

January 11th, 1957.

Dear Lord Kilmaine,

Thank you for your letter of December 20th. Here is the information you ask for, and I shall be happy to come and see you should any points require further elucidation.

(1) The Purposes and Activities of the English Opera Group

The English Opera Group was formed ten years ago for the purpose of creating new British operas, and for giving training and experience to young British singers, conductors, producers, designers, and technicians. It was founded by a group of artists, including a composer (Benjamin Britten), a painter (John Piper), and the singers Joan Cross and Peter Pears.

So far the Group has commissioned and performed nine British operas - five of them by Benjamin Britten, two by Lennox Berkeley, and one each by Brian Easdale and Arthur Oldham. Six out of the eleven British operas given during the Festival of Britain in 1951 were presented by the Group. It has given more than 700 performances of its operas at home and 52 abroad.

The task of creating an English style of performance had to be undertaken chiefly with comparatively inexperienced singers; Kathleen Ferrier appeared for the first time on the operatic stage in "The Rape of Lucretia" and it was with this opera that her international career began; Jennifer Vyvyan took a small part in "The Beggars' Opera" five years before her triumph as the Governess in "The Turn of the Screw"; and many other artists, including Nancy Evans, Anna Pollak, Richard Lewis, Denis Dowling, and Frederick Sharp, have gained invaluable experience through working with the Group.

In the field of stage design and production, the Group has given a lead whose influence extends outside the range of its own performances; evidence of this can be seen in the productions not only of Covent Garden, Sadler's Wells, and Glyndebourne, but also in the theatre generally.

(2) The particular objects for which money is required in 1957 are as follows:-

	<u>Amount Reqd.</u>
	£
(a) A new production of Britten's opera "Albert Herring"	2,500
(b) A revival of Britten's opera "The Rape of Lucretia"	500
(c) A revival of Britten's opera "The Turn of the Screw"	500
(d) A revival of Lennox Berkeley's opera "Ruth"	600
(e) A season of opera and ballet in co-operation with the Ballet Rambert at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, November 1957-January 1958	10,000
(f) Overhead costs	<u>3,000</u>
	£17,000

Our possible sources of revenue at the moment are as follows:-

(a) Annual grant from the Arts Council	4,000
(b) Donation from the English Opera Group Association	<u>1,500</u>
	£5,500

Amount required to make the above programme effective £11,500

I should point out that although we usually manage to cover our running costs abroad, we can never do so in this country, except on the rare occasions when we receive a guaranteed fee, nor can we hope to recover our production costs.

I enclose the latest balance sheet and accounts of the English Opera Group, a Souvenir Book which describes the activities in more detail, and a copy of a draft letter to the Arts Council which gives an outline of the proposed collaboration with the Ballet Rambert.

Yours sincerely,

B.D.

The Right Hon. Lord Kilmaine, C.B.E.,
The Pilgrim Trust,
Millbank House, S.W.1.

Basil Douglas
General Manager

18th January, 1957.

Allen Sanderson, Esq.,
c/o The Haffield Foundation,
Haffield Lodge,
Regents Park, N.W.1.

Dear Allen,

As requested by you on the telephone yesterday, I am sending a statement of the English Opera Group's assets and liabilities as at 31st December, 1956, and supporting this with a detailed list of the creditors.

In case you wonder why the statement includes an estimate for overheads to the end of March, I should explain that these would normally have been covered by the fourth instalment of the Arts Council's £4,000 grant for the year to 31st March, 1957; owing, however, to our desperate creditor situation we asked the Arts Council to let us have the £1,000 early, and this accounts for the bank balance of £380.

You will see that the scenery, properties, and costumes are said to be "without depreciation", but this, of course, refers only to the year's additions; we always provide for depreciation in our annual accounts.

Your Trustees need feel no doubt whatever that, if they are good enough to make the grant of £4,000 for which I have asked, this will see the Group through its next year. We have already taken steps to ensure that, if our immediate creditor position is solved, we can get the money for our 1957 productions.

As regards the future, I think we are likely to decide at our next Board Meeting that, if we can rely on not more than a continuance of the present Arts Council annual grant, we cannot continue both to produce new operas and to exploit them by performances which frequently result in losses and at best just cover running costs with no contribution to production costs. In other words, exploiting of the operas requires a London office and administrative expenditure which is not justified by the turnover.

