



A detailed oil painting of a young woman, likely a lady, in 18th-century attire. She has her hair styled in an elaborate updo with a decorative headpiece. She is wearing a yellow dress with a white lace collar and a pink sash, and a blue shawl with gold embroidery. She is holding a quill pen in her right hand. The background is dark and textured.

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An Artistic Director writes... in our first semi-post-lockdown magazine

We trust that you have safely ridden out Covid-19 whether you were shielding, isolating or simply locked down; be you audience members, participants, technicians, musicians, soloists, members of our Friends organisation or Patrons.

In this newly-formatted edition of DONews, we have invited several folk connected with the Dorset Opera Festival to tell us what lockdown has meant to them. We hear from one Dorset Opera friend, the renowned 'cellist, Guy Johnston, who, along with his wife, actually caught and suffered from the coronavirus.

We've taken a beloved photograph from our archive and discovered where those pictured are now, how they coped during lockdown and what Dorset Opera meant to them.

We hear from the august John Allison, the editor of *Opera* magazine, the industry bible. It's a must for anyone who loves the art form and, with

very few advertisers at this time, they, too must surely be struggling to survive. His editorial, penned before the government's announcement of a £1.57 billion subsidy package for arts and culture, is entitled *Messages in a Bottle*. It deals succinctly with the problems faced by the sector as a result of lockdown. He ends by giving Dorset Opera supporters 50% off a new subscription! We urge you to take up the offer. You will be surprised how addicted you become to *Opera* and how informative it is. You will certainly be able to hold up your head at a Bluffers' lunch!

Whilst there can be no Dorset Opera Festival this year, and therefore, no programme, we take this opportunity to list those who have so generously continued to give us vital financial support throughout the year. With 81% of our tickets having been sold when lockdown was announced, we are hugely grateful to those who chose to donate their tickets to the Company in order to help it survive.

Meanwhile, we know of several in our industry - all necessarily self-employed, many, total beginners trying to find their feet - who are struggling without work, without income and without a future. These are the very people who we have supported throughout Dorset Opera's 46 years. But, sadly, those taking their first steps during this pandemic are the ones not yet in a position to access funds through the government Self-employed Income Support Scheme. These are individuals whose outstanding talent must not, and cannot, be ignored.

Finally, allow us to put your minds at rest by announcing next summer's operas here and now! We sincerely hope that the dates of the 2021 Dorset Opera Festival will be 20-24 July inclusive and the summer school will begin on Thursday, 8th July. It won't be much of a surprise when you hear that the works being performed will be Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* and Puccini's *La rondine*!





From our President Emeritus and Chairman of the Friends of Dorset Opera, **Dame Dione Digby**



Dear Patrons and Friends,

I am sure that you are feeling as disappointed as I am that this summer we shall be deprived of hearing probably the first black Boris and to me an unknown opera by Puccini, the composer who more than any other provokes an emotional response... remember Dorset Opera's *Suor Angelica* in 2012, with some of the most beautiful music ever written for the opera stage?

No doubt 'lockdown' has affected all of us in different ways, but I have found that there have been some significant advantages! Perhaps, like me, you have found that your life is no longer governed by your diary!

As a result, reading time has been greatly increased and I have been consuming Tom Holland's *Dominion* a history of Christianity, which he tells us, has been hi-jacked so often in the last 2000 years for political purposes! To keep a balance, I have read again my friend Nigel Vinson's biography *Making Things Happen* and I have dipped in and out of *The Ring of Truth* by Roger Scruton, my idol, and this I believe to be the most interesting book ever written about Wagner's *Ring Cycle*.

My next achievement was to revise and complete twelve photograph albums, beginning

in 1954, when Eddie and I, then recently married, returned to Minterne, determined to recreate a family home in this great Edwardian house with its sixty-nine rooms. Happily the house had been requisitioned by the Navy in 1940 when their hospital on Portland was bombed ..they had 250 beds here and for five years, being the Navy, they looked after the house extremely well apart from scrubbing the decks and polishing up all the brass door plates with 'Bluebell'! For many years afterwards we received visits from sailors and from Wrens who had nursed here.

It did not take long for me to realise that at Minterne, I had a concert hall and my photographs threw up all sorts of musical happenings; in 1962, John Ogden, returning from Russia with the Tchaikovsky Prize, gave the first two concerts at Minterne and that, as many of you will remember,



led to fifty years of chamber music in every major country house in Dorset! And then in 1974, there was Dorset Opera with Patrick Shelley, Augusta Miller, Robert Glen and *The Bartered Bride*... with none other than HRH The Prince of Wales, a true opera lover, in the first night audience! I was so forward as to write an appreciative but not uncritical letter of encouragement to Patrick, which has resulted in rather a long and a very enjoyable Presidency!

