

Noises Off

From the Editor's desk

"Another opening, another show", so it was with La Belle Hélène, the first time that this show has been performed by the Society. Unfortunately, despite heroic efforts by your Chairman, who was successful in securing unprecedented levels of advertising in the various media, and despite innovative ticket pricing plans, the great Reading public, either through apathy, lack of interest or perforce the effects of the credit-crunch, did not rush to fill seats in the auditorium. Only 1023 bums were seated during the week when there were some 3900 seats available. A long way from our target for each show, which to guarantee break-even or even make a profit, is to have 50 per cent of the auditorium filled each night. Because ticket sales for LBH fell well short of this target, inevitably, the resulting ticket revenue will not guarantee that the production costs will be met. We shall know exactly how much the shortfall is when the final accounts are available.

Reading Operatic Society traditionally has followed a policy of ensuring that it should always hold a bank balance of at least $1\frac{1}{2}$ times the cost of an average show. In other words prudence dictates that even a total loss on a show should never result in the insolvency of the Society.

However the shortfall incurred by LBH follows a similar one incurred with Die Fledermaus and the Society cannot continue to suffer such losses if the required bank balance is to be maintained. No responsible committee can commit the Society to the expense of a show when it knows that solvency depends on ticket revenue from that show.

The Society's largest outlay in putting on a show is of course the fee paid to the Hexagon for the hire of the theatre. Although, as an amateur company, we are said to benefit from reduced hire fees nonetheless they have still increased exponentially over the years and further increases can be expected in the light of the Council's quest for economies. With add-on charges for commission on ticket sales, a charge for tuning the piano, charges for over-runs (we have to be out of the theatre by 11pm) to list a few, currently the hire fee can be expected to be circa £9K. Unlike many amateur companies in other areas who find that the hirer gives preference to professional companies we are grateful to the Hexagon for their support in the field of advertising and promotion.

Because, as a charity, the Society's aim is to promote musical theatre it has always been the aim not to increase ticket prices to the same level charged by professional companies so that people unable to afford professional shows can still enjoy live theatre. It follows that if the pattern of losses continues,



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WHO TO CONTACT

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NB. e-addresses of Committee members can be found on the Society's website at www.readingops.co.uk

other ways of meeting the gap between income and expenditure must be explored. At the risk of repeating ad nauseam the exhortations previously aired in this newsletter members must accept that membership involves more than just appearing in costume on stage two weeks in the year and that they have responsibility to sell tickets. If members are still unable to sell tickets, and promote shows to prevent losses in the first place, they must be prepared to help raise funds in other ways. But if failure to sell is because members lack confidence and don't want relations, friends and acquaintances to see them on stage, just reflect that our shows can be guaranteed to be of a high standard.

Do you read NODA News? Probably not is the answer. Circulating the magazine to every member in the Society is difficult as only receives two or three copies are received. But while it is impractical to reproduce all the contents of the magazine in this newsletter selected items of interest are printed, now NODA is looking at the possibility of publishing the magazine on the internet - website www.noda.org.uk. In the meantime, if you would like to borrow the current magazine to read articles and other interesting facts submitted by other amateur societies - eg did you know that kimono's should be fastened left side over right? Useful to know when you next perform The Mikado perhaps - you should contact either the Chairman or Secretary.

Brian Veale

100 CLUB

The winners of the FEBRUARY 2009 draw were:

1 st prize of £20	John Gibbs	No. 68
2 nd prize of £10	Barbara Rust	No. 99
3 rd prize of £5	Sheila Baxter	No. 06
4 th prize of £5	Mrs M Hurdsweil	No. 71

And the winners of the MARCH 2009 winners were:

1 st prize of £20	Ann Peddle	No. 29
2 nd prize of £10	Rita Barnes	No. 63
3 rd prize of £5	Jean Pratt	No. 56
4 th prize of £5	Julia Sadler	No. 77

SOCIETY'S WEBSITE

A reminder that the Society's website can be found at
www.readingops.co.uk

CATCHING UP WITH THE NEWS

OLDER MEMBERS will be shocked and saddened at the news of the sudden death on 23rd February 2009 of Alan Fisher who, until he moved to the West Country, was heavily involved in the Society. Our condolences to Jennie and family.

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CONDOLENCES go also to Shirley and family on the death of past member Roger Taylor on 10th January 2009.

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CONGRATULATIONS to Sheila and Alan Baxter on becoming proud grandparents to Megan Jessica on 13th February 2009.

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MANY HAPPY RETURNS to Carol Hodgkinson and Sam Murray who both celebrated their birthdays on St Valentine's Day

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BEST WISHES for a speedy recovery to Ray May who suffered an injury to his knee in November 2008 and who is still convalescing.

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CONGRATULATIONS & BEST WISHES to Jean and Barrie Theobald's daughter Jane on her marriage on 12th March 2009.

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BEST WISHES to Bess Stott for a successful convalescence after her hip replacement.

