

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by - CHRISTINE DOUGLAS - 2001 Churchill Fellow

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Introduction

My overall purpose was to observe teaching and directing methods for the education and development of young Australian opera performers – U.K .and U.S.A.

This Fellowship was undertaken between April and June of 2001 and was partially funded from my own savings and partially by the Trust.

I would like to thank the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for the special opportunities my Fellowship offered me and look forward to keeping the Trust informed of the progress made by the project which has emerged from my research.

I hope the Trust will accept my sincere apologies for the late lodgement of my report.

Executive Summary

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Guest Artist Soprano Oz Opera

Project description:

To observe teaching and directing methods for the education and development of young Australian opera performers – U.K .and USA

Highlights and most useful people:

Royal Northern College of Music:
Director of Opera Studies Stefan Janski

Glimmerglass Opera:
Director of Artistic Administration Nicholas G. Russel
Director of YAAP Kathleen Kelly

San Francisco Opera:
General Director Lotfi Mansouri
Merola Program Director Richard Harrell

Major lessons learnt:

- April is not the best month to visit music colleges in the UK. Many classes are suspended as they rehearse for the end of academic year recitals, exams and performances in May.
- UK music colleges are extremely well run and funded and supported at the top levels of society.
- The range of subjects in singing courses is far more extensive than in Australia.
- The study programmes are highly coordinated with performance opportunities within the colleges.
- Influential industry practitioners are regularly invited in to give masterclasses and coachings, thus keeping connections with industry alive.
- Regular open auditions are held which provide audition experience for the students and an ongoing knowledge of the development of individuals by their future employers.
- A great deal of effort is put into successful donorship programmes and the establishment of prizes and bursaries.
- In the USA private, corporate and foundation donations are enormous. Taxation laws are geared to making this attractive.
- Study and performance opportunities are even more highly coordinated and geared to individual needs than in the UK.
- Young artists are developed to a much higher standard than in Australia before being placed in high pressure performance situations. Burnout is less prevalent.

Dissemination and implementation of lessons learnt.

I plan to establish a Professional Development Centre for opera singers in NSW. After initial discussions I am now at the stage of costing an inaugural Summer School to be held in November 2002. This will provide a starting point for a level of industry oriented professional development which is not available at this time. I have been successful in attracting top level industry professionals, Renato Fresia, Italian coach for Opera Australia and Ghillian Sullivan, leading soprano at OA to join me in this venture. Richard Bonyng and Simone Young will also be approached. It is hoped that if we attract sufficient young Australian talent and sufficient funding, we will grow to eventually include a State wide touring company.

Main Body

My Fellowship was a rare chance for me to concentrate on my ideas for directing and training in opera without the usual demands of my day to day commitments. In many ways the most precious thing was having the time to focus on my ideas. Being in places where one could go out and seek answers to the questions that arose was a little like finding oneself in a vast, living reference library.

The planning and organisation which had taken such a lot of time before I left continued to do so once I had arrived. I had been unaware that April was not a very good month for music study institutions in the UK. Many classes were over for the year as the students prepared for their final performances in May. Thankfully there was still much to see and hear and staff with whom to speak but it is worth noting for any future Fellowship holders who wish to visit the music teaching institutions in London.

What I went looking for

I set out to find what sort of training was available for young opera singers in the UK and USA. I wanted to know how this training was delivered and funded, what standard of singers were accepted into the programmes and how this training lead to real jobs in the industry. I also looked at the way two of the top UK stage directors were working in opera.

Where I did it

In the UK I concentrated mainly on colleges, studios and companies which have a policy of casting young singers where possible. In the USA my enquires were based in Young Artist Programmes, (YAPs). (YAPs in Australia have between 4-6 young singers and sometimes conductors who, on a contractual basis, perform large and small main stage operatic roles and take part in whatever masterclasses, language and movement classes can be fitted into their busy schedules.)

What I found

All the UK music colleges offered extremely well funded, comprehensive training programmes. Attitudes varied from place to place with regard to the importance placed on certain subjects such as language. The RNCM for instance offered Czech and Russian in addition to the standard French, German and Italian. This type of specialization caters to the individual who may be showing a particular talent for the repertoires of a certain composer and is rarely, if ever, available here. An extremely wide range of subjects was on offer in most colleges, covering all the facets needed to develop as an artist. Classes ranged from the obvious such as singing and musicianship through to Courtly Dance through the ages, diction and stagecraft, staged programmes of play scenes (no music) and communication in performance. In addition masterclasses are given by notable experts in their fields and regular visits are made by senior coaches from the major companies.

The most important element in the success of the training is the coordination of the study programme with the many performance opportunities on offer and the delivery of sufficient funding to do it well. Entire operas and excerpts are produced in the schools, some even having professionally staffed theatres which are available for external hire. Recitals and outreach education programs also offer performance opportunities. Private individuals and corporate sponsors are found to contribute cash prizes to the most promising performers. A range of scholarships and bursaries are available for local and overseas students. (Annual

fees of over 10,000 pound are charged for OS singers.) The colleges are supported at the highest levels of society and do not struggle for funding in the same way that Australian tertiary institutions do.

