

MIKE ALLEN

Thank you for all that information Neville. As I will now demonstrate Mike was quite an enigma in Chelmsford Operatic Society which I represent today. We thought we knew him well but it seems in very little detail. I knew him, rehearsed with him, shared dressing rooms with him and served on the Committee with him for about 35 years all together but know precious little about his non-operatic life.

Starting relatively late in his adult life, Mike was one of the most unlikely people to spend so many years treading the boards and involved in Amateur Operatics. How on earth did it happen? Where did it all go wrong??

Not exactly the life and soul of the party, even a bit grumpy on occasions, not an extrovert hail-fellow-well-met type and certainly not a latent dancer, singer or actor. Why the stage?

Well I guess we can blame it on or be grateful for- his children.

In 1976 Lisa's brother, Andrew joined CAODS to play one of the workhouse boys in Oliver at Chelmsford's Civic Theatre.

The resulting enthusiasm for theatre persuaded both Andrew and Lisa to join the Chelmsford Young Generation junior society for their 1977 show "Follow the Star".

Mike then made a terrible mistake – a mistake made by quite a few other parents of Young Gen children – mostly the male parents. He went to a rehearsal – probably got there early or most probably the Director Ray Jeffery had run over time?? As if??

Seeing someone who obviously had the complete package to join the cast of one of the adult shows – male and able to walk unaided – Ray persuade him to join CAODS and immediately measured him up as a footman for My Fair Lady or it might have been The Merry Widow both of which were in our 1977/78 season of shows.

He never looked back. Starring as a non-speaking, non-singing and most definitely non-dancing footman, waiter, sailor etc. – don't laugh! Without people like Mike- particularly the men – our stage would like rather like glee night at a girls school reunion. Not every man is cut out or equipped to play the lead. Not even some that might think they are!!

He didn't perform in every show we did but quite a few over the years until his last performance which I'm told was Oklahoma in 2000/01.

In 1988 after the sad loss of Robin Sampson – a committee member and Treasurer for many years Mike was persuaded to take over the role of Treasurer. A very important role in an Amateur society with a regular and fairly high cash turnover and one he suited perfectly. His clearing bank background was more than perfect for controlling the books of CAODS – one of the most successful and hence profitable Amateur societies in the South east whose shows now cost nigh on £50,000 for a week's run at the Civic theatre here in Chelmsford.

It wasn't just his banking background that made him a perfect Treasurer – it was his straight talking common sense approach when dealing with the rest of us luvvies on the committee who nearly all hoped to be on stage in every show. I was Chairman of CAODS for a number of years while Mike was Treasurer and we would all throw up the names of all the shows we wanted to perform only to be met by his usual sensible (hated by the rest of us!) replies – too expensive, lost money last time we did it, we don't have enough men for that one, that one needs a huge orchestra, can't we have a Musicscope show? The royalties are so much cheaper – none of which we wanted to hear. He only had one vote but we managed – sensibly most of the time – to listen to him.

His serious approach – some might say even rather grumpy approach – is the reason why I can easily remember the one – in all those years – out of character comment he made when we were discussing having a rather flashy and expensive black tie annual dinner dance at Lees Priory – “why don’t we let the society subsidise the members ticket cost” he said – total silence – we almost automatically disagreed – and realised that as usual he wasn’t joking – so we did subsidise it and it was very successful.

Well Mike was an excellent Treasurer for 24 years and even in these recent difficult economic years has kept us financially healthy and sound. It’s interesting to note that when he took over as Treasurer it was during the last similar credit crunch – he certainly had plenty of experience!

As a mark of the society’s respect Mike was made a life member at last December’s AGM when his failing health had persuaded him to relinquish his post as Treasurer and that visit to our Meteor Way Headquarters turned out to be his last.

Well Mike you’ve left us now but there’s no way you’ll be forgotten. You were affectionately described as stubborn, argumentative infuriating BUT with a heart of gold. You’ve left behind a financially very secure society and an excellent theatrical legacy. For many years daughter Lisa has been performing in our shows particularly as a dancer and is singing in our soon to be performed concert. And grandson Noah – by the way that was a brilliantly read poem Noah – who played Chip – off the old block? In Beauty and the Beast, will soon be starring in Miss Saigon at the Civic Theatre and has already made his professional debut in London’s Menier Chocolate Factory Theatre in “Merrily We Roll Along” which has now transferred with Noah still in the cast – due to its resounding success to the Harold Pinter Theatre in the West End.

It is, of course an honour to be asked to write a tribute like this to someone you have known for so long, but when I put pen to paper I was amazed and sad at how little I knew of Mike outside the operatic society. I do know what a solid family man he was and how proud and involved he was with his family and every aspect of family life. As Chairman and Treasurer he and I had quite a few “disagreements” about various things to do with the society but they never became problems because – as with everything he did in life – you knew Mike’s point of view under his gruff exterior was only with the best of intentions for all concerned. He was truly gruff but also a very kind man.

Our future is secure in every way so Mike, we thank you for playing such a major part in making that happen.