If, therefore, we have no substantial increase in income, I think we shall have to cut out the exploitation, close the London office, and run the Group from Aldeburgh, concentrating only on the production of new works for Festivals. We have a scheme, however, for starting a new company in conjunction with the Ballet Rambert for the production of operas and ballets at the Lyric, Hammersmith. This scheme is very much favoured by the Arts Council, but it seems unlikely that they could contribute enough to keep the thing going unless they cut out completely the grant made for our normal operatic work. Our participation in this new joint scheme would be based on the employment of fresh talent. From the auditions we have held for our Royal Court Theatre concerts we are satisfied that there are a lot of younger singers and orchestral players who ought to be given the sort of opportunities that we could in this way offer them, and we think this is a really worth-while project on which we should concentrate.

It is for this longer-term venture that I would seek the support of your Trustees when you are ready to discuss it and when we have surmounted the immediate difficulties for which we have asked for the £4,000 grant. If you

(3)

are able to support the longer-term thing, I have no doubt we could work out something together by which we might achieve worth-while results ; if not, we shall drop that scheme and continue the English Opera Group on the lines I have mentioned above.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be the initials 'B.L.' or similar, written in a cursive style.

PRESIDENT:

The Earl of Harewood.

THE

LTD.

English Opera Group

25, WIGMORE PLACE, LONDON, W.1

All communications to the General Manager: BASIL DOUGLAS

Tel.: LANGHAM 3146

DIRECTORS:

James Lawrie (Chairman),
Isador Caplan,
Anthony Gishford,
Lord Horder,
Sir Arthur Jarratt,
Sir Denis Rickett,
Erwin Stein,
Derek Young.

ARTISTIC DIRECTORS:

Benjamin Britten,
Basil Coleman,
Michael Northen,
John Piper,
Anne Wood.

January 25th, 1957.

Dear Jimmy,

Thank you for letting me see Ben's letter of January 16th. In general it makes a great deal of sense, and I would like, if I may, to elaborate some of his points, and at the same time make a counter-proposal.

The policy which he proposes for the future of the Group is dictated, as so many of our policies have been dictated during the last ten years, by circumstances, and although I agree that the present circumstances of the Group are sufficiently serious to warrant drastic action, I venture to hope that no boat-burning decisions will be reached as long as it is possible that circumstances may again change for the better. Even since Ben's letter was written, for example, the prospect has brightened, in that we are now able to pay most of our debts and there is a reasonable hope of grants from certain Trusts. It therefore seems a pity to retire the Group to Aldeburgh until we are quite sure that it is necessary. If you look at Ben's letter again, you will see that his proposal for the Group's activities is not far short of the programme for 1956; the only item lacking is a London season, which we are all agreed must be fully guaranteed in future or not given at all.

Some overhead costs would certainly be saved by the transfer to Aldeburgh, and it would be useful to have a clearer idea of what the saving might be. I imagine that some rent would have to be paid for an office, and storage accommodation of the size required (approximately 2,000 square feet) is not likely to be cheap even in Aldeburgh, and the saving in storage might well be offset by expensive transport and telephone costs. Some managerial and accounting costs would also be inevitable.

I very much hope that the dissolution of the English Opera Group Ltd. may be avoided, if only for the sake of the English Opera Group Association, which has built up so much good will for the Group among the public and in the profession. It has contributed an average of £700 a year to the funds of the Group during the last five years, of which approximately £170 annually is covenanted directly to the English Opera Group Ltd. and might be lost if the company ceased to exist. It is worth remembering, too, that the Group cannot claim exemption from Enter-

tainment Duty unless it is a constituted Society.


In short, my point is that circumstances may change in such a way that we may want to revive and even expand the activities of the Group, quite apart from any new venture with which we may be concerned. I quite agree with Ben that the future of the Group lies in the formation of a new, young company; we have come to the end of a chapter, and it is time we started afresh.

I must say, however, that I am alarmed at the prospect of throwing the English Opera Group overboard before the new experiment has proved practicable. Until Ben's letter, I think we had all intended to retain the individual organisation and activities of the Group in case the Rambert scheme does not work, and its success or failure depends on a number of factors which are at present obscure. Personally, I am all in favour of doing something fresh and new (possibly an opera-ballet revue), and I am sure that unless this is successful we shall not be able to present the Group's old repertory in London. I can imagine, however, that this new show might be successful enough to make it possible to introduce "Let's Make an Opera!" (which can always pay its way in London at Christmas time), and thereafter such other operas as may prove both financially and artistically acceptable.

My counter-proposal, therefore, if I should be allowed to make one, would be as follows:-

- (1) To postpone any decision to transfer the Group to Aldeburgh until we know what money is likely to be available to us this year. (By February 20th, for example, we should have news from both the Elm-grant and the Pilgrim Trusts, if not from the Gulbenkian Trust.)
- (2) To retain the English Opera Group's individual organisation at least until it is possible to combine its office with that of the new Company on a permanent basis.

