

*Altrincham Choral Society*

*A Night at the  
Opera*

*Steven Roberts*

*Conductor*

*Lydia Bryan*

*Piano*

*Janet Fischer*

*Soprano*

*John Pierce*

*Tenor*

*Royal Northern College of Music*

*Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2010*

## **Altrincham Choral Society**

Altrincham Choral Society is a large mixed voice choir that offers amateur singers in the South Manchester/North Cheshire area the opportunity to learn and perform a range of music including major choral works.

There is a high standard of performance and concerts are well attended. The society is directed by an ambitious and inspirational conductor.

Altrincham Choral Society prides itself on offering a diverse, innovative and challenging programme of concerts, alongside many choral favourites. This forward thinking is complemented with a commitment to choral training and standards which provides its members with the knowledge and confidence to thoroughly enjoy their music-making.

Rehearsals are on Monday evenings at Altrincham Methodist Church, Springfield Road, Altrincham – off Woodlands Road (opposite the Cresta Court Hotel). We are only 5 minutes walk from the train/metro station.

Rehearsals are from 7.45 – 10.00 pm

For more information you can contact us in a variety of ways:

E-mail: [info@altrincham-choral.co.uk](mailto:info@altrincham-choral.co.uk)

Telephone: P Arnold (Secretary) 01270 764335

Or log onto our web-site [www.altrincham-choral.co.uk](http://www.altrincham-choral.co.uk) where you can find more information about the choir, future plans and photographs from previous concerts including Verona and Florence. You can also add your name to our mailing list and keep up to date with forthcoming concerts and events.

## *The Chorus*

Brenda	Adams	Dudley	Harrop	Frances	Provost
Joy	Anderson	Liz	Harwood	Ian	Provost
Sara	Apps	Bill	Hetherington	Linley	Roach *
Pat	Arnold *	Jane	Hollinshead	Doris	Robinson *
Ann	Ashby	Catherine	Horrocks *	Kate	Robinson
Joyce	Astill *	Valerie	Hotter	Christine	Ross
Kate	Barlow	Gail	Hunt	Jenny	Ruff
Janet	Bedell	Rosemary	Hurley	Stephen	Secretan
Laura	Booth	Karen	Jarmany	Audrey	Sharman
Frances	Broad *	Alan	Johnston	Fiona	Simpson
Anne	Bullock	Elizabeth	Jones #	Isabel	Sinagola
Melissa	Burgess	Rodney	Jones	Susan	Sinagola
Anthony	Campion	John	King-Hele *	Isobel	Singleton
Anne	Carroll	George	Kistruck	Colin	Skelton *
John	Charlton *	Elisabeth	Lawrence	Audrey	Smallridge #
Barbara	Clift *	Jan	Lees	David	Swindlehurst
Barbara	Coombs *	John	Lees	Audrey	Taylor *
Michael	Cummings	Gill	Leigh	Brian	Taylor
Adrienne	Davies	Keith	Lewis	Elizabeth	Taylor
Jacqueline	Davies	Annie	Lloyd-Walker	Adrienne	Thompson
Marie	Dixon	Emma	Loat	Ted	Thompson *
Jean	Drape *	Rosie	Lucas *	Malcolm	Thomson
Richard	Dyson	Sarah	Lucas	Jane	Tilston
Kathy	Duffy	Gavin	McBride	Jean	Tragen
Liz	Foy	Helen	McBride	Gill	Turner
Joyce	Fuller	Hazel	Meakin	Elaine	Van Der Zeil
Rima	Gasperas	Cathy	Merrell	Joyce	Venables ++
Trevor	Gilmore	Juliana	Morley	Catherine	Verdin
Terry	Goodill	Catherine	Mottram	Christine	Weekes
Estelle	Goodwin	Pamela	Moult	Geryl	Whitaker *
Bryan	Goude *	John	Mulholland	Brian	Whitehouse
Ann	Grainger	Jessica	Murrills #	Helen	Whitehouse
John	Grainger	Julian	Mustoe	Kath	Whyte
Margaret	Greaves *	Maureen	Netting *	Yvette	Willey *
John	Greenan #	Norma	Nock	Julia	Williamson
Pauline	Griffiths	Christine	O'Kell	Brenda	Wood
Jane	Hardman	Neville	Oates	Andrew	Wragg *
Katharine	Hargreaves	Terence	Oddy	John	Yates
		Melanie	Preston		

