

Audience numbers double in 2 years!

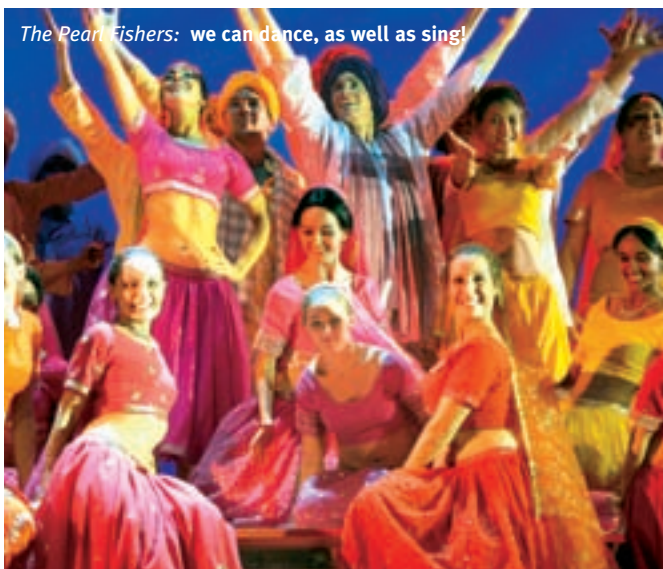
Dorset Opera audience numbers have officially doubled over the last two years!

We might only operate on a small scale, but in a sparsely populated county like Dorset, such an increase is no mean feat. Opera companies around the world can only dream of such a marketing success.

However, if audience numbers continue to increase at this rate, it is estimated that the demand for tickets will require us to present at least six performances by 2012. This would be extremely difficult to schedule, so from 2009 onwards, tickets could be in short supply.

Ticket shortage

There is already evidence that regular audience-goers are aware of a possible ticket shortage. More and more supporters are joining our Friends' organisation in order to take advantage of priority booking arrangements.



The Pearl Fishers: we can dance, as well as sing!

It is also clear that there is a wider appreciation of the charitable work we undertake and even in these leaner times, people are upgrading their support to become patrons or corporate sponsors.

Most Friends of Dorset Opera give more than £30 per annum, and patronage begins at £250 per annum. If you would care to increase your support and donate using GiftAid, enabling Dorset Opera to recover tax, please contact our offices on 01258 840000.

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**New box office arrangements...turn to page 8.
For excerpts from *Pearl Fishers'* reviews, see pages 4-5**

And for 2009 it's...

Artistic Director, Roderick Kennedy, has chosen two unashamedly popular works for Dorset Opera's 2009 presentation: the most famous twins in all opera, Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *I pagliacci*.



Leonardo Capalbo as Nadir

Cav and Pag as they are affectionately known, contain a mass of well-known tunes for our chorus to get their teeth in to, and for our loyal audiences to savour. *The Easter Hymn*, the *Intermezzo*, and Santuzza's aria *Voi lo sapete...* from *Cav*; the *Prologue* from *Pag* is in every baritone's repertoire, and the heart-rending tenor aria *Vesti la giubba* translated as *On with the Motley*, is sure to leave a tear in the eye.

The 26 year-old Pietro Mascagni won a publisher's competition with *Cavalleria rusticana* (*Rustic Chivalry*) in 1890 bringing him instant international success. Unknowingly, he was launching what was to become the *verismo* school of opera – basically, stories about ordinary people set in contemporary times.

Dorset Opera

...nothing short of phenomenal!

(Opera Magazine)

Ruggero Leoncavallo wrote his own libretto for *I pagliacci* (*The Clowns*) after his father, a judge, recounted the tale of an actor in a troupe of travelling players who had murdered his wife in a fit of jealousy.

Dorset Opera first performed *Cav* alongside Puccini's *Edgar* in 1980, but the company has never tackled *Pag*.

Performance dates for your 2009 diary are the evenings of 30, 31 July, and 1 August – again with a matinée on Saturday 1 August.

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The end of an era

The name of Elisabeth Lang Brown is synonymous with Dorset Opera. She has been playing a leading rôle in our Company for more years than she or I care to remember, and has appeared in every production since our first *Turandot* in 1978. Three other folk can claim a slightly longer association with the Company, but I won't embarrass the other two by mentioning them here!

After 30 years, ELB, as she is affectionately known to generations of Dorset Opera participants, has decided to relinquish some of her many duties.

