

Tête à Tête

Family Matters Workshop Report

1. Introduction

Family Matters is a new opera commissioned by Tête à Tête from librettist Amanda Holden and composers Helen Chadwick, Pete Flood, Cheryl Frances-Hoad, Mike Henry, James Olsen and John Webb. It is the third commission by Tête à Tête weaving the work of many composers into one evening.

Family Matters is an updated version of Beaumarchais' third Figaro play, the Guilty Mother, sequel to the Barber of Seville and Marriage of Figaro. It is structured so that the composers each write one large scene in both acts, then co-write the final scene of the evening.

The cornerstone of the development of *Family Matters* was a four week workshop process, 2 weeks c/o the ENO Studio at the ENO works (18th – 30th August 2003) and a 2 week residency at BAC (1st – 13th September.) During this time we worked with the composers, librettist, music director Stuart Stratford, assistant MD Toby Purser, pianist Richard Ormerod, director Bill Bankes-Jones, Designer Tim Meacock, Assistant Designer Lucy Osborne, Lighting Designer Mark Doubleday, Choreographer Quinny Sacks, company of 6 singers: Darren Abrahams, Rob Burt, Adam Green, Andee-Louise Hypolite, Rebecca von Lipinski, Keel Watson, Producer Natalie Steed, Assistant Kate Wyatt, Administrator Caroline Steane, 5 student volunteers, and a wide ranging audience over the whole event of over 300+ through 9 public workshops. The company's associate composer, Julian Grant, also contributed to the process on a consultative basis.

The purpose of this project was to develop the piece for rewrites and full production Spring 2004, drawing not only company members but also both loyal and new audience members into the creative process.

2 The Workshop Process

ENO Works - Week 1 & 2

We focused on fixing the text, both vocal and musical, to accommodate changes in response to what we heard, how it felt for the singers, in conjunction with the librettist and relevant composers. We also concentrated on helping the singers memorise the music. During this period, the composers each also wrote their own short section of the final scene. For the second week, we continued this honing and memorising process, and also began to experiment with rudimentary stagings. At the same time, we prepared both set and lighting designs for the workshops, and plans for ways in which we could maximise audience feedback and involvement.

The outcome of these plans was a radical new design for Studio 1 at BAC, where we managed to build a basic set placing the audience entirely in the round, every single person on the front row.

For the second week, we continued to rehearse the pieces in the space, both musically and dramatically.

BAC, weeks 3 & 4

By and large, after getting in and preparing the space, we concentrated on preparing for each evening's workshops on the day. A useful and focussing structure and discipline for the company, if a little hairy.

We also constructed a carefully considered feedback "zone," taking over a large area of the BAC foyer with props drawn from family life – noticeboards for comments, washing lines for all the information normally included in programmes, a kitchen table from which to serve free wine and beer, (thanks to generous sponsorship) and a sofa and table on which to write further comments, thus creating a whole area where the company and public could mingle, consider responses to the show.

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We also made feedback “packs” which on different nights contained some or all of the following:

- A form to gather statistical and marketing information about the audience
- Pen
- Paper of all kinds (notebooks, post-it notes, old diaries) on which to answer questions and write any comments
- Torches
- Bubbles
- Tissues
- List of questions
- “shopping lists”

A great deal of thought went into how to maximise audience input, in original as well as orthodox ways, how to relax the audience and performers, make the whole process as informal and friendly as possible, and to make it continuously clear that this was an experimental rehearsal, not a finished performance.

Throughout the workshops, we regularly asked some specific questions. Each night the audience was invited to fill in a “shopping list” – if you could buy each character at a greengrocer, what fruit or vegetable would you buy, for example. Each shopping list was then added to a large graph in the foyer. We also asked the audience at the beginning of every interval what they remembered most about 1992. Every night, we also took a vote on the best “strap-line” for the marketing of the show, based on the suggestions from the previous night’s audience. We also included a rolling set of questions, added to each night by the audience, either in the packs or on the walls of the theatre.

We also then asked all kinds of different questions as the workshops proceeded, some recorded in written answers at the end, some logged but more useful in the flesh than on paper, making the audience actual contributors to the event. So the audience were asked to blow bubbles into the space when they felt it was appropriate, maybe giving them pleasure. On other occasions, they were invited to throw tissues into the space if they’d felt at all weepy. Fairly frequently, we asked the audience to flash their torches at a volunteer with giant ears if they couldn’t hear any text, all the flashes then recorded on a libretto. On the last workshop, where we held a full run-through, we asked the audience to write down exactly when they looked at their watches.

For the first week, we concentrated on the work of individual composers. In many ways these were the most exciting and creative workshops for the audience, allowing the time to experiment in public, both with the piece itself and with new techniques of feeding back. We were able to perform a scene in two different ways, show the rehearsal device that led to the current staging, address particular problems where we sensed them, (like clarity of text or comprehension – for one very difficult section, we held a “pub quiz” after the performance.) For one of the workshops, the audience was invited to light the performance themselves with their torches, showing us who the most important character was.

For the final workshop of week 1, we’d planned something called “the trouble with endings” on the assumption that writing the final scene as part of the workshop process would yield plenty of material to present to the public. In fact, this worked so remarkably well, that we simply presented the ending, backwards, component by component, then adjusted the space during the interval so we could ask the audience whether they preferred it in the round or end-on.

For week two, we spent the first few days preparing to run the opera in sequence. For the last three evenings, we first ran each act twice, in two different manners (for example without lights, costumes, and then with them) and then finally the entire opera, still with interactive feedback (tissues, bubbles etc,) as well as the usual plethora of questions.

3. The Feedback

A copy of much of the written feedback from the audience is attached at the end of this document, and really speaks for itself.

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During a workshop process, there are a whole string of very important questions one doesn't need an audience to answer – “can you hear the words?” “does this bit work?” “is the plot clear here?” “is this as a whole properly paced?”

