

I have at home the following on cuttings from the newspapers in November 1984. The source of the longer story on the next page is identified. I do not remember the source of the version on this page, which covers the same information, but which is not identified in my cuttings collection from that season. I reproduce it out of sheer vanity — it was, after all, my first and only outing in an operatic principal role ...



Mozart's *The Impresario*, a rarely performed one act opera, received its first performance with an updated libretto by Ian Hudson, and was set in the 1920s.

The three singing parts, taken by Peter Hewson as the Impresario, Ann Brown as Madam Herz, and Gillian Bartram as Miss Silveryone were all well performed. Ann Brown must be particularly congratulated for tackling the extremely difficult coloratura part. It was obvious that both the cast and the producer, Hazel Helder, had taken great care over detail – in accent, movement and finishing touches to costumes. The speaking parts were played by Chris Forde, Anthony Ramsden and Bridget Thomas.

The musical director was Malcolm Pike and Geraldine Rugman and Ian Miles accompanied.

After the interval a much larger cast performed Act II of Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*. Ian Hudson quite rightly dominated the scene, and his clear voice and

diction and unforced acting were a delight. Barbara Brown as Juno was a clever and amusing actress and made a good foil for him.

The many smaller parts, all well sung with good diction, were taken by Phyllis Burton. Diana; Margaret Tribe, Cupid, Myra Cohen, Venus; Cledwyn Evans, Mars; Ian Tribe, Pluto;

Erica Kollek, Calliope; Anthony Ramsden, Orpheus; with Alan Jackson as Icarus and Robert Aris Mercury.

The stage director, Margaret Ham, is to be commended for the lively and amusing production. The trio between Pluto, Jupiter and Juno went with particular point and verve. Ian Miles conducted and Geraldine again delighted us with her clear and rhythmic playing. The costumes were under the joint control of Margaret Chadwick, Tracy Houston and Margaret Leslie-Ellis.

This is a brave venture for this new company, and we wish them every success.

Enjoyable, light hearted start for Opera Omnibus

THE district's new amateur opera company, Opera Omnibus, made an auspicious start at Haslemere on Saturday. Auspicious in that the South-West Surrey MP Mrs. Virginia Bottomley was able to wish the venture "God speed" at a reception held before the first performance and auspicious, hopefully, in the encouragingly large audience.

Mrs. Bottomley, who confessed to a love of opera after a youth spent in regular visits to Sadler's Wells, urged the audience to give the new venture all the support they could. "A tremendous amount of work goes into an effort like this," she said.

The MP, who was accompanied by Mr. Peter Bottomley, MP, was, however, unable to stay to see the production, but looked forward to see the company perform in the future.

She was thanked for her encouragement by Mr. Ian Tribe, chairman of Opera Omnibus, who also thanked everyone who had helped them get the new venture off the ground. He especially thanked Sue and Russell Farley for the loan of rehearsal facilities at the Little School, and handed them a gift as a small token of their appreciation.

ALL ASPECTS OF OPERA

The new company was born after the regretted closure of Opera Camerata. As the name "Omnibus" might suggest, the aim of the company is to cover the whole spectrum of opera, from the grave to the light-hearted and to tour some productions in Surrey,

Hampshire and West Sussex. One a year they intend to produce at least one major work a year, fully-staged and in English, with chorus and orchestra. The first will be "The Pearl Fishers" in May next year.

Saturday's performance (which is repeated at Farnham and Godalming this weekend) was an excellent introduction of what we may expect from this company so full of musical talent. When there is so much ability about it would be a pity if it could not be used - but everything depends on the support they receive from the general public; not the dedicated few.

Had large numbers of lovers of light opera been present on Saturday they would surely have enjoyed the programme. Nothing heavy about this opening presentation.

NEW LIBRETTO

The first half was given over to a new libretto by Ian Hudson of Mozart's "The Impresario". This retained the three singing characters but reduced the speaking characters to three - which was ample. Not content with this sweeping, but successful change, it was also bravely decided, at the suggestion of Hazel Helder, who produced, to set the version in the mid 1920s. It worked; it was not incongruous and in the 20s "stars" could still squabble over who had top billing; films were just beginning to swamp everyone with publicity that gave double or treble billing to performers.

But, in Mozart's amusing little piece, we have the impresario engaging two top singers and then finding both demand top billing.

Peter Hewson had a nice, easy style as the impresario

while Ann Brown looked very much the established opera singer with Jillian Bartram determined to show as the up-and-coming star that, if she had not the experience, she had every bit the ability. As both Peter Hewson and Jillian Bartram have sung with the New Zealand Opera Company there was no doubt as to abilities to fulfil the roles. An experienced performer, too, Ann Brown was clever to give the impression of the "grand" opera singer without producing a caricature.

Taking the speaking parts were Chris Forde, suitably distraught as the impresario's friend afraid of his too ambitious aspirations and Bridget Thomas, as a soubrette and not in the same bracket as the opera singers, but she had the advantage of a wealthy backer, played by Anthony Ramsden.

Musical director was Malcolm Pike and the piano accompanists were Geraldine Rugman and Ian Miles.

OFFENBACH'S ORPHEUS

The second half was given over to Act II of Offenbach's "Orpheus in the Underworld" - the Mount Olympus scene. This would have been familiar to any amateur operatic society follower and they would certainly have appreciated this crisp, colourful and musically delightful presentation. The principals sailed away with their roles; the chorus was a pleasure and it all ended with a chorus that had you wanting more - which is as it should be. Ian Miles was musical director, stage director Margaret Ham and accompanist Geraldine Rugman.

THE PRINCIPALS

Diana, Phyllis Burton; Venus,

Myra Cohen; Calliope, Erica Kollek; Juno, Barbara Brown; Cupid, Margaret Tribe; Jupiter, Ian Hudson; Orpheus, Anthony Ramsden; Mars, Cledwyn Evans; Pluto, Ian Tribe; Icarus, Alan Jackson; Mercury, Robert Aris.

Chorus of gods and goddesses: Karyl Cragg, Eileen Davis, Pamela Depledge, Carolyn Earl, Tracy Houston, Mary Kirkman, Sue Lane, Judith Reading, Celia Wills, Gabriel Cohen, Stan Hoskyn, Alan Kirk, Keith McCaughtrie, Geoffrey Ramsden.

Other credits: production secretary, Ian Hudson; stage manager, Ben Dare; lighting, Gerry Rogers and Nicholas Brown; wardrobe, Margaret Chadwick, Tracy Houston and Margaret Leslie-Ellis; properties, Diana Ramsden, Carolyn Earl and Jean McCarthney; front-of-house (Haslemere Roy O.Dwyer; Farnham, Sovereign Travel; Godalming, Field Brothers. Rehearsal accompanist, Geraldine Rugman; Haslemere reception organised by Moyra Finlay. Anyone interested in joining Opera Omnibus should contact Margaret Tribe, secretary, at Rowley House, Headley Fields, Headley.

-The same programme is repeated at Farnham College tonight (Friday) at 7.30 and at Godalming on Saturday. This will be a testing time as far as audience support is concerned; it is to be hoped the company receive it; such a laudable enterprise deserves it.