Beneath the surface gaiety there is a deep seriousness at work. The mode is comic but the questions with which it deals are as important as any of those which are thought to be the particular province of tragedy. What is the nature of love? (Counterpoising the antics of Falstaff and the merry wives of Windsor are the lovers Nanetta and Fenton) What is jealousy? (Ford is the first cousin of Othello) Is life, or death, in the end, tragic or comic? How should we live it? The libretto is light-hearted, mocking, swiftly-moving, but the music, often dark and rich, is full of barely contained passion. There are some great works of art that can be said not only to lift the spirit but to change one's life. This is one of them.

*Brian Horne*



## A SIXTY SECOND INTERVIEW WITH CATRIONA CLARK, ONE OF OUR PRINCIPAL SOPRANOS

**How did you get involved with Diva Opera?**

I wrote to Anne Marabini-Young requesting an audition in 2005 for a role in *Die Zauberflöte* and was asked to sing the role of Papagena. I have been involved with the company ever since.

**What do you remember as one of the highlights with Diva Opera?**

Having the great honour of singing with José Carreras.

**What are you most looking forward to this season?**

Singing the role of Adele in the *Die Fledermaus* Party scene with Dame Kiri Te Kanawa.

**How do you prepare you voice for a performance?**

I start off by humming and checking everything feels free and easy. Then I begin with a gentle warm up of scales and various other exercises: if you have a big role to sing, it's better not to use your voice too much on the day of a performance.

**How long do you have to rehearse on the day of a performance?**

It really depends on the venue. The company generally allows about 3 hours to rehearse exits, entrances, choreography and recitatives before a show. If things are going well it takes less time!

**Who is your favourite opera character?**

This is such a hard question, as I love most of the characters I have played. Playing Eurydice and Musetta last season was great fun as they were both drama queens who loved being the centre of attention! Everything about them had to be big and over-the-top.

**What do you do when you are not singing?**

I love going to the gym, shopping and catching up with friends as well as teaching singing.

**If you weren't an opera singer what would be your ideal profession?**

Ever since watching Perry Mason and Ali McBeal, I always fancied being a lawyer! However, I think the reality of it isn't quite as glamorous as it seems on the TV!

**What is your proudest moment outside of performing to date?**

Encouraging Josh (an 8 year old boy) to sing and learn music. He then managed to fulfil his dreams by gaining choral scholarships to both Westminster and St Paul's Cathedral Schools.

**What three things might people be surprised to learn about you?**

I am a brown belt in Wu Shu Kwan (Chinese Kick Boxing), I play the concert harp and I am fundamentally quite a shy person!



## RICHARD MITHAM TALKS TO ANNE MARABINI YOUNG, GENERAL DIRECTOR AND CO-FOUNDER OF DIVA OPERA

**When do you start to choose the operas for the following year?**  
We begin thinking about the choice of operas about 18 months ahead and announce them at least 12 months in advance.

### **What influences your choice of operas?**

We try to include a comedy and a tragedy and we look for a work that can be successfully produced in the way we work. I.e something that can be reduced in size to suit the venues we perform in without compromising the work. It is also very important that we take into account our clients wishes and therefore we always run our ideas by all the regular festivals and charities we work for. It's always a bonus if we can present something new, like this year's production of *Falstaff*, which we are producing for the first time.

### **When you have decided on your choice of operas what is the first thing that has to be organised?**

We have to allocate the production to the director and designer and then we begin to audition for the roles in each opera.

### **How do you find your singers and how many days do you spend auditioning?**

We receive approximately 500 applications from singers across the UK, Europe and even the US each year. We carefully sort through all of these applications and offer auditions to people we think have had the experience required for a tour such as ours. We also work with singers agencies and of course re-cast many of our regular singers if there are roles to suit them.

### **Who decides on the style of the production?**

Ultimately the Director chooses the period for the production, but Bryan and I always have a say in this as well as we know exactly what our audiences are looking for. They appreciate the fact that we usually stick to the period in which the piece was written as it means our costumes are always authentic and lavish. This is something rare in opera today with so many companies now favouring modern dress.

