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**FESTIVAL**  
MMXV

## Inside your Christmas Newsletter...

### 2016 Dorset Opera Festival

Next year's productions revealed.

### 66% of participants under 25

Even more Summer School participants were in the 16-25 age group - an increase of 5% on 2014.

### Dates for 2016 priority booking

All you need to know!

### Reviews for 2015

"The chorus excelled with masses of quick-witted cameos and vivid singing..."

Dorset Opera News | Christmas 2015 | Issue 21



## Farewell William

The archetypal English Gentleman, with impeccable manners, beautifully dressed - always with his signature bow tie.



Dorset Opera's President, William Jeffrey Gronow Davis MFH, died peacefully at his home in Tollard Royal on Sunday 20 September 2015. He was born 24 February 1941 in Baroda, India, the youngest of three brothers. He didn't meet his father until 1946 because he had been captured fighting the Japanese. The family returned to a farm in Sussex, and William was sent off to

boarding school at the age of 5. He went to Clifton where he excelled in the Arts and on the sports field and then to art college in London. He joined Michael Pitt Rivers at Rushmore in 1961 and they remained together until Michael's death in 1999. William was an accomplished landscape artist and exhibited in England and Australia.

Before he died, Michael Pitt Rivers had asked William to take forward his work at Rushmore and, whilst Michael had made huge advances during his life time, it was William that took the Estate into the 21st century, opening it up to the public - an Estate very much 'open for business'. He also instigated major landscape improvements with new tree avenues, clumps and replanting of traditional woodland. He famously built a neo-Mogul folly - the tallest in Britain for over 100 years - designed to celebrate his love of India and reflect the Nepalese style of buildings within the Larmer Tree Gardens.

Whilst he never rode to hounds, nor did he shoot or fish, he was a passionate supporter of field sports. He was Master of the Portman Hunt, inviting the Portman Horse Trials to move to the Larmer Tree in 2006 and supporting the establishment of a larger course within Rushmore Park in April 2015.

William was a great patron and supporter of the Arts, and of many charities and local causes. He had a great love of opera - especially the works of Richard Wagner - and until recently he made the annual pilgrimage to Bayreuth. He supported the Welsh National Opera, the English National Opera and Opera Holland Park, but his great passion was the Dorset Opera Festival of which he was firstly Vice President then President for a total of eleven years. Whilst he was fully supportive of our programming over that time, his favourite production was undoubtedly our sole foray into Wagner - *The Flying Dutchman*.

William, or Mr William as he was known by the Rushmore family in and around Tollard Royal and Farnham, worked tirelessly to secure the long term future of the Estate and to ensure that the plan he and Michael Pitt Rivers devised so many years ago came to fruition.

James Gibson Fleming writes: William will be remembered for his winning personality, his many achievements, his style, charisma, vision and generosity; but more than anything, we will miss him for his great sense of fun and friendship.

He will indeed be much missed by many.

## The 2016 Festival

Dates for the 2016 Dorset Opera Festival performances have been announced. They are 26-30 July - with the Summer School course itself starting on Thursday 14 July.

### Tchaikovsky | Eugene Onegin

We have already publicised the fact that the 2016 Festival will include Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. Based on the novel by Alexander Pushkin, it tells the story of the selfish aristocrat who coldly rejects the young Tatyana's love. In his boredom, Onegin flirts with her sister - the fiancée of his only friend, Lensky. When Lensky challenges him to a duel, Onegin kills him. In shame, he travels the world and, years later, when it is too late, he returns to Russia to seek out Tatyana...

The opera will be in the hands of the Carr brothers (Director Paul and Conductor Gavin) who will no doubt work their magic on a star-studded cast. *Eugene Onegin* will be performed on July 26, 28 and 30 (matinée).

### Verdi | Macbeth

In order to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death and in recognition of the inspiration he has been to so many composers over the years, the second opera for 2016 will be Verdi's *Macbeth*. This has been a favourite of Dorset Opera over the years with productions in 1989 and 2001, and we are well aware that the opera lends itself perfectly to the Dorset Opera model.

Our music director Jeremy Carnall will take the helm and *Elisir* director, David Phipps-Davis, returns. We can promise you some exciting casting that will have you invading the box office! Dates for *Macbeth* performances are 27, 29 and 30 July.

## 66% of Participants Under 25

Last Christmas's DONews reported that 61% of our Summer School participants were under the age of 25. That was somewhat of a record. But this year, we have exceeded that figure, with an increase of 5%. So the official figure for 2015 is that an incredible 66% of our participants were in the 16-25 age group - proof that the Dorset Opera Festival continues to fulfil its remit in bringing the joys of the ultimate art form, to new generations of singers, technical theatre students, and operagoers.