To understand a piece properly, and for a company to have a strong vivid imaginative collective understanding, there is of course an infinity of other, more oblique questions, which are really the key to making a vivid, three-dimensional performance – “if he was a vegetable...” “what ought he to be wearing...”

It's with the questions of the latter category that the audience were really of immeasurable help, assisting us in getting to know the piece we were creating.

There's a third issue, of course, which is simply unquantifiable, and why we do live performance rather than watch everything on telly – the buzz you feel, the tense silences, the laughter, the tears, the longeurs, the chat during the interval. In many ways, for such a dramaturgically bold enterprise, the chance to sense this with an audience was the most important factor of all in these workshops. I'm happy to say the experiment seems to have worked – whatever the public consensus, *Family Matters* certainly seems to engage with an audience and provoke all kinds of discussion.

4. Stated aims

a. To offer a number of highly gifted composers and other artists the chance to discover what it means to create genuinely popular challenging work, in a positive non-competitive environment.

Of the very many new opera commissions I've been involved with, *Family Matters* provoked the strongest, richest, most collaborative engagement of composers with each other I've ever seen. Because they were together telling the same story, each had a stake in everyone else's scene, and *had* to pay great attention to each other's writing, really try to understand what everyone else was doing, how well they were pulling it off. With a group of exceptionally young composers, where all but one are making their professional opera debut, this immersion in the form of opera as a whole seemed critically important. For that alone, the workshops were a REALLY remarkable event.

It was also a great learning experience for all the artists involved, and low-pressure chance to experiment, for all of us. The experimentation was certainly greatest on the theatrical and dramaturgical side – it was a little disappointing not to see so much musical experimentation, but then this is really inevitable if you expect a company to be memorising work.

The ethos was entirely collaborative, entirely non-competitive. The work also transpired to be clearly highly challenging, and certainly genuinely popular. With the refinements we can expect, it stands us in very good stead for the full production.

b. To allow the audience an involvement in this creative process.

The volume of feedback attached speaks volumes itself as to how engaged and involved the audience became. They were absolutely invaluable as adjudicators for creative disagreements, and this feedback will certainly affect and shape the rewriting and full production of the work.

c. To redefine the parameters of how opera can be created.

Family Matters itself is by its very structure a whole new way of writing opera. Famously, the great Russian composers of the time experimented on *Mlada*, an opera-ballet by Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Mussorgsky etc. They never in fact got to the point of being able to perform it. There were, of course, all kinds of collaborative borrowings in the *pasticcios* of

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baroque opera, though this is more about theiving magpies than composers collaborating. So by definition, *Family Matters* redefines how opera can be created.

The huge amount of work we put into experimenting with the feedback process itself also does this. Satisfyingly, Tom Morris, Director of BAC, home of the “scratch performance” circulated an email saying “...meanwhile, in studio 1, Tête à Tête are redefining the notion of scratch.” Also very satisfyingly, this was made tangible when BAC took over the feedback washing-lines and noticeboards for their Octoberfest.

d. To contribute to the future development of Tête à Tête’s work

Ever project contributes to the future development of a project-based company’s work. The *Family Matters* workshops have

- Introduced a whole new batch of artists – composers, librettist, singers, musicians, designer – to the company’s stable
- Deepened more than ever before our close relationship with our core audience
- Extended that audience (below)
- Added to and enriched the creative experience of company members
- Crucially honed and developed this particularly risky project
- Taught us more about how to deploy new creative processes

5. Stated Benefits

a. Audiences and people taking part

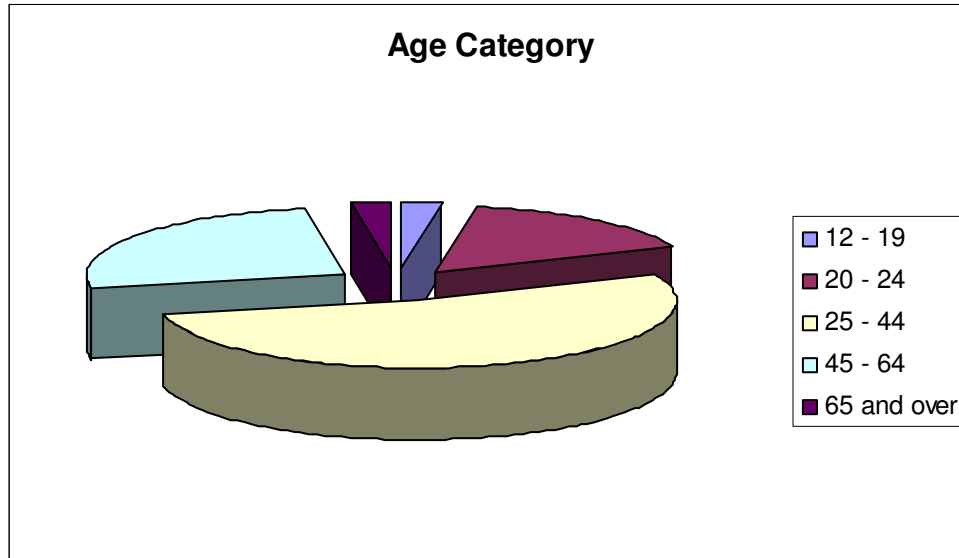
We reached around 300 – 400 people as audience members and 29 as company members. We expect to reach a further 3,500 with the finished version of the production.

It’s a tribute to the marketing of Kate Wyatt, Natalie Steed and the whole company that the audience was so diverse, so young and so broadly based – and of course that practically every workshop was sold out well in advance. The policy of “pay what you can” meant that no-one who wanted to come was excluded.

Of the audience surveys we circulated, 82 were returned. Below is a profile of the age range, showing that the vast majority were under 44 – very much the audience of the future, rather than the traditional ageing opera audience.