So many happy memories of further productions; Patrick gave us 28 in all, and I well remember the 1984 production of *Don Carlos* where the whole cast seemed to be dressed in russet or olive green velvet made from curtains I found in the attic at Minterne! Whenever there was a major bass role, Roderick Kennedy would fly back from wherever he was in the world, to sing for his friend Patrick, contributing hugely to Dorset Opera's growing reputation.

Meanwhile, in 1981, Augusta Miller went off to the USA with a Churchill Fellowship, to study the training of opera chorus's. At the San Francisco Opera she met Roderick who

introduced her to Luciano Pavarotti and Sir Geraint Evans!

Sadly in April 2003, we lost Patrick, in the midst of his most ambitious project yet: the British stage première of Ferenc Erkel's *Hunyadi Laszlo*, to be sung in Hungarian and planned for August, with a third performance in London as part of the Hungarian Arts Festival. Thanks to great efforts by chairman Tim Lee and many other people, it all happened with great success, although our chorus decided they never wanted to try to sing an opera in Hungarian again!

Two years later, in 2005, Dorset Opera, now under the direction of Roderick Kennedy, moved to Bryanston. His first production, *Nabucco*, was memorable for the eight young ladies dressed in black with candles, slowly processing round the stage while the Hebrew scrolls from the temple walls were flung into a fiery pit in the middle of the stage.

Dorset Opera as you well know, gradually grew into a Festival with the staging of two (or more) operas and six performances and a gala

concert, attracting national attention along the way.

So what is it that made these performances so attractive and so different? For me it is the sheer impact of those seventy - mainly young - voices in the chorus; this unique sound which wings its way across the footlights and the orchestra, never ceases to thrill and enchant - and I have seen and heard every single production since 1974!

But now we retire back into semi 'Lockdown' knowing that there is no substitute for live performance... Radio 3 and lunchtime concerts from the Wigmore Hall, with for me, listening to the 'cello being played by my grandson-in-law outside the Royal Oak in Cerne Abbas, are my lifeline!

Dear Rod! May I hope that your inspired choice of *Boris Godunov*, the finest opera to come to us from Russia, will not be forgotten and enthusiastically we all look forward to the Dorset Opera Festival in 2021.



From our Chairman, **Garry Batt** Question: when is a festival not a Festival?... Answer: when it's 2020!



Firstly, greetings to everyone and I do hope you and yours are coping with lockdown and keeping well.

This is a very odd first year to be Chairman of Dorset Opera; to have to take the decision to cancel (along with Rod and the Board), was very sad but inevitable. We are keenly aware of what a disappointment this is for our Patrons, Friends, supporters and artists. However, I would like to thank my fellow Board members and in particular, Rod, for a very sensible, well balanced and positive approach during this time. Also a huge 'thank you' to so many of our supporters, who

have been so very generous in donating their tickets to 'the Cause'! Rod and I were in daily communication and could see the practicability of holding the 2020 Festival gradually but inexorably slipping away.

On a lighter and more personal note - what does a chairman and auctioneer do during lockdown, with no antiques to flog and no turbulents (not really) meetings to chair? Basically and actually, rather enjoyably take up full time farming. We are lucky enough to have a small farm of Dorset Downland in Sydling St Nicholas. I have been a somewhat reluctant shepherd, assisting Louise with her flock during lambing; spending many happy hours in my ancient and wheezing red tractor, chain harrowing and rolling the fields in the company of deer, larks, and very relieved escapee pheasants; river weed and bankside clearing of the little chalk stream running through the land has resulted in flooded wellies many times, but a kind of second childhood

splashing about in the river.

Like many of you, I am certain, our older children have escaped from London which, in this glorious weather has been delightful, but has seen serious diminution of my cellar and probably been no good for the liver! A major success for 'the little grey cells' has been the reading of *War and Peace*. Part of my remit is to support our Artistic Director Mr K. who is perhaps not entirely suited to 'lockdown' (being a social person), I have realised our meetings are normally based around, coffee/ luncheon/afternoon tea/ supper! I am pleased to report he has been a Stoic and is in good order...

We will endeavour, without absolutely deluging you, to keep in touch in as many ways as possible over the next months and we especially look forward to the most fantastic renaissance and Festival in 2021.





La bohème 2018

From our Music Director, **Jeremy Carnall**



We will all miss the Dorset Opera experience this year. It is around this time that the excitement and anticipation really begins to build as we look forward to total immersion in opera. Normally most of my preparations would have been completed. The orchestral material would have been checked, marked and sent out to the band and I would have completed any revisions to my orchestral scores.

