

In Memoriam

Terry O'Farrell

1947 - 2021

Terry always struck me as the most unlikely opera star. Singing was not his greatest skill and on stage his costume was often a bigger presence than he was himself. He had to have a special pocket in any costume for his glasses, so that he could whip them off in the wings just before he came on, now blind as a bat. And his strong allegiance to Southampton FC meant that he would hang on to his radio and earphones to the last minute in the wings on match nights.

But he had other strengths, and although he auditioned for SOS several times unsuccessfully, the audition panel for a production of *The Yeomen of the Guard* in 1990 saw something special, and took him on essentially as set dressing, to sit in the stocks through the whole show. So well did he perform that one night no one came to let him out in the interval and with no tabs, he had to stay on stage in full sight, unable to get outside for the cigarette he so desperately needed.

Latterly he found his niche in character roles, as a Teenage Mutant Hero Turtle (believe it!) in *HMS Pinafore* in 1991; as Branigan in *Guys and Dolls* on 2004; as the Buster Keaton role in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* in 2010 and a particular favourite of mine, as a mesmerising and lugubrious Styx in *Orpheus in the Underworld* in 2012; and not forgetting his free-form 'Japanese man' in the 2016 *Mikado*.

Away from the stage, Terry was a key member of SOS committee and was also vital to the production team of our then junior arm, Debut Youth Theatre. He served as chair; and when, a few years ago, I shared the chair with him, I did the easy public eye stuff; and Terry did all the hard work and just got on with making SOS work. We would meet at his house before committee meetings to prepare the agenda, and that usually led to a garden tour with Jenny, his wife, looking at her ponds and shrubs and bird feeders and specially her prized pot plants and herbs. Terry took over the archivist role for SOS, and typically he wasn't just a caretaker, but dynamic, mining the SOS archives for his regular newsletter, his book for the SOS 90th Anniversary and he had nearly finished compiling the Centenary book based on AGM secretaries' reports (actually much more entertaining than it sounds) when he died.

For me, for the longest time, Terry was SOS. Quite apart from his day-to-day involvement, he was key to connecting today's SOS with its own history, ensuring that no one was forgotten, and that SOS had continuity through the years. His Centenary book will be a fitting memorial.



Terry used an oft repeated phrase, from time to time aimed at children at the school where he was deputy head and when they came to him with some really trivial matter – 'You're confusing me for someone who cares.' And of course, the irony is that he cared, deeply, about many things and not least, SOS. So, Terry, thank you so much for your time with us. For me and for SOS you are a legend, and we miss you.

Jonathan Fulcher

