

## DEBOURNE AND OPERA FOR ALL

It soon became apparent that Opera for All was performing a dual function, in so far as it was not only taking opera performances to small towns where otherwise none would be seen, but it had also established itself as an admirable first rung on the ladder of experience, giving a valuable service both to the public and to young performers. This applied not only to singers, but to young répétiteurs, stage managers, potential opera directors and administrators. It is one of my pleasures nearly fifty years later to look through the programmes of performances now taking place all over the world and see how many of the names belong to people who began with Opera for All.

In 1950 I was engaged to sing at Glyndebourne and immediately became aware not only of the astonishingly high standards of preparation in every aspect of the production, but also of the special care given to the recruitment and training of the chorus. It was amusing to note, of course, that Glyndebourne didn't qualify for the Arts Council grant because John Christie was adamant that they were seeking the highest possible standards of performer worldwide, no matter where they came from, and so did not conform to the Arts Council's rules and regulations. While Opera for All was managed by the Arts Council, its staff were increasingly drawn from amongst Glyndebourne's personnel, and I could see that there was a great advantage to be gained from integrating Opera for All singers with the Glyndebourne chorus. In 1952 I was appointed Stage Director of Glyndebourne and was Artistic Director of Opera for All. In the same year Opera for All gave eighty performances, and had, for example, shown our flexibility by giving a performance of *Così fan Tutte* on the Island of Mull on a stage we erected ourselves and which was the first experience of opera any of the inhabitants had ever had.

Throughout our existence I insisted on the dictum that if you are taking opera to people and places who've never seen any at all, and if you are training students to whom the same applies, you have a duty to provide them with interpretations which are, with all modesty, as nearly as possible what they might have looked and sounded like in the time of the composer and not to present them with some quirky outrageous thing

which might amuse the bored regulars who claim to have seen it all before. In a private conversation with Margot Fonteyn she said exactly the same of ballet, it must reflect the sociological customs of the time in which it was written.

Some of our Opera for All singers were accepted for the Glyndebourne chorus, so that, to our delight, we had achieved a situation in which several singers were guaranteed a steady years employment, or more, singing roles for Opera for All and, very likely, being understudies for Glyndebourne, which was a tremendous help to them in their formative years. I asked the management to allow the understudies a "showing". This was done. John Christie attended and was surprised by how good they were and even more surprised to learn that most of them were members of the Arts Council's Opera for All. The value of the training provided, had impressed performers and audiences everywhere, to such an extent that it was proposed that Glyndebourne should set up a youth company which was to be called "Young Glyndebourne". I was sent off to look at theatres which might be suited to this project. If it had materialised I think I might have been its first artistic administrator, but alas, it didn't happen then because of lack of funds. But the twain had met!

Pleased with what he saw in this collaboration as the possibility of a potential marriage of true minds which might erase previous impediments, the musical director of the Arts Council asked me to pursue with Glyndebourne the idea of a further partnership. I tried. No go. John Christie regarded the Arts Council as "little people". The proposal was dropped.

By the time Opera for All was closed down, owing to change of policy on the part of the Arts Council, we had given something like four thousand performances with Groups managed from London, Cardiff and Glasgow, with an annual repertoire of nine operas and covering the British Isles from the Shetlands to lands End. We had performed to about 450,000 people and given employment to three hundred singers and staff.

Young Glyndebourne finally came into being as Glyndebourne Touring Opera in 1968.

My interest in the affinities remains unabated and despite the difficulties at the centre, performances appear to thrive and multiply, but by no means all of them give unalloyed pleasure. Unfortunately, as it seems to me and to others, our former dedication to historical authenticity for which we strove so hard is under threat.

Joan Sutherland is disillusioned with the increasingly egalitarian brave New Opera World. She loathes updated productions (good for her!). They make nonsense of the plots.

A very senior artist, widow of an equally senior theatre director, said to me sadly "the present generation seems to have lost all sense of style and what Don Alfonso in the last act of *Così fan Tutte* called "eleganza". Let us hope for a cyclic return to good taste.

The melody lingers on, but the counterpoint can be jagged. If we are to preserve harmony, we need to take a long hard look at our understanding of the art of opera.

### The Iles Medal

This has been awarded to James Williams. He is only the second Salvation Army musician to be so honoured. Recently, he retired from the Enfield Citadel Band after over 50 years – 37 as a bandmaster.

His musical interests are considerable and include teaching, the Egon Virtuosi Band and Barnet Schools Wind Orchestra. He has adjudicated at numerous contests including this year's British Open.

### The Mortimer Medal

This has been presented to Gordon Evans MBE. In 1978 he was appointed first ever instructor of Brass and Woodwind instruments to the schools in the remote and rural Campbeltown area on the Mull of Kintyre. His impact has been phenomenal. Currently he manages and conducts two school wind bands, the Campbeltown Grammar School Brass Band and Campbeltown Brass. All these bands have achieved considerable success at home and abroad.

For the past twelve years he has also been involved with the National Youth Brass Band of Scotland.