I was especially looking forward to conducting the initial version of *Boris Godunov* from 1869. I first fell in love with this opera in the year of

my Dorset Opera debut in 2007. That year, I had been assisting Vasily Petrenko at the Nationale Reïsoera in a seven scene version which combined material from both the 1869 and final versions from 1872. The initial version of *Boris Godunov* as the composer originally conceived the work has been on my bucket list for Dorset Opera for many years. The first seven scene version was initially rejected for performance by the management of the Imperial theatres. Mussorgsky decided to then revise and enlarge the opera, but there can be no doubt that these revisions were made to forestall possible objections from the censorship department and to satisfy the conventional tastes of the Mariinsky theatre. I am a passionate believer in the first version of this opera and I was looking forward to sharing it with you.

Boris Godunov is one of the greatest chorus operas in the repertoire and I could already envisage and hear

the "wall of sound" that we all experience at Dorset. This is what I will greatly miss this year. The first book I ever read on conducting had in its introduction two pieces of advice that have remained with me to this day. The first was that you must first inspire and secondly that just 1% of conducting is conducting! I am going to miss the inspiration that I gain from all those involved in creating the magic and from the love and support shared by our audience.

This shared love for opera can only be experienced in a live setting and we all share a hope that we will be together again soon.

Music making has the power to bind a community together and is a source for good and social cohesion. It has the power to inspire, heal, question or to just be great entertainment. It is a wonderful source of hope and its capacity to energise has been a great comfort over the past months.



What have I been doing since lockdown? **Guy Johnston**



It's been a strange old time. My wife, Ali, and I contracted coronavirus in the middle of March following my Duo Tour with fellow cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason. I was returning to the U.S. where Ali and I now live and work for half the year at the University of Rochester and Eastman School of Music. It's impossible to know exactly where I caught it, but when it hit, it felt like a terrible hangover and gradually knocked us both out with a high fever and loss of smell and taste. Thankfully we recovered and were able to return to the UK in early May

after wrapping up the spring 'semester'.

It was bizarre after we landed because it soon dawned on us that we would not be allowed to see family and friends for some time. Following two weeks of isolation in London, we made our way to Ali's family home, Minterne House in Dorset. We arrived just in time for our wedding anniversary, which was special since we got married at Minterne two years ago, and the garden was just as spectacular as we had remembered. We have since moved to Ali's brother's holiday cottage in delightful Cerne Abbas and have been staying there in splendid isolation.

I've found the lockdown experience strange but interesting. The biggest challenge has been deciding how best to use my time. My teaching duties are on pause, my summer concerts have been cancelled, and now I have an enforced sabbatical

ahead of me. In some ways, this is what I have been dreaming of since winning the BBC Young Musician of the Year in 2000. I don't think I've ever stopped but, strangely, I've felt really quite motivated. I have spent my time indulging in new technical aspects of playing, new repertoire, and practice without pressure.

Then, one day, the phone rang, and my agents told me that I had been invited to give a recital as part of the Wigmore Hall series created in June during lockdown. I couldn't believe my luck. I was delighted to have an engagement to work towards with my friend and pianist, Melvyn Tan. We played some socially distanced concerts at friends' houses to help rev ourselves up, and then, there we were on the stage performing for a BBC radio producer, the director of the Wigmore Hall and... 750,000 online listeners!

Lockdown has given me the space to remember why I love music and performing - and how I simply couldn't live without it. When you're on the treadmill as a performing musician, it's easy to forget why we do what we do, but the feeling of performing for this special opportunity at the Wigmore, having not performed for a while, was very special.

Beyond this experience, and my new practice ritual (which includes some Bach every day), I've been playing socially distanced concerts outside the Royal Oak Pub in Cerne Abbas each week. It was an idea of my father-in-law, Henry Digby, to continue the tradition of clapping for the NHS on Thursday evenings with music instead. There

is usually a music festival in Cerne at this time of year, so I think the villagers have been grateful to hear some live music. For me, the chance to connect with the community and to perform in this way, is completely unique.

I've also been developing plans for my chamber music festival at Hatfield House in Hertfordshire. We have just launched our virtual festival that will include performances each Friday during September into the beginning of October (you might be interested to know that two special singers - Iestyn Davies and Katherine Broderick - will be performing). More recently, I was invited by Absolute Classics to give an online concert at the home of Bob and Elisabeth Boas in London. Tom Poster and I

performed the Rachmaninov Sonata, an old favourite of ours, and relished being in that musical moment together. Aside from all these things, we've been enjoying the outdoors here in Dorset, running in the countryside, walking round Minterne Gardens, even doing a spot of gardening. My grandmother-in-law, Dione Digby, was concerned about the weeds growing in front of the lake, so I found myself earning a few brownie points cutting them back to help reveal the edges of the lake once more. It's so wonderful looking out at the landscape that has been lovingly created and tended over the years by generations of Digbys.

