

# Noises Off

## From the Editor's desk

Well the big news in this edition is the decision by the Hexagon Management to allocate to amateur musical groups only one week a year at the theatre for their shows. This sadly ends the tradition for our Society which has, since the theatre opened in 1977, produced two shows there each year. There were but two exceptions, in the first year only one show was produced and we were unable to perform when the theatre was closed for the removal of asbestos but otherwise an impressive record.

Other groups affected are The Sainsbury Singers and The Masquerade Theatre Company. Both of these companies acknowledged that it was only a matter of time when falling ticket sales and resulting losses on shows would have forced them themselves into taking the step of reducing their appearance at the Hexagon to once a year and that the Hexagon's decision had probably anticipated that fateful day. Unlike them however, as reflected in the Treasurer's Financial Statement presented to the recent Annual General Meeting, Reading Operatic Society is in a healthy financial position. Not that the Society hasn't been making losses on its shows like the rest, but rather that energetic fund raising has mitigated those losses.

However, faced with its own budget cuts, the Hexagon Management has been forced to recognise that low audiences attending our shows have also incurred the theatre in losses, hence their decision. We have enjoyed a long and positive relationship with the Hexagon, particularly since that era when Chris Smith was Director of Arts & Leisure, and we must be pleased that we will still be welcome in the theatre, albeit for only one week in the year.

Members will be aware that theatre accommodation is in short supply in the Reading area, and even that is prohibitively expensive to hire. At first sight, at just under £9,000 a show, the hire fee for the Hexagon appears expensive, but it is less so than many alternative venues and is recognition that Reading Borough Council and the Hexagon Management have been prepared to support community activities. But there are limits and we are all victims of the current recession.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work undertaken by Officers of the Management Committee, in particular thanks go to the Chairman, Yvonne Maynard, who has worked tirelessly and with wholehearted commitment throughout the year.

There was good support from members of the Society for Jean and Barrie Theobald's Open Day and thanks go to everyone who attended who helped to make it a successful day. Of course the day could not have happened without the hard



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### WHO TO CONTACT

Editor	Brian Veale	0118 933 2672
Chairman	Yvonne Maynard	0118 948 4602
Secretary	Maggie Preston	0118 975 6387
Membership Secretary	Julia Sadler	0118 948 2438
Patrons' Secretary	Janet Hayhoe	0118 969 5759

NB. e-addresses of Committee members can be found on the Society's website at [www.readingops.co.uk](http://www.readingops.co.uk)

work and organisation of Jean and Barrie to whom we are extremely grateful.

Members of the Society are to be congratulated for an excellent turnout at the concert at St Peter's, Earley on 2<sup>nd</sup> July. We have been told many times that the Society is renowned for its chorus work and in three of the six numbers in which the chorus performed, they had the opportunity of demonstrating, to the delight of those assembled, their abilities at singing in harmony. I wonder whether, like the members of the audience to whom I spoke in the interval, some of the forty-something members who gave up their evening to take part in the concert wished there had been more numbers in which the chorus could show off their singing. Perhaps next time.

The stars of this concert for me were Sam and Kevin with their performance of *Last Night of the World* from Miss Saigon. Also memorable was Jeff, not only for his amusing song, but also for the professional way he conducted the audience through the programme. In this, very much at ease, he gave the impression that he was ad libbing throughout while clearly he must have put a lot of preparation into researching the various numbers - enabling a performance par excellence.

Brian Veale

### 100 CLUB

The winners of the JUNE 2009 draw were:

1 <sup>st</sup> prize of £20	Derek Northeast	No. 26
2 <sup>nd</sup> prize of £10	Mr D Morton	No. 84
3 <sup>rd</sup> prize of £5	Lindsay Hall	No. 101
4 <sup>th</sup> prize of £5	Annie Hogwood	No. 44

The June draw was the last in the annual cycle, and as usual there was an additional draw to use up the balance of funds outstanding. Those winning £5 prizes in this extra draw were: Maggie Preston (No. 36); Carol Hodgkinson (No. 53); Jill Lawes (No. 59); Terry Blake (No. 92); Linnea Vaughan (No. 100); Mike Cullen (No. 104). and Mrs D Adler (No. 95).

Thanks to everyone who has been a member of the 100 club - this is an invaluable source of fund-raising. In this last cycle members (through prize money) and the Society shared a total of £1,158.00.

