

Theatre arts review

Full-bodied sound with lavish costumes

GUILDFORD Opera Company (GOC) was on good form for its latest production at the Electric Theatre – Verdi's *A Masked Ball*.

The score captures the intensity of situation which Francis Griffin, as GOC's guest conductor and musical direc-

tor, maximised to full effect, with the orchestra offering a lush and full-bodied sound that resonated throughout the auditorium.

Revolutionary Europe in the late 18th century is the backdrop for the action, based around King Gustav III of

Sweden's assassination in 1792: he was shot while attending a masked ball, although Verdi's opera provides little historical accuracy or detail.

The 18th century, however, offered Kris Benjafield as the GOC's wardrobe mistress, full scope for colour and drama

and she seized that opportunity. Played against the restrained set designs of Jackie Shearer, the costuming was lavish and considered.

At times it additionally supported the conspiratorial mood as the collective effect of billowing gowns momentarily

obscured or distracted attention – particularly effective in the grand ball scene.

A strength of Guildford Opera has long been its chorus and ensemble work. This production once again reached high levels of discipline and artistry.

Voices soared in a confident and cohesive manner interpreting a score that appeared comfortably within range; never once did I feel it out of control or beyond capability.

Stage director Jacquie Shearer mostly opted for a tableau effect, using the small

acting area of the Electric Theatre stage in a practical and satisfying manner.

The principals played in two teams and appeared on alternate evenings. I saw "the Thursday team" and warmed to Jan Barklem as Amelia – the catalyst for the King's undoing

– and the cheeky interpretation of Asuka Kurogi as Oscar the page.

Kevin John was suitably regal as King Gustavo, and Peter Barber as his cuckolded friend Renato played well against him.

Jeff Thomson

Songwriter delivers the goods

IT'S not every night you hear a love song dedicated to Stansted Airport, nor a truly memorable lyric such as "Jesus had a lot of soul/He was a whole lot bigger than rock n' roll" (part of a ragtime gospel blues number *Make a Little Time For Jesus*).

But these were just two of the highlights from the singer-songwriter Martin Stephenson's sets at Farncombe Music Club on Friday last week.

Between-song banter is nothing new, but between-lyric banter is a little unusual and quite difficult to pull off.

Frequently Martin would interrupt himself mid-song with an aside to the audience. Many found this entertaining, but several – this reviewer included – found that his off-the-cuff comments were a distraction from the lyrics of his songs.

However, when he got down

to the serious business of singing and playing, Martin Stephenson showed he could deliver the goods.

Martin's partner, Helen McCookerybook, is a singer-songwriter herself and she opened the evening with a short set of self-penned songs. She is no slouch on the guitar either, supporting her lyrics with some finely crafted playing.

Grahame Morrison



Martin Stephenson at the Farncombe Music Club.

Powerhouse's play stuns young audience

A NEW Guildford drama company, Powerhouse Theatre, launched its programme aimed at young people with a two-act play *Pretty Ugly* at the Electric Theatre.

Playwright Geoff Lawson based his text on a harrowing book, *Anorexia: A Stranger in the Family* – the autobiographical account of a young woman's phobic attraction to weight loss, the emotional trauma she experiences, her

hospitalisation and her ultimate recovery. He did so with an uncompromising authority and flair.

A stunned audience was led through Katie Metcalfe's teenage obsession with body image, fuelled by a seen alter-ego who sabotages family efforts to support her.

The domestic arguments were handled with a persuasive authenticity – so much so, I began to feel like an involved

neighbour. I readily identified with Katie's dad (Richard Burnip), who finds his situation bewildering, with few easy answers. Traditional explanations for anorexia are represented – the influence of size zero models and teen magazines. Lyset (Gary Cross) satirised all-purpose fashion and beauty articles. His cross-gender editor became a domineering, manipulative and totally resistible persona. The

cast offered a good example of tight ensemble-playing with Hannah Ryan so believably lost as Katie but well supported by Jo Theaker as the alter-ego and troubled friend Nicola.

Powerhouse has set up a youth advisory group who will feed their views into our future projects to make sure they are relevant and accessible, and it seems to have been launched well.

Jeff Thomson

Oysterband back to their best at the Maltings

SOMETHING like 30 years on and folk rock legends Oysterband are sounding positively reinvigorated.

They have released a string of excellent albums over the years but

their latest, *Meet You There* (Westpark Music), is reckoned by many to be their best ever.

They stormed into Farnham Maltings for the final date of a tour

to promote the album. They were in majestic, magnificent form, launching straight into two glorious cuts from the album, *Over The Water* and *Where The World*

Divides. They were the first of a total of seven songs from *Meet You There* and just served to show that the Oysters are definitely back at their very best, both as writers and

performers – singer John Jones leading the line in his imperious way, with Ian Telfer, Alan Prosser and Chopper following closely behind.

Alan Golden

Composers celebrated

A CELEBRATION of British Composers was the apt title of the Guildford Symphony Orchestra's splendid concert last Saturday in Guildford Cathedral, under the energetic and skillful direction of Darrell Davison.

A full orchestral programme was further enlarged by the inclusion of a Christmas carol medley, *Tidings of Joy*.

