

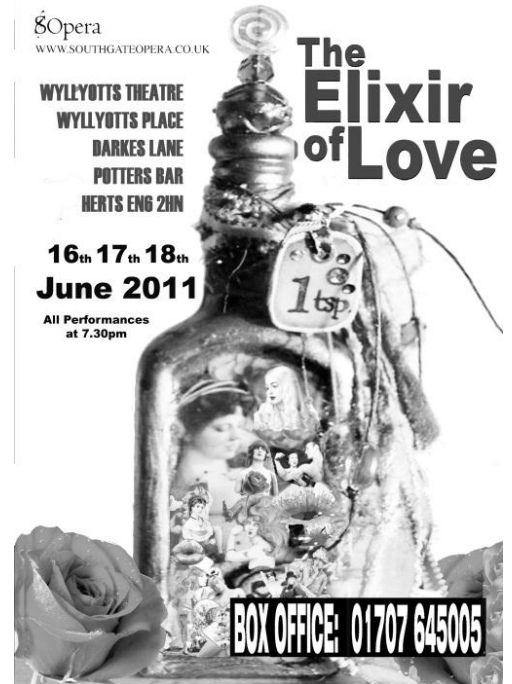
DISTILLING THE ELIXIR

BY DAVID LUCK

It is with great pleasure that we welcome back **David Luck** to direct our production of Donizetti's **The Elixir of Love**. Previously a popular principal at Southgate Opera, he is remembered for roles in both musicals and opera and as a director for us and other local companies.

David says: "It was my discovery of the Barnet Physic Well and its properties that clinched the idea of setting the production at Barnet Fair. Not that our doctor is selling water from the Barnet Physic well, but as noted by Dickens and Pepys in their diaries, the diuretic and humour-giving properties of the Barnet well make an obvious comparison to our itinerant perambulating doctor.

Pepys wrote in 1664, having had a meal at the Red Lion: "half a mile off; and there I drunk three glasses and went and walked, and came back and drunk two more, but I could not, my belly being full – but this wrought me very well; and so we rode home...and my waters working at least seven or eight times upon the road, which pleased me well" in another account the waters appear to be an earlier form of Viagra!"



Welcome to Spotlight

Director David Luck tells us about his approach to *Elixir* and we also go back in time with Anne Golding's reminiscences of Southgate's first production of the opera in 1972.

Like that production and the later one in 1999, our latest production will be played in traditional costume. The timeless love story of this tuneful and deservedly popular opera has often tempted directors to transplant it to a modern setting such as the Midwest 'Adina's Diner' recently at the ENO, or the small town municipal offices presented by the same company some years ago, with Adina as the mayor's secretary and the Doctor arriving by car. But David assures us there will be no burgers or computers in his production!

We also hear from the principal singers as they tell us something of themselves and their lives outside music.

Look out for the reviews of *Yeomen of the Guard* and finally don't miss the important company news, announcements and diary dates.

MEMORIES OF THE FIRST PRODUCTION OF 'ELIXIR'

By Anne Golding

I needed no persuasion to perform in Southgate Opera's first production of *The Elixir of Love*. I was newly-appointed as Head of Art at the then still new Southgate Technical College. Cecil Hayter was a young part-time director and set designer who was producing *The Tales of Hoffman* prior to *Elixir*. His set for *Hoffman* was the first time I'd seen a lit gauze curtain on an amateur stage, and to me it was magic: I had to join! I became a young Italian village girl, singing in the alto section of the chorus.

Part of my job description was scenery painting and I worked alongside Cecil on his *Elixir* set. I was sent off to

hire costumes from Charles Fox. Their costume store was elderly and run down, only providing for the main roles. We ladies' chorus dressed ourselves. I asked my mother to dye white singlets and cut and lace them to make 'bodices' to be worn over peasant blouses and dirndl skirts.

Every Wednesday, my volunteer students and I worked on the college theatre stage with Cecil on his extremely realistic Italian village set. In the centre was a large tree from which Nemorino (Phillip Golding) would sing "Una furtiva lagrima" looking down on Adina (Pam Morrison).

Cecil laboriously cut tree borders of leaves to frame the proscenium arch. Adina's house had roof tiles made from thick cardboard tubes (where did they come from?) cut in half and painted terra cotta.

