



Slimmers expand

A popular slimming group is starting a new morning meeting. The East Finchley Slimming World group has been named 'best warm and friendly group' three times and two members have won awards for losing weight.

Natalie Hanna, the group's consultant, said: "Morning groups often work really well for mothers with young children or retired men and women who prefer not to go out in the evening."

The current group meets at East Finchley Baptist Church, Creighton Avenue, on Tuesdays at 5pm and 6.45pm. The new group meets at East Finchley Methodist Church, High Road, on Wednesdays at 9.30am.

Natalie is offering 50% off membership to all readers of *THE ARCHER* if they mention the paper when joining. For more information, contact her on 07889 252548 or turn up at one of the groups.

Review: Bach and Handel

By Ken Carter

There was no doubt about it: the North London Chorus and Orchestra were the stars. St James', Muswell Hill, rang with the variety of sounds and performing styles demanded by the three principal works in a concert on 20 March.

I admire Buxtehude. His music is simple yet grand, bare and heroic, spare yet warm. Tonight, we heard meditations on the parts of Jesus' body assailed during the crucifixion. Choir, orchestra and soloists were gravely moving, open to the music's stark, glowing splendour.

The Bach *Mass in F* was an astonishing contrast: brisk, busy, with vigorous interweaving counterpoint and daring in its demands for instrumentalists to vie with each other in versatility. This is a shorter work than the great *B minor Mass*. Its style is secular. Even so, the genius of its creation shone and sparkled. Small it may be, but choir and orchestra proclaimed that it has size.

Handel's *Organ Concerto (The Cuckoo and the Nightingale)* brought nimble currents and virtuoso cascades from Nicholas Ansdell-Evans. The evening's climax was Handel's *Dixit Dominus*. The choir hit the rafters with their Gloria Patri, full-throated, unashamedly jubilant, brisk and resonant. This was Handel unmistakably, and at his best.

The soloists played their part. Nina Lejderman and Sarah Barnes, sopranos, together with Jake Ardititti, counter-tenor, blended felicitously, often as one voice. Warren Albers, tenor, and John Molloy, bass, were, somewhat mutedly, distinctive. Conductor Murray Hipkin must be proud of the night's achievement.

Letter to the editor

Rudi Vis signs off

Dear Editor,

From time to time a person has been pointing roughly in my direction saying: "That is my MP." And still almost every time, I look over my shoulder to see who the MP might be, just out of curiosity I suppose, but quickly realizing that the person pointed at me and that a lot of people show far too much deference and respect to MPs. Some MPs, of course, start believing that they are special and rare and start behaving as if they were, often with dire consequences.



I have enjoyed being called Rudi. I have enjoyed the banter, serious conversation, jokes and debates. I probably fool myself into thinking that I have almost never lied. Also, and naturally, I have had to apologise for being in error about matters. I was sure, yet pleased that Sir Thomas Legg QC, who examined the MP's expenses claims wrote to me, and I quote: "Dr Vis has no issues".

This has been part of my experience not just with my Labour Party friends and voters, but also with people who I consider, not as enemies, but always as opponents and often friends. I have enjoyed such friendships with Tory and Liberal Democrat councillors and other voters, although one cannot always utter that in public.

Political parties, all of them, both in their policies, intent and through vagaries can be wrong. If there are superior ideas around from "others" one should lean on them, discuss them, re-examine your own views with seriousness and not dig your own hole even deeper. The good for us all requires at times to transcend party politics and to ditch dogma.

Why do I not fight in this election? Well, I'll be 70 years old next time and talent, if there ever was any, is not growing as easily. Experience might be enhanced over years, but mere backbenchers face terrific difficulties in making themselves heard. Government is too 'presidential' in policy-making and journalism can be rushed in, only directing their attention and interviews at the same 'old faces'.

It also does not assist one to vote against one's own party. I have tried not to be a rebel for the sake of it, but it has not always been possible. It is not the road to take if one were interested in being promoted. Iraq, student fees and foundation hospitals come to mind among quite a few other 'mishaps' by my Government.

