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THE ARCHER

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Chaos and Carreras

The North London Chorus was invited to join other London choirs to sing with world-famous tenor José Carreras at the Royal Albert Hall. The concert was recorded and broadcast on BBC Radio 2. Our insider, Marian Bunzl, takes us behind the scenes.

Our choir had quite an adventure singing with José Carreras but the rehearsals were chaotic. The music was distributed in advance but, on arrival, we found that while the other choirs knew of cuts and changes, we did not.

The conductor then changed the changes and cut the cuts, so that everyone was completely confused. No one bothered to ensure we were singing from the same hymn sheet, which we weren't.

Repeatedly, at a climactic moment of one number, there was a horrid dissonance between the choir and the orchestra. The conductor took no notice. Being Spanish, maybe he thought English singers were like that.

Finally, a brave bass asked for clarification, a misprint was identified and corrected, and harmony was restored. In the end it didn't help. When we sang this number, the lights failed to come on and we had to guess at our music in a sort of red mist.

The rehearsals were not only frustrating, but exhausting. The conductor frequently kept us standing while he had long discussions with soloists or the orchestra. Mutters of 'What did your last choir die of?' were heard in the ranks.

More than all right on the night

The concert experience, however, was amazing. The winners of the Young Choristers of the Year were a choir of angelic little boys in white robes. Hardened orchestra players used to doing the crossword in the rests had tears in their eyes. Then there was a glamorous soprano with

long blonde hair and a different frock for each number.

And, of course, José himself, who gave his rapturous audience a truly generous performance: aria after folk song after carol at full and glorious throttle, and at least four encores.

The conductor had numbered the encore list, and was to hold up the requisite number of fingers to tell us which to sing, but No 1 was to be a surprise Happy Birthday to José. The Maestro duly gave us the finger (they clearly do things differently in Spain). As this is a family newspaper, I won't tell you what he did with No 2.

When we had finished, the hall erupted and numerous small gift bags were handed up to Carreras by ladies of a certain age. We wondered if they contained telephone numbers.

We shall long treasure the memory of singing the last 'Christ the Lord' of the carol *Adeste Fideles* and facing the thunderous applause from an Albert Hall packed to the rafters.

Our next concert is a collection of psalm settings from five centuries: great music for the run up to Easter. Anyone (and partner) presenting a copy of *THE ARCHER*, or this article, will be welcome to a free glass of wine at the bar in the interval. It takes place at St Michael's Church, Highgate, on Saturday 24 March at 7.30pm.

The North London Chorus rehearses on Thursday evenings at Martin School, East Finchley. For more details, visit www.northlondonchorus.org.uk or telephone Norman Cohen on 020 8349 3022.



Michael Palin at the Phoenix. Picture by Paul Homer

Michael Palin and the Holy Grail

By Sue Holliday

What a very pleasant way to spend a Sunday afternoon at the Phoenix for the Michael Palin fund raising event. It began with a rare big screen showing of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* followed by a chance to ask Michael questions about his time with the Python team.

The afternoon started with an introduction given by Tas, a trustee of the Phoenix, then a short funny speech given by Mark Steel, who was later to reappear to chair the question and answer session.

Then it was the showing of the film, to a near full house. I was surprised to see a very wide range of people from different age groups, not just people like me who remember the original

television shows. There were lots of laughs from the start, most of them aimed at the credits where there are some very witty comments that hold up even today. As the film progressed there were even more laughs. It's amazing how this humour has stood the test of time.

After the film, Mark introduced us to Michael and started with a friendly relaxed chat, then opened up the session of questions. Michael appeared to be very relaxed and enjoying

himself. He answered all the questions put to him, even those about his travel programmes, of which he is making another one set in the emerging countries of Eastern Europe.

The afternoon drew to a close with Michael signing copies of his diaries, which were on sale. As I mingled in the foyer on the way out I felt I had to say thank you to the folks from the Phoenix for organising an enjoyable event. And thank you to Michael, who is a patron of our special cinema.

Home is where the heart is

Londoners come top of the league for the amount of money we lavish on our homes. On average, we're said to spend £42 a week, or £2,180 a year, on home improvements.

Homeowners in the Midlands (£38) and North East (£37) come second and third respectively, whilst propping up the bottom of the league come Scottish homeowners spending only £26 a week.

The figures come from Rated Tradesmen, an online service that matches tradesmen to customer-submitted jobs.

University of the Third Age

East Finchley Library will be visited by representatives from the University of the Third Age, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year.

With more than 620 groups in the UK, the University is a place for all to go where they can share and enjoy lifelong learning and is specifically aimed at all persons no longer in gainful employment who wish to continue with Adult Learning

U3A does not concern itself with qualifications, exams or testing and all can share in pursuing common interests.

North London U3A was formed in 1994 and has over 50 diverse groups which include history (local and ancient), architecture, learning a new language, discovering computers, painting, poetry and Shakespeare, and many more.

To find out more go to East Finchley Library on Wednesday 14 March from 2 - 4pm or Church End Library on Monday

12 March from 2 - 4pm where friendly volunteers will be on hand to answer questions.

If you are unable to get to either of the libraries, contact the U3A membership secretary Barry Davies on 020 7226 7658.

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