\* Denotes 20 yrs or more      # Denotes 30 yrs or more      ++ Denotes 40 yrs or more

The Society invites our supporters to become Patrons or sponsors of ACS. They receive advance publicity, complimentary tickets, reserved seating for all performances and are acknowledged on the choir web-site and in all programmes.

If you are interested in becoming a patron or sponsor of the society, please contact P Arnold 01270 764335.

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## **Steven Roberts**

Steven Roberts has combined a career in education with his work as a conductor, musical director and adjudicator, working both in this country and in Europe and as far afield as Peru and Bahrain.

Despite a very busy educational career Steven has conducted numerous groups, including the Liverpool Welsh Choral Union, The Huddersfield Choral Society, Dodworth and Skelmanthorpe Male Voice Choirs and a variety of orchestras, brass bands and wind ensembles, as well as being Chorus Master for concerts with Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and José Carreras.

He is currently Musical Director and Conductor with the Altrincham Choral Society, and also holds the same position with the Chesterfield Philharmonic Choir. Steven has also worked as musical director for a number of theatrical productions, and this diversity reflects his music and drama training.

Steven is Music and Company Development Director with Sing Live UK which has seen him conduct in some of the country's most prestigious concert halls, including the Royal Albert Hall (London), the Bridgewater Hall (Manchester), Symphony Hall (Birmingham), the Waterfront Hall and Ulster Hall, Belfast, Birmingham, Leeds and Huddersfield Town Halls, the Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, and Sheffield City Hall.

Steven has conducted numerous concerts throughout this country but also in Germany, France and Italy and with a variety of ensembles and orchestras.

He has acted as vocal coach for concerts at the Royal Albert Hall, London and at the FM Hallam Arena in Sheffield, as well as conducting in the College Gardens of Westminster Abbey for The Lady Taverners and at Mass in St Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, Rome and also in St Mark's Basilica, Venice.

Steven is an adjudicator member of the British and International Federation of Festivals, regularly adjudicating in this country and also acts as a Music Mentor for Music for Youth. He is also a member of the Board of Trustees of the Federation.

Steven is an associate member of The Lord's Taverners, the cricketing charity that raises money to give 'young people, particularly with special needs, a sporting chance'.

## **Lydia Bryan**

Lydia is a graduate of the Royal Northern College of Music where she studied piano, harpsichord, violin and singing. She specialised in piano accompaniment at postgraduate level.

Her professional concert career started as a winner of the North West Arts Young Musicians' Platform and also with concerts awarded through the Live Music Now scheme, founded by Sir Yehudi Menuhin. She won a British Council Scholarship towards concerts and recording work in Hungary, where she gave performances at the University of Budapest, the residence of the British Ambassador and the Kodály Institute.

Lydia has accompanied regularly for master lessons with John Cameron and Peter Pears, and has performed in master classes for Bernard Roberts and Vlado Perlemuter.

She has performed many times at the Royal Exchange Theatre for the Manchester Midday Concerts and also at the Purcell Room, and appeared as concerto soloist at the RNCM as well as recording for BBC radio and television.

Lydia has toured extensively as soloist and accompanist in Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, France, Italy and throughout the British Isles.

Her concert repertoire is wide-ranging; she has worked with many eminent contemporary composers and has performed works by Alexander Goehr and David Gow at the Society for the Promotion of New Music. She was also the accompanist for the 'Art of Song' courses at Higham Hall and has been official accompanist and adjudicator for music festivals in both the UK and abroad.

Lydia teaches at Manchester Grammar School and Loreto School in Altrincham and has been resident accompanist to Altrincham Choral Society since December 1996. She has many successful professional musicians amongst her past pupils.

