

## On a par with the UK's five main companies...

That's just one of the epithets piled upon Dorset Opera's stunning 2009 productions of *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci*. The *Opera Now* review goes on to say:

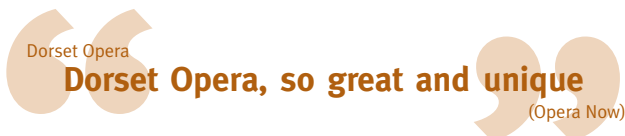
*Dorset Opera is the only provincial ensemble...to produce results consistently on a par with the UK's five main companies, including Welsh National Opera and English National Opera....This (Cav & Pag) was provincial opera to national standards. That's what makes Dorset so great and unique.*

Surely there is nothing more to be said, apart from how can we possibly better this? Roderic Dunnett's incredible critique can be read in full on page 4.

Standards are one thing, but keeping up those standards requires continual funding. The world financial crisis has taken its toll on Dorset Opera's fundraising. Income from trusts and foundations has declined markedly over the past two years, and corporate giving is less than half what it was twelve months ago.

Please help us to remain 'on a par with the UK's top five companies' by joining one of our Patron's Circles. Patronage begins at £250 per annum, and ends wherever you wish. If you prefer, you could assign your donation to an specific item on our Wish List or even sponsor a soloist! If you are already a Patron, please consider upgrading to the next level...and remember that any donation you GiftAid to us, will enable us to reclaim tax at 25%. In other words, £250 becomes £312.50; £500 becomes £625, and £1000 becomes £1250 and so on. If you are a Friend, please consider becoming a Patron.

Dorset's very own international opera company needs you to help it remain 'great and unique'.



### Facts and figures

Yet again, Dorset Opera is fulfilling its remit to bring the joys of opera to the young. 64% of our 2009 participants were in the 16-25 age group, and for the first time, a significant 34 of our 65 choristers came to us via our website.

The transfer of our box office to the Regent Centre in Christchurch proved a great success. The ability to book online and to use credit cards without incurring a booking fee, has been extremely well received.

Box office analysis has shown that around 37% of our ticket sales were made to members of the Friends of Dorset Opera, which indicates that overall we are reaching a much wider audience.

From next year, patrons will be able to book dinner tables and picnic hampers through the box office, along with their tickets.

**For Cav & Pag reviews in full: see pages 4, 5 and 6**



## And for 2010 it's...

It is thirty-four years since we first produced it and seventeen years since we last did it. It offers some of the greatest acting opportunities for individual choristers, and requires the excellence that only our international soloists can bring to its major roles. It is undoubtedly the world's favourite opera. It is, of course, Bizet's *Carmen*.

In announcing his choice of opera for 2010, Dorset Opera's General Director, Roderick Kennedy said: "Productions of *Carmen* fail because directors often believe the public knows the piece better than they think. They underestimate the musical, theatrical and technical difficulties of mounting this opera. Just because it's popular, doesn't make it easy to bring off successfully. I firmly believe that Dorset's very own international opera company is now strong enough to meet the challenge that *Carmen* presents."

Kennedy promises us some 'superstar' casting, but won't be drawn further on who that might be at this stage. Rest assured, when news gets out, tickets will be in short supply.

The Patrons, Sponsors and Friends of Dorset Opera will receive their priority booking information with the Spring edition of DONews in mid-March. The box office opens to the general public in the middle of April.

