

## CHORAL SOCIETY TRIES OPERA ... and succeeds



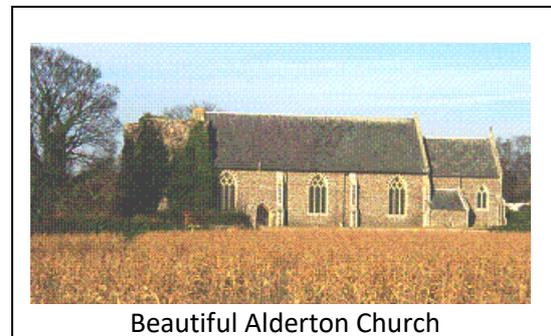
The adult's chorus

Daisy Perkins, Marion Lanyon, Robena Westbury, Pat Naysmith, Nora Neve  
Bob Frost, Roger Neve  
Alison Perry, Sue Leslie, Jean Waller, Peter Bridle

### From our Community Arts correspondent

English Touring Opera's production of Tobias and the Angel by Jonathan Dove (on 2nd and 3rd December 2004) proved a brilliant and fitting climax to a wonderful season for 'Summer on the Peninsula'. ETO has performed Tobias in venues as diverse as London, Gloucester Cathedral, Exeter and St Albans.

Drawing amateur performers from the local community each chorus is different - from song and dance students in London to retired professionals here at Alderton Church.



Beautiful Alderton Church



That dangerous carp

In the final performances staged at Alderton Church, ETO's soloists and orchestra came together with members of the Woodbridge Choral Society, pupils of Woodbridge School and members of the Britten-Pears Choir, augmented by WCS to produce a colour and tonality they had never before experienced (Well done Harry) to deliver an electrifying performance that held audiences spellbound.

Much smaller than previous venues, Alderton provided an intimate setting for the work. Indeed, Richard Burkhard (Tobit) commented, "Because I was so close, I felt it much easier to communicate with and involve the audience."

David Lan's libretto taken from the Apocryphal story of Tobit is set during the Jewish exile in Babylonian Nineveh; the text explores the great themes of religious and racial persecution, family tensions, friendship and love. Political and financial corruption contrasts with the life of the spirit and gaining wisdom.

The Times reported that these were ordinary people playing ordinary people, but they were wrong.

The people portrayed were poor and oppressed, striking chilling chords down the ages, most recently Eastern Europe, Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Were the players ordinary? No! These were brave people indeed, conquering heroes of the community.



Ben teaches the ladies how to wash



Tim Murray, conductor with Ben Wright

How many of us would volunteer to work with trained professionals in public and give our time to a tight schedule of rehearsals?

Ben Wright, choreographer and Assistant Director's careful coaching exploded the saying, "Never work with children or animals."

Cramming an adult chorus, twenty pupils from a local school, including a Chinese Dragon-like fish into a confined space can't have been easy. Getting them to sing, dance and run up and down the aisle without injuring each other or the audience took real skill. 'Music and movement' was never like this when I was a mixed infant.

The final performance brought new changes. As Raguel's men bury the latest victim of Sara's curse, a lone woman stands in silent vigil, her tranquillity a stark counterpoint to the aggressive confusion of the bride's family.

Only anticipation of Ben Wright's brilliance, could have introduced this touching moment (Well done Pat)

Moreover, it was Wright who led these "ordinary" people to share this "life-enhancing experience" (here the Times was correct).

Surely, for them he was Raphael. As Raphael led Tobias to happiness and wisdom, so Ben led these people to sing and dance.



Ashmodeus (Roderick Earle) with Sarah (Serena Kay)



James Laing as Raphael

Picture copyright English Touring Opera

Audience reaction varied from "Fine, it was alright." (Thanks Alan) to the following:

"May we take the liberty of congratulating you and all members of WCS who performed so brilliantly at Alderton Church on Saturday night. The whole production was ingenious and quite magic and, having taken Friends (quite literally) of our Summer on the Peninsular programme to the production (who were equally impressed), we felt really proud to see the involvement of the Society in a community work of this kind alongside Woodbridge School and the Britten-Pears singers. I have seen quite a few operas performed in Alderton, but this ranked as one of the best, especially as we are great fans of the Young Vic and their way of staging things. It really was a delight. What a great thing for the Society to become involved with."

More to the point, we appreciate the commitment and sheer number of (probably unsocial) hours of hard work that must have gone into this. Thank you very much for this really heart-warming finale to our Summer in the Penninsular. We hope you enjoyed it too!"

Thank you to Miles and Judi Shillingford.

## After the show, the place to be was the Ramsholt Arms.

Just before 10-o'clock there were three regular customers, two old boys and a younger man who works behind the bar sometimes.

By 10:30 the place was heaving with most of the cast and crew high on post-performance adrenalin. The two old boys took their leave early on, but the younger man took over running the bar with the young woman obviously unable to cope with this influx of custom.

The chef was there, too, and quickly called into service. A seemingly unending stream of plates piled high with good food issued from the kitchen. He was still serving food at 11-o'clock! We drank the best bitter dry in about 45 minutes.

Full marks to the staff for the way they responded to this unexpected invasion!

I left at about 11:20 but the party was still in full swing.

### In Nineveh

Tobit: Richard Burkhard

Anna, his wife: Clarissa Meek

Tobias, his son: Hal Cazalet

Raphael, an angel: James Laing

### In Ecbatana

Raguel: Bernard Abervandana

Edna, his wife: Catherine Hegarty

Sara, his daughter: Serena Kay

Ashmodeus, a demon: Roderick Earle

Raguel's men: Laurence Cole, Orjan Hartveit, Jake White

Sparrows, Fish: Children's chorus

Ninevans, Ecbatanans, River & Mountains: Adult's chorus

Ninevans, Trees: Seated chorus (SATB)