



Radio 3 success for *The Boatswain's Mate*, plus our latest project!

*There's been much to report since our last Newsletter, including multiple broadcasts of our recording of *The Boatswain's Mate* on BBC Radio 3, the first reviews of *Pickwick and Cups and Saucers*, and the announcement of our latest project!*

The Overture was heard again the following day on the "Sunday Morning" programme, presented by Jonathan Swain. A few days later, on 9 March, our recording was broadcast in its entirety as Afternoon on 3's "Thursday Opera Matinée", introduced by Katie Derham.

Ethel Smyth and International Women's Day

Many of you will already know that Ethel Smyth figured prominently in BBC Radio 3's coverage of female composers around International Women's Day last month – and that our recording of *The Boatswain's Mate* was one of those featured!



Our release was included in the "Building a Library" segment of the Saturday morning "Record Review" programme on 4 March, which was dedicated to a survey of Smyth's music. Not only that, but our recording was made the programme's top selection!

The presenter, Kate Kennedy, said that "*The Boatswain's Mate, bursting with cheekiness and fun, [...] stands out here. It's a young cast, but giving us committed, accomplished performances, and the only chance we have to hear this little gem of an opera.*"

Complete Cast of *Raymond and Agnes*

In our last Newsletter, we introduced five of the singers for our recording of *Raymond and Agnes*, to be conducted by Richard Bonyngé. We are now delighted to be able to announce the complete cast:

- Mark Milhofer as Raymond
- Sally Silver as Agnes
- Andrew Greenan as the Baron
- Madeleine Shaw as Madelina
- Quentin Hayes as Antoni
- Alessandro Fisher as Theodore
- Alexander Robin Baker as Francesco

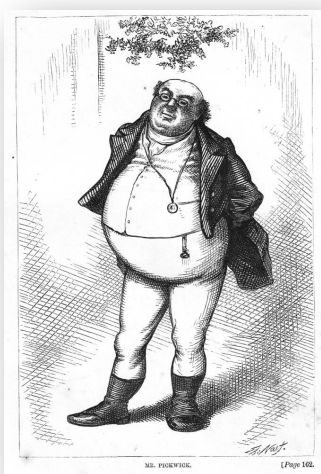
As reported in our Christmas Newsletter, the recording of *Raymond and Agnes* will take place on 16–19 October 2017, at St Jude-on-the-Hill, Hampstead Garden Suburb, London. A donation of at least £150 to this project (it doesn't have to be all in one go) entitles you to attend the recording. Planning is going well, and we now know that even with all the dialogue, it will only need 2 CDs.

In addition to the Retrospect Opera website and Amazon, our CDs are also available from **Forsyth Brothers Ltd** at 126 Deansgate in Manchester, and the Charing Cross Road branch of **Foyle's** in London.

The latest on *Pickwick* and *Cups and Saucers*

Our recording of F.C. Burnand and Edward Solomon's *Pickwick* and George Grossmith's *Cups and Saucers* is the latest release, in February, in our continuing project to make available, through recordings, a representative cross-section of British opera prior to Britten (a period that we are fast discovering yields many hidden gems very worthy of greater public recognition!). It is a landmark in the musical dramatisation of Dickens's stories, one of the best works by a leading rival of Arthur Sullivan, and a composer who had never previously been recorded. As a work written very much in the timeless Gilbert and Sullivan vein, it will have a wide general appeal to audiences even if they have never before heard the name Edward Solomon.

The CD has already attracted critical attention.



'Mr Pickwick' by Thomas Nast, 1873

Zarzuela! CD magazine has the following to say about our release:

"The performers, led with decorous verve by Stephen Higgins at the piano, are very good indeed. [In Pickwick,] Gaynor Keeble and Toby Stafford-Allen bring operatic weight to bear, while the unexpectedly refined treble Alessandro MacKinnon is in tune and musically accurate as Mrs Bardell's son Tommy [...] [Simon Butteriss] brings all his skills to bear in ringing the changes during that central plateau of patter songs. His diction is faultless, his genteel late-Victorian comedy manners unfailingly polite, and he certainly conveys the sunny optimism of Dicken's original.

[In Cups and Saucers,] Butteriss simply channels Grossmith – it hardly feels like acting; and [Keeble] is if anything more congenially cast as the pretentious social climber Mrs Worcester than as the more down-market Mrs Bardell. Stephen Higgins's accompaniment is again nicely judged [...] there's no doubting the value of Retrospect's work in bringing these Victorian rarities back to life – or the superlative quality of their lavish artwork, graphics and gatefold presentation".