## Gift Aid: have your tax circumstances changed?

We hold Gift Aid declaration forms for many of our supporters - some dating back several years. These enable us to claim 25% tax on every donation made to the Dorset Opera charity. To enable us reclaim Gift Aid on your donation, you have to have paid the amount of money we claim (or more) in Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax in that tax year. Please be sure to let us know if your circumstances have changed.





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## REVIEWS:

# Dorset Opera Festival 2015

## What the critics said about our production of: *L'elisir d'amore*

**Opera Magazine's Peter Reed wrote:** While Dorset Opera, with a fair wind, is just about doable in a round trip from London, the 41-year-old festival clearly has a strong local presence. The setting, in the grounds of Bryanston School, is beautiful, the atmosphere informal, and the director Roderick Kennedy is an affable omnipresence. It is all due to his energy that such a high standard is achieved, with a run of three performances each of two operas (plus Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* in Blandford Forum Parish Church).

For their staging of *L'elisir d'amore*, the director David Phipps-Davis and designer Steve Howell moved the action from a village in Italy to one in England during World War II, with the set made up of enlarged pictures by Brian Cook, the illustrator who created the celebrated 1940s and '50s jackets for the Batsford books on English life - highly stylised, rural and urban views, in their way as visionary as Ravilious. Visually stunning and comforting, the set was a continuation of countryside outside the theatre and suited the charm and innocence of Donizetti's opera down to the ground.

The American soprano Angela Montellaro made Adina's pragmatic rather than hard-hearted desirability obvious from the start. Her lightly ironic *Tristan* cavatina set the tone of her playing her two suitors off against each other with a seductive authority that made her capitulation all the more appealing. Montellaro's singing had great vitality, technically she was light and spontaneous, and she had great comic timing.

Leonardo Capalbo's personable Nemorino was gloriously and sweetly sung, and if occasionally his diffident, love-lorn portrayal seemed a little calculated, its pathos still wormed its way into the audience's affections - and he delivered a wonderfully smooth crescendo of assertion in '*Una furtiva lagrima*'. He was delight as disaster loomed, and a complete charmer as everything came right. John Molloy's Dulcamara was a brilliantly pitched buffo turn, sung with enormous verve, and his sulky glamorous assistant (Charlotte Hewett) made a great impression. Jeremy Carpenter gave a solidly sung, triumphant god's-gift caricature as Belcore, performed with panache, moving swiftly to his next conquest, Johane Ansell's saucy Giannetta. The chorus excelled with masses of quick-witted cameos and vivid singing, and the conductor Timothy Henty and his Dorset Opera Orchestra were completely in tune with Donizetti's brio.

**The FTR's Gay Pirrie-Weir wrote:** As the audience flooded out of the Coade Theatre at Bryanston on Saturday afternoon, a universal smile of happiness on their faces, it was clear that the 2015 production of Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* was a triumph. It was one of those productions where everything gelled, a delight for the ears and the eyes and a confirmation that comic opera need never be a sellout.

From the first bars of the overture, conducted by Timothy Henty, through the sets by Steve Howell, redolent of 1930s railway posters, to the energy of the performances, this was an afternoon at the opera to be cherished.

Director David Phipps-Davis had the inspiration of moving the setting from its original Italy to Dorset in wartime, with American soldiers charming the local girls and showing up the Dad's Army Home Guard.

Nemorino, the lovelorn young farmhand pining for the capricious Adina, was played by Leonardo Capalbo, returning to Dorset Opera much to the delight of his many local fans. With his gloriously expressive lyric tenor voice, he brought a real poignancy and desperation to the role of the man who thinks he can buy love in a bottle of snake oil.

The seller is black marketeer "doctor" Dulcamara, in an hilariously over the top performance by the lanky John Molloy, ably supported by the young Dorset soprano Charlotte Hewett as his lovely assistant.

Angela Montellaro is a perfect Adina, flaunting her wealth, beauty and learning as she plays one man off against another. Seeming to prefer the egocentric US Sergeant Belcore (played to perfection by Jeremy Carpenter), she only realises she loves Nemorino when he's suddenly surrounded by other women.

The chemistry between Adina and Nemorino was palpable, making her cruelty to the lovelorn young man and wayward flirtation with the handsome American soldier all the more convincing. They were a first-rate trio.

