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The show must go on!

Pirates celebrate 25th anniversary in style

Marina, Clare
Gislady, Simone, Carrie, Ginette, Linda
Natalie, Carolina, Mary, Seodre



IT'S SHOWTIME!

Pirate Productions pulls out all the stops 25 years on

English-speaking musical theatre group, Pirate Productions, will celebrate its 25th anniversary this year with its biggest show ever. Six months after the start of rehearsals, and with just five weeks to go, Caroline Baines met with director Dominique Vitali to find out how the show is progressing, while photographer Vanessa Rees snapped the cast mid run-through at Gasperich church hall.

Pirate Productions began life as a group of English-speaking enthusiasts of Gilbert and Sullivan, who decided to put on a performance of the operetta 'The Pirates of Penzance', which ended up giving the

group its name. The club soon widened its interests, and has since presented all manner of musical shows, including the traditional British pantomime, the comedy revue, and popular musicals such as 'Oklahoma!' and 'A Fiddler on the Roof'. In its 25th year, the club is stronger than ever, and is preparing to present an all-singing, all-dancing celebration of musical theatre – some numbers revisiting the history of the group so far, but also many others that will be brand new. Featured numbers will include songs from the works of composers such as Gilbert and Sullivan, Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber, as well as songs from such popular shows as 'Cabaret', 'Chicago', 'Les Misérables', and 'Guys and Dolls'. The show will span 100 years of musical theatre, and cover a huge range of styles and moods, from vibrant showstoppers to wistful ballads.

A Luxembourg first

Vitali, who had previously worked with the club as a choreographer for the

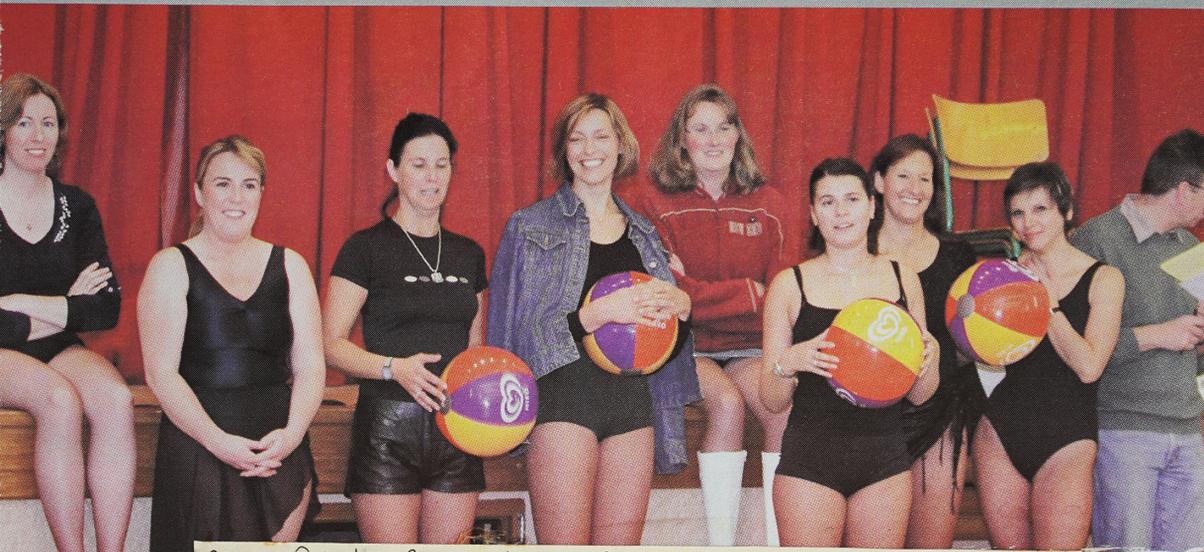
pantomime 'Cinderella' and the play-with-tap-dancing 'Stepping Out', this time agreed to take on a much greater role, thereby becoming the first Luxembourgier to direct for the club. However, he finds that the term 'director' doesn't best describe the role that he is fulfilling. "Yes, I'm doing all the staging, but there's no direction in the same sense as there is in a play," he confides, "It's all musical numbers, so it is a case of sorting out when the chorus comes on, when the soloists leave, and so on, so it's more like a big choreography job. There's a big difference between that and directing a play." And he should know, having amassed a packed CV's worth experience over a long career on stage and screen as a professional dancer, and acquiring two French Latin dance championship titles along the way.

