

Yorke Trust News March 2014

Cleaning up behind the scenes

If the 15th Century angels in St Mary's church could speak to anyone other than the resident bats, they would surely have a tale or two to tell. Leaving aside day-to-day services, christenings, marriages, funerals and other holy occasions, our guardians have overseen fayres and fêtes, builders and bell-ringers, markets and more. Not that many years ago they no doubt rejoiced to hear the village band playing on special occasions. But these days celebrity concerts and international opera bring a somewhat different music to their ears.

Opera is a challenge to present at the best of times. To perform it successfully in a church is something of a miracle. Last summer's production of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* transformed the building into a forest, complete with fairies and a lake, over which Oberon skilfully navigated his precious cargo in a very realistic boat. But every year, minutes after the final 'curtain', the whole place has to become a workshop and everything is dismantled. Electricians scale the heights to de-rig and unplug over 100 lamps, miles of cable and gauzes while another team busies itself with circular saws, hammers and wrenches, cutting the stage into manageable sections for storage and future use.

In a tent behind the church, yet another team packs away costumes, wigs, make up and mirrors in the make-shift dressing rooms, while members of the cast lend a hand stacking chairs, collecting glasses, and loading the Trust's faithful van to deliver everything back to the Old Sunday School Room a couple of hundred yards down the road. Within two or three hours the angels have the place to themselves again, ready for Sunday morning. It is a mammoth task!

But that is far from the end of the story. During the pre-production period when rehearsals are taking place in the Old Chapel, the Sunday School Room serves as a sewing and wardrobe facility, and a place where props of every shape and dimension are ingeniously crafted from scraps of this and that. Woks are turned into lutes, bamboo into prisons, clematis wire into horses' heads and tights into teapots – not that anyone would know. At the end of the 'get out' everything must be put away until the following year, and the Chapel prepared for the incoming instrumental course that usually arrives within the next couple of days.

Inevitably there are loose ends that never seem to get done. This spring that was put to rights and a volunteer working party was recruited to tackle a long list of tasks. These included un-packing and re-stacking the portacabin in the orchard behind the chapel, and spring cleaning the Sunday School Room. Windows were cleaned, years of cobwebs vacuumed away, bags bursting with boots were boxed up and the lighting gear re-stacked to occupy less space. While all this was going on indoors, others hacked back hedges, dug up ivy and tended two hungry bonfires that were kept going for three days. Two of the more intrepid members of the team wielded chain saws to tame trees, avoiding those beneath who were armed with secateurs, forks and rakes.

At the end of the exercise there are still things that need doing, but over a single weekend our dedicated team of more than thirty helpers, fortified by a good lunch and many cups of coffee, worked wonders. It was generally agreed the weekend was great fun. Big thanks to all the gardening angels!

The Yorke Trust at Thirty

Last summer's *Britten 100* celebrations left us all reeling, so the initial plan was to take a break in 2014 and concentrate on getting the office moved into larger premises. But then someone noticed it is the Trust's thirtieth anniversary year and that it coincides with my seventieth, so there was little alternative other than looking for a more simple opera that could be more easily managed than last year's which involved a company of over 100. Eventually we decided to visit Gluck in his three hundredth year,

although he is a composer about whom I know relatively little. His *Orphée* is quite well known but we did that story in Monteverdi's working of it only recently. *Alceste* was an option, but it's done fairly often, so we decided on *Armide* Gluck's last opera, and one that is none the less fresh and inspiring for being so. For some reason, in spite of performing material being readily available, professional productions are few and far between.

But 'simple' it seems not to be! Happily the fantastic Britten production team is keen to come together again and I have been promised a smaller set, though Ian Sommerville's fertile imagination (currently being utilised by Disneyland in Hong Kong) guarantees the staging will be no less arresting. Gidon Saks has appealed for cash for the wardrobe because, extensive though it is, some items have been re-cycled so many times that new ones are essential. Darren Hargan has called for a classical orchestra of twenty-nine players and Jennifer needs between twenty-five to thirty singers. Watch this space... Recruiting is already underway, with live auditions being held in Ireland and London in April after preliminary on-line submissions.

