

The review below is the text from pages 16 and 17 of the November 2007 issue of *SUNDIAL*, the magazine of the Parish Church of All Saints', Isleworth. Alan Gibbs is the church's organist and choirmaster. Copies of the magazine can usually be bought, price 30p, from Taylor & Sons, the hardware shop almost opposite Isleworth Public Hall in South Street.

A FULL HOUSE FOR BAROQUE OPERA

The evening I attended (Friday) was a sell-out, unlucky patrons having to be turned away. The Police at Twickenham? No, I'm talking about Isleworth Baroque performing a little-known 17th century opera in Isleworth Public Hall. I was sitting near the Mayor, gracing the occasion with full dress, and next to a famous opera soprano, who remembered Raymond Leppard's landmark performance at Glyndeboume.

Helena Brown devised her version of the opera, Cavalli's "La Calisto" (1651), with Leppard's and Jacob's as starting-points, and it worked very well. Sung in English for our benefit, it tells the fable of a wood-nymph seduced (like many another) by Jove in disguise (as Diana), turned into a bear by Juno as a punishment, then pardoned and exalted to become the constellation of the Great Bear. As we listened, there were reminiscences of Purcell (not yet born): Pan singing "'Tis Love, 'tis Love" like Cupid in "King Arthur"; every now and then a ground bass; and the odd melting, chromatic harmony. The female leads were uniformly excellent, with the onerous roles of the nymph (Janet Oates) and Diana as herself and Jove in her disguise (Harriet Fraser) outstanding. To Susan Grant's expressive contralto fell the lovelorn male role of Endymion, and to Neville Bayross's mellifluous counter-tenor that of Nature, companion for the female principals in the Prologue. Rosalind Fuller was quite superb as the Puckish satyr Satirino and, together with Jove and Mercury, made the most of the many humorous opportunities. The chorus sang at times in six parts, and at one point a lovely madrigal by Monteverdi (This was justified by contemporary practice, as Laurence Slater told us in his well-researched introductory talk.)

Annee Blott's direction, as last year, located the action on the right side of the hall rather than on the more restricted stage: this has the undoubted advantage of greater space and manoeuvrability, particularly in the dances (including again a magical contribution by four young ladies), albeit the greater distance from, and sideways angle to, the orchestra and conductor causes the odd raggedness in entries and cadences, and perhaps the lapses in intonation from time to time. There were many attractive modern features in the production, decorative and comic: the men's formal dress (satyrs excepted), the dustbin representing the fountain, Mercury's scooter and Jove's Toblerone bar - need I say more? Well, yes, just to add that an authentic-sounding accompaniment was provided by an orchestra mixing old and new instruments, the former being harpsichord, recorders and archlute.

Alan Gibbs