Lucy Baker was the eloquently authoritative soloist in Delius's lyrical *Violin Concerto*. Ingenious programme-planning placed this work between Bax's colourfully evocative symphonic poem *Tintagel* and Walton's post-Elgarian *Crown Imperial March*.

In contrast, we moved from early last century to the present, and from the established to the young. Local schools had been invited to submit new carols, and five were selected and

enthusiastically sung by the massed choirs of the schools concerned, enhanced by Darrell Davison's well-judged orchestrations.

What a wonderful experience for the young poets and composers, and for all the children singing. High praise is due to the music teachers at Waverley Abbey, Longacre, Guildford High, Connaught Junior and Rydes Hill schools for their inspirational guidance.

There was much to admire in the concluding performance of Elgar's monumental *First Symphony*. A few loose ends occurred but, with minimal professional support, these were far outweighed by positive virtues.

The orchestra rose to the challenge and captured the work's intricate structure and wide range of moods.

Sebastian Forbes

Win Christmas!

Wouldn't you love to take the stress out of Christmas and win a host of goodies for the Festive Season all in one go? The Surrey Advertiser and White Lion Walk shopping centre in Guildford is offering you the chance to do just that – with prizes from the shops within the Centre.

Take a look at just some of the prizes you could win from the shops at White Lion Walk:

- A beautiful necklace from Swarovski – who'll be wearing this on Christmas morning?
- A £50.00 voucher from Next – who'll get their hands on this one?
- A coffee machine from Robert Dyas – just the job to accompany those mince pies!
- A host of goodies from Starbucks, including Christmas blend coffee, coffee cups etc
- A £50.00 voucher from The Cotswold Company – brighten up your home with this great gift!
- A Teddy Bear to love from Trotters
- A large, handmade Dream Catcher from Apache Tears, to make your Christmas dreams come true!
- An elegant necklace and £50.00 voucher from Jacques Vert – the perfect combo' of jewellery & cash!
- A £30.00 voucher from Art – so you don't have to draw on your savings!
- A box of "freshly baked 18 cookies" from Millies Cookies to share with Father Christmas – if he's lucky!
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For your chance to win all the prizes listed above – and more – simply answer the question and send your entry to White Lion Walk, Marketing Department, Stoke Mill, Guildford, GU1 1QA by 20th December 2007 – the lucky winner will be presented with their wonderful Festive Prizes on Friday 21st December at White Lion Walk by the Shopping Centre Manager, Steve Cotney.

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Plus, there is an amazing range of dress fabrics from the basics through to designer lengths. Haberdashery and patterns are in stock too.

This winter Snake necklaces are proving to be an ideal Christmas present as they can be worn in a variety of different ways – simple yet striking!

Whether it's a fabulous new outfit for the festive season or a few unique presents and stocking fillers you are looking for, Mad Jak is well worth a visit.

Open Monday to Saturday, 9am to 5:30pm.

Pawfect Dog School

THE Pawfect Dog School (PDS) is a fully insured, privately run facility, situated in Cranleigh.

Set among five acres of privately owned land, the school was inspired by the owner's own dogs, in order to share the experience and knowledge she has learned first hand, since she began her dog handling journey many years ago.

In a calm, tranquil setting, the school lends itself perfectly to a unique training methods. It is a safe, secure environment that allows learning that's conducive to achievement and progress.

The unique training methods are used to engage owner

Yummi Scrummi

YUMMI Scrummi is offering a total body conditioning and fitness solution for real women, with real lives, real parties to go to and real

cravings for chocolate.

It is also ideal for those who simply want to look gorgeous for their wedding day, great for the beach and fab for everyday life.

Yummi Scrummi's speciality lies in weight loss, body toning, massage and nutrition targeted specifically at today's busy women

Its mission is simple; to keep women feeling totally energised and seriously fit.

Yummi Scrummi is dedicated to providing a personal service that specifically caters to a woman's needs when it comes to a happy and healthy lifestyle, fitness

Sandra Dawn Beauty Clinic

MAKING the difference at the Sandra Dawn Beauty Clinic has been a long established tradition spanning 27 years.

It is well known that skin care, including depilatory treatment, body massage, manicures, pedicures and alternative therapies, are some of the services offered in beauty clinics.

Not so much is known about paramedical treatments such as laser hair removal, successful acne treatments, mole and wart removal and semi-permanent makeup, which can be used to enhance a made up look. It can also be used in conjunction with post-operative scars, camouflage on areas where pigment has faded on the lip, realign and correct a misshapen lip as in the case of harelip.

The most amazing result is being able to, either, reconstruct or improve the colour and shape of the areola and nipple area after a mastectomy. This can be a valuable treatment in cases where further surgery is not an option. Most importantly of all this treatment will help to rebuild a woman's confidence.

Call 01483 506364 for an in-depth explanation, photo-

Grovewood Home Improvements

GROVEWOOD Home Improvements aims to help its customers install the windows and doors they've always dreamed of while doing their bit to help the planet.

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It offers the award-winning Tricrest PVC-U window system, as well as internally glazed slimline widows, wood-white maintenance-free windows, hardwood windows, sash and Crittal windows.

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