So did he volunteer for the demanding role, or did he get his arm twisted? "A bit of both really," he decides, "This show in fact came out of Stepping Out, because we had a big cast. We had auditions with



Dominique Vitali: The "funny, good-natured dictator"





Ciara, Deirdre, Carrie, Marina, Blathnaid, Gwladys, Mary, Lidija, Simon ^{aking}

about 70 people, and we knew we only needed 10 – one guy and nine girls.” Vitali and the director of the play, Karim Hyatt, decided to pre-cast 30 people – three men and 27 women – for the run-up period, when they would be taught the routines necessary for the play and how to tap dance.

However they knew that being in the last 30 wasn’t a guarantee for ending up in the play. “During that time, which was a period of about five or six months, this group really got together as a team and the director and I hated the moment we had to announce the final ten who would go through to the last months of dancing,” Vitali explains, “By then, everybody knew all the steps, so the decision had to be based on acting ability and looking right for the part. Finally the decision was made and we were down to ten, but we felt so sad, so I said that I would plan a musical show for next year, and I wanted them all in.”

After first planning to stage this production in cabaret style at Gasperich church hall, with around 200 people in the audience and a cast of 30, it was brought to Vitali’s attention that it would be the 25th anniversary of the group, and that there was, at that time, no celebratory show in the pipeline, so he was asked to make it “a little bit bigger”. Now there is set to be a cast of over 50, performing for three nights in Esch theatre, with an

audience capacity of around 450, and each act is shaping up to be over an hour and 10 minutes long.

Takes two to tango

The bug is well and truly spreading, as more than 100 people turned up to the first auditions in January, no doubt in part due to the success of previous productions. Vitali soon found a partner in crime, and is now ably assisted in the choreography by Allison Kingsbury, also a former professional, and whose assistance is proving invaluable for a show of such ambition. With their joint expertise, ‘Showtime’ is set to feature dance more prominently than ever before. While some of the performers have dance training, most do not, and it is a testament to the skills of the duo that beginners will be participating in complex dance routines, which are sure to delight the audience.

Yet it is still relatively early days. When I ask Vitali how practice is progressing there is a long pause. “...I’m completely relaxed now,” he decides, “I think we’re going to get there, and we’re on schedule. The big problem is, in an amateur show, people have their families and their jobs, and this is not the same as a job where they are paid to show up at regular hours, and if they don’t, they get sacked. Basically everybody does it for free, and you end up working with a lot

of different schedules. The soloists are not the big worry, as they take the song away, work on it, and each time they come back I see an improvement. The big problem is the chorus numbers... It is my job to highlight the people who can do more difficult work, but I also have to make the others look good and give them more than a walk-on part.”

“It’s my job to make everybody look as good as possible”

The end of summer was a particularly difficult phase, as many of the cast had been on holiday and/or absent due to work commitments during the period when Vitali was finishing off a lot of the choreographies, so they missed some important chunks, “so some things still look quite messy at the moment, which is quite normal and was expected,” adds the director. “It’s not a script that we work from. For example, we were going to have 25 soloists, because it is the 25th anniversary, plus chorus numbers, so we would go from love songs sang by one girl to a big over-the-top twenties chorus, coming down a bit to the quieter tap number, and going back up again for quite dramatic songs from Les Mis... But the whole thing was shifting for quite a long period, because I would have a song in mind for one particular person,

and if they dropped out and we couldn't find a fitting replacement, we had to change the song. You need the right range, the right age, the right look..." Vitali was also not afraid of cutting songs from the show if they were not reaching what he thought was the general standard. "As a director, you have to say at a certain stage, 'I have a responsibility to that person as an individual, but also to the whole cast and to the whole show', because in the end, people are paying for tickets and we want to give them the best show possible for an amateur troupe."

Describing himself as a "funny, good-natured dictator," Vitali says he has "quite a personal way" of running rehearsals. "I know where I want to get them, I know what I want them to do, but there is a way to ask for it, and we joke a lot and I say silly things all the time just to make them laugh for five seconds, and then we're back to business. They know that they are not here to suffer under overpowering egos. It is the goal of everybody to get the best out of everybody else. At the end of the day, I won't be up there, and by the time we get to dress rehearsals, it is their baby. I will be sitting there helpless just watching and thinking 'that works...that could be better...' and they know that. More and more they are taking things into their own hands now. You see people over such a long period change and getting more self-confident, more daring..."