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CONGRATULATIONS & BEST WISHES to Jo Hodges for her future wedding on 30th May 2009.

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WELCOME to new patrons Mr S White and Mr R W Wootten

SHOW NEWS - LA BELLE HELENE

The benefit of not appearing on stage is that one has the opportunity of sitting in the audience to get their perspective on the performance - attendance in the audience should be a requirement from time to time for all singers so that they can understand what the audience is looking for. And being front of house one also has the opportunity of mingling with the audience in the interval to get their views on the evenings' performances.

A common comment from the audience was how enjoyable the performance was with tributes on the quality of the singing, costumes and scenery. The one

common thread early in the week however was that the singing of the principals and chorus was so often overshadowed by the volume of the orchestra - why, I was asked by one member of the audience, did we need as many as 19 musicians who seemed more accustomed to playing in a wind band than as an orchestra accompanying singers on stage. And apparently many in the audience had difficulty hearing the proceedings during the prologue.

But by the end of the week the orchestra were less exuberant; and when I sat in the audience on Friday evening it was to see a thoroughly enjoyable show and the departing audience on the final night were lavish were their unqualified praise. Congratulations surely go to all involved with the production for putting on such an enjoyable show. It was such a pity that there were so few in the audiences to share the enjoyment.



Guests on Thursday included the Mayor of Reading, Councillor Beard, and his wife, pictured during the interval with life members Geoff and Molly West who chaperoned the mayoral party on behalf of the Society. Also welcomed at Thursday's performance was NODA representative, and Committee member for the London Region, Henry Hawes (who had a particular interest as he was a member of the audition panel which selected most of the principals), and NODA Regional Councillor Jacquie Steadman, who attended with her husband.

SPRING JUMBLE SALE

A reminder that the Society will be holding its annual Spring Jumble Sale on **SATURDAY 23rd MARCH 2009**: the place: **ST PETERS CHURCH HALL**, open to the public at: **10.30am** (helpers from 8.30am please).

Although final figures are not yet available it is clear that the poor audience attendances at our recent production of La Belle Hélène will mean that the Society will incur a substantial loss on the show. It goes without saying that fund-raising becomes of paramount

importance for the Society if we are to continue our programme of shows in the future.

One consolation in the present financial situation is that people are likely to be more careful how they spend their money; jumble sales therefore are expected to be more successful as people look for good second-hand bargains.

So please turn out your cupboards, wardrobes, garages, under the stairs etc to make this a successful sale. Please, though, ensure that items are saleable, for example no greasy pans, cracked or broken china, electrical items - don't let people use this opportunity to make the Society a receptacle for their unwanted rubbish; if we are unable to sell items we have to dispose of them.

However much jumble we are given, success at the sale is dependant on enough members being available to set up the stalls and man them throughout the morning. So please set aside the morning of **23rd MARCH** to support the Society. It is helpful if the organisers have an idea of the level of support before the day, so please let either Lynne Hunter or Katy Wallis know if you can help.

THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOUR HELP

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

If you haven't yet paid your annual subscriptions then you are too late to benefit from the £12 discount which would have been available had you paid before 28th February 2009,

ARE YOU A TAXPAYER? If so have you completed the Gift Aid form so that the Society can reclaim the basic rate of 20 per cent of your tax through the scheme? Although this year the basic rate of tax is now 20 per cent the Society, as a registered charity, can still reclaim from the taxman 28p for every pound donated.

ARE YOU A HIGHER RATE TAXPAYER? Although the Society can directly claim only the basic tax rate of 20 per cent, higher taxpayers themselves can still claim back from the taxman the 20 per cent difference between the basic rate and the higher rate and donate this to the Society. You will need to claim this through your tax return or by calling your local tax office. The Society's charity registered number is at the head of this newsletter. Every little helps, and if the taxman is prepared to give us money let's take up his offer!

THANKS TO ALL THOSE PATRONS who have renewed their support for the Society. We are grateful to all our Patrons who support the Society, both by donations and by attending our performances, particularly at this time of financial restraint.

SHOW NEWS - NEXT SHOW

As indicated in the last newsletter, the Autumn show at The Hexagon, between 22nd and 26th September 2009, will be:-



Auditions, open to members and non-members, for principal parts will take place at St Peter's Church Hall, Church Road, Earley on **Sunday 5th APRIL 2009**

starting at 2.30pm. The audition panel will comprise Trevor Defferd, Henry Hawes, Jill Morgan, John Lawes and Yvonne Maynard.

Details of the music and libretto audition pieces have been listed at the Society's website at www.readingops.co.uk; members who do not have access to the internet can find details posted on the notice board at rehearsals or alternatively may obtain details from any member of the committee. For the first time electronic copies of the musical pieces will be available and can be obtained from the Chairman, Yvonne Maynard, who you can reach at yvonne@readingops.co.uk. There will be a run-through of the audition music pieces on **Monday 23rd MARCH 2009**.

