YEOVIL AMATEUR OPERATIC SOCIETY

# Centenary Celebration

*JUSTICE DONE:* Members of the YAOS cast for Trial By Jury get in the mood for the Centenary re-run of the Society's first ever show, to be held at The Octagon as part of a special celebration, on the evenings of 9-12 October, and a Saturday Matinee.

# Trial re-run followed by show songs

YEOVIL Amateur Operatic Society celebrates its Centenary from 9 to 12 October with a special production of the show that it first performed 100 years ago – Trial By Jury. The production will be accompanied by a performance of various "Songs from the Shows", adding to what are shaping up to be some fantastic evenings, plus a Saturday Matinee – all giving an oversight of the entertainment provided over the years by this highly respected organisation.

The origins of Yeovil Amateur Operatic Society go back to the Union Jack Concert Party – a group of amateur players formed in 1902 to celebrate the the Coronation of Edward VII.

Receiving a favourable response for their performance of various numbers from Gilbert and Sullivan operas, a public meeting gave the group the name that it holds to this day, licenced to perform by Sir Ponsonby Spencer Fane, then Controller to Lord Chamberlain. Sir Ponsonby's family closely follows the activities of the Society to this day.

A first performance, later in 1902, was "Trial by Jury", in what became the Society's home during its early years – the town's Assembly Rooms. Following the disruption of World War One, YAOS was reformed with a production of "Pirates of Penzance" in the Palace Theatre, Yeovil. In an era when opera became increasingly popular, the Society thrived until the outbreak of the Second World War.

1947 saw a resumption of operatic activity, largely thanks to a dedicated couple, Olive and John Edwards, and three difficult years of being based in a school ended with a performance of "The Gondoliers".

In 1951 a move was made back to the Assembly Rooms which, while much improved, were still fairly rudimentary. Players waiting backstage in the earthen-floored dressing rooms had to be especially careful, as noise carried rather too easily to the auditorium!

Despite this and various other inconveniences, these are days fondly remembered by many members, culminating in a production of "South Pacific" in 1972. The technical college then provided a temporary home for the society, before the relocation to a brand new community building – then known as the Johnson Hall.

"My Fair Lady" was the show chosen to christen the new home in the Spring of 1975, since when two shows a year have been performed, with YAOS going from strength to strength. During that time the hall has, of course, become known as The Octagon.

Olive and John Edwards left a considerable legacy to the Society, which was used to fund the purchase of a building serving as the Society headquarters. Following an extensive search in the late 1980s and early 90s, suitable premises were found and on 26 November 1995, the then YAOS President, Thelma Parish, opened Edwards House, comprising rehearsal space, a props store, committee room, workshop and social area.

As YAOS celebrates its centenary year, it is fitting that "Trial By Jury" will be performed at The Octagon this October, just as it was 100 years ago. The five performances will be followed by numbers recreated from past shows, with members old and new joining in the celebrations.

Among many notable people who deserve recognition for their contribution to the Society are Mary Sercombe, Society Accompanist for 60 years, Lilian Dunkley, long-time professional producer at Yeovil, Mary Hobbs, who has held various performing and important representative roles, and current President Keith Saunders, who has served unstintingly for over 50 years.

● Box Office enquiries for the Centenary Celebrations are welcome on 01935 422884. All tickets are £8.

## Show goes on for floral provider

YAOS has also enjoyed a fruitful partnership with the Yeovil Floral Society, which has, by happy coincidence been marking its 50th anniversary this year, and will be part of YAOS' special celebration.

Formed in 1952, the Society is affiliated to NAFAS (the National Association of Flower Arrangement Societies), and comes under the South West area. Members of the Society meet once a month at the Holy Trinity Community Centre and also have two open meetings at the Octagon in April and November each year.

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