

Gardeners amongst the *Arts for All* clientele will probably be in two minds about the unseasonably mild weather we are having and are probably experiencing visions of pests running riot in the spring and summer. As far as the coaches are concerned, however, it is certainly more pleasant to sally forth from home without having to wrap up for arctic conditions. So let's enjoy the good weather and worry about the greenfly, etc. when the time comes.

Due to our U.S. holiday in September we were unable to catch the first two concerts of the new season (Verdi's Requiem and a programme of Strauss, Dvorak and Brahms) but we received excellent reports from those who did attend. We caught up with the CBSO in October and then Andris Nelsons in November with what, on the face of it, was an unremarkable programme of Brahms, Mozart and Dvorak. But with Andris on the podium nothing should be taken for granted and in the event it was a great concert with soloist Baiba Skride giving a wonderful, chamber-like performance of Mozart's fourth violin concerto. She, like Andris, is a Latvian and has become a firm favourite with the Birmingham audience. In passing, why is it that the Mozart violin concertos are so rarely played? Perhaps it is because they are perceived to lack the bravura of the bigger, romantic works. On 10 November Stephen Johnson gave an excellent introductory talk prior to Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7 (Leningrad) followed by a towering performance of the work by the CBSO conducted by Andris. In lesser hands this symphony can seem hackneyed but not on this occasion; it was spellbinding from beginning to end and the rapt attention of the audience spoke volumes. Hopefully, the performers had sufficiently recovered to give a repeat performance two nights later. We can barely wait to see what Andris and the orchestra will do with Bruckner's seventh symphony in December.

We have also seen some excellent plays at various venues; The Old Rep, which is a new one for us (installing air conditioning here must surely be a priority), the New Vic (fast becoming a favourite with *Arts for All* people), Theatre Clwyd and The Festival Theatre in Malvern.

Visits to Mold and Salford

Although it states quite clearly in the **Booking Notes** that the coach will travel through Shrewsbury in the **opposite** direction to normal on these occasions, many people are waiting on the wrong side of the road at the Shirehall and the Abbey. The boarding point side is the **left-hand side** of the road going **towards** the **town centre**. The boarding times are also shown on the **Booking Form** in a box situated directly beneath the list of events.

Boarding Times

Having recently been taken to task by someone who missed a coach by three minutes may we emphasize that all couriers are under strict instructions **NOT** to wait at any boarding point **beyond the departure times stated on their courier sheet**. The St Chad's departure time is given on the Brochure and the Booking Form. The time intervals, from St Chad's, for Pontesbury, Abbey, Shirehall, Oswestry, Tern Hill, and Wellington are stated in the Booking Notes. Please note that we have decreased the time interval from St Chad's to Tern Hill from 50 minutes to 45 minutes. The Mold and Salford deviation from this procedure is stated above.

Road Works

We would like to thank all those who have kindly changed their boarding point from St Chad's to either the Abbey or the Shirehall due to the extensive road works (new gas mains pipes) taking place at the bottom of Claremont Bank. The traffic problems in this area, during weekday evenings, have been horrific. Work is due to

finish before the end of November at which time we can return to using St Chad's again. It is, perhaps, worth stating that we will always contact people about changing their boarding point if we feel that this step is necessary.

Messaging Services

Quite frequently it is necessary for us to contact people about matters relating to their bookings. If the person is unavailable but has a messaging service we always leave a message, often asking for our call to be returned. Sometimes, for whatever reason, the call is not returned, in which case we feel obliged to try again which is pretty time consuming. With this in mind, we have decided on a limit of one message only requesting a call back. Should there be no response to our original call, there will be no follow-up. So, if you have a messaging service please do make sure you check it on a regular basis. Those without a messaging service will, of course, not be affected by this new procedure.

Reserve List

One of the things which we have introduced is a reserve list for those events which are over-subscribed. This has been of benefit to a substantial number of people enabling unsuccessful bookers to attend their chosen event and helping to dispose of tickets booked by those who subsequently find themselves unable to go. For this system to work effectively it does require people, who are informed that they are on a reserve list, to let us know if they wish to be removed from it. Otherwise we find ourselves making unnecessary telephone calls to people

who no longer wish to take up unwanted tickets. It is worth remembering that the majority of people who drop out of an event do so in the two or three days immediately prior to the date of the event.

January-March Events

The enclosed brochure lists 35 events for the above period although we have found it difficult to include as many plays as we would like. Most theatres have a pantomime which often lasts to the end of January and this restricts the number of plays which can be staged during the January-March period.