Helping the NHS | **Wardrobe Ladies in Lockdown**



Celia



Judy



Vicky



Avril

Normally at this time of year our exceptional Wardrobe team are overworked putting the finishing touches to hundreds of costumes. In 2020, things are a little different as we know, but our wonderful wardrobe ladies, who miss DOF terribly, have been called upon (or have offered) to make scrubs etc.

Celia Harve, Judy King and Avril Griffiths have been supplying the Yeatman hospital in Sherborne. Vicky Gumm, from Tarrant Monkton, in conjunction with members of the Tarrant Valley Quilting Club, made laundry bags for Salisbury hospital and surrounding care homes and hospices.

One of Vicky's daughters took half their output back to Sheffield children's hospital where she is a consultant. Our appreciation and congratulations go out to all those who have supported the NHS at this harrowing time.



Virtual Auction of Promises

Chairman Garry Batt has recently been involved with an online auction of promises for another charity. It's a simple idea involving electronic bids invited over a single weekend for lots generously donated by supporters. It is great fun and has the potential to raise thousands of pounds.

To give you some idea, the lots included everything from meals in smart restaurants, all types of services, riding

lessons and young people offering to cut your lawns and hedges. One person was donating Spanish lessons, others had offered the use of apartments in idyllic locations. Garry himself was offering a half day's valuation, quickly snapped up. So successful was it that we are thinking of holding one ourselves!

Do you need a young opera singer to come to sing at your function? Do you need a marquee for that function?

Perhaps you could hire one through our auction!

Everyone at DOF Towers is really excited about this fundraiser. But we need donations. Please be in contact if you can offer something and the moment we've collected enough lots we'll be back in touch with the launch date. Please - we're not interested in attic clearances or jumble! Question? Genius ideas? DOF HQ - 01258 840000 or info@dorsetopera.com

The Lockdown Quiz

You wouldn't have expected it to be easy, but some of the questions in our Lockdown Quiz were admittedly quite tricky! Question masters, Adrian Thorpe and Hugh Watkins, certainly gave us some points over which to argue and debate.

We are delighted to announce that Chris Bailward was the outright winner! In the past,

Chris, a farmer and committed long distance cyclist, has been a vital member of the Dorset Opera Festival stage crew. He is also a singer himself and is a valued member of the excellent and progressive Milborne Port Opera, whose music director is our company manager, Caroline D'Cruz.

Our heartiest congratulations go to all those who took part



and especially to the ten mug winners! We trust your sought-after prizes are now being put to good use!



Outreach: **the work continues...**



The Dorset Opera Festival is continuing its commitment to outreach and education through the summer, with an online vocal course for students from schools who have taken part in previous DOF schools' projects. This opportunity for learning and vocal development online takes place in the final week of July, and we are delighted that students from St. Edwards School in Poole and the Purbeck School, as well as previous members of the Dorset Opera Children's Chorus, are staying connected with us during their holidays.

The course will be led by Board member and singer/animateur, Lynsey Docherty, together with Robert Gildon - one of the UK's most sought after animateurs. Both Lynsey and Rob have been in demand throughout the lockdown period, creating online content for opera festivals and cultural organisations. The course will also feature invited guests, providing an exclusive opportunity for the students to ask questions and hear professional singers performing live, just for them!

Each day we will look at a range of repertoire incorporating a vast array of styles, whilst offering tips on vocal technique and performance skills. We will also encourage the students to submit a recording of one or two songs at the end of the week, as we attempt to identify stand-out singers who could benefit from ongoing mentoring and the opportunity to gain a place in the 2021 Dorset Opera Festival Chorus.

In addition, in September, we are looking forward to Zooming into all the classrooms of Durweston Primary School, following up on our hugely successful work with the school last year. The Head is extremely keen for us to return with another workshop, as the last visit by Dorset Opera proved to be the best visiting project the school had ever experienced!

During lockdown, many of our readers have enquired about offering extra financial support to our Outreach programme. Now we have something concrete to offer we should be pleased to hear from you! Sadly, it will not be possible for you to watch these online tutorials, but we will no doubt receive photographs and (with permission) possibly sound clips. If you are interested in supporting Outreach, please get in touch with DOF HQ on 01258 840000.



Whats in a photo...?

We took a precious photograph from years long gone and asked those featured (all still good friends) where their lives have taken them. Sadly, one of those in the photo, David de Mattos (a little more mature than the others and a great stalwart of Dorset Opera) is no longer with us. But read on as Tom, Ferg, Mel, Joffry and Alice - at the time, all at school in Sherborne - tell us what, in some cases, 11 or 12 years of Dorset Opera meant to them...

Tom Williams



DO: What years did you take part in Dorset Opera?

TW: 1992-2001 (as a chorister); 2005-6 (As assistant director)

DO: What was your favourite opera?