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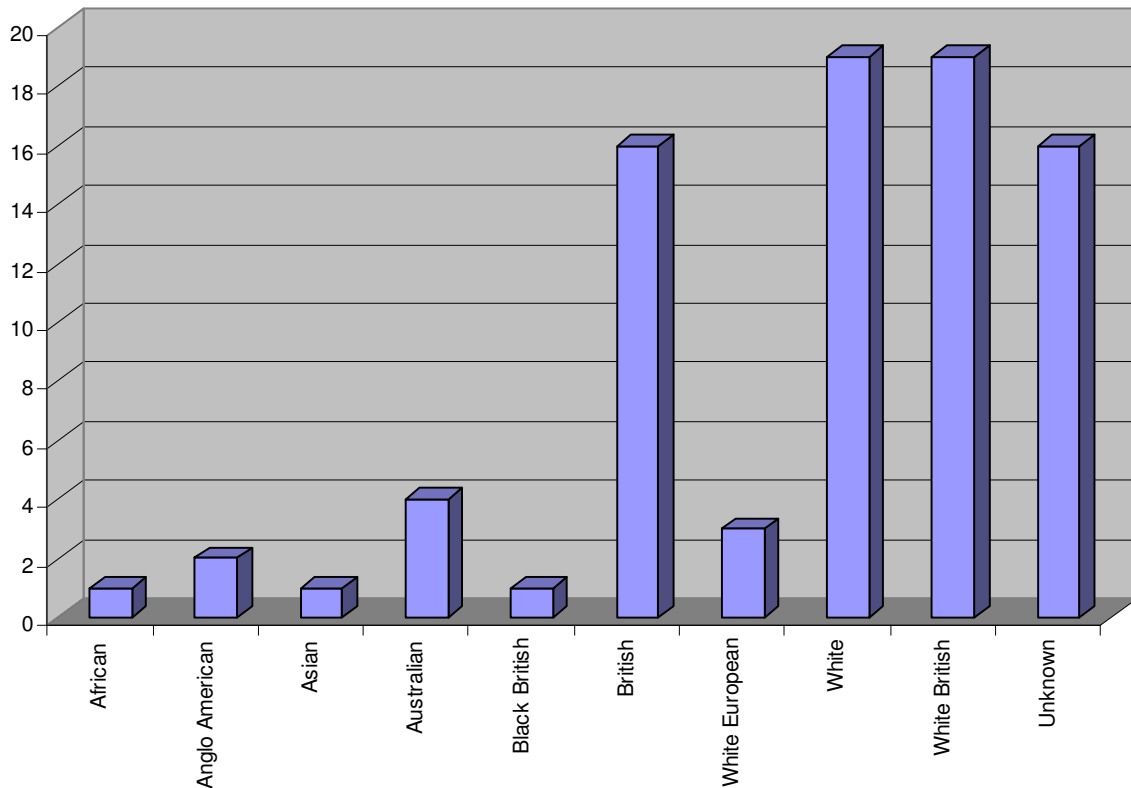
As far as our ongoing aim of bringing opera to new audiences goes, sadly, we didn't survey this. One can extrapolate striking proof of this side of the profile of our audience from the fact that the majority of people who answered below said they didn't know either the *barber of Seville* or *the marriage of Figaro*, two of the most performed operas of the repertoire. Certainly, we had many anecdotal responses of fresh enthusiastic newcomers.

As far as ethnic breakdown goes, the returned surveys look a little deceptive – certainly then and there, it felt more like 10% than the >2% shown from ethnic minorities. As far as the company went, we certainly managed to reflect on stage and among the composers the broad ethnic breakdown we aspire to in our audiences.

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Ethnic Origin



A further aspect of the audience worth noting is the number of seriously expert and eminent opera professionals who were hugely generous with their feedback: critic Rodney Milnes, conductors Paul Daniel and David Parry, our consultant Sarah Playfair (who attended every single workshop) etc etc.

Also strongly present were the company's loyal core audience, many of whom attended several workshops, some the entire run.

6. Conclusion

Though there were of course weaknesses in the *Family Matters* workshops, (principally, I think, the pressure put on the singers by the standard of musical performance they aimed for) I've no doubt that they will not only prove to be an invaluable tool towards the artistic and public success of the finished opera, but that as demonstrated above, they also amply fulfil the company's mission, to bring uplifting, surprising, daring and intimate opera productions of the highest quality to the widest possible audience.

Bill Bankes-Jones

December 2003

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Appendix: Audience Feedback responses

What do you remember from 1992?

Thursday 04

Mary Luckhurst was throwing fruit at my telly during coverage of the general election.

Mrs Thatcher. Selfishness.

John Major on his soapbox.

Last season of old Glyndebourne. Filming Queen of Spades as building was demolished.

Started to fall in love with horses.

Graham Taylor. (Going to a new school). Election. Olympics.

High diving at Barcelona Olympics.

Acquired a river boat. Sons aged 5 + 2. Recession ended.

Speaking Welsh. 2nd year of high school. Being a horrendous swot.

Coping with alcoholic stepmother.

Recession. Redundancy. Fear.

Elections and crisis.

The one and only time I have wittingly tuned a radio to Classic FM

Recession. Unemployment. Uncertainty.

Buying a cabin cruiser.

Paris Gauloise Café au Lait. The Bastille. Baby, wedding, white suit, journalism school, financial mayhem.

I was working and travelling around Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and Thailand.

My football team win the third division championship.

Olympics in Barcelona.

A sense of government sleaze.

You still got the student grants, John Major.

Channel Tunnel.

Olympics: Chris Boardman (British gold medallist cyclist)

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A holiday romance skiing.

The Olympics/getting drunk

Victor Gollancz sold to Cassell and end of opera party moving out of Henrietta Street offices

No 4 nephew born

Major hangs on

Nick Hornby first book published

Friday 05

In 1992 I was wearing skull traction and then a body brace. That was the year I broke my neck.

The decline of shellsuits.

Paul Weller, school, teenage crushes.