After thirty years, the Trust really does have something to crow about, so a celebratory brochure is being launched at Houghton Hall on Friday 25 July on a day the house and grounds are otherwise closed to the public, by kind permission of our patron The Marquess of Cholmondeley. Details are still being worked out but the Houghton day will begin with champagne in the walled garden, followed by a surprise celebrity concert in the Picture Gallery and a Posh Picnic Party on the west lawn. The house will then be open, returned to normality after last year's record-breaking exhibition, and there will be tea before we leave. The evening opera performance will also be rather special and will take the form of a gala with champagne and canapés. There is an opportunity to mingle with the cast and production team after the show and the day ends with fireworks.

Full details and booking forms for the opera and the day of celebrations will be available soon.

Music & Dining – A Tuscan cookery evening

The decision to give the Music & Dining Club a different profile was greeted with dismay by our many loyal supporters. But something exciting has emerged in its place. 'Don't ever live with a chef!', I was once advised. But I do. The combination of that and a serious house restoration project has resulted in a kitchen to die for, largely designed with cookery demonstrations and B&B in mind.

Some twenty or more years ago I was taking a college orchestra to Montepulciano in Tuscany for a series of summer concerts and found myself practising my double bass in the courtyard of a lovely church. A young lady came up to me and asked whether I spoke English. 'Rather well, actually,' I replied. She wanted help with the translation of some architectural terms for a friend and though there would be no fee for the work, she promised me a private tasting of her family wines before dinner. This happy event became a daily routine!

In the middle of January Daniela Gattavecchi and a colleague of hers Claudia lasenza who runs a family restaurant in Montepulciano, asked whether they could come to Norfolk and run a fund-raising event for the Trust. (Daniela had been before to help with our first ever opera production.) There was little time to organise things, but our new kitchen beckoned and literally within a matter of days some boxes of wine had arrived, soon followed by Daniela and Claudia with an enormous suitcase of products including cheeses, special biscuits, spices and various other products they thought they might not find in England.

The kitchen accommodated twenty-nine of us, including helpers, and the evening began, naturally, with a delicious glass of dry white wine and a selection of *crostini* hot from the Aga. Then came the test – making *pici*, a thick spaghetti found only in the region, and even then rarely outside the home. Everyone tried their hand and results varied enormously – one of the men clearly won the day with a yard long perfectly formed *spaghetti* while others could only manage a foot or two of lumpy paste that broke well before it reached the pan.

Then it was time for music. Hannah Francis, a professional colleague now living in Swaffham - a former principal soprano at English national opera - treated us to some well-known Italian arias accompanied by Howard Williams. Those who couldn't squeeze into our little music room sat in the adjoining library, while those who had come for the dining rather than the music, remained with their glasses in the kitchen. Supper was served and Daniela produced different wines selected to go with the meal. It was all too soon time for carriages, with some of us having coffee and teas in the sitting room.

Everyone generously gave their services for the Trust and the evening made just over £350 towards restoration of the Steinway concert grand in the Old Chapel.

Next on the menu is an evening with Madhu Choudhry (www.ethnicfusion.co.uk), our popular local Indian chef, an evening with Robert McNaughtan and a Jewish evening. These small intimate occasions will help keep everyone in touch with what the Trust is doing and, if the Tuscan evening is anything to go by, the formula works well. This time places were all taken within a matter of hours and there were inevitable disappointments. So, if you're interested to join in the fun, please make sure we have your details on the Music & Dining list. Maybe I'll need a bigger kitchen...

Rodney Slatford

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Can you help us with accommodation for Easter (6-12 April) and/or the summer? We have personnel coming and going for the whole of July and any accommodation that can be offered during that time will be greatly appreciated.

If so please contact Sue in the office as we are in need! Thank you.