

SIXTY YEARS OF A FESTIVAL

By Liveryman Paul Campion

NOW THAT GLYNDEBOURNE FESTIVAL'S sixtieth anniversary season has come to a close, it is an appropriate time to look back and assess the achievements and successes of this celebratory year.

From the two most important points of view, the new opera house has been acclaimed as superb with barely a dissenting voice heard. Acoustically it has been tested by nearly seventy opera performances during the season, and, more unusually, also by a fascinating series of experiments which took place on 28th March, two months before the official opening. Guns were fired from different parts of the stage (to the jumpy amazement of the audience), the orchestra played and the singers sang excerpts from different operas; even the 'silence' of the full auditorium was recorded so that the sound could be analysed by the acoustic experts. Fortunately, and not, perhaps, surprisingly, those experts pronounced the results superb. The new theatre is, without doubt, a far better place to see and hear opera than the old one ever was.

The second great success has been the design of the theatre. Architects Michael Hopkins and Partners have created a bigger structure, yes, but one which fits its situation, tucked into the Sussex Downs, most elegantly. The colour, the shape, the height and texture of the theatre all co-ordinate with Glyndebourne's other more familiar buildings. For Sir George Christie and his family, at least, this must be a great relief. Who would want a theatre that really wasn't very attractive or well-designed lurking dispiritedly in their back garden?

There are other things, too, which have helped Glyndebourne to celebrate the new theatre's opening and the Festival's Diamond Jubilee. Two new books have been written, both of which document Glyndebourne's past success and its exciting future prospects. *Glyndebourne - Building a Vision* is by Rosy Runciman, Glyndebourne's archivist for the last seven years, and Marcus Binney, architectural correspondent of *The Times*. This book describes in detail the history of the Christie family, the house itself, the building and eventual demolition of the original theatre and the construction of the new. It is lavishly illustrated with prints and photographs, some of which are from the family's collection, and others taken over the last hundred and fifty years by visitors, friends, designers

and professional photographers. It is published by Thames and Hudson.

The book with which I have been deeply involved, with my co-author Rosy Runciman, tells the story of Glyndebourne's recording career. Unusual, perhaps, to think of a Festival or an opera house having a recording career, but that is very much what it amounts to. Since the first season in 1934 the Glyndebourne Festival has recorded twenty-five of its productions, mostly for HMV. In addition, Glyndebourne Chorus took part in nine recordings of Gilbert and Sullivan operas during the 1950s under Sir Malcolm Sargent, and in recordings of Monteverdi madrigals under Raymond Leppard in 1970; Glyndebourne Festival Orchestra recorded a number of orchestral works with the Italian conductor Vittorio Gui in the 1950s, and no fewer than thirty-six Glyndebourne performances - dating from 1972 to 1992 are available as videos. It is a remarkable recorded legacy, and one that has been fascinating and revealing to write about. Julia MacRae has again been our supportive and enthusiastic publisher. As a final reminder of 'the

old' Glyndebourne's recorded legacy between 1934 and 1988, EMI invited me to select the tracks for a commemorative CD which, with the same name as the book, *Glyndebourne Recorded*, includes extracts from seventeen of EMI's sets. Choosing what to include to represent each of the productions was a heavenly nightmare; spoilt for choice and loving it, knowing only seventy-five minutes of playing time was available in which to do justice to this wonderful collection of recordings. Happily, it worked out well and apparently the CD has been selling successfully since May. EMI also provided very generous sponsorship which enabled me to complete my section of the book on time, and *Glyndebourne Recorded* was published just ten days before the 1994 opening night.

All opera lovers have had much to celebrate this year and I have had the wonderful opportunity to be associated with this unique, most celebrated, magnificent eccentricity - *Glyndebourne Festival Opera*; I hope that there's someone around in 2054 who will have the good fortune to write about the second sixty years.



Alison Hagley (*Susanna*) and Gerald Finley (*Figaro*) in *Le nozze di Figaro* which opened the Glyndebourne Season in the new opera house. They were two of the record number of Christie Award winners appearing this year. The others were Anthony Rolfe Johnson (1975), Louise Winter (1984), Robert Poulton (1988) and Sarah Pring (1990). This award was endowed by the Musicians' Company in 1964.

Photo: Guy Gravett