Most unfortunately I have recently been diagnosed with incurable cancer with all its attendant nastiness, chemotherapy, feeling below par and being totally out of breath.

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Letters without verifiable contact addresses will not be reviewed or printed. Contact details can be withheld, however, on request at publication.

Finchley and Golders Green has been special. I never had the desire to stand anywhere else and I did not think that we would win it in 1997. Locally the Labour Party has been brilliant in assisting me, both for themselves and for me. The constituency is also an agreeable and convenient place in which to live. It needs all our protection as it is one of the jewels in the crown of London, particularly with the improved Northern line.

Finchley and Golders Green constituents have, on average, a higher income than elsewhere. We were the fourth wealthiest Labour-held constituency in 1997, but since then we lost Wimbledon and Hammersmith and Fulham. We still have Hampstead and Highgate so we are now 'second' well off. Of course we have constituents in difficult economic and social circumstances and I have done as much as humanly possible to assist.

It is also a constituency where many people are politically sophisticated and are thoughtfully contributing to just about every debate. This has been a fantastic educative experience for me. We would not have won so many campaigns if 'locals' had not put on their campaigning gear, often only asking me to come in for support. Nuclear trains in Cricklewood, College Farm, a multiple of planning issues, insolvency matters and assistance to non-governmental organisations are all local-led issues where I came in by invitation of them.

I could now name hundreds of party members, friends, acquaintances and people who have assisted me beyond the call of duty, but I will hide behind the screen that says: "What if I should forget some?" Allow me to make one exception. I have been in love with Jacqui, my partner, wife, confidante and mother of our 15-year-old twins for 25 years and she is utterly marvellous. I thank her for that. Both she and I have been honoured by 'our' constituents to be elected and re-elected, variously from 1986 onwards and we shall always remember that with the fondness and humility it deserves.

Our very best wishes for all your futures.
Yours with warmth,
Rudi Vis

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Any reader who feels strongly about any matter is invited to use this "Soapbox" column.

Please note that opinions expressed are those of the writer alone.



Drivers need to look in the mirror

By John Perrow

Stanley Road is a cul-de-sac leading to Ashburnham Close, Homefield Gardens and a footpath to Holy Trinity Primary School. Drivers leaving Stanley Road to join East End Road are faced to their right with a blind bend some 70 feet distant and can see nothing beyond this. A vehicle moving at 30mph covers 88 feet in just two seconds with a stopping distance of 75 feet. It is, therefore, extremely dangerous.

I contacted Barnet Council twice to suggest that a mirror installed on East End Road would give anyone emerging from Stanley Road a much-improved sight of oncoming traffic. Both requests were rejected.

Numerous Acts were quoted to show how difficult it would be, legally, to install such a mirror which might also be a target for vandals. But the objections went much further, giving a whole list of reasons why mirrors could, in fact, be positively dangerous. The objections were highly unconvincing. If valid, why are all vehicles fitted with mirrors?

Frustrated, I circulated a petition urging the council to install a mirror and was surprised at the response. It was signed by 187 residents on the roads concerned, plus the parents of children attending the school.

On 24 February at the relevant sub-committee, I had five minutes to speak and hand in the petition. It was immediately rejected by the Director of Environment and Operations on the grounds that no accident had been recorded at the junction in the last three years and that the council did not advocate the use of mirrors. There was no discussion. Officialdom had spoken. Readers can draw their own conclusions.

Review: The Buddy Holly Story

By Sheila Armstrong

The Theatre Upstairs at the Gatehouse did it again last month with its very successful production of *The Buddy Holly Story*, directed by John Plews with his own inimitable flair and style.

The young and multi talented cast ably supported Roger Rowley (still at drama school) as Buddy and Jason Blackwater as the Big Bopper, both sounding very like the originals. It was a great night out with the audience singing, clapping and strolling down memory lane; well, those who could remember the 1950s anyway.

Find out about future productions at The Gatehouse in Highgate at www.upstairsatthegatehouse.com.

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