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MARRIAGE OF FIGARO TOUR



The tour opened on 30th June at the Strode Theatre, Street followed by a performance the next day at the Rondo Theatre, Larkhall, Bath. We were welcomed by Robert and Patsy Floyd for

two performances at Great Chalfield Manor, then two performances at the Memorial Hall, Wincanton. Bath Opera performed the final show of its summer tour of Mozart's 'the Marriage of Figaro' at the Julian Slade Theatre, Prior Park College, Bath on 21st July in partnership with the Widcombe Association, with whom we are delighted to renew our relationship successfully at Prior Park for last year and this.

The performances at the Rondo, Great Chalfield and Prior Park were sold out, and in total an audience of 540 saw the opera.

Director William Stevens set his production in the 1950s in a big British film studio owned and run by 'the Count', an autocratic and dominating mogul.



The theme of this hilarious comedy is how the master is thwarted in his expectation of bedding his employee Susanna on her wedding night to Figaro, so it fitted well in the Harvey Weinstein era; however the 'Count' was no match for Figaro and Susanna, aided and abetted by the Countess and all ends happily to the wonderful strains of Mozart's ever-popular score. The recitatives were replaced by comic narrations of the story by Antonio the drunken gardener (played by Dave Key Pugh), a most effective and hilarious innovation.



As usual, the tour featured popular members of Bath Opera but with some great additions. Katy Garden made her first appearance with Bath Opera as Susanna, and brilliant young debutant singers Gabriella Eels, Alex Pinkstone and Bruna Figueiredo impressed in their first principal roles. With experienced regular members Andrew Havers, Niall Hoskin, Anna Fitzgerald, Roderick Hunt and Katharine Adams, the singing of the exacting ensembles particularly excited audiences. Alex and Bruna have won leading roles in 'Semele', our next main show.

Emma Cayeux stepped in late in rehearsals to accompany the performances and won universal praise for the quality and sensitivity of her playing.

PRAISE FOR MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

The Fine Times Recorder's review picked out Rod Hunt's performance, 'his wonderfully rounded and sonorous bass, coupled with a wicked sense of humour and perfect timing, enliven his brief moments on stage'. Also Bruna Figueiredo, who 'makes an all-too-short appearance as Barbarina – audiences will be looking and listening out for her in future productions. Maybe your best [tour] yet!'



MARRIAGE OF FIGARO TOUR (cont)

The reviewer for the National Operatic and Dramatic Association (NODA) said, 'Wow! That is all I can say to sum up this production! The performance fitted the venue brilliantly and I loved the younger singers in particular. The virtuoso passages were wonderful ... the clarity of diction from everyone was fabulous and the excellent musicianship of the whole cast was very evident to all.'

Here are some of the comments that audience members made afterwards: –

'We enormously enjoyed 'The Marriage of Figaro', a brilliant production.' (SN)

'I liked its modern retelling because I felt it made it more accessible. It was so exciting to see some up-and-coming stars in the making and of course the seasoned performers really showed their experience and expertise. Really well done.' (JC)

'We absolutely LOVED it and had a super evening. The cast were all fantastic as was the pianist so we will definitely come again.' (FG)

'Excellent performances and strong professional voices.' (JC)

'We really enjoyed 'Figaro' and thought all the cast were of very high class, also Emma on the piano was superb.' (AP)

'I really enjoyed the performance which was an excellent standard and offered good value for money.' (WT)

NEW DIRECTORS FOR DON GIOVANNI

The 2024 summer tour will be Mozart's 'Don Giovanni', 11 years after Bath Opera last performed it. Eight performances have been arranged: at the Strode Theatre, Street (June 28th), Rondo Theatre, Bath (June 29th), Gt Chalfield Manor (July 5th and 6th), Wincanton Memorial Hall (July 12th and 13th), Prior Park College (July 19th), and a private performance (July 20th).



We welcome a new stage director in Harvey Evans, and a new MD/Accompanist in Dominic Irving, seen here with Tour manager Fiona Gray and Chairman John Clark.

Auditions will be at 2pm on December 3rd (venue TBA), and audition information and application form will be on our website www.bathopera.com by October 29th.

Contact Fiona, production secretary, on summertour-bathopera@outlook.com for more information.

SEMELE - CAST & PROGRESS REPORT

Our main show at the Roper Theatre, Bath (February 15th-17th 2024) is Handel's 'Semele', conducted by Peter Blackwood and directed by Dave Key-Pugh. Fiona Gray will stage manage.