### **Janet A.N. Fischer**

Canadian soprano Janet first explored her passion for music at the age of three. Following in her older brother's footsteps she studied the violin until at age 18 she decided to embark on a singing career. She graduated from the RNCM under the tutelage of respected senior professor Barbara Robotham.

Janet loves that her job allows her to travel and has performed in some far flung and unusual places from China to Venice, via Canada, the US and Europe, although the most interesting place she has ever found herself was 5 feet in the air on top of a plinth in an art gallery!

Janet's previous appearances in opera have included the *Female Chorus* (Rape of Lucretia), Countess (Nozze di Figaro), *Dog Fox and Cockerel* (Cunning Little Vixen), *Donna Anna* (Don Giovanni), *Dorabella* (Cosi Fan Tutte), *The Witch* (Rusalka), *Susannah* (Susannah), *Magda* (The Consul) *Tatiana* (Eugene Onegin), *Die Gräfin* (Capriccio) and *Marianne* (Tartuffe).

She is no stranger to the concert platform either, having sung Mahler *Magna Peccatrix - 8<sup>th</sup> Symphony* (Sage Gateshead), Mahler *4<sup>th</sup> Symphony*, *Grüber Frankenstein!* (Wigmore Hall), Lewis *Beyond the Heavens* (World Premiere), Nunes *A Winter's Night* (World Premiere), Berlioz *Les nuits d'été*, Beethoven *Ah, Perfido!* (London Chamber Soloist Orchestra) and Beethoven *9<sup>th</sup> Symphony* (LMO).

Janet enjoys working with others who share her passion for music and is an avid Oratorio singer. She has performed Beethoven *Missa Solemnis*, Verdi *Requiem*, Brahms *Ein Deutes Requiem*, Mozart *Mass in C minor*, Bach *Magnificat*, *St. John Passion* and *Cantata BWV.80*, Haydn *Creation*, Mendelssohn *Elijah*, Rossini *Petite Messe Solennelle* and Handel *Messiah*.

Janet has been fortunate to work with some of the leading musicians of today, singing under the baton of Janos Furst, Tibor Boganyi, Mark Shanahan, Clark Rundell, Matthew Wood, Bramwell Tovey, Mark Elder and others. She has also had the opportunity to learn from such artists as Jane Eaglen, John Mark Ainsley, Paul Kiesgen, Nelly Miricioui, Claudio Desderi, and has also been a pupil of Sherrill Milnes and Dame Ann Evans at the Britten-Pears Young Artist Program.

In her spare time Janet is an avid scuba diver and extreme sports enthusiast and is currently writing her MBA.

## John Pierce

John Pierce trained at the Royal Northern College of Music with Jeffrey Lawton. Currently a student at the National Opera Studio in London he was awarded an Independent Opera Scholarship to continue his studies with Ryland Davies.

Operatic roles at the RNCM included Rodolfo *La Bohème*, and full-scale productions of *Die Fledermaus* (Alfredo) and *Katya Kabanova* (Boris). He was also a finalist of the Frederick Cox Prize, winner of the Joyce and Michael Kennedy Strauss Prize and Elizabeth Harwood Memorial Prize. As a recipient of the Prince of Wales Advanced Study Award he performed for Prince Charles at an event celebrating his 50<sup>th</sup> year as Prince of Wales.

John joined Glyndebourne Festival Opera chorus and took part in their productions of *Falstaff*, *L'Elisir d'amore*, *Rusalka* and *Tristan und Isolde*.

His many concert and oratorio appearances include Handel *Messiah*, Beethoven 9<sup>th</sup> *Symphony*, Mozart *Requiem*, Karl Jenkins *The Armed Man*, Rossini *Petite Messe Solennelle* and *Stabat Mater*, Puccini *Messa di Gloria* and Mendelssohn *Elijah*.

Sponsored by Welsh National Opera at the NOS John also receives support from the Lionel Anthony Scholarship and the Susan Chilcott Scholarship.

Future engagements and commitments include being finalist for the Welsh Singer of the Year 2010, performing the role of Rodolfo in *La Bohème* for British Youth Opera and covering the same role at English National Opera in the autumn.