The recording has also been reviewed for the Sullivan Society bulletin, of which the following is an excerpt:

"the presentation and quality of the recording maintain the high standard set by the first issue of Smyth's The Boatswain's Mate. The three-fold box contains the CD, an extensive 35-page booklet giving the background to the works and the composers, the libretto and the biographies of the soloists. [...] well done to Retrospect Opera for choosing to follow the much-needed Smyth recording with two relatively unknown works from the Savoy period, and congratulations to Simon Butteriss not only for his advocacy of the works but his involvement in

bringing them back into the aural consciousness."

Finally, our projects have been the subject of recent articles by *Planet Hugill* and *StageTalk Magazine*. See the following links:

<http://www.planethugill.com/2017/03/edmund-agnes-and-fete-galante.html>

(You may have to copy and paste the URL in two parts)

<http://stagetalkmagazine.com/?p=10766>

Upcoming performance of Smyth's operas

Subscribers in Canada may be interested to learn that Toronto-based company **Opera 5** is shortly to present Smyth's operas *The Boatswain's Mate* and *Fête Galante* – using Valerie's editions of the scores. Valerie says she's finished preparing the edition, and sent out all the performing materials to Toronto very recently.

The operatic double-bill, entitled *Suffragette*, will be presented in The Mainspace at Theatre Passe Muraille, Toronto, nightly from Thursday 22 June-Sunday 25 June.

Further information and tickets are available from the Opera 5 website:

<http://opera5.ca/suffragette-details-available-now/>

We're still sorting out a date for recording *Fête Galante*, but we're aiming for February or March of next year – it depends on conductor Odaline de la Martinez's availability.

Announcing our latest project

Visitors to the website may have noticed that information has recently appeared about our latest project:

***Christmas Gambols* by Charles Dibdin**

As composer and librettist, Dibdin was one of the most significant writers of English comic opera and song in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He was also highly respected as a versatile performer on the London stage.



Charles Dibdin, by Arthur William Devis

In 1787 he presented the first of his "Table Entertainments", one-man musical shows in which he performed songs at the piano as part of a dramatised story. Over the course of the next two decades or so, he wrote hundreds of songs.

While many of these "Table Entertainments" are sadly now lost to history, *Christmas Gambols* (1795) has survived more or less intact. It was intended specifically as a Christmas show, replete with reference to festive traditions, and features songs in a range of different styles.



A detail from 'Blind Man's Buff', by David Wilkie, 1812

We are delighted to say that **Simon Butteriss**, fresh from his success in *Pickwick* and *Cups and Saucers*, has agreed to recreate *Christmas Gambols* for us, and he'll be joined again by the excellent accompanist **Stephen Higgins**.

Our release will pair *Christmas Gambols* with *The Musical Tour of Mr Dibdin*, a bravura combination of some of Dibdin's most famous songs with extracts from another of his "Table Entertainments", put together for us by Simon.

It includes the famous song known to generations of Britten enthusiasts as "Tom Bowling", but more properly called "Poor Tom, or The Sailor's Epitaph". We are delighted to have found a second theatrical work worthy of inclusion alongside *Christmas Gambols*, in preference to simply filling the disc with unrelated songs.

The libretto for *Christmas Gambols* has been edited by David, and the libretto for *The Musical Tour of Mr Dibdin* has been edited by Simon. The music for both works has been edited by Andy. We're hoping to record in June, with a view to releasing the CD in plenty of time for Christmas.

***Christmas Gambols* is the smallest scale work we've done, and we're hoping to cover the costs through crowdfunding, reserving our grant applications for our larger-scale projects. We would very much welcome your support with it! And remember that if you introduce a new supporter who donates £50 or more, you can claim a free copy of any of our single-CD releases.**

Donations to Retrospect Opera may be made through this link:
<http://www.retrospectopera.org.uk/Donate.html>

And our CDs may be purchased here (you may have to copy and paste the URL in two parts):
http://www.retrospectopera.org.uk/CD_Sales.html

We now have five projects, either released, or in preparation, and we're especially pleased that they cover such a wide range – from late 18th-century musico-dramatic entertainments, to 19th-century grand opera and operetta, to early 20th-century chamber works. There is an extraordinary wealth and variety to be explored.



With renewed thanks from the team
at Retrospect Opera:

David, Valerie, Andy and Chris