

A Word From The Little Soprano...

Picture the scene: in 1968, a child small for her eleven years gives her first public performance. Known as a shy girl, she has just surprised her classmates by asking for singing lessons. The teacher tells her she must stand before the class and sing scales. She takes a deep breath, and begins.

In addition to the normal range of school-life activities, my adolescent years were spent attending singing, piano, ballet and drama lessons. I participated in all the local competitive music festivals, winning awards and trophies. Looking at the certificates now, I'm amazed to see so just how many were awarded with Distinction and Honours, and some signed by Florence Greaves, the then Vice-President of the Portsmouth Music Festival - quite an honour and rarely bestowed! My singing developed further under the interesting tutelage of Miss Freda J Foster ARCM, who herself had studied at the Royal College of Music, alongside fellow students William Walton and Benjamin Britten at a time when Vaughan Williams lectured in composition with his colleague, Gustav Holst. In the elegant music studio of her beautiful house in Southsea, I was introduced to Italian, French and German repertoire in preparation for my entry into Music College .

In 1976 I entered Dartington College of Arts. My two precious years there were spent honing my musical skills under the supervision of excellent tutors. The college as it was then was an inspirational place to study, at a time in its history when many of the original ideals as set out by its founders Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst were still very much in evidence. It was a golden age, and I still cherish the experiences I had there.

On graduating and my ensuing marriage, I faced the decision which confronts so many women - should I put my career first, and put the rest of life on hold? I felt that the life of the career professional was not for me - I could not wait to start a family. I embarked instead on the life I have lead ever since, making my family part of my musical life and, I suppose, having my cake and eating it. I had married and attained a Certificate in Education as a teacher, but gave up classroom music teaching after the birth of my first daughter in 1981. Baby in tow, I successfully auditioned to join the 'English Sinfonia Chorale'. This was another very musically busy time of my life, as the Chorale undertook numerous performances throughout the year, and developed an incredibly varied repertoire, from Allegri's Misere to Tippett's 5 Negro Spirituals from A Child of Our Time, via Handel's Messiah, to Stravinsky's Mass for Mixed Chorus and Wind Instruments.

An early memorable professional engagement was with the English Sinfonia, the Chorale's partner orchestra, as soprano soloist in Ed Welch's musical setting of Paul Gallico's The Snow Goose. It was my first brush with fame - Richard Stilgoe was stepping into Spike Milligan's shoes as the narrator of the story. When I received my voice part in the post, it was hand written and signed, 'Snow Goose words and music for girl soloist. Compliments of Ed Welch.'

After moving to Hampshire in 1983, I began studying technique with the illustrious Ilse Wolf in her studio in Chiswick, watched by her wonderful cat, Figaro, who would on request jump through Ilse's circled arms when she clapped her hands. One memorable phone call with Ilse began, after a tentative hello from me, with her reply in her wonderful german accent; "excuse me just one moment, I have nothing on but the radio"!

My association with my present vocal coach, David Harper, began in 1988. Initially awestruck - he is a very commanding presence - we now share a personal and professional friendship which has seen us work together many times. His wealth of technical vocal wisdom is rivalled only by his prowess at the piano, and in January 1992 we made my first solo professional recording in the Wigmore Hall in London , David accompanying. In 2001 he also joined with me for my second CD, 'A Celebration for Alice' - a live recording of a recital in memory of my youngest daughter, who died that year aged seven of complications arising from Leukodystrophy, the disabling metabolic disorder from which she suffered. Once again, I was able to bring music to my family life. I remain a devoted performer of classical music, and at this time in my life and career am enjoying exploring a more introspective approach to repertoire.

In 2000 I began a love affair with the Edinburgh Fringe Festival that continues to this day. I appeared as Gwyneth in a premiere performance of Lunch at the Cooked Goose, performing with all-girl quartet 'Definitely Divas'. Unusually for newcomers to the Fringe we performed to full houses and received an excellent review in the Herald. Bitten by the Fringe Bug, I returned in 2002 with 'Divas 2' and Let's Kick Mrs Worthington, musical theatre featuring songs by Cole Porter and Noel Coward and scripted by Marian Lines. The production, for which incidentally I brought my family along as crew, also sold out. A future return trip to the Festival is planned, but this time with a one-woman show, Metamorphosis. This is likely to be an unashamedly nepotistic production, being written, produced and crewed entirely by my family, thus taking my life-plan of all those years ago to its ultimate expression.

2007 was my fiftieth year; David and I were finally unable to resist putting together a programme to celebrate. 'Renaissance Woman' with guest soprano, Kate Macoboy, was given on Sunday 10th May 2009, and featured songs and duets by a variety of wonderful composers. David, Kate and I were supported by a great turn-out on the day. Thank you to all who attended. No new plans on the horizon as yet, but suffice to say, new repertoire simmers away on the

back-burner all the time. I'll keep you posted.