



A brief history

Over 100 shows and counting...

Born in 1943, the offspring of the long-established Croydon Light Operatic, CODA's first production was Merrie England, performed at the local Grand Theatre and Opera House.

It proved such a success that the publicity at the time proudly stated: 'The demand for seats has exceeded the supply, and hundreds of disappointed patrons have been turned away. By general request, therefore, there will be (their capitals) A SECOND WEEK. Gallery two shillings.'

For most of its formative years, the society followed fashion and put on the likes of *The Geisha*, *The Quaker Girl*, *The Vagabond King* and *The Rebel Maid*, with a healthy sprinkling from the Gilbert and Sullivan repertoire.

In fact, over the six decades of its existence, Croydon Operatic and Dramatic Association, to give it its full title, has put on *The Gondoliers* and *The Mikado* (above) no fewer than nine times apiece! Old favourites such as *White Horse Inn* and *Rose Marie* have come and gone.

In 1962 CODA was privileged to be the first amateur company to perform in the Ashcroft Theatre in Croydon which boasted stage facilities at that time not surpassed anywhere in London – the company's

production of *The New Moon* had the audiences rolling in. Many popular shows including *King's Rhapsody* and *La Belle Helene* followed.

Then, in November 1971, there was something of a coup for the society . . . CODA staged the premiere of a show called *Young Tom*, which was to earn a place in West End theatre history. The book was co-written by a lady by the name of Joan Maitland, who was the secretary to a certain Lionel Bart. He didn't pen the music, however; Chris Andrews, who had written several top ten hits, did the honours. The show, based on Tom Brown's *Schooldays*, naturally generated a great deal of publicity. A vast company of 73 was led by the only non-local: Tom himself, horror of horrors, was recruited from North London!

In May the following year, much altered and now called, what else, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the show opened at London's Cambridge Theatre. It was directed by Peter Coe, who also directed *Oliver!* – a show which one can safely say ran a tad longer than this production's 76 performances. For the record, during its short run, Roy Dotrice played the main character, Dr Arnold and, among the youngsters cast as schoolboys were Simon Le Bon and . . . Keith Chegwin.

As musical tastes changed, CODA kept up, switching from mainly operetta to more modern musicals such as *Sweet Charity* and

Grease. Indeed, one of the society's recent offerings, was a hugely successful 'rock opera' – Rice and Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Now, up with the trends as ever, CODA can even boast its very own nationally famous (and highly topical) soap star . . . When the company put on a production of *Oliver!* in 1982, taking the lead was a stripling of a lad called Nigel Harman. These days, he is better known as Dennis, son of *Dirty Den* in *Eastenders*. (Nigel's father, Del, incidentally, is also a past member and, indeed, has directed several CODA shows).

Which brings us pretty much full circle. Although, contrary to the dramatic (or should that be operatic?) licence employed in the finale of its 130th production in 2004, *Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance!*, the society has yet to stage *Les Miserables* . . . who knows?