Anyone wishing to audition should let Julia Sadler, the Membership Secretary, know of their intention not later than seven days before the audition date so that preparations can be made for the day. Exceptionally members wishing to audition who are unable to attend on the prescribed date may, at the discretion of the panel, be seen on an alternative date. Julia can be reached at julia@readingops.co.uk. An audition fee may be payable by non-members but this would be set against the membership fee if the non-member is successful in obtaining a part.

The first singing rehearsal will take place on **Thursday 19th MARCH 2009** a "read through" took place on the evening of **Thursday 12th MARCH 2009**.

NODA NEWS

The National Operatic & Dramatic Association is again this year holding its summer school at Loughborough University. As a member of the Society, which is affiliated to NODA, you are automatically classed as a member of NODA and eligible to attend the summer school. Held between 1st and 8th August 2009 and designed for adults of all ages and experiences, the week of unrivalled, intensive training for amateurs

promises to be a popular way to spend some of the summer holiday.

If you're passionate about theatre why not take up this wonderful opportunity to learn more about your preferred theatre craft or perhaps try something new?

Courses available include Directing Youth Theatre, Choreography, Stage Make-up and Stage Sound. For details of what's available visit the NODA website on www.noda.org.uk

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This is your formal notice that the Annual General Meeting of Reading Operatic Society which will be held at St Peter's Church Hall on **THURSDAY 11th JUNE 2009** starting at 8 pm. A copy of the Agenda and relevant documents to be put before the AGM will be sent to members nearer the date.

In the meantime members are reminded that written notice of any business which a member wishes to be transacted at the AGM, including nominations for President, Vice Presidents, Chairman and other officers (each for a one year term), 2 Committee Members (each for a three year term) and auditor should be sent to the Secretary no later than **14th MAY 2009**.

Nominations, on the appropriate form, must be signed by the proposer and seconder (who must both be members of the Society) and countersigned by the nominee to indicate acceptance of the nomination. The nominee must also confirm that s/he is not disqualified from acting as a Trustee of a Charity.

A copy of the Society's Constitution can be found on the Society's website (go to the page "How to join"). If you don't have access to the internet and would like a hard copy please contact Brian Veale (0118 933 2672).

CONCERT (1) - 25TH APRIL 2009

Thanks to those members who have indicated that they will be supporting this charity concert which will be held on **SATURDAY 25th APRIL 2009**. The concert will take place in the Salvation Army Hall, Lower Earley, this holds an audience of some 300 so the challenge is selling tickets, clearly the Salvation Army will be active in this but it is hoped that Society members will take their part in promoting the show and selling tickets. Admission is £5 and the proceeds will be shared between the Salvation Army's charity and the Duchess of Kent Hospice. Any member who wishes to participate and has not yet put their name forward should contact Yvonne Maynard asap. at the Salvation Army Hall, Lower Earley.

There was a good turnout at the first rehearsal in preparation for the concert which took place at St Peter's Church Hall on Monday 16th MARCH 2009. At this rehearsal three of the numbers which will feature in the concert - items from Oklahoma! The Boyfriend, and Die Fledermaus,- were run through Further rehearsals are scheduled for the following dates: Mon 30th March; Mon 6th April; Thurs 16th April; Mon 20th April and Thurs 23rd April. Please make a note in your diary now.

CONCERT (2) - date to be announced

Following the successful venture last June we have been asked again by the Arborfield Parish Council for a repeat appearance. Details have yet to be finalised so watch the notice board.

OFFERS ON LONDON MUSICALS

"Show Pairs", the UK's No. 1 ticket discount scheme, is pleased to offer NODA members a credit crunching discount for the sensational West End productions of *Grease* and *Chicago*. Buy one ticket and get one free! Show Pairs is absolutely free to join - to be added to their mailing list all you need to do is to register online at www.showpairs.co.uk. Current offers are:-

GREASE - Two top price tickets for £53.50 at the Piccadilly Theatre, Denman Street, London WC2. Offer valid until 3rd April 2009.

CHICAGO - Two top price tickets for £55 at the Cambridge Theatre, Seven Dials, London WC2. Offer available until 27th March 2009.

To book, call 020 7907 7077 or go online at www.showpairs.co.uk

THE PAJAMA GAME - Memories

With his rugged looks and strong baritone voice, the Canadian born singer Edmund Hockridge was one of the West End's biggest stars in the 1950s.

He played leading roles in a string of popular musicals. his favourite of which was *Carousel*, in which he appeared for 1300 performances. As we start rehearsals for *The Pajama Game*, members of the cast who have scanned the dramatis personae listed in the vocal score may have noticed that he played Sid Sorokin in the original production which opened at the Coliseum, London on 13th May 1954. "*Hey There*", from that show gave him his biggest record hit and became his signature tune.

Sadly Edmund Hockridge died on 15th March 2009 aged 89.