**Performance dates for your 2010 diary are the evenings of 29, 30, 31 July with a matinée on Saturday 31 July.**

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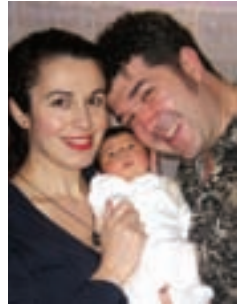
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## News of our soloists:

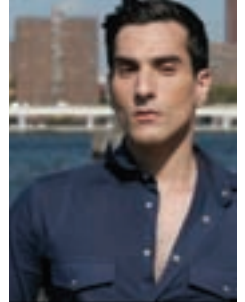
### Canio & Nedda's new arrival

Congratulations go to husband and wife team soprano Marie Vassiliou and tenor Luis Chapa who sang Nedda and Canio in this year's production of *Pagliacci*. They are proud to announce the birth of their beautiful daughter, Rosie Marialma Rodriguez-Vassiliou. After an epic 48-hour labour, Rosie was born on Sunday 8 November at 18.51pm weighing 8 lbs. With such talented parents, we look forward to hearing Rosie's singing voice.



### Einspringen...

The American tenor, Leonardo Capalbo, who appeared as Nadir in our *Pearl Fishers* production in 2008, tells us that he was called upon to do an exciting *Einspringen* (a 'jump-in' where another singer cancels at the last minute) in Dresden in October. At just 6 hours notice he replaced the tenor in *La traviata*. Leonardo said, "I arrived in Dresden by plane at 4.30pm, was driven to the theatre where they fitted me into a costume. I had a short staging rehearsal and no music rehearsal. The performance began at 7.00pm!" Despite having not looked at the role let alone sung it for about 6 months, Leonardo remembered everything. He said, "The public was so enthusiastic. It was an awesome experience and surely got the blood flowing!"



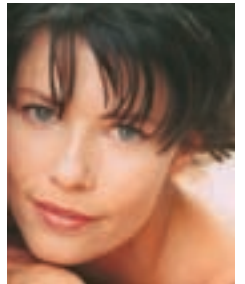
Dorset Opera

**...nothing short of phenomenal!**

(Opera Magazine)

### Paris's Maria problem solved

American soprano Christine Arand – who played Salomé in *Hérodiade* (2006), and Liù in *Turandot* (2007) – can be seen as Maria in a new French production of Rodgers & Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music* in Paris. The show runs throughout December and over the New Year at Paris's 'other' home of opera and musical theatre, the Théâtre du Châtelet.



### Some Enchanted Evening...

One of Dorset Opera's most popular baritones has turned down the opportunity of playing the role of Emile du Becque in the Broadway production of Rodgers & Hammerstein's *South Pacific*. The singer concerned found that the contractual requirements of a long run would have severely curtailed his ability to fulfil many of his future opera engagements. There is a history of famous operatic bass/baritones playing this role. Readers may recall that the Emile in the original Broadway production was played by an opera star of the day, Ezio Pinza. In the 1958 film, the Italian star Rossano Brazzi was Emile, but his singing voice was dubbed by another well-known bass from the Met, Giorgio Tozzi.

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# Reviews of Cav & Pag:

## Opera Now

Dorset Opera is the only provincial ensemble apart from Buxton's to produce results consistently on a par with the UK's five main companies, including Welsh National Opera and English National Opera.

It is blessed with all the key requirements: a splendidly-run administration with a music professional as its general and artistic director (baritone Roderick Kennedy, veteran of ENO, Covent Garden, Glyndebourne, San Francisco, Chicago and the Met); invariably first-rate standards and top-class imagination from stage director William Relton and designer Cordelia Chisholm; a stupendous young chorus with a chorus director of fabulous authority (Nicolas Mansfield of the Netherlands' Nationale Reisopera) at its helm; and brisk energised conducting from Opera St Gallen's Jeremy Carnall.

It's a formula for excellence, as Dorset recently proved with *Hérodiade*, whose forceful Herod, Franco Pomponi, returned to shine in *Pagliacci* as the equally headstrong Silvio; and with their British premiere under Carnall of *Turandot* with the Berio ending, in which Opera Dortmund's Christine Groeneveld was stupendous,

returning to deliver an equally magnificent, if staid, Santuzza opposite John Hudson's phenomenally strong Turiddu, where they were joined (at short notice) by last year's Zurga from *The Pearl Fishers*, baritone Simon Thorpe, as an aggressive Alfio.