# Act I

<i>Wagner</i>	<i>The Mastersingers</i>	<i>Procession and Chorale</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
<i>Wagner</i>	<i>The Flying Dutchman</i>	<i>Spinning chorus</i>	<i>Ladies Chorus</i>
<i>Puccini</i>	<i>La Rondine</i>	<i>Chi il bel sogno di Doretta</i>	<i>Soprano solo</i>
<i>Donizetti</i>	<i>L'elisir d'amore</i>	<i>Una furtiva lagrima</i>	<i>Tenor solo</i>
<i>Mozart</i>	<i>The Magic Flute</i>	<i>Priests' chorus</i>	<i>Mens Chorus</i>
<i>Puccini</i>	<i>La Boheme</i>	<i>Your tiny hand</i>	<i>Tenor solo</i>
<i>Puccini</i>	<i>Gianni Schicchi</i>	<i>O mio babbino caro</i>	<i>Soprano solo</i>
<i>Verdi</i>	<i>Il Trovatore</i>	<i>Soldiers' chorus</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
<i>Verdi</i>	<i>La Traviata</i>	<i>Matadors' chorus</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
<i>Verdi</i>	<i>Nabucco</i>	<i>Chorus of the Hebrew slaves</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
<i>Mascagni</i>	<i>Cavalleria Rusticana</i>	<i>Easter hymn</i>	<i>Soprano solo and Chorus</i>

# *Act II*

<i>Rimsky-Korsakov</i>	<i>Mlada</i>	<i>Procession of the nobles</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
<i>Verdi</i>	<i>Rigoletto</i>	<i>La donna e mobile</i>	<i>Tenor solo</i>
<i>Strauss</i>	<i>Die Fledermaus</i>	<i>Klänge der Heimat</i>	<i>Soprano solo</i>
<i>Verdi</i>	<i>Macbeth</i>	<i>Witches' chorus</i>	<i>Ladies chorus</i>
<i>Verdi</i>	<i>Macbeth</i>	<i>Chorus of Scottish refugees</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
<i>Puccini</i>	<i>La Boheme</i>	<i>O Soave Fanciulla</i>	<i>Soprano &amp; Tenor solo</i>
<i>Weber</i>	<i>Der Freischütz</i>	<i>Huntsmens' chorus</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
<i>Verdi</i>	<i>Il Trovatore</i>	<i>Anvil chorus</i>	<i>Chorus</i>

## **Wagner**

Procession and chorale

(Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg)

The *Meistersinger von Nürnberg* was completed in Switzerland, where Wagner had taken refuge from the hostility caused by his extravagance and political meddling. It was first performed 21 June 1868 in Munich and is the only non-tragic drama that he wrote. The story is woven around the historical figure of Hans Sachs (1494-1576), shoemaker, poet, dramatist and member of the German guild of Meistersingers. In the opera, a mid-summer song contest is about to take place, in which Eva, daughter of the goldsmith, is the prize. A revolutionary youngster, Walther, (who happens to be in love with Eva), confronts two old masters; the cobbler poet Hans Sachs, and the town clerk Beckmesser. Walther wins; the pedantic Beckmesser cannot understand why he loses. Sachs recognises that he is of the older generation (so forgoes winning Eva for himself), but reminds the crowd that the impetuosity of youth needs artistic discipline in order to uphold the tradition of true German art. The *Procession of the Mastersingers* is heard in act three as the town assembles for the contest. Sachs appears, and the crowd spontaneously acclaims him, breaking into a rendition of one of his compositions, '*Wach' auf*', - a song in praise of the dawn. The text is by the historical Hans Sachs, the dawn referred to being Luther's Reformation.

## **Wagner**

Spinning chorus

(Der fliegende Holländer)

Wagner was in Paris when he wrote *The Flying Dutchman*, the first of his long series of operas based on legend. He was thirty when it was first performed 2 January 1843 in Dresden.

In the story the devil condemns a Dutch captain to sail the oceans until doomsday unless he finds a faithful woman to redeem him. He is allowed to land once every seven years to search for her. On one such occasion, the Dutchman moors in a Norwegian port. He offers the captain of a nearby ship his treasures if he can be permitted to woo the captain's daughter, Senta.