(Cont. page 2)

(Cont. from page 1) In Cecil's home in Fulham, paper wisteria was made to garland the house, and paper lanterns for the night scene. The fire-officer insisted they were fire-proofed: they had to be sprayed, went soggy, but were used anyway.

I was not a good sight-reader, but I learned. We in the chorus worked creatively with a double cast of soloists. I had never before seen a whole live opera and Cecil, as always, gave us freedom to react inventively.

A young engineering student named David Luck was Dulcamara – and very funny. Allan Girdlestone was the army captain Belcore.

After months of rehearsing with Terry Hawes at the piano, we came to the band call and one realised the strength of Donizetti's wonderful music.

This time, Alan and I are the only two members from that first production and David Luck is now the director. What a legacy! I can't wait to enjoy this wonderful opera once again.



Tony Boother Retires

We are sure *Spotlight's* readers will want to join us in wishing Tony Boother a happy retirement from his long years of work for Southgate Opera.

From 1976 to 2011 he was involved with the company in an amazing variety of ways.

Initially he helped the late Alan Legget on the lighting. He worked backstage not only during performances, but also beforehand with building and mounting the sets (together with Peter Stretton who directed operations, Donald McDonald the Southgate College stage technician and others.

For many years he also ran the box office and front of house. For a number of years he was the company's chairman, during which time he emphasised the links between it and the local community, for instance by inviting college staff, local MPs and other local figures to the 'VIP night' of each production.

He also designed and produced the company newsletter. After retiring from the chairmanship he continued with the newsletter, for which he invented the name *Spotlight*. He produced programmes, publicity material and letters to the Friends of Southgate Opera, as well as maintaining the Friends' database.

The present editors of *Spotlight* can bear witness to his constant concern for high standards of production and his keen eye for detail.

Very few people have contributed as much as Tony to the life of the company over such a long period of time and his work will be remembered for many years to come.

THE FRIENDS OF SOUTHGATE OPERA NEWS

Last year's Friends' Concert at St Mary Magdalene's Church was a huge success with magnificent singing, followed by wonderful catering by Jutta Mason – all sorts of tasty morsels and home-made soup.

We are very pleased to give you early notice of this year's concert – which will, however, be in a different venue. Details are as follows:

Saturday 1 October 2011

**Church House, Waterfall Road, Southgate
(Opposite Christ Church near Ye Olde Cherry Tree)**

With car parking

Detailed directions will be supplied nearer the time

A Gilbert & Sullivan Evening

The first half will be a semi-staged "Trial by Jury"

The second half G&S solos and ensembles

Refreshments are included as usual. More detailed information will be in the Friends Application Form letter.

The Yeomen of the Guard went really well and it was delightful to see so many Friends there. We hope to see you all again at *The Elixir of Love*.

The Friends are also invited to **The Members' Concert & Social Evening** on **Saturday, 2 July 2011** - See enclosed leaflet for details.

Please contact us with any queries, membership applications etc. Current Friends will receive their renewal notification in May.

Ann and Rex Bourne

Joint Friends Secretaries (01992 700847)

90 Years Old – Phyllis Waters Life Friend of Southgate Opera

Congratulations to Phyllis Walters, who celebrated her 90th birthday recently. She and her late husband David Waters (for many years principal tenor of Southgate College Opera) were the first Joint Secretaries of the Friends, and it was their enthusiasm and commitment that gave the new organisation a good start and a firm foundation.

Following retirement, Phyllis and David moved to Heybroke Bay in Devon, where Phyllis still lives. Any reader of *Spotlight* wishing to congratulate her individually, please contact Terry Hawes on 020 8360 3066 for her address.

The Elixir of Love

INTRODUCING THE PRINCIPALS

Usually we only learn about our principals through their biogs in the programme – and then mainly about their musical lives. We thought readers would be interested to get to know the ‘person behind the singer’ and so we invited our five principals to write something about their lives. We’ll let the two Aussie ladies go first!



Alexandra (Lexi) Hutton (Adina) I grew up in the beautiful little country town of Bingara in North-West NSW, Australia. My dad played the guitar so I used to sing and play piano by ear with him and my twin brother until I was able to have

piano lessons. I wanted to be an Olympic swimmer at that age, so spent too much time in the pool and at swimming carnivals. My parents owned a country department store that had been in my Mum’s family for 120 years and I spent a lot of time working there during school holidays. Bingara is where I call home.



