

**Welcome to the Spring 2022 edition of the WAOS Newsletter.** In this edition we look forward to *Betty Blue Eyes*, coming this April, we will be telling you all about the show, the cast and how to book your tickets. We will be looking at our October 2022 show and our centenary project, with articles from our chairman and our President.

***And of course, we will have a look at what's next for WAOS... Bringing you all the details!***

## A message from our chairman!

After almost eighteen months of restrictions, where we were forced to cancel or postpone three WAOS shows and one WOW show, we have responded with strength and brevity in delivering to our patrons two sensational shows. A week of standing ovations for *Made in Dagenham* at the end of October, and similar reactions to the different presentation of the classic, *Guys & Dolls*, by WOW during February half term. There was much critical acclaim from the various reviewers, and we have every right to be optimistic on the awards front.

Times are still tough out there with regards to people's desire to meet in large groups, and writing from my Covid bed, I can understand why. But our society has everything to celebrate going forward, particularly this year. Any organisation which survives one hundred years should be very proud.

### **One hundred years!**

Yes, this year is the centennial of the first performance by *Witham Amateur Operatic Society*. Now, we could have all just sat back on our laurels, drank copious amounts of alcohol, and enjoyed the moment.

**But no!** We wanted to stretch the abilities of our society, and really celebrate!

Elsewhere in this newsletter, President Stewart Adkins talks about what has been a challenging endeavour to date, made all the more difficult with the pandemical interruptions. Despite that, we will be delivering a **home grown, written from scratch, brand new musical**, based on true events which occurred in Witham. Bringing a new musical to the stage is a mammoth task, and we need every support that we can leverage.

The show is called **The Flames of Injustice**, and you can read more about it in Stewart's article later in the newsletter.

Equally as important as bringing a new show to our audience, and sharing our centennial celebrations with the community, is to celebrate our endeavours and successes with our members and volunteers! There are so many people who give so much to allow us to continue to be one of the best societies in the country.

Some of you will remember the **WAOScars** back in September 2019. A tremendous success, and intended to be an ongoing annual celebratory event, but interrupted by Covid. Well, the WAOScars are returning, and for this year we will combine them with our centennial celebrations. **The** date for your diary is *Friday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022*, at Witham Public Hall. We are still in the planning stages, but it will be an event that you will not want to miss.

Finally, we are deep into rehearsals for our next production, *Betty Blue Eyes*. Wonderful music and songs, all delivered in a Yorkshire accent, and a pretty pig! Get your tickets.

~ *Chairman, Trevor Drury*



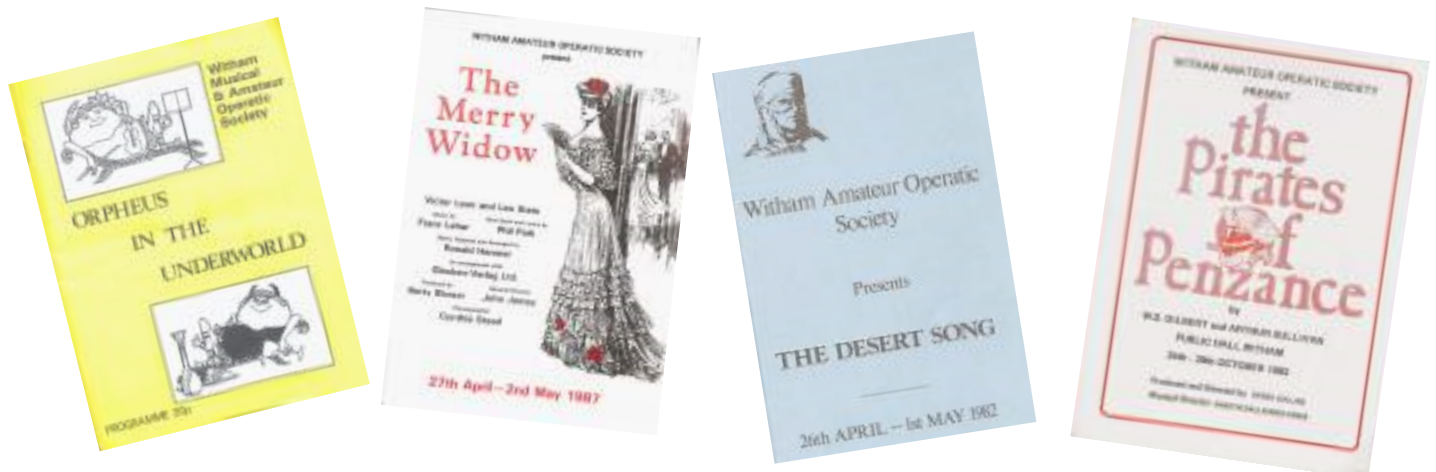
## A New Era for WAOS! As it enters its second century!

It is intriguing how different countries are dealing with the reality of "living with Covid". In Italy the skiers have to wear FFP masks (the really effective three-layered ones that look like the beak of a bird) on the ski lifts and gondolas. There is even a thriving market in plastic clips that allow you to attach a mask to your ski helmet, thus avoiding long delays normally required to fiddle with a mask's elastic straps. By contrast, here in the UK masks are all but a distant memory everywhere except in airports, while at WAOS members seem to have welcomed the return to mask-less rehearsals and accept that people will occasionally miss a week if they succumb to a, hopefully, mild bout of Covid with cold-like symptoms.