Act two begins with the *Spinning chorus*: the women sing while they spin, and as they do so, Senta gazes at a portrait of the mythical Flying Dutchman, to whom she is attracted.

In act three, the Dutchman hears Senta reject her previous suitor and, fearing that she may also reject him, puts to sea. Senta declares her love for the Dutchman and fearing she has lost him, casts herself into the sea. The Dutchman's ship vanishes, and he, redeemed at last, is seen embracing her above the waves as the curtain falls.

### **Puccini**

Chi il bel sogno di Doretta  
(La Rondine)

*La Rondine* (The Swallow) was written as an operetta for Vienna. It is set in Paris and the Riviera in the 1850's. Magda de Civry, mistress of the wealthy Rambaldo is giving a party in her Paris home. A poet-philosopher reads Magda's palm and predicts that, like the swallow, she will fly away from Paris, perhaps to find true love.

After meeting the young Ruggero, the prediction comes true, but Magda feels unworthy of his love, and finally returns to Paris and Rambaldo, leaving behind the one love of her life.

### **Puccini**

Your tiny hand is frozen  
(La Boheme)

A tender, tragic story of love among the artists and residents of the Latin Quarter, La Boheme is a perennial favourite of opera fans. Set in Paris, the first scene is in a lonely garret on Christmas Eve in the 1890's where Rudolfo the poet sits writing by candlelight. Mimi knocks at his door and says that she has lost her key and a draught has blown out her candle.

In the confusion Rudolfo extinguishes his candle and in the darkness they both search for her key. Rudolfo cleverly waits for the opportunity to touch her hand. "Che gelida manina" he says gently, "your tiny hand is frozen!"

## **Mozart**

Priests' chorus

(Die Zauberflöte)

Mozart's last opera, premièred in September 1791, is a mixture of fairy story and pantomime with an imaginative portrayal of Masonic ritual and symbolism. His letters reveal it to be a work with which he identified closely.

The opera is set in Egypt. Tamino, a Prince is in love with Pamina, daughter of the Queen of the Night. The young couple are led through a series of trials before they are allowed to marry. 'O *Isis and Osiris*' is sung to introduce the lovers' trial by fire and water.

## **Donizetti**

Una furtiva lagrima

(L'elisir d'amore)

L'elisir d'amore (The Elixir of Love) is an opera in two acts and is one of the most frequently performed of all Donizetti's operas. The aria "Una furtiva lagrima," is the romanza taken from Act II of the opera and is sung by Nemorino.

Nemorino is in love with Adina, and to win her heart, Nemorino buys a "love potion" with all the money he has in his pocket. The "love potion" is actually a cheap red wine sold by a travelling con man. But as Neromino sees Adina weeping, he knows that she has fallen in love with him and that the "Elixir" has worked.

## **Puccini**

O mio babbino caro

(Gianni Schicchi)

*Gianni Schicchi*, a comic opera in one act, premièred in Italy in 1919, is based on an episode in Dante's *Inferno*.

Gianni Schicchi is a sly rogue who, under the guise of helping his friends obtain their just inheritance, devises a plan to impersonate a dying man, and before lawyers dictates a new will leaving something to each of the relatives, but keeping the best for himself.

## **Verdi**

Soldiers' chorus  
(Il Trovatore)

The first performance of Verdi's *The Troubadour* was on 19 January 1853 at the Teatro Apollo in Rome. The opera is set in Spain in the early fifteenth century and is based on a play by Antonio Garcia Gutiérrez that had been an immediate success in 1836.

The plot is a complex one of gypsies and mistaken identities. The *Soldiers' chorus* comes near the beginning of act three as the troops are told they will assault the enemy the next day.

## **Verdi**

Matadors' chorus  
(La Traviata)

The opera is based on the novel by Alexander Dumas 'La dame aux camélias (1848), which Verdi had seen in its stage version in 1852. Dumas gave a modern Parisian setting to his partly autobiographical work.

