

www.dailyinfo.co.uk Issue No. 7114

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Words@30p (min 10), display@£8/cm (min 3), all + VAT Next issue Thurs 10th May Deadline 10am, Wed 9th May

#### WEDNESDAY 9TH MAY 2001 (4TH WEEK)

#### **TODAY**

Garden Show - Opens Tonight The Rivals

(R. B. Sheridan)

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Tickets £7 (£5 concs.)

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**ST ANTHONY'S. SAT 2ND JUNE.** Awaiting further details.

CHRIST CHURCH. SAT16TH JUNE, 8PM-3AM. The "Spy" Ball. £55. Free drink, free food, cocktail bar. Also includes casino, Quasar Laser, dodgems, massage parlour, games consoles, cinema, photographer, magician. Music is Beatles Tribute band, live jazz stage, local bands and folk dancing. Contact spyball@chch.ox.ac.uk for more details.

THE QUEEN'S. FRI 22ND JUNE. 8PM-6AM. £70 Bands, ceilidh, Jongleurs comedy, Cream Dj, infinite food & drink. Theme: four elements, details www.thequeensball.com

Keble. Sat 23rd June. Tickets £95 dining/£75 non-dining. International Carnival theme. Free food & drink. Dodgems, sumo, sky dancers(?), volleyball, street performers etc. Three stages (Main, dance, alternative.) Headliners Finley Quayle & Right Said Fred. Ticketforms from www.keble2001.co.uk

New College. Sat 23rd June. For details, try Luke Streatfield on 07940 582274

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WOLFSON. SAT 23RD JUNE. Dinner from 7.30pm, Entz 9pm-6am. £49 dining/£36 nondining (if booked by May 23rd). Theme: Egyptian. Further details from www.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/

**GREEN.** Unofficially happening, probably in July.

ST CATHERINE'S. November, no details available so far.



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**MEETINGS** 

#### Wed 9th May

CREATIVE WRTING GROUP / All welcome / 7.00pm / Borders bookshop, 9, Magdalen St, Oxford OX1 3AD;

Tel: 203901 JOCELYN BAIN HOGG / The photographer promotes his book 'The Firm' / 6.30pm / Borders bookshop, 9

Magdalen St, Oxford OX1 3AD; Tel: 203901 EXTREME RIGHT MEMBERS AND VOTERS / With Jocelyn Benson and Astrid Depickere / 2pm / Maisor rancaise, Norham Rd, Oxford. OX2 6SE; Tel: 274220, THE USE OF MASKS IN MODERN PERFORMANCES

OF GREEK DRAMA / Prof. David Wiles / 3.30pm / Ashnolean Museum, Beaumont Street. Opening times Tues-Sat 10am-5pm, Sun 2pm-5pm; Tel: 278000, THE CULTURAL CONTEXT I: SACRED OBJECTS CHOSEN PEOPLE - THE CHALICE OF THE LORD JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA. THE MARIES. AND THE

GRAIL WINNERS. / Prof M Alison Stones / 5pm Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall St. DREAMING HUNGARY / With Graeme Murdock. Oxford Hungarian Society. Contributions suggested, i.e. £5 per

erm. / 8pm / Oriel College, Oriel Square; Tel: 276555 THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF QUMRAN / With Professo Jodi Magness. All welcome / 8pm, light buffet from 7pm Yarnton Manor, Yarnton, Oxford OX5 1PY; Tel: 377946 THE GERMANS IN BRITSH PUBLIC MEMORY SINCE 1945 / Prof. R J Evans / 5pm / Examination Schools

WHY WOULD HUMAN HISTORY UNFOLD DIFFER-ENTLY ON DIFFERENT CONTINENTS FOR THE LAST 13.000 YEARS? / The Charles Simonvi Annua Lecture with Jared Diamond, Free (booking essential) 5.30pm / Oxford Playhouse, Beaumont Street; Tel

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**REVIEW: OPERA** 

## Suor Angel ica (Puccini) and Stabat Mater (Pergol esi)

Opera Femina's Inaugural Performance Keble College Chapel, Saturday 5th May, 8pm

Almost anyone involved in the performance of vocal music in Britain today will have begun to notice symptoms of a national crisis. The problem is not a lack of funding, nor a lack of audience interest - it is a shortage of men. Quite what has caused the sudden decline in male interest in singing is unclear. Nor is it clear what the men are doing instead with all the time they must now have on their hands. But what is certain is that the effects are being felt everywhere: mixed choirs; amateur dramatics societies; even those historically all-male bastions, the Cathedral choirs - all are finding it increasingly difficult to get people to sing the lower parts. Moreover, if the experience of cathedral organists is to be believed, the crisis looks set to get worse, rather than better. While girls are flocking to join the new girls' choirs set up in many of the nation's cathedrals, applications from boys are dropping alarmingly. Girls may be able to supply a treble line every bit as beautifully as boys; but even the most musical of girls will be struggling when it comes to supplying the baritone part in ten years' time. Even in the traditionally talent-saturated

world of the professional opera singer an imbalance is beginning to be noticed. More women than men are now trying to make it as professional singers, and they are competing, in the case of most operas, for fewer parts. Opera Femina is an attempt to redress the balance. Founded by two young singers, Sarah Estill and Angela Fuller, the company seeks both to increase the number of opportunities available to young female professional singers, and to break the male dominance which still tends to exist in areas such as direction and conducting - cast, conductor and



accompanist are all women If the result is that audiences get to see

performers who would otherwise have been beaten to the stage by men, then the endeavour must be worthwhile. For the audience at Opera Femina's inaugural performance in Keble College Chapel on Saturday night was treated to superb performances from all the cast. All sang with both

impressive technique and fine dramatic presence, this latter something not easy to achieve in the mammoth acoustic of Keble Chapel (as perfect a setting as it was for Puccini's Suor Angelica, an opera set in the chapel of a Nunnery). Particularly impressive were Sarah Estill, who gave a powerfully sung, emotionally charged portrayal of the eponymous Sister Angelica; Angela Fuller, whose resonant, raw alto was perfectly suited to her role as the cold Princess; and accompanist Amy Bebbington, who negotiated the challenging score with consummate skill.

Unfortunately, having staged Suor Angelica, Opera Femina has already exhausted the available repertoire of all-female operas. Noble as their aims may be, and talented as the group is, they are going to find it hard to improve opportunities for singing women too much more with only one opera to perform. True, some baroque repertoire can be adapted without too much difficulty, since many of the male roles were written for castrati. But the contrast between the passion of the group's performance of Puccini, and the rather sterile rendition of Pergolesi's Stabat Mater with which they preceded it suggests that their talents are better employed on more romantic repertoire. What they really need is a new opera; all scores from budding young female composers gratefully received.

Matthew Rogers, 5 / 5 / 01

After Oxford, Opera Femina's Launch Tour takes them to the North of England, where they perform in South Parade Baptist Church, Leeds, on 9th May.

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