With strong characterisations by members of the Dorset Opera chorus, and direction which made clever use of the whole circular stage and the auditorium too, the production was evidently as enjoyable for the company as for the audience and the excellent orchestra. And even Lord Reginald Pickles deservedly got his own credit!





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## Priority booking in 2016

Priority booking for the 2016 Festival begins in February - and this time, we have split the booking periods to give those in our Patrons' Circles the exclusive opportunity to book separately. The booking periods will be as follows:

<b>Chairman's Circle</b>	<b>Tuesday 2nd February</b>
<b>Director's Circle</b>	<b>Tuesday 9th February</b>
<b>Conductor's Circle</b>	<b>Tuesday 16th February</b>
<b>Friends of Dorset Opera</b>	<b>Tuesday 23rd February</b>
<b>General booking</b>	<b>Tuesday 8th March</b>

We will be using the Regent Centre in Christchurch for ticket booking once again, and we hope to be able to offer you an improved online system that will take you straight to the booking page when you click through from the Dorset Opera website. If you want to add dining or food options at a later date (i.e. nearer the Festival), you will be able to do so simply by clicking on the Food Ordering tile on the website.

You will automatically receive booking forms in time for your priority dates.

### Booking fees

Nowadays, almost every venue in the country charges a booking fee when you purchase a theatre or concert ticket. Dorset Opera has been extremely lucky that in the past, the Regent Centre has waived that extra charge. In 2015, they brought in a booking fee for Internet transactions, but Dorset Opera alone managed to negotiate its way out of that. However, next year, we have not been quite so fortunate. If you choose to book online in 2016, the Regent Centre will add 5% to the ticket price up to a maximum of £5.

Strangely, there is a way around this. If you book by telephone or in person at the Regent Centre box office, you will not incur the 5% booking fee! So why not make a note of that box office telephone number now: 01202 499199.

Tickets sent by post will still incur the administration charge of £1.

## Please consider becoming a Patron

Did you have difficulty getting your preferred seats for this year's Festival performances? Are you missing out on functions and events organised especially for our Patrons? Are you a Friend of Dorset Opera who might like to become a Patron? Perhaps you are already a Patron but would like to upgrade to a higher Circle.

Please contact our Patrons' Secretary, Elspeth Brown on 01725 517581 or send an e-mail headed Patronage to [info@dorsetopera.com](mailto:info@dorsetopera.com) or to Elspeth at [elsp21@gmail.com](mailto:elsp21@gmail.com)

## AGM, Annual Report & Accounts

The AGM of Dorset Opera and the Friends of Dorset Opera is on 19 January 2016 at 19:00 at Knighton House School. Electronic copies of the Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 30 September 2015 will be available from [mail@alanfrost.co.uk](mailto:mail@alanfrost.co.uk)



## Forthcoming Events

One of the major events we have organised for 2016 is a lunch with the one and only John Copley. He first appeared at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, as an actor at the age of 15. Later, he famously assisted Franco Zeffirelli on the 1964 production of *Tosca* with Maria Callas and Tito Gobbi.

John went on to become Resident Director at the Royal Opera and his productions have been seen in the world's major opera houses. He has worked with every great singer and conductor of the past 50 years. His much-loved production of *La bohème* was 'retired' last year after 41 years, with Angela Gheorghiu and Joseph Calleja in the leading roles. It was broadcast live to cinemas everywhere. Don't miss the opportunity to hear John Copley in person next April; his anecdotes are the stuff of legend.

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## REVIEWS:

# Dorset Opera Festival 2015

## What the critics said about our production of: *Un ballo in maschera*

**Opera Magazine's Peter Reed wrote:** While Dorset Opera, with a fair wind, is just about doable in a round trip from London, the 41-year-old festival clearly has a strong local presence. The setting, in the grounds of Bryanston School, is beautiful, the atmosphere informal, and the director Roderick Kennedy is an affable omnipresence. It is all due to his energy that such a high standard is achieved, with a run of three performances each of two operas (plus Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* in Blandford Forum Parish Church).

By comparison (to *L'elisir d'amore*), Paul Carr's production of the Boston version of Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* was a more stagey affair, with the sort of ambition that got in the way of the opera's impact. Steve Howell's fixed set showed massively blown-up photographs of a grand opera house, with a comic-book giant splat of blood on the floor centre stage. The setting was the 1920s, with Riccardo as a Mafia-style gangster capo, with a court of silent assassins dressed as undertakers. Rebecca Hopkins's costumes made a thing of black and white contrast. A suspended corpse dripped blood onto the 'orrido campo', lit by a blood-red moon. All very expressionist, and there was the annoying anachronism of assassins wielding swords. It was certainly a bold gestural staging, but one with melodrama overload.