The opera opens with a party at the house of a fashionable courtesan, Violetta. Alfredo, in love with her, sings the *Brindisi* (an alternation between a soloist, who calls on the company to raise their glasses, and a choral response), which is taken up by the chorus and repeated by Violetta. Their love develops, she abandons her former life, and they set up home together.

But Alfredo's father persuades her to leave him, since the scandal of the liaison is preventing the marriage of Alfredo's sister and so Violetta writes to Alfredo saying she is returning to her old life.

At another party, in act two, friends of Alfredo turn up dressed as matadors and sing of their fearless life gambling with fortune. When Alfredo arrives, Violetta lies that she loves her new protector. In act three Alfredo realizes the true nature of her sacrifice but it is too late: Violetta dies of consumption.

The opera was first performed on 6 March 1853, at La Fenice Venice.

## **Verdi**

Chorus of the Hebrew slaves  
(Nabucco)

Verdi wrote in 1879 that he was given the libretto for *Nabucco* and when he looked at it, it fell open at '*Va, pensiero*'. The opera's triumphant success was due at least in part to the melody to which he set this paraphrase of Psalm 137. It is recounted that all the stage-hands, at the first run of performances in 1842 at La Scala, would gather every night in the wings to hear the great chorus. It is sung by the Israelites as they lament the loss of their homeland, and was soon widely interpreted as a political gesture, becoming an anthem of Italian patriotism. At Verdi's funeral the crowd spontaneously broke into it.

The narrative, which derives from a French play produced in Paris in 1836, is set around the biblical story of the Jews in Babylonian exile in 586BC.

## **Mascagni**

Easter hymn  
(Cavalleria Rusticana)

*Cavalleria Rusticana* was Mascagni's first and only real success. With this one act opera he won first prize in a competition sponsored by the Milan publishers Sonzogno. At its première, on 17 May 1890, at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome, it was given a tumultuous reception, making its composer famous over night and attracting numerous admirers, including Verdi and Puccini. It began a vogue for similar one act works, in contrast to Wagner's long musical dramas. With Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* of 1892 it represented the beginning of 'verismo' opera, sharing a concern with what was at the time considered a realistic portrayal of rural life.

The action takes place in a village in Sicily. The story of the opera is one of love, betrayal, and death, and the function of the *Easter hymn* is to provide local colour and show the religious devotion, which is another side of the hot-blooded Sicilian character.

## **Rimsky-Korsakov**

Procession of the nobles  
(Mlada)

Première on 1 November 1892, at the Maryinsky Theatre, St Petersburg and described by its composer as a 'magic opera-ballet', *Mlada*, is the fourth of Rimsky-Korsakov's fifteen operas. It is very much a pretext for displaying pageantry, ballet sequences and scenic effects. It is set in 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> century Slav lands.

Mlada, herself, is one of the rare non-singing title roles in opera, for before the action begins, Voislava, daughter of Prince Mstivoi, who desires Yaromir, Mlada's husband, has murdered her. In the fourth act the ghosts of Yaromir's ancestors inform him of Voislava's crime. She is condemned to death and, in a flood and earthquake Yaromir dies, thus being united forever with his beloved Mlada. The *Procession of the nobles* takes place at the beginning of act two when the princes assemble at a national festival.

## **Verdi**

La donna e mobile  
(Rigoletto)

Rigoletto is an opera in three acts. The Italian libretto was written by Francesco Maria Piave based on the play *Le roi s'amuse* by Victor Hugo. "La donna è mobile" ("Woman is fickle") is the cynical Duke of Mantua's canzone from Act III of the opera - The inherent irony being, of course, that it is the callous playboy Duke himself who is "mobile" (fickle).

Before this song's first public performance, Verdi demanded that this aria was rehearsed under tight secrecy: a necessary precaution, because soon after its first public performance every gondolier in Venice was singing it.

## **Strauss**

Klänge der Heimat  
(Die Fledermaus)

Subtitled 'The Bat's Revenge', *Die Fledermaus* tells us how Dr. Falke revenged himself on his friend, Gabriel Eisenstein who, after a fancy dress ball, pushed Falke, dressed up as a bat, into a fountain.