Elisabeth - most definitely with an 's' - tirelessly supported both Patrick Shelley and me in the rôle of 'Chorus Secretary'. Her task was to find up to 90 choristers for each of our productions. ELB didn't want to be called a 'Manager' or a 'Director', 'Secretary' would be fine. That she herself should choose such an unassuming title to describe the far greater, far more stellar and varied tasks she undertook, was typically self-deprecating of ELB.

Let me spell it out. For Dorset Opera, she also acts as librarian (arranging both the hire or purchase of vocal scores for chorus and parts for the orchestra); she is our archivist (anything she doesn't know about Dorset Opera, she will somehow find out); she writes copiously for our programmes (just look through back issues to see the initials ELB at the foot of synopses and composers' notes); she sends out forms, scores and information packs to prospective participants the world over; she has done the make-up; helped erect, paint, and dismantle sets; acted as a chauffeuse to various parties in need of transport from railway stations and airports, and at the end of everything, she manages to be at every committee meeting, every rehearsal and every performance - where she sings her heart out. And Dorset Opera is but one recipient of her skills: she is heavily involved in music theatre and choral singing in Somerset.

Elisabeth had a promising childhood - her father was a fanatical opera buff who took her to countless productions at Sadlers Wells. She met her future husband, James, in 1955 when they were both appearing in the back row of the chorus of Kurt Weill's *Down in the Valley* at a time when The Oxford University Opera Club put on a scratch concert performance nearly every week of the term. James, as he would say "Left to build the Empire!" and they were married two years later.

ELB appeared in OUOC's fully-staged *Macbeth* (Lady Macbeth was a very young Heather Harper) and Smetana's *The Secret* (with a young Janet Baker). When James returned to Oxford, they appeared in the first UK production of *Ernani* since the original in Verdi's time (in a racy translation by their professor of music, Sir Jack Westrup, who also conducted). James recalls a brief moment of fame when they appeared as extra chorus in a Royal Opera touring production of *Aida*. They also sang under the baton of (Sir) Colin Davis in his newly formed Chelsea Opera Group.

Return to Uganda meant that the LBs were virtually without music for six years. There was a choral society in Kampala - where they were based for 18 months - but 'up country' they had to rely on listening to a gramophone powered by the Land Rover battery.

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Back in the UK once more, they joined the Frome Opera Group and it wasn't long before Elisabeth was active on the committee. G&S concerts turned into fully-staged productions (including *Ruddigore* as a fundraiser for the young Dorset Opera!) She also mounted an operatic event at Stourhead for the National Trust, in pouring rain much to the detriment of splendid costumes from the Bristol Old Vic.

She started a sentimental Victorian quartet which trod the boards in many a village hall, on one occasion with the late, great, Erik Smith (one-time Dorset Opera Chairman) at the piano. She and James now sing with the Oakfield Choir in Frome, of which she has been tireless secretary the last five years.

Elisabeth will be furious with me for penning this brief tribute, and even more upset with James, for having collaborated with me and given the go-ahead to this article! For you see, ELB is quite content to appear on the periphery of the limelight, but never in the centre of the spot!



ELB ready to go on stage for *The Gondoliers* in Frome

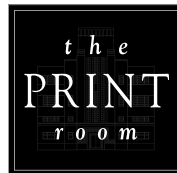
She will still be playing a rôle in Dorset Opera albeit a supporting one. We will continue to see her initials in the Dorset Opera programme; hers will be that encouraging voice on the end of the phone, and she will remain as our archivist and librarian. But the hectic task of Chorus Secretary has now been passed on. Her wisdom, wit and willpower will continue to inspire us and steer us in the right direction. ELB will always act as the rock whose experience and candour (usually) stops us from making the wrong musical decision.

Meanwhile, on behalf of the several thousand Dorset Opera participants - both choristers and soloists - who have been guided, sometimes consoled, but always befriended by Elisabeth Lang Brown over the past 30 years: "Thank you."

Roderick Kennedy

Recording reminder

Dorset Opera's première recording of the Brazilian composer Carlos Gomes' *Salvator Rosa*, conducted by the late Patrick Shelley, is still available to purchase through retail outlets. Online, it can be obtained for just £6.99 through Dorset-based Dorset Opera supporter Selections at www.selections.com



A NIGHT OF OPERA

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Pearl Fishers' Reviews

The Times HHHHI

Bollywood has hit Bryanston; and the yeomen of Dorset don't know quite what to make of it. Curtain-up in the Coade Theatre of Bryanston School dazzled the eyes with a Sri Lankan fishing festival a-flutter with orange, lemon, magenta and heliotrope silks and sequins, flashing lightbulbs and a wild swirling of arms and legs, in the first of the evening's lavish all-singing, all-dancing set-pieces. Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers* has been referred to as a *Norma* with palm trees; but in Cordelia Chisholm's shamelessly vulgar design for William Relton's production, the trees twinkled too, and even the sacred temple pulsated with pink light.