TW: *Carmen stands out! It was my first opera (and firsts are always special). Sex, violence, sport, alcohol, crime, punishment - it's got the lot, plus of course all those legendary, instantly recognisable tunes. Nearly thirty years on, and I can still sing the tenor chorus part (though I can't reach all the notes) from memory. It was a weird production. Our Carmen, Sonja Nerdrum, had broken or otherwise damaged her leg prior to rehearsals. The Habañera on crutches was something to be seen. And our Don José, Zoran Todorovich, was having problems with his instrument in the run-up to the*

première. But he came good on the night, and how. (My mum would give her heart eternally to him the following year for his O bell'alma innamorata... in Lucia di Lammermoor.) The great Anthony Besch directed with heavy use of a gauze backdrop, which could either be rendered opaque or translucent depending on the lighting. Recalcitrant chorus members were forever being sent 'behind the gauze', while the blue-eyed cherubs were picked out in key light downstage centre. Patrick Shelley conducted, and obscured the view of the first four rows, as was his way. The whole fortnight is just bathed in a warm summer's haze for me.

Simply put, it's when I fell in love with opera.

DO: What was your favourite Dorset Opera moment?

TW: *Obviously there are so many to choose from, split between the music and the 'extra-curricular'. Starting with the latter - passionate summer relationships made and broken, friendships made and never broken, skinny dipping in the SSG pool, hitting golf balls over Sherborne Abbey, picnics up at Corton Denham beacon, boisterous carriages at the Rajpoot, the regular post-get-out Sunday pub lunch with signing of programmes and promises to meet up at Christmas (it never happened). And the musical memories are so precious too. Standing in the wings, waiting to go on, listening to phenomenal singers pouring their hearts into some of the best music ever written. My experience of the operas was generally limited to scenes the chorus was in - it's still a revelation now when I see operas I've been in, to find out what actually happens onstage! The high point for me came in the last ever opera I sang in. Macbeth, 2001. End of Act 1, Schiudi inferno. Something insanely dramatic is happening on stage - I can't remember what, possibly something to do with ghosts or regicide and all the rest. I'm a spear/axe/sword carrier on a raised level at the back. The orchestra is turned up to 11. Everyone is at full whack and Christine Bunning, as Lady Macbeth, is hitting high C's about eight inches from my left ear. It is still ringing, and I am shivering as I write this. Wow.*

DO: What are you doing now?

TW: *I'm a screenwriter with*

occasional forays into music theatre.

DO: Did your connection with Dorset Opera influence your career choice in any way?

TW: *It did. When I started doing Dorset Opera, I was definitely on a 'professional' trajectory - lawyer/accountant/financier. But somewhere along the way I 'came out' as a creative. I'm sure that the experience of witnessing all these wonderfully talented performers following their dreams, enduring the lows in order to enjoy the highs, sacrificing so much for their passion and their talent and their art and their lifestyles, left its mark on me. When I assisted William Relton in directing the first two operas at Bryanston, I watched at close hand a master craftsman at work: the preparation, the precision, the emotional commitment that he put into his job are all something from which I took inspiration. I've since worked on a number of film scripts with a strong music element, including one about Puccini and his mistress Doria Manfredi. On a somewhat different tack, I've also worked with Tim Rice on a revival of his 1983 musical Blondel. I'm happy to say I'm still a defiantly 'out' creative.*

DO: Do you still attend opera regularly?

TW: *Not as often as I would like. Living in West Wiltshire makes it financially and logistically prohibitive. Thank God for Dorset Opera! My annual trips to Bryanston have been the sum total of my opera-going experience for the past few years. If I do go to the theatre it's to see a musical like Hamilton or The Lion King with my kids. Give it a decade or two, then I'll get back into it.*

Might even give the Ring a go, although let's not get carried away.

DO: What is your favourite opera now?

TW: *I love all my DO operas hugely, but my two favourites are ones that DO never did - and probably never will do - because of their relatively small chorus parts. They are Rigoletto - the first opera I ever saw, with my grandmother in Holland Park before it was Opera Holland Park - and Così fan tutte - Jonathan Miller's 1995 ROH production is the best night of opera I've ever seen. And I've just seen that the 2010 revival is available on YouTube during the Coronavirus outbreak, so I'll definitely be giving that a watch.*

DO: What has Coronavirus meant for you and your life/family/business?

TW: *It has had its challenges, but I certainly haven't had it as bad as some. As a writer I'm used to self-isolating and working from home, but I now have to intersperse that with home-schooling and setting up my kids with zoom calls so they can check in with their friends. The bigger question I have is what to write about? What will people care about post-lockdown? What will the world look like, and what stories will demand to be told? For now, I'm retreating to the safety of some period drama scripts - one TV series I'm writing about the Russian Revolution, a tale of the world tilting on its axis in the space of a few months, has particular resonance. That and opera, of course. Always opera.*

Fergus Llewellyn



DO: What years did you take part in Dorset Opera?

