

PRESS RELEASE

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Castleward Opera Launch 2008 Season

The war of the sexes, as captured by Mozart in his much loved opera *Così fan tutte*, was today played out aboard the oldest floating warship in the Royal Navy, the HMS Caroline, as Castleward Opera launched their 2008 season. Guests at the launch were also treated to a preview of some of the music that will feature in a specially devised gala performance that will also be part of the 2008 season.

Dr. Roelf Schierbeek, Chairman of Castleward Opera, welcomed guests aboard the HMS Caroline at Alexandra Wharf, Belfast, and thanked the staff of the Royal Naval Reserve for hosting the event. He paid tribute to the Castleward Opera artistic and administrative team for conceiving and organising such a high quality programme for 2008.

Ian Urwin, the Artistic Director of Castleward Opera introduced the 2008 programme, reminding guests that it was *Così fan tutte* that first launched Castleward Opera onto the operatic scene almost a quarter of a century ago. He congratulated Tom Hawkes, (Director *Così fan tutte*) and David Angus, (Musical Director, *Così fan tutte*), for assembling a dazzling cast of top opera performers that included Ian Caddy as Don Alfonso, Joana Seara as Despina, Catriona Barr and Lee Bisset as the sisters Dorabella and Fiordiligi and Oliver Kuusik and Julian Hubbard as their fiancées Ferrando and Guglielmo.

He also informed guests at the launch of 7 specially devised gala performances directed by Wilfie Pyper, and conducted by Brian MacKay featuring a broad selection of music from Verdi and Donizetti, through to more modern composers such as Rodgers and Hammerstein and Leonard Bernstein. Addressing the assembled guests, Ian Irwin said:

'The 2008 programme promises to be one of our strongest ever, with a line-up of world-class opera singers who have prestigious international opera careers with the world's top opera companies. Così fan tutte will be set at the beginning of the 20th century, with stunning set and costume design by David Craig, one of the leading designers working in the UK today. Our opera gala, which will be semi-staged, will feature some of the most thrilling young voices around at the moment, with an opportunity for audiences to enjoy an eclectic mix of opera form and style, including much loved modern arias, such as the Balcony Scene from Westside Story, and favourite songs including Maria and America. Our vision continues to be that of producing and presenting opera at its very best, musically, visually and technically and this year's programme achieves that and much much more.'

A tribute was also paid to the Castleward Opera sponsors, in particular the Kennedy Group, who have been the main season sponsor for Castleward Opera for the past several years and were represented at the launch by Adele Kennedy. The Chairman also thanked the 2008 Corporate sponsors including the Belfast Harbour Commissioners, The Ulster Bank, Northern Bank, Bombardier and Paul Monaghan. It was also announced that Castleward Opera have a new sponsor in 2008 in Mivan Limited, who are sponsoring the Castleward Opera Orchestra through their new Ardnalvalley Development at Comber and this sponsorship has secured support through the Arts and Business Reach programme for an education project that will be targeting young audiences.

The highlight of the event was a selection of arias and duets delivered by performers who will be taking part in the 2008 season, including Ravil Atlas (*Opera Gala*) Catriona Barr (*Così fan tutte*) and Lee Bisset (*Così fan tutte*).

Audiences can now book on-line for this year's season by visiting www.castlewardopera.com where details of all performances and other information is readily available.

Ends

Notes to Editor

The launch takes place aboard the HMS Caroline, Alexandra Wharf, Queen's Road, Queen's Island, Belfast at 12.15pm on Thursday 24th April 2008. There will be photographic opportunities with performers and other representatives after the launch at 1.30pm.

Castleward Opera is sponsored by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Kennedy Group. The Castleward Opera Orchestra is sponsored by Ardnalvalley, Comber (A Mivan Development)

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