

Chairman's Report

This has been an interesting year for the Opera Club, one that has been both difficult and rewarding.

We started the year on a high, reflecting on the success of *Scarlet Pimpernel* the previous year. The show did, however, present us with one major problem - how do you follow that!!! The company was at a new level of strength within the membership all wanting something equally challenging the next year. We had already earmarked our show for 2007 but something nagged at us to say that perhaps there was a show out there that would yet again really engage the membership and perhaps pull in even more new members. We had decided that for our 2007 season we would have a concert in the spring, as well as our main show in the autumn. One of our members, Lynda Barrett, was extremely keen to be given the chance to produce for us and asked to be able to handle the concert. This gave us more time to decide which show we would pick for autumn 2007. Unfortunately due to prior commitments Angela Barker was not going to be available to MD our concert. We approached a number of Musical Directors, with guidance from Angela, and were delighted when Judith Gonsalves agreed to accept the post. Whilst this was happening, over the Christmas/ New Year period, we finally agreed our show for the autumn as *Children of Eden* with a production team of Angela Barker, Helen Hardwick and Audrey Lucas.

So in mid January we convened with Lynda and Judith to finalise arrangements for the concert "Magical Musical Moments". Without trying to place blame on anyone it immediately became apparent at the first meeting that the scale of the production and what would be asked of the members was way beyond the timescale we had – starting rehearsals two weeks later. To be fair to Judith and Lynda, who were both new to the Society in terms of a production team, their enthusiasm to make the concert work in spite of the timescale was fantastic. It did however mean that some drastic rethinking had to be done in a very short space of time to make the concert practical at all. As many of you are aware there was a lot of chopping and changing through the rehearsal period and this led to a lot of insecurity from the members as to whether we would actually pull this off. In my own mind and with discussion with the committee on more than one occasion, we considered cancelling it and cutting our losses. The consequence of what went on during rehearsals was that members did not feel confident enough to push ticket sales until too late. The concert was successful, and although there were parts that were not up to our usual standard, there were some superb moments too, imaginatively set and beautifully sung. The overall result though was unfortunately a significant financial loss for an event that is meant to be a fund raiser. I feel that we probably should have postponed the concert rather than cancelling it altogether as both Lynda, and probably more so Judith (who organised several extra rehearsals at her house on Saturday mornings), worked extremely hard to do their best for the Club. It gave us the opportunity to publicise our Autumn Show and that did us no harm at all.

Children of Eden took over all of lives from almost as soon as the concert ended. Angela and Helen had worked extremely hard on what was effectively a blank canvas to come up with a vision of how we were going to accommodate a cast of approximately 50 on the Harlequin stage (we had expected 40 adults and 10 children to be amongst the cast). It was apparent from the introduction evening that this was not going to be the case. People came from everywhere to be in this show. Such was the interest that we allowed 22 children and 50 plus adults to be part of this experience. I had many interesting conversations with Helen as she had to keep changing the stage set up to accommodate that many people. The show was a phenomenal success for us. The whole rehearsal period was amazing as people developed their on stage families – to such an extent that they become quite real to many of us. As the individual performances grew, something almost "spiritual" took over the company and members of the cast could be seen openly weeping on stage as the story unfolded. I think, for all of us, *Children of Eden* will always be something special and people will say "I was there when we did that". The production team of Angela Barker, Helen Hardwick and Audrey Lucas surpassed all our expectations and gave us a truly wonderful time in a very happy show. We performed the show at the Harlequin over four performances again and with some clever managing of the budgets we nearly broke even, in as much as that overall in the year, we made a loss of under £3000.00 (The concert being £2000.00 of

this). With the benefit of hindsight postponing the concert may have allowed us to actually make money on the year, as in the past these events have always been good for us.

As your Chairman I have also played an active part on the Harlequin User Group, attending nearly all the meetings (sometimes twice a month!). As many of you will know, a petition was raised and some 10,000 signatures were delivered to a council meeting in December and more recently a public meeting was held at the Harlequin when we had the chance to put our questions directly to Council Members. At this stage the future of the Harlequin is still far from certain and it is therefore imperative that we all do all that we can to make our feelings known to the Council, They must be made to honour the commitment that was made back in the 70's, when they were given permission by the Public to pull down the Market Hall, to provide a place for a theatre in the town for 125 years (the same period that the Market hall had stood).

I would also like to thank my committee for all their hard work this year. Due to circumstances beyond our control certain members were either ill or not available for most of the meetings and so we had to manage sometimes with only four people at any one time. In fact if it had not been for people like Alys Dreux, Fiona Thompson and Lynda Pond, who took on specific tasks in the year, we would not have managed. This year Ralph and David are not standing again. The remaining six of us are more than happy to offer our services, should you wish us to do so, however we do need at least 2 more dedicated committee members to join us – namely a Vice Chairman and an ordinary member*. We currently have a very active membership and it is not right to expect just a handful of people to run your society. If you want this Club to continue to thrive, at some point you must step up and do your bit. It is not too difficult and can be good fun - and there are always chocolate biscuits at the meetings.

*Since drafting this report I am delighted to say that two of our members have come forward to offer their services.

Moving forward we now have our charitable status and will be approaching companies next year to try and achieve some sponsorship.

This year we have no concert but we do have some exciting events planned for late in the year which should help to swell the finances. Next year sees us joining forces with ESOS to present not only Scrooge in December but a concert in the spring. A separate sub committee has been formed from 3 members of The Opera Club Committee and 3 Members of ESOS so that we dot the I's and cross the T's properly.

As a committee we feel that the current format of only performing a show over 4 performances will continue, at least for the foreseeable future. The budget and model that David, our treasurer, has produced shows that this gives us our best chance of getting to the stage where we once again start to put money back into the bank.

It is always a pleasure to be Chairman of The Opera Club and represent such a talented and enthusiastic group of people.