

## Company History

Friday, 10 October 2008

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When the late Elizabeth Evans, MBE, joined the Furnace Gardens Further Education Centre as a youth leader, her passion for opera inspired her to channel the boundless energies of her young charges into putting on a show. In 1979 "Snow White" received glowing plaudits from both cast and the audience alike. This was the catalyst that inspired Elizabeth and her dedicated team of volunteers to form the Carmarthen Youth Opera the following year.

The Education Centre thus became the Youth Opera's first home. The annual productions continued to grow from strength to strength and in 1987 the company moved into and re-opened the Lyric Theatre in King Street, Carmarthen. It was transformed into the truly glorious theatre that is enjoyed by so many today.

The Youth Opera continued to grow at pace, with the company making appearances at the London Palladium, Buxton Opera House and receiving curtain calls galore at the Waterford Music Festival.

BBC Wales Television broadcast a documentary of the company's redevelopment of the Lyric Theatre including the unforgettable production of "Jesus Christ Superstar", performed in the most fitting setting of St. David's Cathedral in Pembrokeshire.

Many members of the company have gone on to become professionals in TV, Radio, Musical Theatre and Opera; the roll of honour includes well known names such as Mike Doyle, Mark Evans, Wynne Evans, Stephen Elias and Karen Evans. As well as developing the acting and singing talents of members, many have gone on to become successful stage managers, lighting and sound engineers, costume managers, script writers and even artistic directors.

Following the retirement of Elizabeth Evans in 2005, Adrian Wyn Rowlands, an accomplished actor, singer and member of the company since 1982, took over the reigns as Artistic Director. Since then the Youth Opera has continued to achieve new heights of excellence; the Lyric resounding to wonderful performances of "Singin' in the Rain", "Oliver!" and "The King and I", with this year's "Carousel" awarded the NODA Wales & Northern Ireland Region Best Youth Production, plus the Best Poster Award. In addition to the regular annual production, members of the company undertake a wide variety of performances throughout the year. The young cast's virtuoso is displayed at fund-raising cabarets and charity concerts, including light entertainment at the prestigious opening of commercial enterprises.

The cast are regularly given the opportunity to develop their talents at theatrical workshops and take part in an annual series of short-film productions in partnership with other youth companies in South Wales and in association with HTV Wales and various sponsoring bodies which include Carmarthenshire County Council.

2010 will see the Carmarthen Youth Opera celebrating its 30th Anniversary – thirty wonderful years of providing a cast of youngsters with a unique opportunity to discover and develop their talents – at the same time delighting the successive audiences that have packed St Peter's Civic Hall and subsequently The Lyric Theatre. The company is indeed focused on the youth of the county, the maximum age normally just 21 – the youngest performer - one of the King of Siam's children - at less than six months old! The emphasis still follows Elizabeth Evans' legacy – to discover, nurture and develop the stars of stage, screen and backstage of the future.