John Major PM

Freelancing at the foreign office having left the city in 1009/91

Saturday 06

Crossing the Western Desert (Egypt/Libya) to Sliva – remote oasis – crossing point of ancient trading routes visited by conquerors Napoleon, Alexander, Rommel... Also demolishing one opera house and building another.

Neil Kinnock

I was care-free figure skating at Granby Halls with my bovers. Wearing Global Hypercolour.

I was 11 and was wearing Global Hypercolour t-shirts and Nike Air Jordans and I think I liked Paula Abdul and Tina Turner. Also I had a wicked BMX bike.

1st year of university studying performance art at Middlesex – Devon dumpling hits the big smoke!

I was 15, listened to go go gorilla

Sunday 07

Manchester music/Brit Pop was becoming big

Opera Factory's production of *The Coronation of Poppea* (Nigel Robson superb as Nero, Seneca dying in his bath, Amor supplying the obligatory bit of total nudity); Birtwistle *Yan Tan Tethera* (Opera Factory) I've forgotten the lessons in breed recognition; Finchley Children's Music Group at the QEH – a timewarp experience hearing pieces I'd sung when they were new 25 years before and not heard since; John Buller's *Bakkham* (the most tedious evening ever spent in the theatre, an opera where the composer wants the audience not to understand the text); Platform 2 marathon (flunking swimming at 11.30pm); City of London Sinfonia 20th Anniversary concerts; a Vic Hoyland / Judith Weir double bill in the Purcell Room of which I recall nothing other than its' happening; Hilliard Ensemble in Westminster Abbey: sitting in the choir stalls behind the other side of the screen from the performers, maximum splendour of surroundings, but semi-detached from performance. Failed again to understand that attraction of Perotin

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Thursday 11

In 1992, I was a junior doctor and a young mum.

I was having wild Brazilian affairs followed by inner angst.

I was sixteen and spent the summer in Paris. Apart from that, I remember very little! Bros seemed to be popular at the time.

I lived in N London (Harringay) and worked with young people 16-19 and adult unemployed; I loved my work, hated my house and loved my climbing!

Like the Fitzroy's, 1992 was a life passage

This was a transitional year for me. I left college. Started my first job. Moved towns. Got my first mortgage.

I remember everyone wondering what was going on. The 80s were over, Thatcher finished. What do we do now? A bit grey and confused.

HRH Princess Alice turned 91 in 1992.

'We're all right!' Neil Kinnock, Sheffield 1992.

The ABBA revival began in 1992

Friday 12

1992 – Broken Hearted

meeting my husband

from 1992? I remember being 13 and going through puberty, my first pubic hair. And staying off school cause I'd started my period...and squeezing spots.

I was 26, living in Englefield Green. Going out with Fred

What were you wearing in 1992?

Thursday 04

Some clothes.

Black leggings. Short skirts.

I was a two year old.

'studenty' clothes

this suit.

Second hand clothes

Double breasted pinstripe suit.

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Jeans. enormous t-shirts!!

(Post-box) Red v. neck jumper to school. Blue shade doc martens. Leggings and big knitted jumpers

doc-martens

pinstripe suits

as now

nothing

army boots!

stone washed jeans

much the same as now!

sensible shoes

Bright green silk with huge shoulder pads. Fantastic!

?

shorts

black

DMs

Wide trousers and sometimes barefoot

DMs, monkey boots

White suit

Wearing black

Friday 05

I was wearing a lot of stern black trouser suits

Tamed punk hair, blue and black clothes, leggings (urggh!), long big dangly earrings (QS)

Hyperglo colour-change t-shirts

Leggings and big jumpers

Rainbow dungarees and cherry red DMs

Saturday 06

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In 1992 I turned 5. I didn't like wearing shoes. When I had to I wore patent leather shoes with sparkly butterflies. I wore a tartan pinafore with a blue polo neck. My swimming costume had a pink hippo on it. Classy.

Cut off jeans with cowboy shoes

Wore snowdogs, 501 levis jeans, t shirts

Monkey and biker boots with 501's (jeans) and the same t-shirts I still wear now!

DM's leggings

Hyperglo colour change t-shirts. Culottes for girls. Plastic dummies on a black string (as a necklace). Cycling shorts when not even cycling. Leggings. Bodies (legless romper suits for girls – like leotards)

Sunday 07

I was wearing jeans and men's work shirts to work

Indie T-shirts/ long sleeve band shirts ripped jeans Dr Martin boots Curtain style hair cuts

Coloured jeans. Platform shoes, Trainers, Indie/grunge

We were mostly wearing waistcoats long skirts with D.M boots. Shirts open with t-shirts under them. Stone-washed or coloured jeans – tapered. White trainers.

Rainbow dungarees and cherry red DM's

Levi 501's and Doc Martens

Thursday 11

Wearing jeans – black, straight.

I threw out a lot of my old clothes and bought p[in-stripe hot pants with matching waistcoat. Opaque black tights. Baggy jeans with wide belts pulled in tightly.

I wore suits to work but jeans and t-shirts any other time

Wore lime green trousers and gold costume jewellery

Clothes were

a) Indie (Doc Martens, green German army jackets with T-shirts from e.g. Ride, The Cure, The Levellers)

b) House – shaven head, baggy jeans, big white Nike Air

or

Acid Jazz – Adidas Campers etc and silly Jamiroquai hats.

I was wearing bold liberty print shirts or butterfly Levis and toning plain t-shirts.

My husband was ordained in St Paul's Cathedral. I wore apple green linen and a hat with veiling

Friday 12

I was wearing stripy jeans and a naff co. 54 t-shirt.

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Hippy shirts and tartan trousers

Long wool multi-coloured cardigan

Suits for work. Jeans and bright coloured tops

Do you know the other operas in the trilogy? If yes did it help?

Thursday 04

No

not yet 1st night...

yes. probably.

no

I don't know. I was confused anyway.

no

yes (a bit) and no.

no, and I was a bit confused as to what was going on, possibly due to Bill's explanation!

