

TITLE PAGE

Churchill Fellowship Report

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by – PATRICK LIM – 2005 Churchill Fellow

The Mr and Mrs Gerald Frank New Churchill Fellowship
to study the style, methodologies and strategies used by stage directors at the English
National Opera and follow a major opera through its production process.

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Signed: PATRICK LIM

Dated: 10 October 2006

INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of my Churchill Fellowship was to study with stage directors at the English National Opera in London. However, with additional support, I was able to extend my time overseas and expand my project to achieve a variety of additional outcomes.

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust afforded me the remarkable opportunity to spend time overseas and engage with arts practitioners of the highest calibre in my field, and to study within the workings of a major European opera house. My sincere thanks to the English National Opera who gave me full access to a wide range of their productions, directors and artists, and actively involved me in their planning department and production process.

Thank you to Mrs PD New whose sponsorship enables two Churchill Fellowships each year, one for excellence in classical music or voice and one for training carers for dementia and Alzheimer sufferers. These fellowships, named The Mr and Mrs Gerald Frank New Churchill Fellowships, are a wonderful way for Mr New to be remembered, in making a significant contribution to outstanding professionals in two industries.

I would like to acknowledge the English National Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera and the Royal Opera in London, Jean-Paul Fouchécourt in France, Qantas and the State Opera of South Australia back home, as well as many individuals from these organisations to whom I offer personal thanks.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Mr and Mrs Gerald Frank New Churchill Fellowship to study the style, methodologies and strategies used by stage directors at the English National Opera and follow a major opera through its production process.

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust afforded me the remarkable opportunity to spend time overseas and engage with arts practitioners of the highest calibre in my field, and to study within the workings of a major European opera house. My sincere thanks to the English National Opera who gave me full access to a wide range of their productions, directors and artists, and actively involved me in their planning department and production process.

London is a major centre of the international opera industry and my directing fellowship with English National Opera provided me with a dynamic environment in which to develop my skills as an opera artist. During my time at the English National Opera, eight operas were in performance, rehearsal or workshop, which provided an amazing plethora of material for my study. I was able to see each of these productions at various stages in their process and was thrilled to also be able to work on *Nixon in China* as a staff director, enabling me to assist the directors and see the production through from day one of rehearsals to the final performance. From each production and its director I was able to learn something different: a stylistic approach of interpretation, a methodology of working in the rehearsal room, or a strategy for realising an artistic vision and dealing with the unexpected. This was a unique opportunity to learn from a wide range of practitioners in an intensive block of time, for which I am most grateful.

Whilst in London I was able to visit the two other major opera houses: the Royal Opera and Glyndebourne Festival Opera. Their productions were similarly of an exceptional calibre and they stimulated my interest in the director's role in interpreting or re-interpreting an operatic story in ways that will both respect the intentions of the opera's original creators (composer and librettist) and give renewed relevance to the work for its artists and audiences. Another aspect of my Churchill Fellowship was to visit France to work with my singing mentor Jean-Paul Fouchécourt. This was a very rewarding time, working on operatic technique and repertoire with a master of the genre and my particular voice type.

My fellowship provided me with such a source of inspiration for the directing work I have been doing, but it also allowed me to examine in close detail a broad field of work and working methods within the discipline. The information I have learned has been on a creative and very practical level, and so my method of disseminating this information will likewise be through creative and practical means. My role as a director has an educative aspect to it, but I am also directly involved in arts education, which gives me a platform to share my knowledge, teaching at a range of arts based institutions and as Artistic Director to the Festival of Music for schools. However, the foremost way in which I will implement what I have discovered and learned, will be through my own work as a director and in the creation of my own productions, which to date have enabled many independent artists to collaborate on a professional level and extend their experience and repertoire. I now look forward to utilising my experience as it shapes and informs my future work in opera direction. I hope that my development as an artist will be of benefit to our local industry. I know that my understanding has been sharpened and my creative influences broadened by this experience and I will be pleased to put this into practice.