## XMAS IS COMING - NOT YET

... but advance warning that we have been asked again to sing round Woodley's Tree of Light when they switch the Xmas lights on. Make a note of the date in your diary, 7<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2009.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

No worries about achieving a quorum then; the excellent turnout of members for the Annual General Meeting of Reading Operatic Society held at St Peter's Church Hall on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June 2009 reflected the interest in the business of the Society.

Welcoming members to the meeting the chairman, Yvonne Maynard, thanked, on behalf of the Society, the President and Committee who had supported her during the year; all those working behind the scenes without whom performances on stage would not have been possible; vice-Presidents and Patrons who have continued to support the Society during the year and particularly the dedicated group of fund-raisers who have helped to keep the Society "in the black" for another year.

In her report for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008 Yvonne explained that it has been the tradition that, as far as possible, the Society should produce alternately operetta and West End-style musical to meet all tastes, not only of the audience but of members. But because in 2008 members had been unhappy about the choice of "Annie Get Your Gun" as the musical selected by the Committee two operettas were performed in that year. While *HMS Pinafore*, which was performed in the Spring, returned a surplus of £4,086, *Die Fledermaus*, the Autumn show, incurred a deficit of £5,216 half of which cost arose as a result of the payment of royalties to the rights' holder.

Both shows maintained the Society's high standard (*HMS Pinafore* received a "Highly Commended" NODA award and those who read the NODA News will have seen the cover photograph on a recent edition was of that show) and were enjoyed by audiences; unfortunately despite maintaining low ticket prices and producing excellent shows the Society was unable to attract sufficient numbers from the Reading public and audience targets were not met. Members were urged to do their utmost for future shows and make a concerted effort to increase ticket sales.

The chairman reminded the Meeting that being a member did not mean that they only appeared on stage, but that a commitment was necessary to support the Society in many other ways - by helping with fund-raising, taking part in promoting the Society and its shows to name but two examples, and a request was made for volunteers who might be able to help with the various activities. There was too, she said, a need for members taking part in shows to be more focused about attending rehearsals. It was forecast that a more disciplined approach would be taken in the future when frequent non-attendance at rehearsal could lead to exclusion from participating in the relevant show.

Members had been forewarned before the Meeting that The Hexagon Management had seen representatives of the Society, Sainsbury Singers and Masquerade Theatre, ie those amateur societies who regularly performed in the Hexagon, when they

were informed that with effect from 2010 they would be offered only one week's slot in the theatre each year.

The chairman said that the Society's first show under the new arrangements would be performed in early September 2010 which meant that an alternative venue needed to be found for the performances of *Iolanthe* planned for the Spring 2010. As members knew, Reading was not well served with premises suitable for use by amateur societies, but the chairman confirmed that the Salvation Army had offered their hall in Reading - this theatre style hall accommodates an audience of some 400. This was being explored, while it might not be suitable for West End musicals which required multi-changes of scenery etc. it was thought it would suit a G&S operetta.

Reflecting on poor audiences at recent shows - the first show in 2009, *La Belle Hélène*, had incurred a loss of some £7K - and looking forward to the Autumn 2010 production, the chairman said that the Society should recognise and be prepared to accept changes that were taking place in amateur theatre.



Long service awards were made to:

**20 years:** Barbara Moore, Ann Peddle, Julia Sadler

**30 years:** Terry Hodgkinson, Bess Stott

**35 years:** Elaine Adamson, and

**50 years:** Janet Hayhoe, Mike Hayhoe

A special award was made to Jean Theobald in recognition of her work as fund-raiser, the certificate was presented by Vice President David Rust:



The Treasurer submitted his Financial Statement for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008 to the Meeting. This showed that the Society ended the year in surplus with net assets of £57,425.00 and meant that the target of having funds to meet the cost of 1½ to 2 future shows was met. The Treasurer warned however that as the expenditure on shows resulted in a deficit of £1,130, the surplus would not have been achieved had there not been a refund of Gift Aid, (£1,528) or income from Fund Raising (net £2,480) particularly as the cost of hiring wigs for *Die Fledermaus* had been met out of the Social Account. It was agreed that there should be no increase in the subscription rate.

At the following elections Joyce Bamford was re-appointed President of the Society. The Management Committee for 2009/10 was:

Chairman	Yvonne Maynard
Vice Chairman	Barrie Theobald
Secretary	Maggie Preston
Treasurer	Ray Fullbrook
Membership Secretary	Julia Sadler
Members	Abigail Clarke Helen Eastwood Lindsay Hall Lynne Hunter David Saunders Katie Wallis

## CATCHING UP WITH THE NEWS

**MANY HAPPY RETURNS** to Joyce Bamford who celebrated her birthday on 25<sup>th</sup> June .

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**WELCOME** to new members Liz Kessell and Rachel Toland.