Dorset's calling card is its committed (and this year, 65-strong) chorus, as much a joy to behold in action in Relton's leave-nothing-to-chance, beautifully finessed productions (one thinks of Phyllida Lloyd's) as it is to hear in full voice. These are young singers, some with professional careers in view, who return to participate in a two-week masterclass in vocal delivery and stage performance.



The church processions, the chorus's full-throated interaction with Alfio and then Turiddu, the unostentatious intelligence and artistry of their moves as Mexican Luis Chapa's mellifluous, stupendously-powerful young Pagliaccio dissolves to dust before their eyes (especially with Paul Need's ideally judged lighting combining with Chisholm's subtle and sharp ideas about colouring, all of which specifically worked, and the costume department working wonders) ensured a gripping and galvanised double show under Carnall's ample yet fiery beat. Dorset's orchestra sounded really spot on: no concessions now needed.

Dorset's other strength, to which it devotes time, trouble and money, is its casting of principals. Not just Pomponi's Silvio but Indian tenor Anando Mukerjee's lithely attractive Beppe/Arlecchino and Claudio Otelli's quite superbly loathsome Tonio contributed much to *Pagliacci*. Annelies Lamm's rich-hued Mamma Lucia was stolid, staunch and empathetic; there were some nice brief solo touches from the chorus.

This was provincial opera to national standards. That's what makes Dorset so great and unique.

©Roderic Dunnett: Nov/Dec 2009

## The Daily Telegraph

**Opera singing is not just for professionals. Having a go yourself is the best way to prove that opera isn't elitist.**

Quite aside from the dismally familiar notion that opera is an elitist art form (a pretentious way of expressing the notion that its audiences are snobbish), there's an even more ingrained idea that it's something that only highly trained professionals can adequately perform.

At many levels, this is true – the prospect of an amateur production of the *Ring* is not something to be countenanced. Opera is often a difficult and a complex business, requiring a sensitive integration of music and drama, pit and stage, libretto and score, and getting the articulation right is something that not even seasoned professionals often achieve.

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But that's no reason to mystify the thing, and at the very least, it's profoundly educational to have a go and see what's involved. Welsh National Opera used an amateur chorus until the 1970s, and for a recent production of *Aida* swelled its professional ranks for the Triumph Scene with local choirs to stunning effect; Birmingham Opera Company has gone further, and put community groups at the heart of productions of *La traviata* and *Idomeneo*, rigorously directed by Graham Vick.

But perhaps the most venerable and heroic of these pro-am organisations is Dorset Opera, founded in 1974 by Patrick Shelley. Every summer, currently in the 600-seater theatre of Bryanston School, it presents a run of fully staged performances in the original language. Over the years the repertory has embraced the British stage premieres of Puccini's *Edgar*, Verdi's *Un Giorno di regno*, Donizetti's *Maria Padilla* and Erkel's *Hunyadi Laszlo*, as well as large-scale works such as Verdi's *Don Carlos* and Puccini's *Turandot* (in both Berio and Alfano's editions).

The whole show is put together in a two-week residential summer school...and it attracts student singers as well as amateurs from all over Europe, with a concentration on 16-25 year olds, many of whom plan to pursue music as a career.



Last week I visited Dorset Opera for the first time and relished the spirited productions of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, sensibly directed by William Relton and sturdily conducted by Jeremy Carnall...but what shone throughout was the excellence of the chorus, trained by Nicolas Mansfield, on leave from the Nationale Reisopera in the Netherlands. Somehow he had managed to build a totally ad hoc body of singers of all ages, shapes and sizes into a chorus that not only sang with unity and precision but also acted their roles as Italian peasants with a conviction that full-time choruses in major opera companies don't always match. They reminded me that the truly 'elitist snobbery' pinned to opera is the assumption that professionals are always better than amateurs

©Rupert Christiansen: 2009

## Opera magazine

*Cav* and *Pag* are ideal works for Dorset Opera. The chorus is focal to both, and Dorset fields an excellent example that is 65 singers strong. This summer the company introduced a chorus master

capable of encouraging them to still greater heights: Nicolas Mansfield, whose 20-year experience with the Netherlands Radio Choir and Nationale Reisopera has honed his gifts for motivating a young choir to deliver with precision.

