



THE REHEARSALS

From mid-May 2008, over 300 children, a staff choir and three professional singers worked in schools with Director Clare Whistler, Music Director Jonathan Gill and assistants Lea Cornthwaite, Allyson Devenish and Katherine Gillham to rehearse the words, music and movement for the new opera.

Directing *Confucius Says*

Clare Whistler

I was apprehensive about my Chinese knowledge, and I decided that I would not be attempting any sort of Chinese inspired movement. The only exception being MeiMei who I would allow to use whatever she knew and at least I had been in a Chinese dance company in New York for 3 years and actually did learn ribbon dancing!

Above all I could tell it would be a massive feat of organisation, with many cooks. I decided early on to approach everything as an art of compromise and to be willing and open to changes at all times. I thought the whole idea of Yin and Yang fighting was a great premise and loved the idea of exploring their qualities with the children.

Using movement and drama is how I see pieces with masses of children; they remember the music, words, drama better and of course it is stretching them in all ways. It helps to tell the story not always straightforwardly but in other ways

and in some places give children a more creative outlet to make their own work.

I spent many hours with the score putting the piece together in my head – it is incredibly time consuming, listening over and over, finding inspiration and of course trying to make each section as different as possible. Even with a circular set, with very defined space limitations, it takes a long time to get an



overview and work out practicalities of exits and entrances, solos, groups, use of space, story-telling, all before one meets the children. I think putting the whole show together was done in my head before we began, but I knew everything could change!

I always love the transformation of the children – that is the best, most precious part. I thought some teachers were exceptional and loved having the big team of designer, lighting, projection as well as amazing costumes.



When I auditioned I felt great, just thinking about the people cheering and saying my name gave me joy. A letter came saying I had been chosen; my heart leapt out of my body and danced.

Christabel

The practice builds up your voice and makes it stronger. Clare and Jonathan were really patient with us.

Isabella

Jonathan and Clare instilled the self-belief in the children that they could not only perform brilliantly, but had the capacity to learn new skills quickly and with enjoyment.

Veronica Frankland, Project Co-ordinator St Dominic's RC School





I was so happy to be given the privilege to perform with professionals. I was blown away when I heard NüWa (Alison) sing. Rehearsals were the best ever and I loved every single minute of it, even when I had to sing some very high notes that I couldn't sing!

Kiki



The team were absolutely great with the children and staff. They were always upbeat and full of energy. They pushed the children and had high expectations of us all, which was great.

Norma Hewins, Staff Choir, Lauriston School









While Richard's score is tuneful, it is by no means easy and I enjoyed every minute of helping all of the students, their teachers and my colleagues bring it to life. What a tremendous achievement!

Jonathan Gill – Music Director