No. yes.

Yes, liked Figaro with his measuring tape.

Yes it did help.

Moderately well. Only when I realised the connection.

Yes, yes

No no

No no

Yes yes

Didn't seem to be a problem

Saturday 06

Didn't think lack of knowledge of Figaro trilogy is a problem.

Sunday 07

Marriage of Figaro was written by Mozart

Nope

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Didn't know marriage of Figaro/Barber of Seville

No

Don't know the other operas

Don't think lack of knowledge of Fitzroy trilogy is a problem.

Thursday 11

I do know Marriage of Figaro – I don't think it matters, but I enjoyed the moments that reminded me of it.

Friday 12

Yes I do know the marriage of Figaro and the barber of Seville and it doesn't matter AT ALL!

What did you like about the performance?

Thursday 04

All.

The intensity.

The intimacy in the space.

Hearing about its development

Extremely emotional

The voyeurism

Music. Performances.

Clarity of characters and music.

Music. Performances. Informality.

Hands on

Interaction with the audience

The singing!

I really liked the 'sub' characters Figaro and Burgess – I think they work really well and play off each other

Mrs F's voice was absolutely stunning

Friday 05

Figaro vs. Burgess

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I love seeing Rob Burt as a baddie

Mr F was really impressive

Clever mirror for cues

Moments of chamber piece intimacy

When the music changes tone

I like the rapport between the characters

The music is great!

The individual characters were really coming through

Saturday 06

I loved the modernity of the piece and the visual aesthetic. I very much liked the design e.g. the empty slides – the empty frames mean we can fill in the pictures ourselves. I liked the lighting very much especially the ‘attic’ atmosphere in the pictures scene. I found it very moving and full of potential.

Mr F’s solo scene with the letter – made me feel quite differently about him (though I wondered how genuine he was: if I read the libretto only I think it would be Mr F convincing himself that is how he might feel and how Rosa should be as a wife.

Seeing the work develop

Sunday 07

It was true and very powerful

Varied styles of words

Simplicity and openness

End was more effective when Mr. F stayed in the space.

Mrs F’s voice was absolutely stunning; the individual characters were really coming through

The mix of composers works very well

Thursday 11

Loved the backing vocals in the last scene and the beginning of Rosa’s reminiscence scene

Friday 12

Enjoyed the unaccompanied parts very much and beautifully sung. All singers excellent.

I liked Figaro’s voice.

Liked the duet middle Figaro/ Leo

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Great singers

Great diction

Saturday 13

Really liked the diversity of drama, different dynamic levels etc. It's brave to try in a small space but really works. It's quite TV/film intimate in nature

Liked the duet between Figaro and Leo

I loved how flora and Leo could be affectionate even in a weird family situation – this is also how life is

Rosa and Fitzroy in the denouncement! Great performances from both of them

What would you like to change? How would you like to see it changed?

Thursday 04

Diction needs improving please. Too early...

Stuart is unclear. Had they another son who has just been killed?
More clarity.

Less middle-class. Different carpet.

More sex and violence and passion. i.e. more physicality

I wasn't sure about Mr F's clipboard

What is Mr F doing with the clipboard? Is it business, is it moving related? Not sure I like it

I like the lighting idea, but I don't think the torches 'worked' effectively

Generations should be clear

Bigger space

More input from audience

Friday 05

When the opera began I was quite pissed off with the tired old 'not my son' theme. During my sexually active years I have met a lot of men willing to leave their sperm lying around without an iota of care about its future. However I have too often heard of the supposed trauma when / if a child they had previously believed to be from their sperm is discovered not to be. The opera plot developed into quite an intricate and interesting intrigue. I found I was able to let go of my initial feeling of 'how tiresome!' and enjoy the storyline.

Saturday 06

Didn't understand why having started with a blast, the cd player went off (spontaneously?) for the photograph session and then spontaneously came on again for the last bit of the scene.

Pianist drowns singers in opening duet of 1iii; background CD noise is not a good idea, it distracts, and the piano is lovely there

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In scene 4 background CD music doesn't work – it's just a noise which distracts

Didn't like the screechy bits or the comedy injections

Churchy music on revelation of Leo etc?? Stops fusion. I don't know would have to be very stylised.

Movement and body language between Mr and Mrs F needs to be clearer.

Sunday 07

Nothing really it flows. Start from the beginning and finish at the end.

Burgess's final reaction + exit is the one bit that really doesn't work for me – neither full melodrama villain, nor 'Yah boo suck didn't want to play any way'. In particular falsetto weak + out of place.

Nothing

Unsure of relationship between Leo and Flora

Burgess scene + exit of mother

Movement and body language between Mr and Mrs Fitzroy needs to be clearer.

Piano somewhat overpowered Leo and Rosa on occasion

Thursday 11

At top of show, relationship between Mr and Mrs wasn't clear. I felt a bit wobbly. Just a few moments.

Don't use shredded paper in the boxes – makes you wonder why letters aren't shredded?

Scene 5 – Pianist drowns singers in opening duet (Leo and Flora) then background CD noise not a good idea – it distracts – and the piano is lovely there.

Leo should be listening to Take That, not drum 'n bass, which wasn't around in 1992.

Leo should be wearing very *tight* denim cut-offs.

Rosa should be wearing a wedding-ring.

In order to look older, maybe Rosa should put her hair up (in a 'French pleat' – very '90s).

Scene 5 – less piano, more voice.

Rewrite scenes 2, 3 and 6 – all pretty dire. (others are excellent).

Where has Mr F's romantic impetuous past gone?? He used to go to the theatre....

Barbara raising Flora on her own – very sentimental "she worked so hard... the mental task" etc etc. – all sentimental claptrap!

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Why is Mr F so quick to renounce his second son only on a suspicion? We don't understand exactly why he hates Leo SO much. Also, where does the suspicion come from? Has he suspected for 21 years and hated Leo from the beginning? If that's the case Leo would have SERIOUS emotional difficulties not just a bit of teenage angst!