PROGRAMME

I visited the United Kingdom and France during my Churchill Fellowship, between April and July 2006.

In London, I undertook a directing fellowship at the English National Opera, and also visited Glyndebourne Festival Opera and the Royal Opera.

In France, I worked specifically with principal tenor Jean-Paul Fouchécourt.

MAIN BODY

My fellowship enabled me to spend a large block of time in London, which as a major centre of the international opera industry provided me with a more dynamic environment in which to develop my skills as an opera artist. It also exposed me to the workings of a major European opera house and afforded me the chance to work with a range of arts practitioners I would otherwise not have had the opportunity to meet.

The English National Opera is based in the recently refurbished London Coliseum (adjacent Trafalgar Square) and presents a large repertory season each year. The company has a tradition of performing operas in the English language, which appeals to audiences for accessibility, but it has also built a reputation for presenting very innovative productions. During my time at the English National Opera, eight operas were in performance, rehearsal or workshop. This provided an amazing plethora of material for my study.

- *Madama Butterfly* (a new production, Anthony Minghella's first opera)
- *Orfeo* (a new production by Chen Shi-Zheng)
- *La Belle Hélène* (an acclaimed Châtelet production in a new translation)
- *Gaddafi: A Living Myth* (a commissioned new work in workshop stage)
- *The Makropulos Case* (a new production by Christopher Alden)
- *Ariodante* (a revival production by David Alden)
- *King Arthur* (a co-production with the Mark Morris Dance Group)
- *Nixon in China* (Peter Sellars' acclaimed original production)

I was able to see each of these productions at various stages in their process and was thrilled to also be able to work on *Nixon in China* as a staff director, enabling me to assist the directors and see the production through from day one of rehearsals to the final performance.

From each production and its director I was able to learn something different: a stylistic approach of interpretation, a methodology of working in the rehearsal room, or a strategy for realising an artistic vision and dealing with the unexpected. This was a unique opportunity to learn from a wide range of practitioners in an intensive block of time, for which I am most grateful.

At the English National Opera I was also given the opportunity to work with the planning department, which is part of the artistic administration. This enabled me to observe the roles of a variety of their staff members, and to assist in some capacity with daily tasks and more long-term scheduling tasks. This was a useful way for me to apply my own skills in

this area and through practical experience to develop these skills and come to appreciate their methods of operational planning as a major arts organisation.

Whilst in London I was able to visit the two other major opera houses: the Royal Opera and Glyndebourne Festival Opera. The Royal Opera, commonly known as Covent Garden, shares the Royal Opera House with the Royal Ballet and boasts a large season of mainstage works as well as a studio theatre where a number of more unusual pieces are performed, often by visiting companies. I was pleased to meet with the Royal Opera's Head of Staff Directors who gave me an insight into the workings of their house and their directors, and a tour of their facilities. Their staff directors each have different specialities such as movement or a particular operatic language (Italian, French or German predominantly, also Russian and Czech).

I saw all of the Royal Opera's repertoire that was in season during my time in London which comprised *Götterdämmerung*, *Duke Bluebeard's Castle / Erwartung*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Tosca*, *Turandot* and *Don Pasquale*. I also enjoyed a variety of work in their Linbury studio theatre including new operatic works and works featuring young artists. The immensity of their overall program was quite staggering and I was also interested to find out about their audience development and accessibility strategies, with a number of initiatives in place to provide a very broad range of ticket pricing and day-seats.