Yvette Litchfield (Giannetta) I trained as a classical ballet dancer for eight years before having to choose between my established love of dance and an increasing love of singing. Music was an integral part of life from infancy for me and my

four siblings, with ABC Classic FM playing all day in the house and parties held in the garden to celebrate favourite composers’ birthdays. It seemed natural that music lessons should precede kindergarten, and the recorder was a good place to start aged four. Piano and cello followed and while much loved, singing provided not only an exciting variety of performance opportunities, but a joy unmatched by anything else. Skip to the present day – via Sydney Conservatorium and The Guildhall School of Music here in London – to Southgate Opera where I am delighted to be performing the cheeky role of Giannetta.



Renato Cordeiro (Nemorino) I’m originally from Brazil and began singing when I accompanied a nervous friend to an audition and was invited to sing myself. Once I started I never looked back. At that time I was a dedicated swimmer and

training to be an engineer but I decided to leave my family and friends in Brazil to follow my dream of becoming an opera singer. In London it was very hard at first, learning English (by making lots of mistakes!), earning a living and trying to keep up with singing lessons. The turning point came when, after a couple of years, I was accepted by Trinity College of Music and had the chance to study with great teachers such as the British tenor John Wakefield. I have continued in Trinity as a post-graduate student studying with two amazing teachers Ameral Gunson and Helen York. London has become my home and here I intend to stay.

Derek S. Henderson (Dulcamara) Don’t be fooled by my accent – I may sound American, but that’s only one of my three nationalities. I was born and raised in Panama and also carry an Italian passport.



When I’m not singing, I am usually developing websites, reading books,

learning a foreign language, solving a Rubik’s Cube (which I can do in under two minutes), or flirting with anything which has a pulse. My dream role is the Queen of the Night and my favourite aria is Nemorino’s “Una furtiva lagrima”, both of which I feel strongly ought to be part of the bass repertoire.
www.dshenderson.co.uk



David Roberts (Sergeant Belcore) The height of my operatic career (literally) was at the age of 13, suspended high above the stage in a boat in The Magic Flute at Covent Garden. Other early triumphs included a Christmas day solo on Radio 2, television and singing

solo with the London Boy Singers at the Wigmore Hall. I have now launched a comeback and after adulthood phases of rock, folk and lieder am back to my operatic roots with a high baritone rather than treble range. Along the way I have managed to combine my musical ambitions with family life (four children) and earning a living as a financial adviser.

NODA REVIEW

by Paul M. Holgate

A production of Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Yeomen of the Guard" with most of the cast in Tudor costume but the chorus of citizens in modern dress.

Musical support under Neil Cloake was excellent with a particularly noteworthy performance of the overture. Direction from Martyn Harrison was well paced. The substitution of a chorus of workmen, visitors, guides and students for the usual 'gentlemen and citizens' was an interesting idea but it did make ensemble scenes seem rather confused.

Chorus members using books onstage pulled focus. The young people's chorus, although also looking somewhat out of place at times, did give good performances and reacted well to the action, most notably during the Act II finale.

Effective lighting

The set, representing a view from Tower Hill with the Tower itself obscured by scaffolding, worked well although the single turret on view (part of the White Tower, I think) failed to represent the well-known shape of the landmark.

Lighting was unobtrusive and cues well observed with particularly effective coloured lighting during the Act I finale.

The Warders needed to be better drilled and the men's chorus, in particular, were unsure of some musical entrances. The exeunt at the end of Act I was very well staged and the Act II finale worked well. Costumes and make-up conformed well: an especially good choice of costumes for Jack Point and for the bridal party. The feathered plume in Richard



Cholmondeley's hat was rather distracting. Without doubt, the highlight of the production – and one of the most accomplished interpretations of the part that I have ever seen – was Colin Davis as Jack Point. The two solos were exceedingly well delivered. The progression from the wise-

cracking, self-obsessed strolling jester to the broken man that Point is by the end of the piece was expertly portrayed through vocal nuance, body language and make-up.

Faultless characterisation.