After three years of trying we have, at last, managed to arrange a tour of Symphony Hall which will take place before a Centre Stage lunchtime concert at the CBSO Centre. There is, unfortunately, a limit of 40 people who can be accommodated on this tour. As the coach size will be more than this number there will be places available for those wishing to attend the concert only and this is reflected in the fact that there are two prices for this event. Please note, however, that preference will be given to those who wish to include the tour as well as the concert. Once the 40 limit is reached the concert-only bookings will be processed. Other events worth mentioning are five Andris Nelsons concerts, including a concert performance of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Unfortunately the main interval is only 60 minutes which is insufficient to allow supper reservations at Strada. The new CBSO Principal Guest Conductor Edward Gardner conducts three concerts including the CBSO Youth Orchestra and Sir Mark Elder brings The Hallé to Symphony Hall for a performance of Vaughan Williams' *A London Symphony*. There is a special Centenary Concert of Scott's epic expedition to the Antarctic which will not only feature V-W's *Sinfonia Antarctica* but also some of Herbert Ponting's ground-breaking photographs. There are two RSC productions, two operas, two ballets and a musical. These highlights are less than half of the events listed in the brochure!

This Time?

In the January-March brochure there are no fewer than four days on which there are two events. These are Wednesday 25 January (events 5 and 6), Thursday 26 January (events 7 and 8), Wednesday 22 February (events 16 and 17) and Wednesday 07 March (events 22 and 23). If you use the event numbers rather than the dates there should not be a problem in booking the event you want. If anyone wants to book both Event 5 (Centre Stage lunchtime concert) and Event 6 (CBSO evening concert) by travelling out on the first coach and back on the second one, please deduct £4.13/person from the total of both events. For Wellington boarders the amount will be £3.38.

Will this be the occasion when everyone gets it right? We hope so!

Sorry to Hear

Earlier this year we were greatly saddened to learn of the terminal illness of Margaret Stewart. She had been a regular user of the coach from way back in Derek Wharton's day, along with her late husband. Margaret passed away in September. Another long-standing coach user was Louis Brunner. He, together with his wife

Teresa, greatly enjoyed concerts at Birmingham Town Hall and also often attended lunchtime concerts at the CBSO Centre. Lou looked much younger than his 87 years and we were shocked to learn of his death on 31 October. There is more cheering news of Peter Jacobs, who recently suffered a stroke but is currently slowly recovering. We wish him all the very best and hope that in due course we shall see him back on the coach.

Vouchers

Our *Arts for All* vouchers are becoming increasingly popular to use as a Christmas or Birthday gift for a relative or friend. The values of these are £5, £10, and £20 and they are enclosed in a plain, white envelope. Please make your cheque payable to *Arts for All* and enclose a C5 (9" x 6.5") stamped, self-addressed envelope. The vouchers can be redeemed against any event listed in our brochures.

Future Events

Probably the main event in the Spring/Summer brochure will be a 50th Anniversary performance of Britten's *War Requiem* in Coventry Cathedral (30/05) with Andris Nelsons conducting the CBSO, CBSO Chorus and Youth Chorus. Fifty years ago the CBSO gave the world première of this work in the same venue and the new performance will be one of the artistic highlights of 2012. Andris will also conduct Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* (12/04) and Shostakovich's tenth symphony (09/06) as well as a Symphony Hall 21st Anniversary Concert featuring Bryn Terfel (12/06). Valery Gergiev will conduct a concert performance of Wagner's *Parsifal* (06/04) and Sir Simon Rattle brings The Vienna Philharmonic to Symphony Hall with a programme of Brahms, Webern and Schumann (16/06). For the first time we shall be including a Birmingham Contemporary Music Group event when Thomas Adès conducts a concert performance of Gerald Barry's new opera *The Importance of Being Earnest* (28/04). Gerald Barry is one of our favourite living composers and his music is ideally suited to a comic opera. We urge you to give it a try!

Conventional opera will be represented by WNO with *La bohème* (13/06) and Opera North will semi-stage *Die Walküre*, the second instalment of Wagner's Ring Cycle (30/06). There will be two Shakespeare(?) plays at Stratford, *King John* (21/04) and *Richard III* (02/06). We have yet to arrange any house/garden trips but will aim for three of these, one in each of May, June and July.

Disabled Persons

If you include yourself in this category please take a look at the enclosed Booking Notes because we have rewritten this section. We hope this will make it clearer for you to complete your booking form and also easier for us to process.

Season's Greetings

May we wish you all a very pleasant Christmas and a peaceful New Year. Hopefully no one will experience the disastrous time suffered by the characters in Alan Ayckbourn's *Season's Greetings* which many of you recently saw at the theatre in Malvern!!

Frank and June North