"yes sir no sir three bags full sir" – AARGGHHH!!! Shut up!!

That 'best man' business, what's going on there!?

How does Burgess know where the letters are?

Leo should pubesce a bit more.

In Scene 4, background music doesn't work – just a noise which distracts.

Could Mr Burgess be more obviously evil? E.g., sly looks/ sneaky glances aside?

I think the lighting designer should appear in speedos (tight ones).

Less sure about Charlie's voice – apart from anything else she'd be remembering him from 1969 yes? (if Leo's 22 now) and he sounded more 70's especially the nudge nudge Eric Idle style

Friday 12

More Figaro music to lighten Act 1

The stress on 'temper' was always on the second syllable – it should be on the first

Rosa – 1. why aren't you wearing a wedding ring? 2. Why do you look so young – not old enough to be Leo's mother. Do something with make-up/ clothes. 3. Why don't you react more when you are told Mr F is Flora's father? NOTHING HAPPENS!!

Mr Fitzroy – Sorry but your jacket was a bit small. Didn't get when you got hold of the crucial letters.

Figaro – 1. Why are you wearing a silly hat? 2. Why are you calling Mr Fitzroy 'sir'? Come to think of it, don't have servants.

Flora – Don't quite get all your words.

Felt the ending was weak. Generally, down with bubble and hankies (I never felt dabby). Annoying! Distracting! Pointless! Didn't get the family relationships. Need a family tree.

Leo is too young – to 'teenagery'

We question the benefit of the audience participation which seemed to trivialise the serious subject matter and intrude on the emotional experience of both audience and performers. BUT torch idea very good

Flora – sorry but I really don't get your words quite often.

Interesting plot but confusing at times; do the singers 'fit' their characters?

What was the relationship between Flora and Leo?

Most crucial part of 1st scene is overlaps re. Leo (my dead brother) and Flora (I am so lucky) – can't hear

Meaninglessly busy

"How dare you" in scene 1ii doesn't quite work – why does Mr F get annoyed?

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Purely a personal taste thing – hate the boys singing in the box through rosa's scene; reduces the impact of her dramatic tension somehow (like a mobile phone ringing)

Felt the ending was weak

I would like to change the music! It may be the acoustics or where I am sitting BUT it is too much at times it overbears the otherwise touching libretto. At times of discord it fits but..... nuff said!

If Burgess wants Flora why does he not try harder to get her rather than cock it up with mischievous ineptness that actually brings Flora and Leo closer together?

At the top of the show the relationship between Mr and Mrs wasn't clear, I felt a bit wobbly – what is happening? Only for a few moments

It was very good, although I was occasionally muddled as to who Charlie was – a family tree is necessary

1ii. What plans for Flora? Why does Figaro leave? He has asserted his authority and then still has to go – this must be a very hierarchical family, very archaic, not 1992 at all

I would wish to hear the words better, especially Mr F's

Could Mr Burgess be more obviously evil? E.g. Sly looks / sneaky glances aside

How does Rosa think Burgess is helping when he shreds the letters? She says that she knows that Mr F is worried about Leo and Flora's relationship and wants to send Leo away – why then does she shred the letters, thereby compounding the problem (i.e. she destroys the very evidence that could secure Leo and Flora's happiness – is she a selfish sadistic cow!?)

Describe one person that you would like to come and see the performance? Why?

Thursday 04

A friend who is fanatical about opera but dismisses anything post-Strauss to show her what she's missing.

My children as always.

I would like to send a person who is very much into classical opera and knows Figaro by heart.

Too early to tell – Tony Blair? Real world still exists!

A colleague who loves dance and thinks he hates opera!

Young aspiring singers so must see the work involved

Friday 05

I would like my friend Del to see this as he thinks opera is for the elite.

I would like my friend Tom to see the performance – he loves music he's a composer and he always speaks his mind and says what he's thinking.

Tête à Tête

Family Matters Workshop Report

Sunday 07

Bill Clinton - he might keep his DNA to himself then.

What was your strongest memory of the performance? Why?

Thursday 04

Mrs F's feet.

Great singers

The looks

The naked actors

Watching the audience reacting to the individual performances

Facial expressions and tension

Scene with Mr and Mrs F

The expose scene + Stuart's foot tapping

Mr F singing the word 'mean'

The shredder scene

The shredding scene

"Leave me alone"

"I want you to love me"

Friday 05

Figaro – his language is alive and human

Strongest memory is of how slimy Mr Burgess is

The duet between Figaro and Burgess

Really good, particularly the duet at very end. But who is Fairfax?

Mr F's sol scene with the letter – made me feel quite differently about him (though I subsequently wondered how genuine he was: if I read the libretto only, I think it could be Mr F convincing himself that is how he'd like to feel, and how Rosa should be as a wife)

I loved the music in the last scene tonight – very clever!

Sunday 07

Figaro arriving back from the Solicitor.

Photo albums

Tête à Tête

Family Matters Workshop Report

Music

Thursday 11

Rosa remembers.

Friday 12

Some beautiful lyrical sections

Saturday 13

Rosa – wonderful voice, moving acting; Figaro – powerful voice; Flora – fluid natural performance

A capella in second half with Figaro, Flora and Burgess in masks – excellent!!

Mrs F's voice

I loved the harmony with the piano when Rosa was reminiscing about when she was in love – it was beautiful

What should we see in the boxes?

Thursday 04

Out of date shoes. Home gym equipment. Magazine collection. Soldiers.

Polystyrene packaging in different colours.

The boxes are annoying because they are too light and fall over easily

Stuff. Teddy bears.

