

Glyndebourne's new opera house

Romeo, wherefore art thou so hetero ?

1994: An educational charity offered free tickets to the juniors at Kingsmead School, Hackney - tickets for the Royal Ballet's production of "Romeo and Juliet".

"No thank you," said the school's headmistress, Jane Brown. She claimed the ballet is entirely about heterosexual love, and she did not wish her children to be exposed to such a one-sided view of human relationships.

Education Minister, John Patten, said her action was "crackpot".

Deaths of two Playwrights

JOHN OSBORNE

John Osborne, the original "angry young man", whose "Look Back in Anger" pioneered a whole new direction in British theatre, has died at the age of 55. His later plays included "The Entertainer", "Luther", "Inadmissible Evidence", and "A Patriot For Me".

He won an Oscar for his screenplay of "Tom Jones". His two volumes of autobiography caused outrage. He was accused of "dancing on the graves" of his two former wives, Mary Ure and Jill Bennett.

EUGENE IONESCO

Another pioneer in new approaches to drama was Eugene Ionesco, the Romanian born French citizen who dominated much of the "theatre of the absurd" from the 1950s onwards.

His "Bald Prima Donna", "The Lesson", "The Chairs", "Rhinoceros" and "Exit the King" attracted performers like Olivier and Alec Guinness for their London productions. He has died, aged 82.

1994: Sixty years after its first season, The Glyndebourne Festival Opera has a new theatre, built at a cost of £30 million, and claimed to be a "state of the art" opera house. The owner of Glyndebourne House, John Christie, built an opera house in his garden and launched a season of two Mozart operas in 1934. His wife, the soprano, Audrey Mildmay, sang Susanna in the opening production, "The Marriage of Figaro".

However, this was not just a rich man indulging his wife. This was a serious attempt to create the best in opera, and the pre-war Glyndebourne seasons attracted world class singers and conductors.

The tradition carried on after John Christie's death in 1952, when the baton was passed to Christie's 18 year old son, George. The Glyndebourne season would include everything from Monteverdi to new works, but always had the operas of Mozart at its core.

The standards and reputation of the company meant the productions were always sold out (at very high prices). Part of the Glyndebourne experience was the necessity of wearing evening dress and enjoying the long intervals where patrons were invited to picnic in the grounds of the estate. This led to strange early afternoon scenes at Victoria Station, with crowds of people in full dress clothes struggling with Fortnum and Mason hampers and champagne bottles as they caught the train to Lewes. In recent years the Glyndebourne Company has undertaken nation wide tours after its home season. Its standards remain as high as ever, and its enthusiastic following has increased so much that this new, larger capacity theatre is essential.



"Sunset" - tears and triumphs in America

1994: Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Sunset Boulevard" is playing on both the East and West coast of America. The Los Angeles production was a stormy one. Faye Dunaway, dismissed before opening night because "her singing was not up to standard" is suing Sir Andrew for \$6 million. She said "I am the last in a long line of artists who have come to this man's productions in good faith and suffered great personal and professional injury at his hands". He is said to be considering a counter-suit for injury to his reputation.

On the other hand, the New York production at the Minskoff Theatre, starring Glenn Close, earned a roaring ovation and rave reviews. It had the biggest advance sales in New York history. The New York Times said of the show "When it is good, it is outlandishly good. When it isn't, it's big". The critic also claimed Glenn Close gives "one of those legendary performances people will be talking about years from now. She takes breathtaking risks, venturing so far out on a limb you fear it will snap. It doesn't".

Bernard, Lord Delfont, dies at the age of 84

1994: In the footsteps of C.B.Cochran and "Binkie Beaumont", Bernard Delfont was the most powerful and successful impresario of his time. Born Boris Winogradsky, in Russia in 1909, the son of an actor, he and his family fled to London's East End in 1912. One brother changed his name to Lew Grade, another to Leslie Grade, but Boris invented something "classier" - Bernard Delfont - and went on to become a Charleston dancer, an agent, impresario, theatre owner, and a multi-millionaire. Meantime his brother, Lew became the country's biggest name in television and cinema, and Leslie ran the country's biggest agency. Bernard Delfont merged with the entertainment corporation, EMI, and later Trust House Forte. He was knighted in 1974, and in 1976 became Lord Delfont. His death at the age of 84 deprives the theatre world of a brilliant, respected, much loved giant of the business and an indefatigable worker for show business charities.