During the 2006 Adelaide Festival, immediately prior to my Churchill Fellowship, I had the wonderful opportunity to assist the director on Glyndebourne Festival Opera's production of the opera *Flight*. This introduced me to the company 'on tour' and I was thrilled to then be able to visit Glyndebourne at its famous home location in East Sussex. I was very privileged to be given access to Glyndebourne's studio and theatre rehearsals. I was able to observe the work of several directors, particularly Nicholas Hytner on his new *Così fan Tutte*, Daniel Slater on a new production of Prokofiev's *Betrothal in a Monastery*, David McVicar reviving his acclaimed *Giulio Cesare*, and Deborah Warner's revival of *Fidelio*. All of these productions were of an exceptional calibre and they stimulated my interest in the director's role in interpreting or re-interpreting an operatic story in ways that will both respect the intentions of the opera's original creators (composer and librettist) and give renewed relevance to the work for its artists and audiences.

The second aspect of my Churchill Fellowship was to visit France to work with my singing mentor Jean-Paul Fouchécourt. Fouchécourt is a renowned tenor, singing principal roles with the Royal Opera in London, the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and many companies across his native France. It was a very rewarding time working with him during my fellowship, being able to focus on operatic technique and repertoire with a master of the genre and my particular voice type. This study enabled me to review my technique and discover nuances of voice production that I had not hitherto encountered in Australia. It has given me a basis on which to found the next stage of development for my voice and immediately given me a revitalised confidence in what I am achieving. Upon my return to Australia I was delighted to win Adelaide's Aria Competition: the Arnold Matters Vocal Scholarship, and I look forward to continuing the work that I started with Fouchécourt. Whilst in France I also briefly visited the Aix-en-Provence Festival, famous for its opera program.

CONCLUSIONS

My fellowship provided me with such a source of inspiration for the directing work I have been doing, but it also allowed me to examine in close detail a broad field of work and

working methods within the discipline. Each production and its director gave me something to take away that will take practical effect in my own work.

At times what I was learning challenged my perception of the scope of the director's role and how what it encompasses can vary in different contexts. I enjoyed working with a range of directors in different capacities too: directors, associate directors, assistant directors, staff directors and movement directors. Having now had my own experience in each of these aspects of directing, it was useful to observe others in these roles and their various interactions and contributions to the process.

The information I have learned in the process of my Churchill Fellowship has been on a creative and very practical level, and so my method of disseminating this information will likewise be through creative and practical means. My role as a director has an educative aspect to it, but I am also directly involved in arts education, teaching at a range of arts based institutions and as Artistic Director to the Festival of Music for schools. These avenues give me a platform to share the knowledge gained during my Churchill Fellowship. However, the foremost way in which I will implement what I have discovered and learned, will be through my own work as a director and in the creation of my own productions, which to date have enabled many independent artists to collaborate on a professional level and extend their experience and repertoire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is difficult to make recommendations from my fellowship in my field. Australia and Europe have vastly different opera industries, and we naturally do not have the tradition or audience base for opera here, to compete on the scale in which opera is produced in Europe.

Furthermore, risk taking and innovation can be attempted more readily when that risk can be spread across a larger season. A more defined target demographic, such as we have in Australia, also limits the boundaries of what is achievable. Sydney, which hosts our industry's national company, is somewhat different to our other cities, having a more diverse audience through a greater percentage of tourists, and tourists specifically attracted to the icon that is the Sydney Opera House. This facilitates a larger season and more repertory approach to programming than the other opera companies; naturally the size of each company and its audience determines what resources they have to work with and what results can be aimed for. During my fellowship I observed companies with strong human resources, enabling productions to be undertaken with creative teams boasting a number of staff to handle different responsibilities within the overall process. This allows a clearer delineation of roles within a production process and each aspect to be coordinated in greater detail. Ultimately the artistic success of each production still comes down to the vision and talent of its one director, but the team they have to work with and the efficiency of the company's operations can greatly enhance the ease of the process and the calibre of the results.

At the conclusion of my Churchill Fellowship, I now look forward to utilising this experience as it shapes and informs my future work in opera direction. I hope that my development as an artist will be of benefit to our local industry. I know that my understanding has been sharpened and my creative influences broadened by this experience and I will be pleased to put this into practice.