An indulgent announcement before the performance warned that Philippa Christer was recovering from laryngitis and her voice was, indeed,

weak. Her characterisation, nevertheless, was faultless with some excellent use of expression especially during "A man who would woo a fair maid" and the following "When a wooer goes a wooing". The impact of her opening number was reduced by having other people on stage as she performed it. Her reactions to Wilfred and her father and brother were also well observed.



Stuart Boother was a caddish Fairfax, a good interpretation of the role. I particularly enjoyed his asides in answer to Jack Point's description of the shooting. He has a clear voice and performed both arias with effortless ease. A characteristically incisive performance from Lee Mason as Elsie Maynard included a heartfelt performance of her solo and some pleasing stage business during "I have a song to sing-o". John Fisher as Wilfred Shadbolt seemed a little unsure of himself in his opening scene although he soon relaxed into the part and gave a creditable performance.

Christine Hunter had a pleasing voice and sang the refrain of "When our gallant Norman foes" with great relish, making Dame Carruthers seem rather more sadistic than is usual. She was well paired with John Furlong's assured Sergeant Meryll and "Joyful, Joyful" was great fun to watch. David Roberts used his imposing stage presence to make a good case for Richard Cholmondeley, who has very little stage time in which to create much of a character. Likewise, Emma Tirebuck made a good impression as Kate. There was also solid support from Jeff Turner as second yeoman.

Background notes

The programme had a striking front cover and clear layout. It lacked a list of musical numbers. Thank you for including a NODA credit. A few of the cast photographs were rather dark and some were badly cropped. The interesting background notes included some detail on "A laughing boy but yesterday" and "When jealous torments wrack my soul" though neither was performed. It was mentioned that the date of action was an 'unspecified past'. This was belied by the prominent use of the HR cipher on stage and also ignored the fact that Cholmondeley was Lieutenant at the Tower between 1513 and 1520, during the reign of Henry VIII. Many thanks for your invitation; I look forward to seeing you again soon.

REVIEW: YEOMEN WYLLYOTTS THEATRE 9 FEBRUARY 2011

By Stella Masters

The programme gave an excellent synopsis of the plot, and interesting and informative notes on the background of the opera from the founder and former Music Director of Southgate Opera, Terry Hawes.

Minimalist sets are in vogue nowadays, and the Director's idea was to imitate the fact that, at present, the White Tower is actually surrounded by scaffolding and shrouded in plastic (or similar) builders' sheeting. However, not all of the audience liked this approach – which some may have incorrectly assumed to be an indication of cost-cutting – and much preferred the more realistic, beautifully painted sets of Cecil Hayter's productions.



The cast was excellent, and special mention must be made of Philippa Christer, as the best Phoebe that I have seen: moving in her grief, alternately teasing and tempting, naughty and winsome. Although just recovering from laryngitis, she also sang well.

Another well-played character was her suitor, the repulsive gaoler, Wilfred Shadbolt (John Fisher). Although given few opportunities to display his fine baritone voice, he did everything

necessary to the character, and one felt that, although an unwilling bride, Phoebe would soon have made a respectable character out of him.

Christine Hunter made a delightful Dame Carruthers, while Emma Tirebuck, as her niece, having been only a silent witness during most of the opera, at last got the opportunity to shine as the soprano in a quartet "Strange Adventure".

Stuart Boothe made a fine Colonel Fairfax, with his good tenor voice, and high-spirited acting, although he was, perhaps a little more flirtatious than a 'noble hero' is expected to be. Jeff Turner sang the song of the Second Yeoman very well. The parts of Sergeant Merryll and the Lieutenant of the Tower were played and sung with dignity by John Furlong and David Roberts respectively, as was the all-too-small part of Leonard Merryll, by Hugh Benson.

Lee Mason always excels in Heart-rending parts, and this was no exception, with beautiful singing, made all the more poignant by Colin Davis (her real husband) playing Jack Point, the heartbroken jester. When this company last performed *Yeomen*, Colin played the gaoler, but Jack Point better suited his style, and his own quick wit.

The chorus, here representing present-day visitors to The Tower of London, sang well, and acted appropriately. It was good to see so many children and young people keenly involved. It was slightly puzzling that the visitors to the tower, including parties of schoolchildren, were hustled on to the stage to witness the beheading'. (Which century are we supposed to be in?).