Yours sincerely,


Basil Douglas
General Manager

J. H. Lawrie, Esq.,
3 Soho Square,
W.1.

January 31st, 1957.

Dear Ben,

Johnnie Cranko tells me that he will be staying with you for the weekend, so he will be able to tell you more about our talk to-day. I think that he was attracted by the idea of producing a revue with E.O.G. singers and a few dancers, and I believe that he thinks it might be feasible. Perhaps you and he can discuss the general outline of such a show, so that I can get started with the organisation of it.

There appear to be two snags:-

- (1) Johnnie confirms that he has no faith whatsoever in the Ballet Rambert, and does not want to be associated with them in any way, artistically or administratively. If, therefore, Johnnie is to produce the revue (and personally I don't think anyone else can), the Rambert idea is out. Incidentally, John P. called in on Wednesday to say that he feels exactly the same way as Johnnie about the Rambert people.

I could possibly induce the Rambert to hand over the contract for the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, to ourselves, but they could hardly be blamed if they refused. I could sound them about this, however.

- (2) Johnnie has half promised a revue to the Watergate Theatre Club, and they have given him carte blanche as to the form of it. I encouraged Johnnie, therefore, to think in terms of an opera-ballet revue presented by the E.O.G. under the auspices of the Watergate Theatre Club. That might be one solution to the theatre difficulty, although the dangers are obvious.

Even if both the Lyric, Hammersmith, and the Watergate ideas fall through, it may well be possible to get a theatre for a Cranko show. Naturally, I very much hope that something new and exciting can be thought out so as to give the young company a good start.

I am sending copies of this to John P. and Jimmy.

Benjamin Britten, Esq., C.H.,
Crag House,
Aldeburgh.

Basil Douglas
General Manager

THE ENGLISH OPERA GROUP LIMITED

MEMORANDUM BY THE GENERAL MANAGER

Before I go on leave on March 25th the Directors may like to know how things stand.

The financial position is roughly as follows:-

- (1) I have now received and acknowledged a cheque from the Gulbenkian Foundation for £4,000 for the purpose of "getting us out of our present difficulties".

This sum will cover the amount of the Group's current liabilities and its overhead costs until March 31st, 1957.

N.B. It is the wish of the Foundation that this grant shall be treated as strictly confidential for the present.

- (2) As announced at the last meeting, cheques for £1,000 have been received from the General Electric Company and from Messrs. N. M. Rothschild, who have now resigned from the Company.

These sums will cover the Group's overhead costs until the end of 1957.

- (3) Further revenue is available as follows:-

- (a) The English Electric Company have agreed to pay up the amount of their guarantee (£1,000) on receipt of the indemnity referred to at the last meeting. This indemnity has now been signed by all the Directors, and has been forwarded.
- (b) The Pilgrim Trust have decided to make a grant to the Group of £1,000 per annum for the next three years, "on the distinct understanding that during that period determined efforts will be made to enlist continuing support elsewhere". I have received the first cheque and acknowledged it.
- (c) The English Opera Group Association are accumulating a further fund for the Group, and are able to hand over £1,500 this year if needed. The Opera Ball on February 13th, under their auspices, yielded approximately £7,200 and was generally considered the most successful ball in the series.
- (d) The Arts Council are still holding in reserve the sum of approximately £5,000 which they are prepared to allot to the Group or to a new Company if a suitable programme is submitted.
- (e) The British representative of the Gulbenkian Foundation, Mr. Allen Sanderson, told me in an interview that he is prepared to discuss the future on the basis of an annual but short-term grant.

On the face of it, therefore, there would appear to be adequate funds available to finance further activities, and I have already declared my

willingness to go ahead with:-

- (i) A new Cranko production.
- (ii) A series of concert performances of operas written for the Group (possibly with the collaboration of the B.B.C.).
- (iii) Sunday evening concerts at the Royal Court Theatre.
- (iv) Lunch-time concerts for young artists.

Assuming that the decision to retire the Group to Aldeburgh, however, is unaltered by the change in our material fortunes, it will be for the Directors to consider whether they wish to reconstitute the English Opera Group Ltd. in such a way that activities of this kind can be organised in London as and when the demand and supply coincide.

If the Group continues to be active in London, even on a reduced scale, it will continue to enjoy the goodwill of the profession and the general public, which has been so carefully fostered since the Association was formed. There is a danger that this goodwill will be dissipated if activities cease. But it is now clear that any future London company must be able to do without the active participation of the present Artistic Directors, and for the Board this may be an overriding consideration.

Next Meeting. As a number of people are unavailable, the next meeting cannot be held before the middle of May. The Board will be notified of the date as soon as it is settled.

BASIL DOUGLAS

General Manager
March 23rd, 1957.