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**WELCOME** to new patrons Mr and Mrs J Sumner.

## FUND RAISING DAY

We are extremely grateful to Jean and Barrie Theobald who again this year opened their garden on 13<sup>th</sup> June to raise funds for the Society. The fine weather attracted good support from Society members and others during the morning when there were brisk sales of plants etc, although the afternoon was quiet. The evening was well attended and saw many more members than normal meeting for a meal and a social exchange.

Profit to the Society from the day's event amounted to a magnificent £1,060.90. Congratulations and thanks to Jean and Barrie for all their hard work not only on the day itself, but in the preparations months before, to make this such a successful day,

## MURDERED IN AFRICA

The world was shocked when it was learned that Edwin Dyer, who was taken hostage in January 2009 while he was on a tourist trip in Africa, had been brutally murdered by an Al Qaeda cell on May 31<sup>st</sup>.

The Society's President, Joyce Bamford, remembers Mr Dyer as they both joined Maiden Erleigh School when it opened in 1962. She said, "We were both in the school choir which was led by our music teacher Paul Mundy, who at the time was the Musical Director of Reading Amateur Operatic Society. It was perhaps not a surprise when we both joined the Operatic Society, Edwin performed in HMS Pinafore/Trial by Jury and The Mikado in 1968 and 1969 respectively".

Although afterwards he moved abroad, Mr Dyer continued to support the Society and remained a patron and a member of the 100 club until his untimely death. Our sincere condolences go to his mother, Mrs Dyer, and her family.

## CONCERT (I)

It was not just because it was a summer evening that members of the Society were warmly welcomed in Earley St Peter's Church on the evening of 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2009. Many of the audience who enjoyed the programme of songs from the shows presented to them that evening had over the years been regular listeners to the Society's singing on Thursday evenings while they attended keep fit classes, parochial council meetings etc in the rooms above the rehearsal rooms. Indications were that on the whole they enjoyed seeing and hearing members of the Society in the flesh, although there was some comment during the interval that they would have liked to have heard more numbers sung by the chorus.

Refreshments ,provided by our hosts in the church grounds during the interval. were enjoyed by the audience and Society members in the late summer sunshine.

Thanks go to Earley St Peter's for inviting the Society to sing to them, to Tania Pratt for organising the event, to David Harrison for driving the piano and especially to Jeff Trim who masterfully guided the audience through all the musical numbers. Donations collected during the evening were shared by the Duchess of Kent Hospice and the church fabric fund.

## KNOW YOUR COPYRIGHT FROM WRONG - PART 2

Set out for members' information in edition 62 of this newsletter (September 2008) are the rules of copyright which apply to complete shows which the Society performs. In the Spring 2009 addition of the *NODA* (London) Magazine Jacquie Stedman, Councillor for the London Area has since reminded Societies of the rules which are applied when they perform compilation shows. These are reproduced here for information:

- ✓ "Songs from the Shows" may be performed without permission under certain conditions. Performing rights will be payable to the Performing Rights Society from whom the hall or theatre in which the concert is performed will usually have a licence. If no licence is held the PRS should be contacted.
- ✓ Not more than 25 minutes of songs from any one show should be performed.
- ✓ Costumes associated with the songs performed may not be worn.
- ✓ No scenery associated with the songs may be used.

Jacquie mentions that the rights holders employ representatives to travel round the country to watch the shows they have licensed to check that no unauthorised alterations have been made - the risk is that if a Society is caught out they chance having the show summarily cancelled and of course normal insurance would not cover any subsequent loss. There is also the chance of licences for future shows being withheld. Reading Operatic Society was caught out in this way in 1991 when alterations were made to the beginning of our production of *Carousel*. Fortunately we escaped with a reprimand and a warning that any future breach of contract would result in future licences not being granted.

## READING LIONS' DAY

Although, or perhaps because it was a hot sunny day, attendance at Reading Lions' Fun Day in Prospect Park, Reading on the afternoon of Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2009, where Reading Operatic Society had a fund-raising stall, was not as good as previous years. Even so, proceeds from the day's event amounting to £170.10 were a useful addition to Society funds. Thanks go to Jean and Barrie Theobald and Brian Veale who manned the two tombolas throughout the day and to Sam Prior, Katie Wallis and Barbara Moore who dropped in during the afternoon to help with the stalls while much welcomed breaks were taken.