### **How long does it take to get a costume made from design to finished product?**

The designer usually begins work on the costumes 3 or 4 months before the opening night of the opera. She begins by sourcing designs and fabric samples to show to the Director and together they choose the style and palette for each production. Fabrics need to be as authentic as possible, while also being robust enough to withstand wear for around 20 performances in any one season. It also helps if they are cool enough to remain comfortable in the extreme heat of venues like the Villa Ephrussi in St. Jean Cap Ferrat! When the fabrics and designs are all agreed upon the Designer sends the designs, fabrics and singers measurements to the costumiers who take between 1 and 2 weeks to produce each item.

### **And the set and props for the production?**

Again, these have to be designed and made approximately 3 months ahead. If we have a special set made the designer works in conjunction with a set builder who has to build it from wood and reinforce it so that is strong enough to hold a cast of more than 10 people. The basic set then has to be painted in an effect to reflect whatever material it is portraying, i.e stone, wooden floorboards or even vegetation. Props can be specially made or sourced from antique shops and places like Portobello Market or from the many prop hire companies who also supply the film and television industry. We have also built up our own enormous collection of furniture and props over the years and always endeavour to re-use what we have in stock.

### **Who plans when and where the performances take place?**

We offer performances between May and December each year and our clients choose the date on which they want to have their event. However, as there are now so many regular clients and festivals that we return to annually I am able to pencil the regular dates in a year or even two in advance. We have an agent in France who negotiates new and regular performances for most of the French festivals we perform in each year. While the majority of these are in August, she and I work closely throughout the year to fit new venues into our increasingly busy schedule.

### **What are the administrative procedures when performances are imminent?**

Travel for performances outside of the UK is booked as soon as all our casting is finalised. I then work for several weeks with each client to fine-tune all the arrangements for every performance. Approximately 10 days before each performance or tour I issue a schedule to the whole company giving them as many details as possible for each job. For performances in the UK they will need the address of the venue, directions to the venue and rehearsal and performance start times. When we travel abroad they also need to have their flight details, check in times and name of the hotel in addition to everything they need for UK performances. I also have to arrange all the accommodation and pick ups from airports or stations well ahead of time. Our lorry also has to be packed or unpacked according to which performances we are doing, so everything in our storage unit is cross-packed each time we leave for a tour.

### **When you founded Diva Opera in 1996 did you ever imagine that it would become the success it is today?**

We began with very few resources but with great belief in our abilities and a lot of hope in our hearts. That said, it was impossible to predict at that stage what impact Diva Opera would have on the operatic market. Luckily the company grew slowly at first so we were able to gain the experience we needed at a manageable pace. By the time we received in excess of 50 bookings in one year it just seemed a natural progression. I am continually delighted by the popularity of our company and very proud of our achievements that are due to great dedication and hard work from everybody in the team. We are so very lucky to be doing the job we love and I never take our success for granted.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2010:

THE DRESS REHEARSALS FOR OUR NEW PRODUCTIONS ARE ON THE FOLLOWING DATES:

*Falstaff* | 3rd May at Rivercourt Methodist Church, Hammersmith  
*Carmen* | 7th June at Rivercourt Methodist Church, Hammersmith



*Orphée aux Enfers, 2009*



*La Bohème, 2009*

## NEWS IN BRIEF:

### DIVA OPERA SINGERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Jaewoo Kim will sing Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* at English National Opera.

David Stephenson will be appearing as Escamillo in *Carmen* at Opera Holland Park before singing the same role for Diva Opera.

Matthew Hargreaves will sing Leporello in *Don Giovanni* at Opera Holland Park.

Elizabeth Donovan will sing Marzelline in *Fidelio* at Welsh National Opera.

Richard Mitham will cover the role of Colline in Scottish Opera's production of *La Bohème* and appear in 'Scottish Opera Unwrapped' of this production.

Linda Richardson will sing the title role in *Madama Butterfly* for Longborough Opera Festival, as well as singing Alice in Diva Opera's production of *Falstaff*.

Nicholas Sharratt has recently performed in the World Premiere of *Swanhunter* by Jonathan Dove and will be singing the role of Ernesto in *Don Pasquale* for English Touring Opera in March 2010.

### CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FOLLOWING DIVA OPERA ARTISTS WHO WERE MARRIED IN 2009:

Wardrobe Supervisor Freya Pointer married Rob Barker on June 13th.

Soprano Catriona Clark married Cameron Sutherland on September 5th.

Soprano Elizabeth Donovan married Phil Pooley on December 30th.

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Our thanks to Mark Holford for his photographs for *Così fan tutte*, *La Bohème* and *Orphée aux Enfers*