



Note perfect: Composer Giacomo Puccini and one of his musical manuscripts written in Stephens ink.

Stephens was the ink of choice for a master composer

As collection curator at Stephens House and Gardens in East End Road, N3, **Melanie Wynyard** knew the ink manufactured by the Stephens family was extremely popular but she didn't know one fan was a world-famous composer. Here she takes up the tale:

One afternoon I got a call over the radio saying that a man in the café courtyard had something for me. Expecting to be handed the usual ink bottle, I was instead handed a photocopy of a page from a book that read: "Constantly chain-smoking and relieving his sore throat with cups of coffee he worked away at *La Bohème*. He was painstaking and meticulous and it took three years and nine months to complete. He relied on Ricordi for a free supply of score paper and Stephens blue-black ink."

Stephens ink used by Giacomo Puccini to write some of the world's most beautiful



music? I must admit that I laughed, returned to my office and put the piece aside. There have been several claims over the years about our ink, many of which have turned out to be simply hearsay.

Eventually, however, the page reappeared from the pile

of paperwork on my desk. It was in fact from *The Lives and Times of the Great Composers* by Michael Stein. So where did Stein get this information from?

Actually, Puccini started composing around 1880 by which time, thanks to Henry Stephens' efforts, the blue-black indelible ink was indeed available throughout Europe, so it was possible that the composer would have used and liked it. More research was obviously needed.

An exhaustive search finally unearthed a letter written by Puccini to his publisher Giulio Ricordi on 31 July 1898 when Puccini was working on *Tosca*. The letter says:

"I shall send on some material which I have already orchestrated, but I beg you not to look at it, as the calligraphy has deteriorated. I cannot understand it, but as I grow older I lose that neatness of hand which was so conspicuous a gift in me! Could you please send me on a bottle – not very large – of the usual Stephens Blue-black."

Eureka! With this discovery in mind, we decided to celebrate the work of Puccini with an evening of his music. The Voice finalist Nadia Eide will join tenor Austin Gunn performing arias and duets from *Tosca*, *La Bohème*, *Madam Butterfly* and more, set against the backdrop of Henry Stephens' home on Wednesday 6 July at 7.30pm. Tickets are on sale at

www.stephenshouseandgardens.com/events

Writers and readers together at first libraries festival

By Daphne Chamberlain

Barnet Council is holding a literary festival this month, and the good news is that it's accessible from East Finchley. All the events will be at Church End Library in Finchley, N3 and everything takes place across the weekend of 21-22 May. Entry is free, but booking is advisable as there are limited places.

Barnet Libraries say: "It's a great opportunity to get together and share the love of books and reading with some of the wonderful authors who create those words." The programme is as follows: **Saturday 21 May:** Rob Bidulph and 'Draw with Rob' (age guidance: 5-12-year-olds), 9.30am - 11am; Louise Hare and Luan Goldie in conversation with Patrice Lawrence, 11.30am - 1pm; Mandy Morton and Nicola Upson in conversation with Natasha Boydell, 2.30pm - 4pm; Erin Kelly, Heidi Amsinck, Caz Frear, and C J Tudor, 6.30pm - 8pm.

Sunday 22 May: Michael Rosen in conversation with

writer Miriam Halahmy (age guidance: 9+, teenagers and adults), 9.30am - 11am; Pam Fox in conversation with Francine Wolfisz, 11.30am - 1pm; Helen Fry and Charlotte Philby in conversation with Michael Newman, 2.30pm - 4pm; Debra Barnes, Ariana Neumann and Meriel Schindler in conversation with David Herman, 6.30pm - 8pm.

To book, contact Church End library by emailing Meriel@churchend.library@barnet.gov.uk or by phone on 020 8359 3800. If you are not yet a member and want to join Barnet Libraries you can do so online at www.barnet.gov.uk/libraries.



Francis Spufford



Jeremy Farrar



Anjana Ahuja



Charlotte Mendelson



Howard Jacobson



Claudia Roden CBE



Jon Sopel



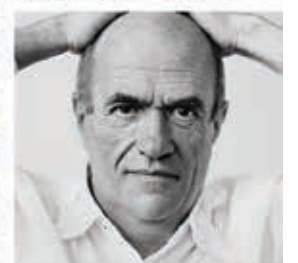
Colm Tóibín



Steve Richards



Victoria Glendinning



Colm Tóibín

Wordsmiths: The line-up for this year's Literary Festival at the Proms

Garden Suburb Proms will be a showcase of literary talent

The Literary Festival that runs as part of the Proms at St Jude's season next month will feature conversations and readings with distinguished novelists, journalists and writers.

Award-winning novelist Francis Spufford talks about his new book *Light Perpetual*, which imagines the possible futures of five children killed in wartime London, and Head of the Wellcome Trust Jeremy Farrar will be interviewed about his book *Spike: The Virus vs the People*.

Booker Prize winner Howard

Jacobson discusses his latest book *Mother's Boy*, and there will be live sessions with former BBC correspondent Jon Sopel, cookery writer Claudia Roden and biographer Victoria Glendinning.

Eight live events will be held at The Henrietta Barnett School in Hampstead Garden Suburb on the weekend of Sat-

urday 25 and Sunday 26 June, while an online-only interview with novelist Colm Tóibín will be first broadcast on 25 June. Every session will then be available online the following week from Saturday 2 July for which there will be individual tickets or a season pass. Find out more and book at www.promsatstjudes.org.uk

A Warm Welcome to Probus!

Come and meet us at the North London Probus Club for brunch, lively conversation and stimulating talks given by notable academics, journalists, media personalities and fellow members. Our Club welcomes all semi- or fully-retired PROFESSIONAL & BUSINESS men and women, and we meet from 11am on the third Wednesday of each month at Stephens/Avenue House in East End Road, N3. More details from Eric (ericdalton147@btinternet.com). See also our website at www.northlondonprobus.com.