Dorset Opera is addicted to challenge...This year Relton, directing, and Jason Pennycooke, choreographing, moved a vast chorus around a tiny stage to powerful effect. Just as Jeremy Carnall, conducting, stirred his players to relish every ratcheting of tension within Bizet's score, so, in the great storm finale of Act II, the crowd rose and fell like waves.

The tale is the one of the priestess who breaks her vows of love, and of the two men who worship her. The four weekend shows were double-cast: I saw the soprano Marie Vassiliou give her all as Leila, first appearing behind aquamarine gauze as a silent lady from the sea, then singing in hot flesh and blood. Bizet's musical exotica flowered from beautifully placed trilling ornaments both in her hymn to Brahma and in her nostalgic *Comme d'autrefois*.

Leonardo Capalbo looked and sounded the part as the tenor Nadir,

firmly etching each impassioned line... Words were powerfully projected by Simon Thorpe, a Tasmanian baritone of broad vocal and expressive range who totally inhabited the part of poor spurned Zurga. Bernard Deletré's High Priest Nourabad created a rhythmically potent and vividly focused cameo. **Hilary Finch**

Dorset Echo, Weymouth

Bizet production is a pearl HHHHH

DORSET Opera annual productions can truly be said to combine the best of both worlds: the expertise of professionals together with the enthusiasm of amateurs, and this year's event is no exception. The combination of a cast of professional singers and musicians plus the backing of a workshop-trained amateur chorus makes this a sure-fire winner.

Bizet's opera, though less well known than his masterpiece *Carmen*, has the advantage of a hit parade classic in the form of its famous duet for tenor and baritone, the tender melody of which resonates throughout the work.

With its exotic Ceylon setting, the producers have pulled out all the stops to create a colourful piece of stagecraft that includes splendid Indian costumes, flashing lights, firebrands and a sensational storm that is quite simply electrifying.

But while presentation is important, the singing is what matters and the principal rôles of the priestess Leila and her two rival suitors Zurga and Nadir played by Marie Vassiliou, Simon Thorpe and Leonardo Capalbo are of a high order indeed, each bringing a depth of emotion and integrity to their rôles that made them very special.

Bizet's stirring score is admirably performed by a full orchestra under the baton of Jeremy Carnall in a memorable and dazzling production that continues tomorrow. **Marion Cox**

Blackmore Vale Magazine

DORSET Opera again broke new ground this year, when its four sell-out performances were staged over three days, giving the amateur chorus the opportunity of singing a matinee and evening on the same day...

Designer Cordelia Chisholm chose vibrant silk and satin costumes, and the set was dotted with coloured lights to indicate both the splendour of temples and the lights over the water from the shore.

Conductor Jeremy Carnall once again drew some marvellous playing from his orchestra, and director William Relton marshalled the often inexperienced chorus into a professional troupe of very convincing actors, never drifting from the dramatic story. The two casts were strongly differentiated, bringing contrasting interpretations of the story.

American tenor Leonardo Capalbo has a heroic future ahead of him. Thirty years old and a native of New Jersey, he spent summers in his parents' home in Calabria, learning the Italian that he needs in so many of his rôles. He came to Dorset to sing, in French, his first Nadir, much to the delight of the audience. His relationship with Zurga, sung by the Tasmanian baritone, an equally charismatic Simon Thorpe, was one of rivalry and passion.



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The focus of their love was Marie Vassiliou's Leila, who was able to revive the rôle she sang for Welsh National Opera when the original Dorset Opera Leila withdrew.

The second cast, Janis Kelly returning to DO after last year's poignant Liù in *Turandot*, tenor Ashley Catling and baritone Dimitrie Lazich, gave a very different slant to the story. These two men, remembering the first time they saw the priestess, sang



Marie Vassiliou as Leila and Leonardo Capalbo as Nadir

soliloquies of pure love. Their own friendship, and the yearning they felt for the woman of their dreams, was deeper and less testosterone charged. It was a fascinating contrast.

