



Angela Vernon Bates: A Profile

Hi, I'm Angela and I've had a varied career in the arts before becoming Chair of Crowborough Arts.

After studying painting at Birmingham College of Art and gaining my ATD I was accepted by the Royal College of Music to study singing and opera. During this time to help finance my studies I taught a painting evening class next door to Wormwood Scrubbs prison where a mixture of prison warders and local elderly ladies were my pupils. I also painted and designed sets and costumes for the Opera School at the RCM for opera productions that were staged there. I had my own painting area in the scene dock immediately below the main hall of the College which housed the organ which thundered and vibrated above my head when the students were practicing.

I was then lucky enough to win the Sir Thomas Beecham Opera Scholarship, which enabled me to live and study in Milan for a year, during which time I travelled to Geneva every two weeks for singing lessons. I had a singer friend who lived there, and her landlady allowed me to sleep on her floor overnight. The train journey past Lake Maggiore through the Italian and Swiss mountains and finally along the edge of lake Geneva was always a wonderful treat, travelling past the snowy mountains and ice-blue rivers in winter, and the romantic summer views of the gardens and Castello on Isola Bella on Lake Maggiore.

I have sung with various opera companies including Glyndebourne and the English Opera Group, and also had my own business restoring antiques specialising in the painted surface and gold-leaf gilding — using my artistic skills alongside my music as I have done all my life. My first workshop was with other artists and designers in the East End - in an old disused factory. When it rained, we collected water in buckets as there was only one working tap in the building which was over an old bath(!) with an attached bit of hosepipe to get the water into any container. However for some reason this hose pipe got shorter and shorter and it was only when I noticed an artist in the next door studio making collages of intestines (as you do) I realized he had been cutting off bits of the hose to use in his pictures.

For many happy years I sang with the renowned Parlour Quartet, presenting a cameo of a Musical Evening in the Victorian Drawing Room, with costumes and topical amusing linking dialogue which we wrote ourselves. We all had stage characters and one of my characters was Madame Melodia Celeste, named after a harmonium that belonged to our pianist; it lived in his hallway as he had no-where else for it to go as his grand piano took up most of his sitting room. We appeared regularly at the Purcell Room and Wigmore Hall and on Radio 3.



Ten years ago I was part of a small group of Crowborough based artists who decided to put on an art exhibition in the United Church and various shop windows around the town. This was a success and later became Crowborough Arts Open Studios. Later, with my musical background it seemed natural to include concerts featuring both local performers and chamber music with international musicians in the relaxed and intimate setting of Green Cottage. Later we added our thriving literary section with play reading, poetry sessions and much more.

What fun I've had and how lucky that I am now using my experience and skills to work for Crowborough Arts, bringing together so many local people and to be able to offer such a varied programme of events within the community.