FL: 1992-2002 (as a chorister)

DO: What was your favourite opera?

FL: Lucia - what an opera, with some fantastic chorus moments; Carmen comes close, again, just for those phenomenal choruses.

DO: What was your favourite Dorset Opera moment?

FL: Apart from *Abbeylands* (one of the Sherborne boarding houses) antics, the Rajpoot, the Gareth and Wilko (chorus master and assistant, Gareth Jones and Stephen Wilkinson) double act, etc... The mad scene from Lucia - a combination of stunning music and drama with the greatest work out for my quad muscles that I have ever undergone - a 4-minute lunge hold/freeze frame. I will also never forget my first day at DO, and having the evening with Patrick Shelley, (who was my tutor at school at the time), who shared his love for opera that really shaped my understanding of it being the greatest form of drama and artistic expression.

DO: What are you doing now?

FL: I'm headmaster of a Prep School in Kenya, having

previously been a Housemaster at Cheltenham College.

DO: Did your connection with Dorset Opera influence your career choice in any way?

FL: One of the main reasons for my love of DO was the community and friendship it brought. The intensity of bringing a group of people together to work on a shared project for two weeks, all living with each other, was something that I really thrived on. Schools, especially boarding schools like the ones I have worked in, can be a bit like that - all-consuming, shared passion, great bonds made, etc. I also really appreciated the time that the older members of DO put into the likes of me as a teenager - they were really influential in my perspective on the world back then - and that is something that I have tried to emulate in my teaching career.

DO: Do you still attend opera regularly?

FL: Not in Kenya! However, Covid permitting, we are moving to a school only 25 minutes from Glyndebourne over the summer, so I hope to be a regular visitor there.

DO: What is your favourite opera now?

FL: Don Giovanni - the best of Mozart distilled into a stunning score - or Lucia: my grandmother, who was the biggest family influence on my love of opera, was fortunate to see Sutherland perform in the famous Zeffirelli production at Covent Garden, and it remained her favourite.

DO: What has Coronavirus meant for you and your life/family/business?

FL: Well, in Kenya, Schools

are closed, so we are running the term virtually. Our three children have mixed attitudes to working online (!), but this is a great place to be a child, with all the facilities of a school available. It is our last term here, having had five wonderful years, so the thought of leaving without seeing the pupils and their families again is a very sad one. However, we are fully aware of our blessings - this is a beautiful place to be self-isolating, (the School is on a 450 acre estate), and the weather is lovely.

Jo Fry



DO: What years did you take part in Dorset Opera?

JF: 1993 Lucia Di Lammermoor; 1994 Un Giorno Di Regno; 2000 Salvator Rosa; 2001 Macbeth; 2002 Norma

DO: What was your favourite opera?

JF: Lucia - for the sheer drama and exquisite music - Donizetti at his sparkling best. Made perfect by Christina Knochenhauer's electric portrayal of the title role, truly maddening (sorry)... But mainly because it was my first opera.

DO: What was your favourite Dorset Opera moment?

JF: This is hard - there are so many! Maybe it was my first ever chorus rehearsal with

Gazza (special guy, influential!) back on that Monday morning in 1993, pretty quickly realising that DO was something really special and life changing! It could be standing, in a very un-Covid way, far too close to Tom, Ferg & Mel (my fellow soldiers), with us all just praying that the multiple beads of sweat dangling from the end of Tom's nose didn't succumb to gravity, thus prompting seriously inappropriate corpsing during another moment of intensely quiet high drama! Or was it conducting Faire is the Heaven with the chorus at the DO cabaret evening in 2000 (I think) - certainly a special moment for me!

DO: What are you doing now?

JF: I am currently in my 11th year at Askonas Holt, a leading arts management company, where I manage ten artists: a mix of opera singers (such as Elina Garanča) and conductors (such as Michael Tilson Thomas).

DO: Did your connection with Dorset Opera influence your career choice in any way?

JF: Without a doubt, DO cemented my belief that I had to work in music, but also proved to me that I wasn't good enough to perform professionally! I left university and went to work in the classical recording industry (finishing at Decca - the great opera label!), where I stayed for 12 years before joining Askonas.

DO: Do you still attend opera regularly?

JF: Yes, very much so, thanks to the job.

DO: What is your favourite opera now?

JF: Korngold's Die Tote Stadt or Don Giovanni

DO: What has Coronavirus meant for you and your life/family/business?

JF: To be honest, the Artist Management sector has, like so many others in our profession, taken a tragic existential hit - I just hope that we can all recover from this, in time. I want to believe we can.