The Mexican tenor Luis Chapa had more than enough power for the spivvy Riccardo. His top range, though, sounded pressured, supported by a vibrato too big for the theatre, and there wasn't much chemistry between him and his best friend's wife. A larger theatre would also have suited Claudio Otelli's Renato very well, especially so in the powerfully staged Act 3 scene with Amelia. She was played by the Russian soprano Svetlana Kasyan who showed off her prodigious vocal strength, but her pitch wavered high up, not helped by a vibrato that was as unsubtle as her acting. Rosalind Plowright played the 'psychic' Ulrica as all the Madame Arcati's you've ever seen rolled into one and was unstinting in her even, full-voiced declamation. Elizabeth Bailey's Oscar was suitably androgynous, but her soprano didn't have the brilliance to do full justice to her music. Gavin Carr's conducting sided with the staging in terms of drive and drama, and the chorus, rather amorphously directed compared to *Elisir*, was vocally on top form.

**The FTR's Gay Pirrie-Weir wrote:** The second DO production for 2015 was Verdi's darkly difficult work *Un ballo in maschera*, its story based on a real event in Swedish history, and here transposed to America... Paul Carr's production, set against the goldfish bowl of a monochrome theatre facing the auditorium to increase its intensity, is full of danger and torment. Effective lighting, particularly in the gallows field scene, added to the escalating aura of doom.

Circled by plotters mingling with his loyal and loving subjects, Riccardo (Luis Chapa) basks in adulation, tortured by guilt at loving Amelia (a stunning Dorset Opera debut for the young Russian soprano.)

There were many powerful scenes in this production, but a lack of chemistry between Riccardo and Amelia - who hardly looked at each other - undermined the personal tragedy. There was a much stronger connection between Amelia and her husband Renato, played by Claudio Otelli, who embodied this noble character torn between loyalty to his friend and jealousy at his wife's apparent infidelity.

One impressive directorial idea was the almost constant presence on stage of the top-hatted, black-clad assassins, heightening the tension from the opening scene.

Rosalind Plowright, making a welcome return to the Dorset Opera stage, was simply terrific as Ulrica, the sorceress (here, a psychic), and Elizabeth Bailey was a delightful Oscar, singing her witty and enchanting songs blissfully unaware of the dark drama unfolding around her...

...Overall, with the calibre of soloists and musicians, this year's Dorset Opera Festival reached even higher standards. Under artistic director Rod Kennedy, this has become one of the summer's most anticipated (national) musical events.





Rosilind Plowright (Ulrica) Un ballo in maschera



*Un ballo in maschera*

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## The Friends of Dorset Opera

The Trustees of FODO have for some time, in consultation with the board of Dorset Opera, been carefully considering the level of Friends' subscriptions, particularly in the light of Dorset Opera's recent rapid progress to its present status as a Festival. It is well documented that the Friends' subscription has somewhat lagged behind. Having taken into account the subscription levels of support organisations of other opera companies around the country the Trustees have concluded that the proper level for the Friends of Dorset Opera is £40 per year for a single subscription and £60 for a joint membership. This new level of subscription will apply to those joining FODO from now on.

Opera is expensive to produce, and the Trustees are naturally anxious that FODO should make the maximum annual contribution that it reasonably can towards the Festival. Whilst the Trustees are not for the time being making it compulsory for existing Friends to increase their subscriptions to the new rate, particularly those who have recently joined, they would obviously be most grateful to any who felt they were in a position to action this increase. If you are happy to do this, do please contact the FODO Hon Treasurer, Nicholas Block, at Willow Barn, Stalbridge Weston, Sturminster Newton DT10 2LA. If you have any queries about your Friends' membership, please contact Nic on 01963 362068 or email: [nicholas@nblock.me.uk](mailto:nicholas@nblock.me.uk)

The Friends of Dorset Opera is a Registered Charity No: 284784

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## Ticket Pricing for 2016

Next year there will be two levels of pricing. Tickets for the first nights of *Eugene Onegin* and *Macbeth* - Tuesday 26 and Wednesday 27 July respectively - will be at a lower price than the other performances. We set a precedent for this in 2013 when *La traviata* and the *Der Fliegende Holländer* were priced differently.

We are often told that inflation rates are very low, and yet prices continue to increase. Over the past two years, Dorset Opera has been able to absorb increases made by suppliers and providers but, with further rises in the pipeline, we have found it necessary to adjust the price of some tickets for the 2016 Festival.

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