Next appearance will be at Swallowfield Show, Spencers Wood on August Bank Holiday weekend. Will you be there?

## CONCERT (II)

A reminder that the Society has agreed to perform a concert of *Songs from the Shows* on **SATURDAY 7<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2009** in the Salvation Army Hall, Reading and members who are willing to participate in this are asked to let Yvonne Maynard know - a note will be on the notice board on which to indicate attendance. Not only will this be a good opportunity to sample this new theatre in advance of the production of *Iolanthe* in the new year, but as we will be showcasing the Society to a new audience it is hoped that it will again be well supported by members prepared to participate.

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## SHOWS IN 2010

Sadly *Pajama Game* will be the last show in our regime of two shows a year in the Hexagon. Under new arrangements, along with the other amateur companies, we have each been allotted a single slot in 2010 by the Hexagon Management. Our slot is for the week commencing 6th September when the Committee has decided that the Society should perform *Disco Inferno*. Set in 1976, this show features memorable songs of the 70s and is described as the "Devilish new 70s musical". Loosely based on the story of Faust, *Disco Inferno* is a high energy musical guaranteed to warm hearts, get feet tapping and audiences leaving the auditorium with a daft grin of pleasure and the fondest memories of a sensational era. This show has enjoyed sell-out audiences and promises to be an exciting nostalgia trip (dig out your platform shoes and flares) or a brand new experience depending on your age.

You will have read in the January 2009 edition of this newsletter that it was planned that in 2010 we would continue the tradition of alternating operetta with musicals. Gilbert & Sullivan's *Iolanthe* had already been pencilled in on the calendar as our Spring 2010 show before the news broke that the Hexagon would be limiting access by amateur companies to one show a year. Clearly we shall be unable to put this show on in the Hexagon as planned.

Instead, as announced by the chairman at the AGM, *Iolanthe* will be performed in the Salvation Army Hall in Reading during the week commencing 15<sup>th</sup> February 2010. With Reading ill-served with suitable premises available to amateur companies to perform shows we are certainly fortunate to be offered this venue which is in a prime site in the centre of the town with access to adjacent car-parks.

## CONCERT (III)

The Society will be teaming up with the Masquerade Theatre for a Christmas concert entitled "Deck the Hall" on **13<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2009** at the Concert Hall in Reading. The programme will include a selection of the best in festive song writing from Broadway Shows, Hollywood Films, Popular Ballad, Traditional Songs and Carols.

Starting at 5pm so that all the family can enjoy the seasonal music, it promises to be a sparkling festive concert. Tickets will be priced at £15 for adults with a discount of £2.50 for concession holders. Details of when and where tickets will go on sale will be published nearer the time, but make a note in your diary now.

## THINKING OUT LOUD

Are you an active Member, the kind who would be missed,  
Or are you just content that your name is on the list?  
Do you attend the functions and mingle with the crowd?  
Or do you stay at home and grumble long and loud?  
Do you take an active part to help the Society along,  
Or are you satisfied to be the kind that just belong?  
Do you ever come along or information seek,  
Or leave the work to just a few, and talk about "The Clique"?  
There's quite a programme schedule that means success if  
done,

And it can be accomplished with the help of everyone.  
So why not come along and help with hand and heart,  
Don't be "just a Member", but take an active part.  
Think this over Members, are we right or are we wrong,  
Are you an active Member, or do you "Just Belong"?

(With acknowledgement to *NODA Magazine*)

## DAISY'S DREAM

It was planned that the Society should sing at the Oracle, Reading to help raise funds for the charity, Daisy's Dream, on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2009. Perhaps fortunately, as there would probably have been little preparation time, it was found that the Oracle had double booked us with others so our presence was not required. Instead we have another slot in **SEPTEMBER**, either **12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup>**, which will enable preparation for a short programme. Shortly before our performance of *The Pajama Game* this will provide a much better opportunity of publicising the show to the Reading public. But it is imperative that there is a good turnout if the public is to be impressed. There will be a note on the notice board, please read it and indicate whether you would be available and prepared to take part.

## THANK YOU

And finally, a thank you from Jean Theobald for the flowers and certificate presented to her at the AGM. In a letter to the newsletter she said "I have been part of the Society since 1960 when I was persuaded to serve interval teas etc at the old Rainbow Hall during show week - no change there. I enjoy my "behind the scenes" role and hope to be able to continue raising funds for years to come. However I couldn't do the fund-raising without the support of many other people to whom I give thanks on your behalf".