The director William Relton has upgraded Dorset's latest productions into kaleidoscopes of thoughtfully-contrived stagework; the designer, Cordelia Chisholm, should have larger companies queuing. Wardrobe and Lighting (Jane O'Donnell, Paul Need) were in broadly the same class. But prime credit for this double bill lay with the committed young Rotterdam-based conductor Jeremy Carnall.

Amid a bevy of first-rate principals, Claudio Otelli as a beastly Tonio in *Pagliacci* and John Hudson's expressive Turiddu in *Cavalleria rusticana* stood out. The Mascagni provided gripping moments galore: the village bustled, the candlelit procession was thrilling, and Santuzza's exchange with Mamma Lucia (Annelies Lamm) was shattering. Christine Groeneveld was an impressive Santuzza. Simon Thorpe was strong, too, as Alfio, mastering the role at short notice when Christopher Robertson was inexplicably denied a visa. In *Pagliacci*, the Mexican Luis Chapa offered an unnervingly dominant, impressively sung Canio; Marie Vassiliou was at times a rich-sounding Nedda. Franco Pomponi was well cast as Silvio, and along with Otelli's death-dealing villain, I enjoyed the Indian tenor Anando Mukerjee's Arlecchino.

©Roderic Dunnett: October 2009



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## Dorset Echo

### A stylish occasion

Opera's most notable double act, namely *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci*, provides a challenge for every company but Dorset Opera rose to the occasion with great style in this fully staged modern dress production, which emulates the Glyndebourne atmosphere of wining and dining before the performance and during the long interval.

With a professional orchestra as well as leading solo singers, the standard can always be relied upon to be extremely high and both operas were well cast and satisfyingly presented, not least with their large cast of around 40 young chorus members, all of them having studied their roles during an intensive two-week summer school.

Both works were performed in Italian with English subtitles as passion, revenge and retribution swirled around the stage in true operatic fashion with complex plots worthy of a Mafia conspiracy movie.

Starry performances were delivered by baritone Simon Thorpe as the wronged husband in *Cavalleria* and by Marie Vassiliou as the doomed wife in *Pagliacci*, while Luis Chapa scored a hit in the role as the tragic eponymous hero with his rendering of *On With the Motley*.

The opera orchestra is always of the highest quality and under the baton of Jeremy Carnall, this year proved to be no exception in a classy production.

©Marion Cox: 2009



### WHAT WILL YOUR LEGACY BE?

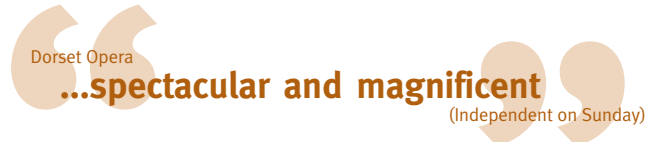
Including Dorset Opera in your will is perfectly straight-forward. Your solicitor can easily provide you with the appropriate wording to include in your will, or a simple codicil.

Your gift, large or small, would be a lasting memorial to your generosity.

## Blackmore Vale Magazine

*Cav* and *Pag*, the most famous operatic double bill, both centre on jealousy and murder in the Mediterranean heat...*Pagliacci* making its company debut and *Cav* chosen for the first time in 29 years. And the productions, though with the same director, performed on the same set with the same excellent chorus, were as different as marble and gorgonzola.