As always, Neil Cloake conducted the orchestra with careful and sensitive attention to the singers.



DIARY DATES

2011

Sunday 12 June to Saturday 18 June

Show week of *The Elixir of Love* at Wylllyotts Theatre. Performances 7.30pm on Thursday 16th, Friday 17th, Saturday 18th. No matinee.

Monday 20 June

Auditions for *La Vie Parisienne*. Further information from Joanna Raworth, Auditions Secretary, on 020 8529 3094 or email: jo_star_light@yahoo.co.uk

Saturday 2 July

Members' Concert

Saturday 1 October

Friends' Concert

Monday 3 October

7.30pm Southgate Opera Annual General Meeting St. Mary Magdalene's Church, Windmill Hill, Enfield

2012

Sunday 5 February to Saturday 11 February

Show week of *La Vie Parisienne*



NOREEN FORD

It is with great sadness that we record the passing of Noreen Ford who died on 5 November 2010 from cancer after a short illness.

Possessed of a fine voice, Noreen loved to sing. In her twenties she joined the Royal Choral Society when it was conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent and sang with it for many years in the Albert Hall. Later she sang with the Alexandra Choral Society, sometimes in the Great Hall of Alexandra Palace.

She joined Southgate Opera in 1996 and became a loyal member of the chorus, taking part in every production until, after *Pirates* in 2010, illness prevented her from attending rehearsals.

She also performed with the Cabaret Group on many occasions. She thoroughly enjoyed being involved in the shows, including the acting!

For some years she was Publicity Secretary. For all the productions that were put on at the Gladys Child Theatre in Southgate she arranged appropriate and colourful displays in the foyer that transformed an otherwise rather bleak space and created interest for arriving audiences.

Noreen will be remembered for her cheerful demeanour and warm, caring friendliness. She will be greatly missed by all who knew her.

Ann O'Hara

CAN YOU HELP?

A smooth-running front-of-house team is a vital part of any production. If you enjoy meeting people and would be interested in helping at the theatre during one or more performances, you could become part of that team, either as an usher in the auditorium or a programme seller in the foyer.

Anne Dangerfield would be pleased to give you further details. You can contact her on 020 8441 5309 or at denanne@tiscali.co.uk.

SOUTHGATE ON THE ROAD

The cabaret group now has an official name – Southgate Cabaret. A letterhead for use in its official correspondence will be designed shortly.

We perform three cabarets in the run-up to Christmas using a new programme of chorus numbers. We have recently welcomed one new member to the group and would like to see more joining us.

Most cabarets are performed in the afternoon (2 – 4pm) to groups of senior citizens in luncheon clubs and retirement homes. Do come – it's fun and much appreciated by our audiences.

Any company member interested in joining us or helping with the design of the new letterhead, please contact Frances Richardson on 020 8368 7569.

Spotlight is published by Southgate Opera. Deadline for contributions for the next issue: Saturday, 9 July, 2011

Please post, e-mail or hand-deliver contributions to one of the Joint Editors:
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Spotlight is the newsletter of Southgate Opera, and is published twice a year for free distribution to members of the Company and registered Friends. The views expressed in it are not necessarily those of the Editors or of the company as a whole. Contributions are always welcome, though for reasons of space, balance of material, etc, no guarantee can be given that all those received will be published, or published in entirety. The authorship of each contribution must be clearly identified to the Editors: anonymous pieces are not acceptable. However, a contributor's request to be published anonymously, or under a pseudonym, will be respected.

The Editors' decision is final.

Peter Sculpher

We very much regret to announce the death on 11 March of Peter Sculpher, husband of Monica who is one of our longest-serving members of the chorus.

After a long period of poor health, Peter died peacefully at home, in his sleep.

For many years Peter was a staunch supporter of the company through his membership of the Friends and attendance at company social events.



In addition, he regularly devoted his engineering ingenuity and skills as a craftsman to Southgate productions, particularly in the creation of props – everything from constructing wooden shutters to designing a stand for our massive chandelier which allowed it to be safely stored and easily transported.

His friends testify to his wonderfully meticulous work. If there was something that presented a technical difficulty, Peter was the man for the job.

We offer our warmest sympathy to Monica and their sons Michael, Jonathan and Martin.