

Operatif! makes debut on Coast



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□ The stars of Operatif! from left Stewart Cameron, Helen Webbe, Regis Danillion (at piano) Jennifer Parish and Adrian EcEnirey.

QU E E N S LAND'S champagne classic music group Operatif! is making overtures to the Gold Coast as part of a long-term plan to expand its Brisbane base and stage concerts at the Gold Coast Arts Centre.

The company's daytime series for seniors, which plays to packed houses in the state capital, will have its debut at the Gold Coast Arts Centre on April 24 at 11am.

Classics commentator Howard Ainsworth, who

recently has started transmitting on the Coast through FM 103.7, will host the concert, which features a blend of opera, operetta and songs such as One Fine Day, You Are My Heart's Delight and Desert Song.

Operatif! has gained a reputation in Brisbane for staging special celebrations after its first champagne opera concert at Old Government House in 1994 led to a highly successful subscription series, now in its fourth year.

"Since our formation,

we've been wanting to expand our regular performance schedule to include our neighbours on the Coast, and this is the perfect opportunity," says Operatif! director and co-founder Jennifer Parish.

"What we offer is quite unique in Queensland and this was reflected in our first Songs For All Seasons concert selling out so quickly. The audience can expect to hear many familiar melodies from the areas of popular, Viennese operetta and traditional song.

"We have even organised for a special morn-

ing tea to be available before the performance."

Operatif! specialises in self-mounted ventures from opera picnics to gala New Year's Eve celebrations, featuring Viennese operetta, Gypsy minstrels and fine food and wine.

Its activities span the corporate and convention arena, special events for radio stations, such as the ABC Opera in The Park at Brisbane's Riverstage, major arts centres and prestige hotels, including the Coast's own Sheraton Mirage.

Ms Parish says the performers create a certain 'air of the past' with the emphasises in the costuming on gowns and tails.

Last year saw an increasing number of outdoor events featuring the ensemble from Music Beneath the Stars at Historic Ormiston House to Opera in Buderim Forest on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. There's similar events planned for 1998.

Operatif! plans to release its first CD this year with the help of the radio program Intermezzo.

OPERATIF: Opera ensemble at Gold Coast Arts Centre, Friday, 11am.

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How Operatif stylishly combines elegance and charm

It is inevitable that in a city the size of Brisbane with an arts agenda that has mushroomed since World Expo 88 set Southbank abuzz with cultural activities, and a Conservatorium of Music turning out highly qualified and competent music practitioners, that small professional performing groups should spring up.

Survival is another matter entirely, but given the style Operatif, one of Brisbane's newest singing ensembles, has chosen for its program, it could be around for a while if it keeps its head and present focus.

I caught up with Operatif at its second showing on October 22, a selection of operatic solos and ensembles presented in the totally suitable surrounds of Brisbane's restored Old Government House.

More modest than Pocket Opera, with its semi-staged production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Operatif offers style with simplicity and strikes a nice balance between elegant formality and charming informality.

An evening in the presence of Operatif: Jennifer Parish (soprano), Bronwyn Clark (mezzo soprano), Paul McMahon (tenor) and Stewart Cameron (baritone) is a musical feast. Each performer gets to sing solo and in a variety of duo, trio and ensemble arrangements, then takes a turn with informative and entertaining introductions.

In this acoustically friendly space the singing sounded marvellous. McMahon sang Mozart's *Il mio tesoro* with ease. La ci darem followed current trends to belt through Mozart without catching its soul, much too fast for my liking, but there was better control in the exquisite trio from *Così, Soave sia il vento*.

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Parish's soprano bloomed through *Casta diva*. Cameron gave a commanding rendition of *The Toreador's Song* and Clark was dazzling in *Cruda sorte*, seldom heard because we never get productions of operas such as *The Italian Girl in Algiers* in Brisbane. Hers is a mezzo with a true chesty base and a rich top.

Then all singers launched into English art song, most charming of which was *She is Far From the Land*, in which Cameron caught the Irish lament of the piece. Accompanist Jillianne Bartsch gave the program a stylish edge.

This evening was the more enjoyable for the interval victuals served by the singers mingling with guests. All very civilised and of a format that should work well in the new performing milieu that tourism has opened

up and with the popular cultural legitimisation bestowed on opera post-Three Tenors.

DR GUY JANSEN has given the Brisbane choral scene a real "shot in the arm" since he arrived from New Zealand to take a post at the University of Queensland's Music Education Department, and set about forming the University Chamber Singers for specialised performance.

Just three weeks after his Singers presented a program of settings of Shakespeare sonnets and other related pieces, he directed the University of Queensland Chamber Singers, Choir and Orchestra in Brahms' *German Requiem* at the University's Mayne Hall on October 23.

It probably followed a little too soon after the Shakespeare program, what with sickness knocking the numbers and examinations close at hand, for the performance at times showed

signs of insufficient preparation. A dire shortage of male students upset the balance, a lacking which is not good in such music and affected choral color at times.

There was still much to enjoy. Soloist Margaret Schindler floated her soprano with effortless beauty and poise, and baritone Manfred Pohlenz lent an appropriate darkness to the mood. Their singing was a joy.

So too was the orchestra, from which Jansen drew an all-per-vading rock-solid base on which to build the vocal power, a particularly thrilling contribution coming in the chorus following the baritone solo *Herr, lehre doch mich*, an effect that was repeated in *Denn wir haben*, although the fugue almost got away from his decisive beat.

Jansen was careful with the changing moods, establishing the defiance in the face of death in one chorus, and the ethereal wonder of the best-known chorus from the work, *Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen* (How lovely are thy tabernacles).

— PATRICIA KELLY