Auditions were held at the end of July, and the cast is: -

SEMELE	Hannah Drury
JUPITER	Alex Pinkstone
JUNO	Judy Davis
IRIS	Bruna Figueiredo
ATHAMAS	Gill Clark
CADMUS	Niall Hoskin
SOMNUS	Andrew Havers
INO	Becky Granger

Dave Key Pugh introduces the opera, "Our production will be set five minutes from now, in a world adjacent to our own. The drab reality of the populace is enlivened by the new Gods of the internet, and they live vicariously through following the 'influencers', instagrammers and social media stars such as Jupiter, Juno and so on. Semele will be swept off, less to a mountain top, and instead to a luxury spa and retreat by her paramour. Her ultimate destruction at the hands of the jealous Juno, does prove a blessing in disguise for everyone else, as her sad demise leads to the creation of Bacchus, the new 'God' of wine, and the chorus end by celebrating their new form of relief and escape – inordinate intoxication!"

"To move the piece from Oratorio to full Opera, we will do all we can to avoid the 'us and them' divide between the soloists and the chorus. Chorus members will be integrated into many of the recits and arias and their silent participation in these scenes will be just as demanding and critical to the production as their full-throated contribution to the wonderful choral sections."

.SEMELE - CAST & PROGRESS REPORT (cont)

Rehearsals started at the beginning of September, with the focus on learning the music. There are nine choruses to learn, so the pace of rehearsals is urgent! Peter Blackwood is impressed by the progress so far. We give a warm welcome to new chorus members Mary, Sue, Molly, Ethan and Cameron!

Meanwhile plans are afoot for the staging, with special effects for the 'Immolation' of Semele at the end of the opera! Bath Opera has invested in an extra tab track in the Roper theatre for the use of 18ft stagecloths. This will enhance our productions considerably and aid speedier scene changes. The Roper has now also been updated with mid-stage black curtains, and new 'legs' in the wings to improve the sight lines.

Contact Fiona, production secretary on mainshow-bathopera@outlook.com for more information on the Semele production.

Ways you can help the company

1. Patrons are a valuable source of income, and benefit from advance booking and newsletters. Do you know someone who would like to help in this way?
2. Do you know somebody who would lend us a van during productions?
3. Do you know somebody with a lock-up not being used, or where we could park a storage container?
4. We are always looking for front of house support. The only requirements are common sense and a friendly smile!

Sad news

Since the last newsletter, we sadly have to record the deaths of Graham Billing and Brian Snell, both long standing members of Bath Opera. We shall miss them both and our condolences go to their friends and family

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NEWS FROM THE AGM

The Bath Opera AGM was held on the 11th October.

In his Chairman's report, John Clark recorded another successful year for the company, and said he was particularly pleased with the new young people we have welcomed during the year as singers, directors and backstage.

Financial report

As expected, the company made a loss of just under £6,000 this year, due to an expensive main production (particularly with royalties) and lower members' and patrons' subscriptions. However the summer tour fulfilled its fund-raising target of £3,000 profit, and we still have adequate reserves. Next year, we forecast a return to profit: already the Paragon Music Trust has awarded a grant of £1,000 towards Semele, and an eighth performance of the tour arranged at Pyrford which will contribute.

New Trustees appointed

Two Trustees retired by rotation - Nicole Kirkman who did not stand again, and Jane Clark, who was re-elected. The Chairman expressed the thanks from the Trustees for Nicole's service, especially leading the main show publicity which was greatly improved.

Two new Trustees were elected – Fiona Gray and Naomi Heffer. Fiona has excelled as tour and stage manager, and will expand the backstage team: Naomi has taken over the website so that we no longer need external help for updates.

The other Trustees are John Clark, Pat Harper, Richard Hunt, Rod Hunt, Hannah Crisp and Peter Sutton. The Trustees will elect the Officers at their first meeting.

News from Ghiulnara.

Ghiulnara Raileanu, our wonderful Tosca in 2022, has written to say that she has 5 more performances in the role with Prague Opera from December.

She writes, *"The State Opera of Prague is considered one of the most beautiful theatres in the world and I am so happy to sing there. I met lots of amazing and talented people, musicians and artists. I shared the stage with famous opera singers which sing around the world."*

"The audience's reception and enthusiasm was truly breathtaking. I got a lot of beautiful feedback from the audience. One of them made me truly happy, saying..."If Maria Callas were to see this performance, she would be very proud of Ghiulnara as Tosca and of the whole cast..."

