



**FLIRTATION:** Tayside Opera cast members rehearsing popular operetta *Die Fledermaus*.

## GAYLE RITCHIE

**I**t's been a challenging return to the stage for Tayside Opera Company.

Founded in 1968 under the presidency of Ian Mortimer, 54 years later members are treading the boards to deliver their 67th performance, *Die Fledermaus*.

"It has been chosen as a lighter offering and the popular comedy of misunderstandings and flirtations with a beautiful score will entertain the audience," says current president Peter Gackowski.

Translating literally as *The Bat*, *Die Fledermaus* was written over a two-year period from 1873 by Austrian composer Johann Strauss II.

Its accessibility – both musically and dramatically – made it a hit, and ensured that Strauss was inspired to go on and write operetta after operetta over the next 25 years.

"It will be sung in English, and while we retain the services of musical director Richard Johnston, Alan Borthwick joins us again as production director," says Peter.

"It has been particularly challenging at rehearsals given that *Die Fledermaus* mixes dialogue with the wonderful music of Strauss and our principals have had much to learn.

"The end result will be a delight but it has been very ambitious in its execution.

"We are one of very few groups that still use the luxury of a full orchestra and adhere to the genre of Grand Opera.

"That is down to the support of our benefactors and the commitment of the Tayside Opera team."

The hotly anticipated production will launch at Brechin City Hall on June 4 and will then run at The Space Theatre in Dundee on June 9, 10 and 11.

Since launching in 1968, the company has seen 12 presidents, 13 leading ladies supported by three leading mezzos, 13 lead bass/baritones and 14 with Donald Maxwell, Tayside Opera's current honorary president.

"Tayside Opera is about performance, but importantly to have fun doing it," says Peter.

"Whether you are a seasoned singer, a past member, or a beginner, there are no barriers to you joining.

"I'm keen to open up opera to a younger audience and widen its appeal.

"There is no substitute to live theatre, and in the age of the virtual world it is important for social engagement and interaction."

Tayside Opera performer and Courier music critic Garry Fraser has just returned from walking the

West Highland Way in memory of his brother Stuart who was diagnosed with advanced prostate cancer and died in September last year.

Garry has already raised more than £30,000 for Prostate Cancer UK and there will be a collection for the charity after each show.

"Garry sang with us at our winter concert and was to be on stage for *Die Fledermaus*," says Peter.

"However, his commitments to the fundraiser took him away, and he felt that unless he could be there for enough rehearsals it was not fair on the company, so with regret he had to pull back.

"Garry was in Tayside Opera before and will I hope return once his other commitments fall away."

■ For tickets and more information see [taysideopera.com](http://taysideopera.com)