

## Chairman's Report Opera Club AGM 2007

This has been an interesting year for the opera club as we have faced up to the challenge of presenting live musical theatre to our audiences both in the Harlequin Theatre and other venues.

The year started with our presentation of the French Collection at the Reigate Park Church. As always the standard of presentation and performance was high thanks again to our superb musical director Angela Barker with more than a little help from Alison Cooper.

It was wonderful to hear such a wide range of music and comedy items from a very talented group of people, and although soloists shone in the performances still the outstanding hallmark of the opera club was once again the strength of its chorus.

Although numbers and faces may change it is still something to be very proud of when you hear the opera club sing as one unit. The French Collection was an artistic success and although our audiences were not huge, we still managed to make a profit, helped largely by the introduction of a raffle.

As we said at the beginning of the year our autumn production *The Scarlet Pimpernel* was going to be an expensive show to put on and would require a large cast and some radical re-thinking if we were going to get anywhere near breaking even. We took note of as many comments from last year's AGM as we could and as such spent more on advertising than we would normally have done and, I believe, perhaps more than we should have done. Almost as a knee-jerk reaction and to say that we had done so, we advertised in *The Stage* as well as all the magazines we could find both to promote the show and to attract new members.

The biggest change we made was to reduce the number of performances from six to four which had a significant effect in reducing our costs. It also meant that we performed to sell-out audiences on two of the performances, Thursday and Friday, but the matinee and Saturday evening still had tickets available. The committee also managed to obtain sponsorship for the printing of the handbills posters and programme saving approximately nine hundred pounds from previous productions.

Also thanks to the input from two club members namely Helier Dreux for a hilarious and entertaining quiz night and Ann Staddon for her Walk for Wigs we managed to raise approximately another thousand pounds. We also had a serious drive at achieving more advertising revenue for the theatre programme than we had done before which we did with great success. We also managed to get a large cast assembled for the production which, because of the 50% reduction in membership for the first year, actually added to our overall costs due to the expense of costuming each of those members of the cast.

So all in all we put ourselves in the best position we could to perform the SP at the Harlequin Theatre in October. Was it worth it? Without doubt the opera club's presentation of the SP, produced and directed by Angela Barker and Alison Cooper was magnificent; and as reviews say will be rightly held up as the standard to which other societies need to aspire in performing this piece. It was with a little sadness that we made our usual presentations on stage at the end of the show as Alison Cooper had previously announced that this would in fact be her last production for the club (that is until we twist her

arm in the future). As she has been with the club for a number of years both as a performer and producer, and the club's reputation has grown as a direct result of her innovative and magical productions - she will be a tough act to follow. She and Brian are still going to be involved with the club, not least because they have a significant store of props and a very competitively priced photocopier!!

We also said goodbye to Bobby Murphy who has been our wardrobe mistress for many years and has travelled from Devon for the last few years to fulfil this role. I am sure that she will continue to make that journey not just to see the shows but how the costumes look.

It is always difficult choosing shows for musical societies to perform - do we pick a box office certainty – if there is one – or do we just pick what we want to do? As the membership of the opera club changes, how do we keep everybody happy and enthusiastic? This year we have chosen another new show, namely Children of Eden. It has been picked because it appears that the membership like the challenge of something new, because it has a huge amount of onstage singing for the company and, significantly, it has three great parts for ladies in the society, with a number of smaller parts as well.

Another significant thing that has happened this year is the formation of the Harlequin User Group Committee. I and a number of the committee have regularly attended meetings and have been actively involved in the building of the Support that the Harlequin website. The purpose of the User Group is to represent all the amateur theatrical users of the Harlequin and to petition and to present to the council what we, as a user group, want as a replacement to the Harlequin Theatre when it is pulled down probably at the end of 2010. We have individually visited various other theatres of different sizes, run by different methods, to be able to draft a report of what we would like to see the council provide for the local community. We still have a long way to go before we get agreement of what will or may be built but it is encouraging that the quality and mix of the people on the committee are already making the council sit up and take notice and that they are now in dialogue with us.

We believe that there will be a gap between the closure of the Harlequin and the opening of any new venue and as such have already spoken to Dorking Halls about once again using their venue. As a committee, we also intend to speak to ESOS about the situation as we will both be in the same boat so to speak.

We finished this year with a change to our constitution to charitable status, which has financial benefit to the club both in terms of membership fees and the potential to obtain sponsorship. This EGM was held at a rehearsal for a superb carol concert that the club was invited to put on to raise money for charity, which we did very successfully.

You will hear when the Treasurer makes his report that although we did not make a profit this year, the loss is significantly lower and more manageable; the aim in future will be to at least break even.

I would like to thank all the committee members for their hard work this year and we are sorry to lose two members, Chris Whitebread and Lynda Barrett who are standing down.

I've enjoyed being chairman of the opera club this year for the most part and look forward to the future.