What Mr F considered was Mrs F's rubbish

Pictures, clothes, kitchen stuff

Mr and Mrs F's pasts

Clothes, plates, pots

Lost dreams

Teddy bears, photos, clue to dodgy parentage

Things that can smash

A rotten peach

Friday 05

I would like to change the contents of the boxes for a) double helix of DNA b) photographs in frames c) military memorabilia

Tête à Tête

Family Matters Workshop Report

A plastic skeleton

Teddy bear

Family pictures, CDs, photos, paintings, personal objects

Saturday 06

I like the idea of the boxes containing secrets slowly being unpacked.

Nothing they should be black – everything hidden.

Sunday 07

Books, crockery, clothes, toys (if they have children)

Photographs newspaper cuttings and other memories

Irrelevant

One box ought to contain a Havishamesque wedding dress; possibly some military memorabilia as well.

Friday 12

There should be underwear, CDs, cutlery, books, Rosa's shoes, cuddly toys.

Saturday 13

The boxes should remain translucent and largely empty – they are our memories and our baggage

References to 1992? Records? Collections of sentimental things

Do you have a good question we should ask tomorrows audience?

Thursday 04

Describe the Characters as Colours

Did you find watching the 'process' interesting or is it more important to just focus on the 'product'?

7/9/03 watching the 'process' was different / enjoyable.

Are you really sure about the plot? Does the Director know the story?

7/9/03 Don't really know the plot that well.

I think you are asking the audience to do too much especially on first viewing – second bite of the cherry its ok

What becomes of the relationship between a) Mr and Mrs F

b) Flora and Leo

7/9/03 They go to Spain and live happily ever after they should have lots of babies.....

Family tree would be good

Tête à Tête

Family Matters Workshop Report

Would you like the performers to extend their movement/make it bigger/explore it more?

7/9/03 *No*

The first three words that they think describe each character

Will it be best performed in the round or not?

7/9/03 – *In the round for an intimate space the singers need the room*

7/9/03 – *it worked better in “theatre” style than “in the round” more compact better drama*

7/9/03 – *I actually liked the second style (end on) better but then ‘d had a beer and knew the story more. Was more involved first time around (in the round)*

7/9/03 – *In-the-round is more intimate but easier to grasp dramatic effect other way. In-t-r is uncomfortable and being so close means you watch the technique of singers rather than really engaging with the opera.*

7/9/03 *Much preferred seating around the edge – you couldn’t see when the seats were on the floor*

12/9/03 – the performance in the round is a good idea

best performed on stage

Friday 05

If Figaro has been the ‘fixer’, what is his role now Burgess has arrived?

7/9/03 *Couldn’t work out what Figaro was up to.*

7/9/03 *Figaro is the fixer (fixing is part of a minders job)*

What proof do you have that the man you call ‘father’ is the DNA donor?

7/9/03 *It’s a wise man who knows his father.*

What dish on a menu would each character be?

Why is Mrs F still with Mr F?

Mr & Mrs. F are in love (still) – maybe only saw last act.

Convenience

She didn’t have a good enough reason to go

Because she still loves him, partly, and also because she is a bit weak; it’s only during the opera that she gets up enough strength

Saturday 06

What is the age difference between Charlie and Rosa?

7/9/03 *Rosa is 20 years older than her godson.*

Sunday 07

If you had a secret love child would you keep it a secret from your spouse if you found out about your other half’s child?

How did Burgess find out in the first place?

What does Mr F think of the kid’s relationship as he knows who the father is?

Did you believe musical + emotional arc?

How does Flora resolve her journey? With only the information from Leo “Your father is not my father”.

Why does Rosa leave her husband? They’ve both had affairs doesn’t this put them now on an equal ground.

Tête à Tête

Family Matters Workshop Report

Thursday 11

How old is everyone?

Why is Leo bitter?

How old are all the people?

What proof do you have that the man you call 'father' is the DNA donor?

11/9/03 – None

If Figaro has been the 'fixer', what is his role now Burgess has arrived?

11/9/03 – Reconciliation.

Will it be best performed in the round or not?

11/9/03 – yes

Are you really sure about the plot? Does the director know the story?

11/9/03 – Does not matter.

Did you find watching the 'process' interesting, or is it more important to focus on the product?

11/9/03 – very exciting

If you had a secret love child would you keep it a secret from your spouse if you found out about your other half's child?

11/9/03 – No

I'll never reveal my love child!

What becomes of the relationship between Flora and Leo?

11/9/03 – Falls apart after first infatuation.

They spend a happy 6 months together, but split up because of the memories...

What is the age difference between Rosa and her Godson?

11/9/03 – 10 years.

Why is Mrs F still with Mr F?

11/9/03 – Because she still loves him, partly, also because she is a bit weak. It's only during the opera that she gains any strength.

Friday 12

What star sign would each character be?

12/09/03 – Leo: Sagittarius, Rosa: Cancer, Figaro: Taurus, Mr F: Scorpio, Flora: Leo, Burgess: Gemini

Why does Mrs F stay with Mr F?

Convenience.

If Figaro has been the fixer, what is his role now Burgess has arrived?

Slight-comedy character? But mainly he is the one who helps everyone find out the truth about Burgess.

What is the age difference between Rosa and her godson?

She is fifteen years older than him.

What proof do you have that the man you call 'father' is the DNA donor?

I have no proof my Dad is the DNA donor. Would be good if he wasn't!

Tête à Tête

Family Matters Workshop Report

Should it be performed in the round?

It should be performed in the round, although sometimes it's difficult to hear the words when singers have their backs to you.

Saturday 13

What wedding gift would each character be?

Other

Sunday 07

Does an audience really have to respond physically (e.g. Blowing bubbles, hand clapping) to register its' fascination and appreciation of the performance?

I didn't understand what was being said in the immediately preceding scene to tonight's when it was played on Thursday. Will I understand it better next week? To cope with the quick-fire coda the audience needs to have caught up totally with the developments to date.

Are you intending to keep the washing-line image for the poster? The girdle is so not Rosa (camisole maybe?) I'd suggest a 'family group' like Thurs/Friday introduction would work well instead.