So all bodes well for the end of October. In a nutshell, if you like musicals and sequins, this show is for you – you might say that it is all that musical theatre is about, with the added bonus of showcasing a wide spectrum of local talent – which comes in all ages, sizes, nationalities and musical styles. Showtime takes place at the Municipal Theatre in Esch-sur-Alzette from Wednesday 27 to Friday 29 October at 8.p.m.

For reservations call 54 03 87 or 54 09 16 during box office hours, and for more information see www.pirates.lu



Jane Philpott

How did you first get involved in Pirates?

I was in the very first show – I think I'm the only one left actually from the first one. I was working at the American school at the time, so that's how I got involved. I have been involved since then on and off with the shows. A lot more recently.

How does Showtime compare to others you have worked on so far?

Well, we've come so far. It's just incredible how far we've come. And its lovely to see Pirates dancing, because it was always a joke that nobody in Pirates could dance or move or anything. Everybody is busy learning their parts. It's nice that we are able to add dancing to all the singing now.

How is the general mood at the moment?

We haven't quite reached panic yet!... It'll come!... But just at the moment everybody is working very hard and its all coming together, a lot of things are well ahead of time.

Do you have to put other things on hold during the rehearsal process?

It's always the same with amateurs, because everybody has a life and they just don't have that much time to devote all the way through. On the last night when it is finished, everyone sits around and says, "what are we going to do with our time now!" I say, "well, I could start with tidying the house!"



Claire Abbott

How did you first get involved in Pirates?

I first applied to join the Stepping Out programme last year. I plucked up the courage to go to the audition and I got through, and actually made it into the show, which was incredible for me. It was hard work but I loved it, I really did. The idea of working with Dom inspired me to come back and audition for Showtime. He taught us to tap dance last year, and did you know that he has the best bum in showbiz.

Had you much dancing experience?

Not tap dancing. However, I did dance lessons when I was at school.

How does Showtime compare to Stepping Out so far?

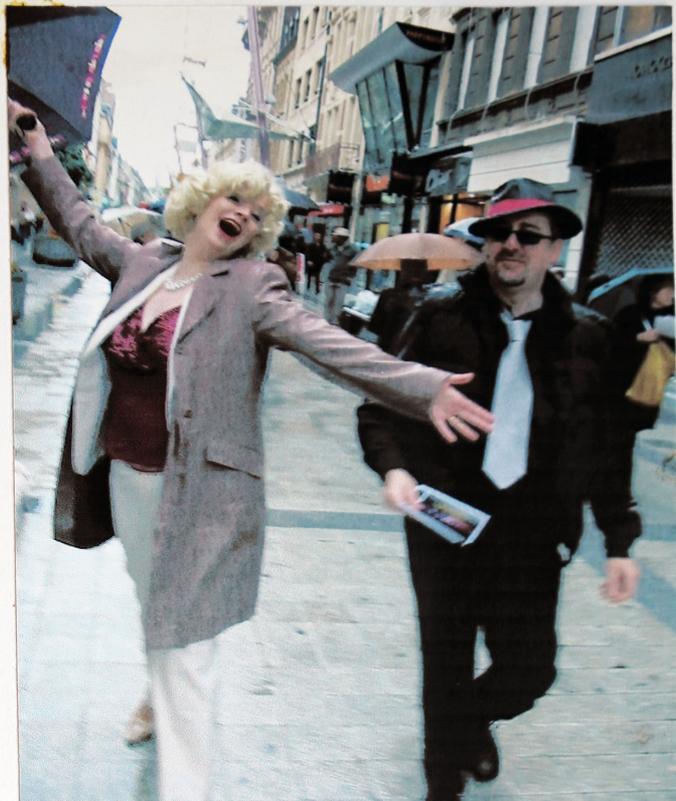
I enjoy it more because everyone is involved, and it is the 25th anniversary of Pirate Productions, so the buzz is quite something.

What have you had to give up during the rehearsal process?

