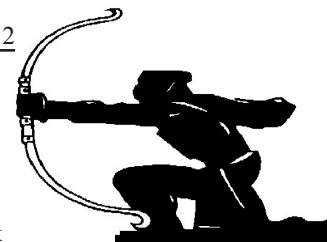




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## Nights (and days) at the opera

Sonia Singham, *ARCHER* team member and former headmistress of Holy Trinity School, was invited to chaperone two 12-year-old boys while they performed in an opera in Rotterdam, Holland. Here, she tells Marian Bunzl about the experience.

### Cast list:

**Mitchell Zhangazha and Nathan Musoki, two talented young performers chosen from over 40 children by...**

**Joan Lane, Children's Co-ordinator and trustee of the Finchley Children's Music Choir who had a long relationship with Holy Trinity School and its much loved headmistress... Sonia Singham, tutor / chaperone / cook: you name it, she was it.**



Sonia Singham

Dutch opera company Opera OT commissioned Jonathan Dove to compose *The Two Hearts of Kwasi Boachi*, which tells the story of two Ashanti princes presented to the King of the Netherlands in 1837. One tries to fit in and become a true Dutchman; the other struggles to maintain his African identity in an alien culture.

Mitchell and Nathan were chosen for the parts of the princes and Sonia set off for Rotterdam for six weeks to be their chaperone.

### The princes and 'mum'

The trio lived in a hired house and Sonia's job was 24/7. She accompanied the boys to rehearsals and provided five hours of study per day during term time. Then came the duties of house-mother: cooking, shopping, entertaining the boys on days off and weekends, tucking them up in bed at night (and making sure they stayed there).

Sonia says what made it possible and enjoyable was the boys themselves. She found them delightful to be with, well behaved, helpful and never bored, cranky or quarrelsome, in spite of all the hard work at rehearsals.

As chaperone, Sonia attended every rehearsal and was fascinated by the process of building up a show. She and the boys loved the music, which drew on African and Javanese rhythms. The opera opened at the Rotterdamse Schouburg theatre in October last year to great acclaim. And at the first night party, there was a special bouquet for 'mum'.

### Possible UK tour

The opera then went on tour, which was so successful that there is talk of a UK and even a USA tour. Sonia and the boys returned to Rotterdam for the last performance at the Schouburg on 27 May, a standing ovation, and a champagne reception on stage. It was a bittersweet occasion: a celebration of great artistic success but a sad goodbye to the team that produced it. Sonia has made lasting friendships throughout the company and, in spite of the hard work, wouldn't have missed the experience for the world.

## Cherry Tree Wood still under fire

By Jake Eiseman-Renyard  
**Within the last year, I have written a lot about Cherry Tree Wood and people making fires there. As this has continued, I write this update.**

In many other countries, forest fires are part of a natural regenerative cycle, but that is certainly not the case here, so why is Cherry Tree Wood the constant target of youths setting off fireworks, cooking up a roast and leaving a deluge of beer cans, packaging and even unused disposable nappies? Stranger items left behind include plastic guttering and some sort of tool bag set alight.

### Fire group outnumbered

In May, I saw some people making a fire and for the first time I tried to explain the trouble this causes for the park. I found it hard to get them to listen and one of them claimed: "The world's a big place, there'll still be more parks." Other dim-witted excuses were that burning rubbish counted as recycling as it would not have to be binned.

Amazingly, they then put out the fire. Another group of youths nearby who had seen this supported what I'd said and we chatted but, as soon as my back was turned, the first group relit their fire. Unfortunately for them, they were outnumbered and they left the park. I don't think they would have done this without the support I had from 'the gang'. It is good to know I'm not the only young person who is concerned about this park.

We were lucky this time, and the bad weather since then has kept people from making fires. Next time we might not be so lucky. With all the people who tried to get back a park keeper and have written to *THE ARCHER* about the state of the wood, I think it's time Barnet Council got on with putting the community first.



Pollarding trees in the High Road. Picture by John Dearing

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