Mark (Mel) Ferrer



DO: What years did you take part in Dorset Opera?

MF: 1992 - 2002

DO: What was your favourite opera?

MF: They've all been great in their own way, with favourite moments (that perfect tenor line that you find yourself singing at totally random moments years later). But I think the favourite has to be Lucia di Lammermoor, so many great choruses and a spectacular wedding scene - albeit a not very happy one!

DO: What was your favourite Dorset Opera moment?

MF: Probably not one single moment from one year but rather the same from each year, that first day turning up and seeing friends from previous years and picking up from where you left off like it was yesterday. That first rehearsal where Gazza would get you

energised and starting to sound like an opera chorus after only a few hours and knowing that by the end of the two weeks, the brand new score in your hands was going to be battered, scribbled all over and indelibly imprinted in your memory for years to come. Oh and the prospect of that first trip to the Rajpoot.

DO: What are you doing now?

MF: I work in software

DO: Did your connection with Dorset Opera influence your career choice in any way?

MF: It certainly influenced the early part of my career with my first job being for IMG, one of the big music agencies, staging concerts across Europe including one in Stuttgart where I was able to meet up with the McKechnies (Gordon directed Lucia and L'Elisir). I moved on to other things but I still sing and love my music.

DO: Do you still attend opera regularly?

MF: With a young family and living away from any big city, trying to escape for an evening at the opera is only a dream. The closest I get is singing along in my car!

DO: What is your favourite opera now?

MF: So difficult to choose just one. Don Giovanni, Rigoletto, La bohème or a bit of Wagner - depends on the mood!

DO: What has Coronavirus meant for you and your life/family/business?

MF: Our business supports a number of essential worker sectors so I'm fortunately still very busy. Working at home with 3 children doing home school has been challenging

but on the plus side it's been good to spend lots of time together. I think it's been hardest for the children not being able to see their friends and extended family but hopefully there's light at the end of the tunnel soon.

Alice Freyman (née Babington-Hill)



DO: What years did you take part in Dorset Opera?

AF: 1994 - 2000; it was a huge part of my life from the ages of 16 to 22.

DO: What was your favourite opera?

AF: Definitely my first - *Un giorno di regno*. It's really a pretty terrible opera but I had so much fun over the two weeks. Read on...

DO: What was your favourite Dorset Opera moment?

AF: On my very first day of my very first opera, being asked to act as a chambermaid for the soprano Anna Steiger in *Un giorno di regno* - just the two

of us on stage for a scene - the buzz from performing was addictive! That, and the sense of camaraderie, the silliness of performing in the Cabaret Evening, etc.

DO: What are you doing now?

AF: For the last few years I have worked in the visual arts world, specifically in antiques, so not really performance related at all. However, perhaps there is some subliminal influence from stage sets on my interiors interest?

DO: Did your connection with Dorset Opera influence your career choice in any way?

AF: Yes, I think it did. I read Music for my undergraduate degree at university and whilst there had all sorts of fun performing and directing, and taking shows up to the Edinburgh Fringe etc. I later did a Masters in Text & Performance Studies at RADA/Kings College, London and then ran evening & weekend acting classes and was involved on the sidelines of various other productions whilst holding down various 'proper' jobs. I directed an English language production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the garden of the British Ambassador's Residence in Moscow in 2003 which was a huge career highlight for me.

DO: Do you still attend opera regularly?

AF: I did go to the opera for many years but over time I realised I actually prefer the ballet! So now, I watch dance as often as I can, usually at the ROH or Sadler's Wells. That said, I went to see a friend perform in the ENO's production of Peter Grimes a few years ago, which I enjoyed.

DO: What is your favourite opera now?

AF: *Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It captures me and transports me to a magical place from the opening glissandi.

DO: What has Coronavirus meant for you and your life/family/business?

AF: I am lucky enough to split my time between London and Devon usually. Together with my family I have been seeing the lockdown out in the countryside with the chickens and the vegetable patch and whilst I know it's been a difficult time for many, we've actually had quite a lot of fun. Although looking after our four children full time has been busy to say the least.

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The Distanced Bluffers' Picnic Lunch

We will attempt to hold a distanced Bluffers' picnic lunch on Monday 10 August and should the weather be wet, we'll hold it on the Tuesday or the Wednesday or the Thursday or on the Friday of that week! If it's wet every day, we'll be very unlucky!

In a change to what is still our 50th Bluffers, Adrian has decided that his talk should be called *On the Bright Side*.

Susannah will be in touch with our regular attendees first then as spaces become available, with other Patrons and Friends.

Bring your own picnic lunch along with a chair or a rug and we will provide the wine!

The normal timing will apply - 11.30 for coffee. The more of you that can be in the same bubble, the more we'll be able to accommodate.