Janis Kelly is not only a wonderful singer but an instinctive actress, slipping effortlessly into "eastern" gestures to create a totally convincing priestess whose life certainties are shattered by the sometimes unwelcome arrival of love.

This production once again raised the standards for Dorset Opera, and allowed the locally based singers a real experience of working on a professional production. They rose magnificently to the challenges. **GP-W**

Daily Echo, Bournemouth

MENTION this Bizet opera and most people will immediately recall the duet, but little else. And yet after watching this fine production I was left wondering why it is so unfamiliar, as it has so much to recommend it.

The story is set in a community of Sri Lankan pearl divers where the arrival of a priestess, Leila (Janis Kelly), to pray for the safety of the divers, causes a rift between village leader Zurga (Dimitrie Lazich) and his boyhood friend Nadir (Ashley Catling) since she has crossed their paths in the past. And when High Priest Nourabad (Bernard Deletré) overhears a private conversation it seems that death for one or more of them is inevitable.

This production was the culmination of a two-week summer school, using well-established professional soloists and production team with a predominantly young chorus, only a handful of whom had previously worked professionally. Yet a wonderful set, marvellous lighting effects, glorious costumes and outstanding choreography and direction combined with a brilliant orchestra – conducted in vibrant style by Jeremy Carnall - and superb, passionate singing and acting from soloists and chorus alike to produce an end result that was as good as any one might see in the major opera houses. **Linda Kirkman**



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Bursary fund benefits

A weekend workshop organised by Dorset Opera stalwart Caroline D’Cruz, saw 170 singers attend Port Regis School in October to have the opportunity to sing *Spem in Alium*, the 40 part motet by the Tudor composer Thomas Tallis. They also gave the world première performance of a specially commissioned 16-part work, *Love is a Circle*, by Shaftesbury-based composer Barry Ferguson.

BBC Singers’ conductor, David Hill, was drafted in to lead the singers through the complexities of *Spem* and conduct the public concert that rounded off the weekend.

The proceeds from the event - £1500 - were shared between the Musicians Benevolent fund and the Dorset Opera bursary fund. The money will go towards enabling young people from a state school background, to take part in our 2009 production.

ACE funding

Dorset Opera had hoped for Arts Council funding again in 2008, but whilst our application “*met all the criteria and was recommended for funding*” by their grant assessor, unfortunately, there weren’t sufficient funds to meet our meagre needs.

Tradition has decreed that we should intersperse popular opera with rarer works that we feel are worthy of an outing. Had we not had Arts Council support in the past, we could not have given you



Palm trees get the Bollywood treatment

the world première of Donizetti’s *Gabriella di Vergy* in 1985; the British premières of Donizetti’s *Maria Padilla* in 1988, Gomes’ *Salvator Rosa* in 2000, and Erkel’s *Hunyadi Laszlo* in 2003; the rarely performed *Hérodiade* in 2006, and the British stage première of the Berio ending of *Turandot* in 2007.

It is hoped that the Arts Council will look kindly upon us in future years in order to keep Dorset Opera at the forefront of operatic innovation.



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Choral composition

An unprecedented 68% of our chorus and stage crew for *The Pearl Fishers* were under the age of 25. Yet again, with your support, we continue to attain our stated charitable goal of introducing the joys of opera to young people.

That's not to say that we aren't delighted to welcome participants of all ages. Several members of our chorus are happily singing exceedingly well in their seventies.

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2008 Raffle Winners

Winners of the 2008 Dorset Opera Raffle (two tickets to an opera of their choice) are:

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Even the weather gods smiled over Blandford

Sadly, with the disappearance of the Dorset Music House shop in Sherborne's Cheap Street, we can no longer offer a physical presence in our traditional heartland.

Priority booking will still be available for Patrons, Corporate Supporters and Friends of Dorset Opera, and for the first time, audience members with access to a computer will be able to identify exactly where they want to sit and reserve those seats online at the click of a button!

The facilities are being provided in collaboration with the Regent Centre in Christchurch. Their box office staff will be handling all applications, and tickets will then be sent to you by post.

Details of priority booking dates and box office opening times will be sent to you in March 2009.

NFU Mutual Hamper Winner

The magnificent hamper provided by our corporate supporters, NFU Mutual, was won by Mrs Ann Bullman. It was presented to Mrs Bullman by Rob Baxter from the NFU Mutual agency in Wimborne.

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