Your shopping list questions invite ill-considered snap judgements! I hate them!! The ending has to be ambiguous. When Mr F. sat in chair it was all wrong. The fact that Leo and Flora say 'Don't be bitter, don't be sad' says - ??? a reconciliation between the parents – at least a VERY AMBIGUOUS ending. Your Sheet of feedback questions require several hours to answer, lots of paper + and a very thin pencil. And why Cheerio, when Figaro has just said he is not leaving ??? says it for Cheers any more! But I loved it, found whole thing v. moving + the music blended seamlessly, how astonishing!

The ending with Mr F staying in the chair worked better

The different composers merge together surprisingly seamlessly

Thursday 11

Thank-you for the show – and for asking for the feedback. Such a fascinating and amazing project. Go for it!

Geneticists say that non-paternity runs at a consistent 10% in different social groups and parts of the country

Generally down with 1) bubbles 2) hankies – annoying, distracting, and pointless!!

Suggestion: when the characters are reminiscing they should look at a fixed point (e.g. An audience member) instead of gazing into the middle distance – it might increase the intensity?

I only came because my friend invited me and I wanted to support her. However, it was much easier to listen to than I'd expected and I enjoyed it. The lyrics were amusing which really helped.

Think maybe if it's two old army friends then they might not put hands on knees when they say 'I understand'. Stiff upper lip. James Hewitt etc. Passive aggressive too.

The bubbles and hankies get in the audience's way. It isn't a kid's show (thank god).

If Figaro was so 'here and there' why is he so redundant now? What does Figaro actually DO?

Tête à Tête

Family Matters Workshop Report

What is Fitzroy thinking when Flora leaves? Should he just sit there? Perhaps he could half follow Rosa out, Rosa going too quickly and cross with Figaro coming in – which would allow Figaro and Rosa to exchange glances and would explain why Fitzroy does not run after Rosa.

The final scene worked much better first time round – lighting 2nd time obscured Mr F's expressions entirely when he was reading the letters and seems his reactions were important. In the rest of the scene, having him in the dark orifices of the space was hopeless.

Friday 12

Overall impression - When Flora is told the truth by Burgess, which is the first of the revelations, the moment passes much too quickly and the music is too dense – both singers together obscure the words and it is VITAL to hear them at this point. For such an important moment it passes too quickly. In the final scene, the denouement with Burgess is much too trite and there is not enough extended development within the music to convey his change of mood from self satisfaction to realisation that his plans are rumbled to anger. This should be a truly dramatic moment but it flashes by and falls flat. Then the tension drops and the end reveals nothing. No air of exhaustion or calm after storm or solid bonding of master and servant. I had not seen the first act where apparently the remaining letter is made much of, so that it's reappearance with Mr F makes sense. Not knowing this, this episode was of course incomprehensible. Enjoyed the unaccompanied parts very much and beautifully sung. All singers excellent. Libretto disappointingly bland. Would have enjoyed more spaces of music development without voices.

A conventional Catholic marriage does not break apart.

Leo – Why are you being sent away? Never quite got that.

How does Rosa think Burgess is helping when he shreds the letters? She says that she 'knows that Mr F is worried about Leo and Flora's relationship and therefore wants to send Leo away – WHY THEN does she shred the letters, thereby compounding the problem (i.e. she destroys the very evidence that could secure L and F's happiness). IS SHE A SELFISH SADISTIC COW?

What is word at end?

When they sang 'piano' they were all plausible and lyrical – and listenable but we lost a lot of comprehension

Keep the washing line. But are Flora's knickers a bit too provocative, and Leo's a bit too juvenile?

The various musical styles need to be brought together with more coherent, elegant integrity and a driving purpose. The lyrical bits were solid but some of the atonal music was more like a film score and less like a musical theatre piece

The manner of Mr Fitzroy is too emotional – as an officer he would have been 'cooler' (and then his aggression would be stronger)

The fact that Mr F and Burgess are good friends but haven't seen each other for 20 years NEEDS to be reflected – is MR F that desperate for a friend?

Saturday 13

Fitzroy OK; Flora and Leo excellent; Burgess good dramatically but ugly at times; Rosa poor, no texture and not moving; Figaro good but lines are weak (PS. What do I know?! I am an engineer!)

As I get older it seems less and less likely that my father and I are related. However, I don't think either of us care much

1ii improved but still not moving; 1iii a mess and tedious and annoying; 1v should be Act 1 finale; 1vi weak; 2i excellent; 2ii and iii rushed and a mess; Burgess swan song rather badly sung; too much drama by screaming in general (PS. What do I know?! I am an engineer!)

I wish Flora had been sung by a lyric or preferably non-operatic singer – would have reflected youth better and have matched Leo

Tête à Tête

Family Matters Workshop Report

Fatherhood doesn't matter, it's being a dad that counts – Mr F didn't think that way

"I can't believe it" – wasn't Victor Meldrew around in 1992? Is "I don't believe it" no good?

"how strange is that" – a locution which only came into common usage in the late 1990's and early years of this century; before 1996 the character would have said / sung "how strange that is"

Maybe something stronger than the washing line for publicity, or different things on the line?

Slogans

Family matters: no matter who's/whose family.

Memories can send you mad.

Families – Is there another way?

Secret Children

Family Matters: Accept no Substitute

Blood is deadlier than water

Sons and Daughters

A Matter of dishonour

Keeping up appearances

Home Falsehoods

Falling apart together

Take a closer look

It's a family affair

This is not a family I wish to be part of.

Stick it in your family...

Keeping up appearances.

Home Falsehoods.

Falling apart together.

Take a closer look.

It's a family affair.

Skeletons in the cupboard.

Family Matters: New Kids on the Block

Spot the Bastard

So many parents don't explain

Mum's the word

I'll never reveal my love child!

A wise child knows its father

The family that never was

Family Matters – sorting out a few home truths