With the best will in the world and accepting that theatre is about suspension of disbelief, it was impossible to accept the statuesque and Nordic Christine Groeneveld (so impressive as Turandot), as a passionate Italian peasant. And Santuzza is the centre of this tale of betrayal and jealousy...Simon Thorpe, who sang Zurga to great acclaim in last year's DO *Pearl Fishers*, came in at late notice to sing the role of Alfio, but you would not have guessed how short his rehearsal period had been. John Hudson was in fine voice as Turiddu and Annelies Lamm made the most of the only sympathetic character, Turiddu's mother. Katharina Peetz (whose real-life husband Claudio Otelli, sang the black-hearted Tonio in *Pagliacci*) was Lola, perhaps the least likeable of the characters in this short opera, which depends on a sweltering atmosphere to engage a modern audience.



Director William Relton had slightly altered one of the women's stories – for obvious reasons. Usually it is Santuzza who is pregnant by Turiddu, but here Nedda (Marie Vassiliou) in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* was also an expectant mother, and it made perfect and additionally moving sense of the story. It starts with the very impressive Mr Otelli as Tonio, the Fool in a troupe of travelling players, confidently warning the audience that clowns have feelings too.

The citizens rush out to welcome the players back to town, but passions are simmering to boiling point. Leading actor Canio is married to the pregnant Nedda, who rejects the unwelcome advances of the hunchback Tonio. Furious, he tells Canio that Nedda is having an affair with a villager, Silvio. But the show must go on and revenge is inevitable in the sultry heat of the late afternoon.

The audience was glad to welcome back Franco Pomponi in the role of Silvio. This American singer - who heads the website [www.barihunks.com](http://www.barihunks.com) as the sexiest baritone in the world (truly!) - made a great impression in *Hérodiade*.

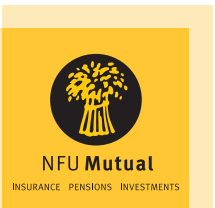
Marie Vassiliou's beautifully judged Nedda and the heartrending Canio of Luis Chapa (her real-life husband) were among the highlights of this terrific production. Guest chorus master Nicolas Mansfield ensured that this predominantly young chorus would have graced any of the major opera houses. And once again, Jeremy Carnall's incisive conducting not only brought out the best in this scratch professional orchestra, but showed the interested members of the audience, all the intricacies and moods of his job.

GP-W

## Friends' AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Dorset Opera will take place on Wednesday 31 March 2010 at a venue to be advised.

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Dorset Opera

provincial opera to national standards

(Opera Now)

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## DiDO – Dine-in for Dorset Opera

No, not the title of next year's opera presentation, but a novel way of helping to raise the extra funds that Dorset Opera desperately needs to bring the 2010 summer school and performances to fruition.

Dorset Opera's Special Events co-ordinator, Marigold Verity, who appeared in a reality television programme about the glorious Cothay Manor in Somerset, suggests that our Friends and supporters might care to emulate another reality TV show: *Restaurant in your Home*. On television, two pairs of contestants open their homes to complete strangers for a 'gourmet experience'. After the meal, diners are invited to pay what they think the meal is worth (some don't pay anything!) The couples get to keep their winnings – the pair earning the most money is declared the winner.

In a twist on this format, Marigold suggests that we take this one stage further and *Dine-In for Dorset Opera*, or DiDO for short. She asks supporters to invite friends to dinner (or lunch, tea, or even just a drinks party) on the clear understanding that they will be expected to 'pay' for their attendance by donating a sum of money to Dorset Opera for what they feel the occasion was worth! Donations should be GiftAided by cheque, enabling us to reclaim the tax paid (currently 25%).

We will gladly supply packs to include invitations explaining what DiDO is all about, and GiftAid envelopes for friends' donations. Meals could be as simple or as lavish as the hosts wish...we just hope your guests recognize your talents. For an extra donation, you might consider asking Dorset Opera to supply singers to entertain your guests...

For further information or for your DiDO invitation pack, please telephone Dorset Opera on 01258 840000 or e-mail us at: [info@dorsetopera.com](mailto:info@dorsetopera.com)

Dorset Opera is most grateful to the Arts Council of England and the National Lottery, who supported our productions of *Cav & Pag* to the tune of £5,000 – or 2.8% of our overall budget.



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