Change can either be so gradual that you don't even notice the transition, or it can be a sudden collective acceptance that we're going back to normal, and that interim period of abnormality gets parked at the back of your memory bank until such time as we forget its duration. I find this with the nature of shows over the years; it's only when I deliberately look back and analyse the shows that WAOS have done during my membership since 1980 that I realise just how much we have changed. My regular musical theatre diet in the 1980s was Gilbert & Sullivan and light opera, including such old favourites as *The Merry Widow*, *Orpheus in the Underworld* and *Die Fledermaus*. At the time such shows were hugely popular with members and audiences alike, but they did require a different type of voice, perhaps a more formal voice than is now common. For one thing we didn't have amplification and successful auditionees really had to be able to project over an orchestra that was much larger than the reduced bands we routinely use today. Of course, we were probably kidding ourselves that we could be clearly heard, despite cladding the pit with carpet to absorb some of the orchestral sounds. As soon as we heard people complain that they couldn't hear clearly, we introduced amplification!

Perhaps the shows today are more forgiving, allowing different types of voice to shine in a way that operetta didn't. As G&S and operetta gave way to Rodgers & Hammerstein and then musicals from the 70s,80s and even more recent times than that, the variety of what we could offer increased dramatically. It's hard to imagine shows so far apart dramatically, as *The Addams Family* and *Sister Act*, or *Cinderella* and *Made in Dagenham*. This is all to the good, in my view, and along with new shows we attract new members, so necessary for the health of the society. In our latest production, *Betty Blue Eyes*, I note at least seven members who weren't with WAOS just a few shows ago. I hope they continue to keep WAOS on their radar through our very own musical, *The Flames of Injustice*, and beyond into our second century since our foundation. It isn't every society that has the wherewithal to create its own musical. Based on a real historical event, the hanging of 16-year-old James Cook after being convicted of arson, we have created a dramatic and exciting story to celebrate the first 100 years of WAOS' existence. I encourage all members to come to the Open Evening in May to hear all about it.

~ Stewart Adkins – President





## **The Flames of Injustice - more than just a new musical!**

For most people The Flames of Injustice may be just a catchy title which triggers few additional thoughts. Yet, for some of us this has been a fascinating and unique project already 30 months old. Let's begin by giving this new musical its full title and sub-title. The Flames of Injustice, Based on the true story of James Cooke & The Witham Fires of 1828. The graphic still needs tweaking to make the sub-title font larger but hopefully you can get some sense of the drama and passion from the image alone.

James Cooke, a 16 year old Witham lad was hanged at Chelmsford Gaol for the crime of arson - setting fire to a barn. The fires in Witham continued after his arrest and it is felt that he was very likely innocent of the crime for which he was executed. The first act of our musical introduces the key characters (mostly real people based on research done by local historian, Janet Gyford). We have introduced some additional characters to balance the role of men and women within our narrative as well as to add sub-plots such as a love interest, comedy and deeper themes like forgiveness and redemption. The first act begins on bonfire night and leads us to the hunt for the arsonist that set fire to a barn at Freeborne's Farm, just off Newland St and to a haystack in Lions Fields on the opposite side of Newland St. Amidst scenes that establish the abject poverty in which James Cooke, his widowed mother Dorcas and her six children live, we also witness the arrest, trial and conviction of James Cooke. His hanging at the end of Act 1 is mercifully off-stage. There are also two comic songs about the introduction of the Constables (think Keystone Cops) and the Fire Brigade sent to protect Witham from future fires.

Act 2 is more about the people of Witham seeking forgiveness and redemption for their complicity in their, possibly, over-hasty arrest of James Cooke. The act includes tragi-comic scenes in the courtroom, a pensive song from Edmund Potto who is transported for life to Australia, and some romantic songs as James' brother Will finds love. The musical has a cast of almost 30 named parts, most with some dialogue, and 24 songs. Given that this musical was envisaged as a way of celebrating WAOS's centenary we do hope that members will be keen to get involved. We also welcome any ideas about how to create awareness of this show and to get local people engaged. We have many ideas but there may be many more. The orchestration process has begun and we hope to have a fully orchestrated score and vocal score by mid-April.

~ Stewart Adkins

## **We need YOU!**

We always need more people to help during show week ~ 25th - 30th April 2022!  
If this is something you would like to do, please get in touch, we are looking for help backstage, Front of House & Bar, if you would like to help, please get in touch at [WithamAOS@Gmail.com](mailto:WithamAOS@Gmail.com)!



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Trevor Drury - Chairman



### **WAOS Committee**

President ~ Stewart Adkins  
Chairman ~ Trevor Drury  
Treasurer ~ Anita Goold  
Secretary ~ Matt Waldie  
Business Manager ~ Trevor Drury  
Production Manager ~ Paul Goddard  
Social Secretary/Marketing ~ Emma Loring  
Membership Secretary ~ Liz Chapman  
Stage Manager ~ Ben Sawyer  
Committee Members ~ Annette Maguire, Justine Ephgrave  
General Enquires - [secretary@WAOS.org](mailto:secretary@WAOS.org)  
WAOS Web site - [WWW.WAOS.ORG](http://WWW.WAOS.ORG)

### **DATES FOR THE DIARY ~ 2022**

25<sup>TH</sup> - 30<sup>TH</sup> APRIL - Betty Blue Eyes  
4<sup>TH</sup> MAY - WAOS/WOW AGM  
11<sup>TH</sup> MAY - Flames of Injustice Open Evening  
22<sup>ND</sup> MAY - Audition Workshop  
29<sup>TH</sup> MAY - Flames of Injustice Auditions  
16<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER - WAOS/WOW  
WAOSCAR! & Centennial Awards night.  
24<sup>TH</sup> - 29<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER - Flames of Injustice

*Stay safe and best wishes from the WAOS Committee.*