Faulke was left to make his own way home at dawn, much to the amusement of the local urchins.

At a subsequent masked ball, Prince Orlofsky introduces the guest of honour, a Hungarian Countess wearing a mask, who sings "Klänge der Heimat" (Sounds of my Homeland) to convince guests that she is the Hungarian Countess she pretends to be. Von Eisenstein is greatly attracted by the Countess, little suspecting that the mask conceals the features of his own wife, Rosalinda whose appearance at the party has been stage-managed by Dr. Falke as the final move in his revenge.

Mistaken identities, flirtations at a masked ball, elegant frivolities and confusions of all kinds provide a hilarious vehicle for some of the younger Strauss's most melodious and captivating music.

## **Verdi**

Witches' chorus

Chorus of Scottish refugees  
(Macbeth)

*Macbeth* is an opera in four acts by Verdi to a libretto by Piave based on Shakespeare's play. The first performance was on 14 March 1847, in the Teatro della Pergola, Florence. Verdi's frequently voiced perception of this first version was of an important work, ennobled by its Shakespearean theme, and one that he had successfully converted into dramatic substance. He had set himself a new standard with *Macbeth*; - one that he rarely retreated from in subsequent works.

The *Witches' chorus* makes an atmospheric opening to the first act of the opera set in a Scottish wood (Shakespeare's 'blasted heath'). The *Chorus of Scottish refugees*, one of Verdi's finest choral utterances, from the 1865 version, has as its theme the plight of an oppressed country and its people (as does the Hebrew slaves' chorus).

## **Puccini**

O soave Fanciulla  
(La Bohème)

Having fallen in love on first meeting, Rodolfo later wants to leave Mimi because of her flirtatious behaviour.

However, he is wracked with guilt as Mimi is very ill and he feels their life together may have worsened her health. They reunite for a brief moment at the end of the opera before Mimi dies.

## **Weber**

Huntsmen's chorus  
(Der Freischütz)

First performed on 18 June 1821, Berlin, *Der Freischütz* embodies the German romantic love of the forest and the mysterious (sometimes sinister) power of nature.

There is to be a shooting contest: the winner will marry Agathe, the daughter of the chief forester, and will succeed him. The favoured candidate, Max, is off form. Another forester, Caspar, tempts him to visit the Wolf's Glen, where, under the auspices of Samiel, the Wild Huntsman, they can make seven magic bullets. Six are used for hunting: the seventh goes where Samiel chooses. At the contest Max accidentally shoots Caspar, but is forgiven and allowed to marry Agathe after a year's penance. Hunting music pervades the opera; the *Huntsmen's chorus* comes in act three, shortly before the final denouement.

## **Verdi**

Anvil Chorus  
(Il Trovatore)

The *Anvil chorus* opens act two: gypsies (who earn their living as tinkers) are striking their anvils and singing in praise of the approaching dawn and the pleasures of work, wine and women.

Programme notes: Elizabeth Jones. Additional notes: M Preston  
Sources: Opera Choruses – John Rutter, The Oxford Dictionary of Opera, The New Grove Book of Operas, and The Oxford Companion to Music.

# What is Opera?

Opera is when a man gets stabbed  
and instead of bleeding,  
he sings.

ED GARDNER

An opera begins long before the curtain goes up and  
ends long after it has come down. It starts in my  
imagination, it becomes my life, and it stays part of  
my life long after I've left the opera house.

MARIA CALLAS

One can't judge Wagner's *Lohengrin* after a first  
hearing, and I've certainly no intention of hearing it a  
second time.

ROSSINI

I love Italian opera -- it's so reckless. Damn Wagner,  
and his bellowings at fate and death. Damn Debussy,  
and his averted face. I like the Italians who run all on  
impulse, and don't care about their immortal souls,  
and don't worry about the ultimate.

D.H. LAWRENCE

No good opera plot can be sensible, for people do not  
sing when they are feeling sensible.

W.H. AUDEN

I like your opera. I think I will set it to music.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN