

1998

March 21st – Handel’s ‘Theodora’

Conductor – R. Bloodworth

Soloists – Hilary Ions (soprano), Elaine Black (alto), James Huw Jeffries (counter-tenor), Brian Ash (tenor), Peter Carey (bass)

The programme notes mark the death of founder member Stan Davison.

This performance was reviewed by Mike Fry in the prestigious magazine *Opera*: “An audience and a choir who normally do *Messiah* or the *St. Matthew* were galvanised by a work whose power is awesome – there is no other ‘opera’ like it in England before Britten – and to see people moving around Ryton Comprehensive in a daze, stunned by music that burns its way into your soul, was testament to the power of opera to communicate in the most profound way.

The music had to be trimmed, simply because Ryton Choral don’t have Glyndebourne’s pull with local transport infrastructures to allow them to go on until midnight. Some cuts were made in the prison scene, and some *da capos* omitted, but the work came across with late-Verdian power. The soloists were professional. Peter Carey was the smartly dressed President, with good passage work and an edge to his character. Brian Ash (Septimus) lost some of his arias, but those he retained were sung with beautifully burnished tone. As Irene, Elaine Black’s mezzo was reminiscent of early Janet Baker or present-day Catherine Wyn-Rogers – clear diction and great spiritual power in this wonderful part. In the title role Hilary Ions displayed purity of tone and silvery clarity of purpose, and James Huw Jeffries understood why Didymus is a great role – what is he to do about Theodora’s moral stand? – and sang with power and passion, throwing off the passage work with bravura. The chorus put everything they had into their music – the opening sequence and the great Widow of Nain finale were stupendous – and the hard-working orchestra was powerful and clear, with the continuo nicely varied in colour. Those present found this an evening of exceptional power and passion, one of those rare occasions when everything conspires to challenge and change you. Isn’t opera a great force for humanity? Isn’t Handel wonderful? Isn’t *Theodora* a masterpiece strangely neglected, like the Composer’s Temple in Godsall Park? Maybe all those metropolitan squabblers should have been flown up to be shown what this art form can achieve, maybe Bloodworth should give up his day job and tell Chris Smith what opera is all about – changing the world.”

June 8th – Gilbert and Sullivan’s ‘Ruddigore’

Conductor – R. Bloodworth

Soloists – David Telford Reed, Richard Bloodworth, Judith Thompson, Carolyn Below, Sandie Telford Reed, Jean Grave, Neil Pont

October 10th

Choir members joined with others to perform highlights from *Messiah* at The Parish Church of St. Michael and All Angels, Houghton-le-Spring with Richard Bloodworth conducting. Soloists were Pauline Curtis (soprano), Elizabeth Lincoln (alto), Richard Bloodworth (tenor), David Curtis (bass).

Current Society librarian Julia Black made her first appearance.

October 17th – NE Last Night of the Proms

Thomas Allen CBE (later Sir Thomas) made his debut at this event.

December 12th – Charpentier’s ‘Messe de Minuit (+ carols)’

Conductor – R. Bloodworth

Current altos Clare Hagan and Monica Parker joined the choir.