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Messages in a Bottle, **John Allison**

John Allison is Editor of Opera magazine. Here, we reprint his editorial from the June issue - which was dispatched prior to the government's announcement that they would support the arts industry to the tune of £1.57billion.

From Germany to New Zealand, governments have moved effectively to prop up culture during these months of the devastating Covid-19 pandemic and damaging shutdown. Berlin quickly put €50 billion into rescuing its country's arts, while Wellington - not normally a friend of arts funding - has recently launched a NZ\$175m salvage plan for its creative sector. By contrast, the UK government's response has been lamentable, limited to Arts Council England's £160m emergency package, which

will really help only its regular clients and which - given the size of this country's arts economy - is no match for the severity of the crisis. Freelance musicians are struggling to access even minimal support.

Ah, how could we forget the brand new 'cultural renewal task force'? Announced 64 days after the UK cultural venues closed their doors (no rush, then), it was evidently conjured up on the back of an envelope to give the culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, something to say when he finally joined the puppet show presenting Downing St's daily Lies at Five bulletin. A man who would be out of his depth in a muddy puddle, Dowden has restored pigeon racing but omitted to include anyone from the worlds of opera or music (classical or pop) on his committee, which has all the makings of an inconsequential charade. No one from the UK government seems to recognize that the arts are not a luxury but have a role in

keeping people's spirits alive.

But then this is the government of a dilettante prime minister who spent the first part of the pandemic joking about 'operation last gasp' and boasting that there would be no safer place in the world to sit out the crisis than the UK. Sleepwalking into disaster, this cabinet of populist ideologues has shown that British exceptionalism really only means leading the world when it comes to death rates. Not just glorifying incompetence but actively practising it, the government is now blocking economic renewal with muddled quarantine regulations while getting a visa system into place that will make artistic recovery almost impossible.

So who in the UK will stand up for opera and classical music, and where are such brand names as Simon Rattle? The silence so far has been deafening, while in

the meantime other sectors have been busy lobbying and getting their voices across. What funds will be left for the arts (apart from the money ringfenced for the government's Festival of Brexit in 2022)? Has the Arts Council created such an atmosphere of intimidation that no one will speak out for fear of having their grant pulled? To return even to the 'new abnormal' we need practical leadership, and to invent something new - because that will also be required - we need vision. If no one asserts the value of culture soon it will be too late: once companies are gone, they're gone.

This month's issue includes some messages in a bottle, the last of our reviews from a time when the operatic world was functioning as normal. Until performances return we'll be filling our pages with all other things operatic, and we hope to be publishing live reviews again soon. Indeed, as we report in *Newsdesk* (p. 797), green shoots are showing and performances may restart sooner than anticipated. Berlin's Deutsche Oper was due to stage a scaled-down version of *Das Rheingold* in mid June, and Madrid's Teatro Real, following meticulous protocols set by its own committee of medical

experts, is planning to semi-stage *La traviata* this month - however complicated these projects may be, they are hugely symbolic displays of positive thinking. Salzburg and several Italian festivals have plans for August. Elsewhere, we may have to wait longer, especially after the gloomy news that the Met will remain dark until December 31. There is no news yet of when opera will restart in Britain, but - as Anthony Roth Costanzo recently said in *Opera News* - 'One thing is for sure: if ever there was a time for opera, it's now.'

See back page for *Opera* offer.

What Lockdown means to me | Baritone, Tom Chenall



Baritone, Tom Chenall, has been coming to the Dorset Opera Festival summer school since he was sixteen. His family lives in Winchester and Tom is currently studying for a Masters degree at the Royal Academy of Music in London. He was due to sing a role in *Boris Godunov* this year. We asked Tom to contribute a few words:

'We have all been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic in our own different ways, and it's nice to be able to

share my story. I am a young singer currently studying at the Royal Academy of Music. Since February, I have watched contract after contract being cancelled due to COVID-19. The financial repercussions of this have been felt by all, but I would say that the Arts have felt it the most.

Being self-employed, there was no offer of financial aid from any of those companies, because they themselves are struggling just as much. However, singing is how I must now make my living and it has been a struggle to remain in London at this time. I was lucky enough to make my international role debut at the Wexford Opera Festival in October 2019, but little did I know that this would be the last time I was to go on stage for the foreseeable future. My university was closed, my Masters degree went online and

the chance to be onstage this summer for various companies, including the marvellous Dorset Opera Festival (which I have attended for 8 years now) have all been put on hold.

One of the things to which I was most looking forward was taking part in the final of the Eva Marton International Singing Competition in Budapest this September: sadly, but that too was cancelled! As a young musician I am worried about what the future will hold, but I am very excited at the thought of being back on stage again and performing again, once everything is allowed to continue. And I look forward to returning to the Dorset Opera Festival - hopefully in 2021...

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