The YAPs I saw in the USA were extremely comprehensive and geared to the individual's needs. They offered a great deal of performance opportunity without the pressure of the main stage. The San Francisco Opera Centre, first begun as a development and training program for singers, conductors and technicians in 1954, today provides a coordinated sequence of performance and study opportunities for the 24 or so young artists invited annually. SFOC also administers a series of performance and education programs and touring companies into which suitable trainees can progress and begin their lives as paid professionals. Ultimately some singers will go on to become Adler Fellows-San Francisco Opera's resident artist's program where they will share the main stage with the world's best. It is considered counter productive to place emerging artists into such a high profile arena until they are truly ready. It is unfortunate that we do not do likewise in Australia.

Glimmerglass Opera uses a different model. Running as a summer festival, young artists are paid a small weekly sum in addition to full board to take part in the summer season either as chorus or small part players. They share the stage with the new crop of young professionals which gives them exposure to the next level. Masterclasses and private coachings are available and a Recital program runs throughout the season to give further individual performance opportunities. These are supported by opera patrons and the local community which is about 4 hours drive out of NYC. The funding and donorship program is extraordinary in its scope and success.

Programme.

Welsh National Opera	Isabel Murphy Marriage of Figaro	Director of Opera Planning Performance Stage Director Neil Armfield (A co-production with Opera Australia)
English National Opera	Nicholas Selman Il Trittico Rehearsals Steve Moffitt Alice King-Farlow Rebecca Branch Mary King Janice Chapman David Freeman	Company Manager Performance Morning to Midnight Stage Director Richard Jones Assistant Director Rhian Hutchings Choreographer Linda Dobell Head of the Baylis Programme Baylis Programme Manager Projects Officer The Knack - Core tutor, music and voice Private voice teacher Freelance director. Former Artistic Director of Opera Factory, London and Zurich
Royal College of Music	Michael Rosewell Dr Aaron Williamson	Head of Opera Studies Research Fellow in Psychology of Music and Project Leader of Zoning In: Motivating the musical mind.
Glyndebourne Festival Opera Fidelio	Bernard Davies Rehearsals. Deborah Annaliese	Company Manager Warner Stage Director Assistant director
Britten-Pears School For Advanced musical Studies	Tisi Dutton Anthony Rolfe Johnson Anthony Rolfe Johnson	Director Director of Singing Studies Masterclasses
National Opera Studio	Hugh Lloyd Showcase 2001	Administrator Performance
Royal Northern College of Music	Stefan Janski Jennifer Hamilton Barbara Robotham Bethan Rys-Williams Anna Sweeney	Director of Opera Studies Tutor in communication in performance Tutor in Pedagogy, Oratorio, Voice Tutor in Movement and Dance Movement Masterclasses
English Touring Opera	Katherine Herbert Manon by Massenet	Chief Executive Performance
Guildhall	Clive Timms Going into Shadows by Andrew Schultz	Head of Opera Studies Rehearsal
Glimmerglass Opera	Nicholas G. Russel Kathleen Kelly Lorna Haywood L'Etoile Marriage of Figaro	Director of Artistic Administration Young American Artists Program Director of YAAP Vocal Tutor Rehearsals Rehearsals

San Francisco Opera
San Francisco Opera
Centre

Lotfi Mansouri
Richard Harrell
Suor Angelica
Gianni Schicci

General Director
Director
Rehearsals
Rehearsals

Conclusions and Recommendations

Two things stood out from all my discussions with opera companies and training institutions in the UK and USA . One was the need for passionate advocates for excellence in training and the other was the need for sufficient funds to do it

Based on my observations I recommend a more rigorous, industry oriented style of training be developed here in Australia along the lines of the excellent programmes at Glimmerglass Opera in upstate New York and The Merola Program at San Francisco Opera. Central to this is the continuous flow of information and ideas between employers, trainers and trainees in order to maintain and sustain the vitality of the scheme.

The best way I can think of to improve the Australian situation is to start such a programme here. The inaugural *Professional Development Summer School in Sydney to be held in November 2002 will be the first step toward this goal. My colleagues Renato Fresia, Ghillian Sullivan and I are in discussion with potential staff and expert tutors. We are currently approaching leading industry figures including Richard Bonyngue and Simone Young for their participation. It is hoped that we will attract sufficient young Australian talent and funding to grow and eventually include a State wide touring company. This will provide the performance opportunities so vital to the training process.

As soon as the final costings are complete we will be seeking backing in the form of direct funds or scholarships to keep the charges within the realm of the students' resources. It is hoped that the creation of such a school will spark discussion and reform in the wider operatic community. Certainly a forum at the close of the first Summer School is an idea we are working on. The venue will be central and easily accessed by public transport.

Other improvements that should be made in Australia include an overhaul of Primary and Secondary music education. The level of participation is extremely low in the majority of schools here in comparison with overseas. This is seriously detrimental to the development of musically gifted Australian children and to the development of appreciation in future audience members, not to mention levels of public philanthropy.

Most Australian YAPs run by the Opera companies could use an injection of funds and the will to be relevant if they are to be meaningful as anything but cheap labour.

**Working title only.*