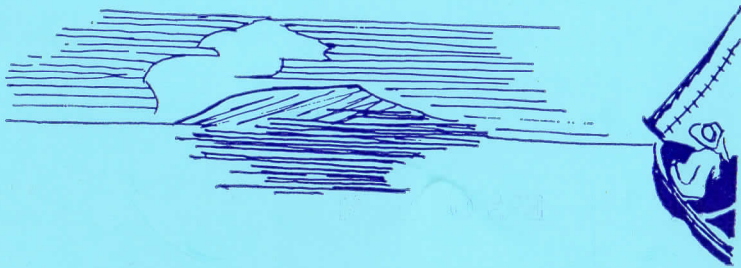


Woking Amateur Operatic Society

presents



Free as Air



Rhoda McGaw Theatre

Just in case

Just before the curtain goes up, turn to your right, and look towards the back of the Theatre. Right at the top of the stairs, seated on a couple of hard chairs, you will see two figures. A man and a woman, very likely, the man in a black uniform, the woman in grey.

They are, of course, members of the St John Ambulance Brigade, who look after us—and you—on this and on many other occasions. The “Order of St John” as it was originally called, has its roots in the 11th century, when it was a monastic order much involved with the Crusades, both as a military organisation, and as a source of help for the sick and wounded. Later, the Knights of St John, based first on the Island of Rhodes and later in Malta, were for many years engaged on keeping the Mediterranean free from piracy.

In the Middle Ages the English branch flourished as a monastic order until the suppression of the monasteries by Henry VIII. After a gap of some 300 years, the Society was re-formed in the 1830's, mainly as a religious organisation, and in the late Victorian years it again took up its work for the sick and injured, providing ambulances and similar services for the coal mines and the potteries. Today members of the St John Ambulance Brigade are a familiar feature of our daily life. We see them at the theatre, at the seaside, at the football match. Calm, capable, and experienced, they deal with a faint, a cut finger, a bumped knee, or a life-and-death drama with the same cool efficiency.

All this costs money: not for the personnel, of course: they do their job for love. But a bandage or a safety pin costs money (never mind an oxygen cylinder) and as the Brigade says, “Our time is free: our equipment is expensive.”

We in the Woking Operatic Society are deeply appreciative of the responsibility which the St John Ambulance Brigade shoulders on our behalf. Every night of our Show, there will be about 250 of you (Bless you!) in the Theatre, and there will also be 50 or 60 of us, either taking part in the performance or working backstage. And, of course, accidents can happen, either side of the curtain.

It is good to know that in any emergency, help is at hand, and the Operatic Society is pleased to make a small contribution to the Brigade's funds. Perhaps some of you would like to join us in giving support to this splendid organisation: if so, you will find a member of the Brigade (holding a box!) as you pass through the Foyer on your way home. Probably, you will never need their services. But it is nice to know that they are there . . .

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