A lot of time! Probably just socialising really. But the rehearsals for the show are so sociable anyway, you don't really feel like you are missing out.



Dominique



Rachel, Brian

Promoting the show in Esch-Alzette



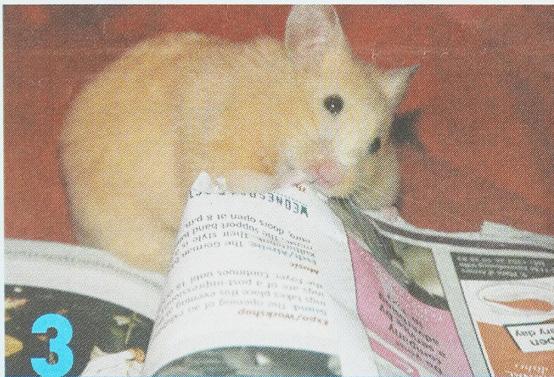
Rachel, Dominique's partner, Vicki Ball, Clare Maskey



1

1) PIRATES AT THE EMBASSY

British Ambassador James Clark held a reception at the Embassy on Friday for Pirate Productions to celebrate the launch of their 25th anniversary production, 'Showtime'.



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3) 352, YOUR FAT-FREE ALTERNATIVE TO SUNFLOWER SEEDS

Thimble, the Sanderson family's pet hamster, was caught enjoying a snack between meals earlier this week. Ian Sanderson commented, "We rescued the rest of the magazine before she destroyed it entirely. No idea what's so special about 352, but she's never attacked any other mag or paper..."



2) SUCCESSFUL OKTOBERFEST

The Church of God Luxembourg would like to thank everyone who came to the 'Oktoberfest' on Sunday 17 October. The event raised 4887.78 euro which will be used to repair and buy new equipment for a boarding school for deaf children in Lviv, Ukraine. A special mention goes out to Mme Becker-Fernande, a Luxembourg artist who donated two of her paintings for sale, the clients of Mme Suzette and Mme Margie at Pedicure Kohan for their donations, and to the Taj Mahal and Namaste Restaurants for their donations of food.





1

1) HUNGARIANS ON STUDY TOUR

Ten months after Luxair inaugurated its new service to Budapest, the National Tourist Office (ONT) invited a group of ten managers from travel agencies and tour operators in Hungary to spend a long weekend in the Grand Duchy. The group of ten women arrived with Luxair last Friday, and enjoyed the hospitality of the Hotel Le Royal for two nights.

The hotel's director of sales invited the group to an excellent dinner on the terrace of the Le Jardin restaurant. Brigitte Leunen told 352 that 36 Hungarian guests spent 96 nights in the hotel during the first six months of 2004.

Following a guided tour of Luxembourg city, the group headed to Vianden on Saturday morning. A light lunch at Restaurant Petry

in the town where Victor Hugo spent some of his exile provided the group with the energy to climb up to the beautiful medieval castle. Having discovered the natural beauty of „Little Switzerland“, a short walk around Echternach, completed the official programme for that day – although the group spent Saturday evening at the jazz festival.

Sunday morning, before returning to Hungary, the group visited the Moselle, and enjoyed a tour and wine-tasting at Cave Bernard-Massard. Special thanks to Brigitte Leunen (Hotel „Le Royal“), Georges Gitzinger (ONT), Patrick Lamesch, Max Pellitteri and Simon Cook (Luxair) for their contributions and organisation.

Text and photo by György Földes



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2) SHOWTIME APPROACHES

Dancers from Pirate Productions rehearse a number from 'A Chorus Line' in preparation for the production Showtime – a celebration of 25 years of Pirate Productions. Under the direction of Dominique Vitali this will be Pirates biggest show ever - an all-singing, all-dancing extravaganza to take place in the Theatre Municipal in Esch-Alzette from 27 to 29 October. More details on www.pirates.lu



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3) CEPL STUDENTS RECEIVE CERTIFICATES

Education minister Anne Brasseur was on hand recently to give certificates to students who had completed further education courses at the Chambre des Employés Privés. The CEPL hosts a variety of courses each year in information technology, law, accounting, management and sales. It also offers specialist courses and university level education – the Open University in Luxembourg now has its offices in the CEPL building. For more information, check out www.cepl.lu