

# the northern line

the newsletter of north london university of the third age

issue 66

january 2018



## A morning at the opera

Not many of us can afford to travel the globe to watch live opera performances. However, as **Ann Bracken** told **Judith Abbs**, with the NLU3A opera group you can enjoy DVDs of superb productions performed by the world's greatest singers in the world's grandest opera houses

### How did the opera group get started?

The late Branwen Lucas, a lover of opera, founded the group and hosted it in her home for over 10 years. We now meet monthly on a Thursday morning at the New North London Synagogue in East End Road.

### Is the main aim education or appreciation?

I don't think one excludes the other: members are often exposed to operas they haven't seen for

years and perhaps have negative feelings about, or they may be exposed to an opera they have never seen before, or they may see a performance which questions and changes their preconceptions. Surely that is an educative activity. We watch, we listen, and – hopefully – we learn. The onus is on each member to become familiar with the background and synopsis of the opera being shown: fortunately, these are easily available online.

### Are you a group of opera critics or are you an opera audience?

The best description is that we are a critical audience: we

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Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier's production of *The Barber of Seville*

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generally comment on and discuss the production, individual performances, costumes, acting skills, and interpretation.

**The earliest opera that is still performed is Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, from the beginning of the 17th century. There are also many active 21st century composers. Does your repertoire include operas from four centuries and different nationalities?**

Until the 20th century, opera composers were European. This is a selection of some of the composers we have featured: Handel, Mozart (18th century); Donizetti, Verdi, Tchaikovsky (19th century); Massenet, Rossini, Janáček (19th/20th century); Strauss, Britten (20th century); Ades, Birtwhistle (21st century). Adams and Glass are hopefully on the horizon. Major opera houses employ artists from all over the world – casts are truly international, as are musicians and conductors. Recordings are from major European and American opera houses.

**Are you more concerned with the opera or the performance?**

An opera is often chosen because either a particular production or a performance is noteworthy.

In October we watched the 1993 *Così fan tutte* from Le Theatre du Chatelet, produced and conducted by John Eliot Gardiner with the English Baroque

*We watch, we listen, and – hopefully – we learn.*

Soloists and the Monteverdi Choir. There were many groans prior to watching it, because it is 'such a silly opera'. Doubters were won over by the beauty, sensitivity and sheer musicality of the performance.

In November we watched Massenet's *Werther*. Yet again, groans prior to seeing it as it is 'so dark with no good tunes'. Tenor Jonas Kaufmann and soprano

Sophie Koch effectively dispelled that myth!

**Do you only watch grand opera, or do you also watch light opera?**

The term 'grand opera' really refers to those operas which were conceived (mainly in the 19th century) to be staged on a vast scale with huge casts, lavish costumes and settings, augmented orchestras, occasional live animals; think *Aida*, *Don Carlo*. Nowadays budgets are tighter, but opera is still a very expensive art form.

Not all the operas we watch have tragic endings. We certainly

also watch lighter ones – Rossini, Offenbach. In the summer programme we watched the movies of *The Great Caruso* and *Carmen Jones*.

**Is the language barrier an issue for an opera audience?**

English subtitles are available on all DVDs.

**How do you find and make a choice of a DVD?**

The length of an opera is critical as our meetings last three hours and members need a break in the middle. I am still trying to find a DVD of *Don Carlo* which is less than 220 minutes. Fortunately, several group members have large collections of opera DVDs which they are willing to share, and the U3A resource centre has a collection of approximately 300 operas, all available for U3As to borrow. This is a tremendous facility which I make use of regularly.



Anna Devin in *La Fille du Régiment*, Covent Garden 2014

## Our publications

**The Northern Line** and **Update** are each published three times a year and edited by Leni Green with assistance from Judith Abbs and designed by Barry

Davies. **Update** is edited by Jane Marsh. Please send Jane submissions for the next **Update** by 9 February to oriana.jane@btinternet.com

• **The editors may shorten or otherwise amend articles to fit spacing and style requirements**



# Editorial

When I joined NLU3A eight years ago, two things puzzled me: why there were so few men and why there were so few people of colour in our U3A. The first seems to have been resolved as more men have joined. But what about the second?

I belong to half a dozen groups, and I'm glad to say that five of them have non-white members – though not many – and some are the same people attending different groups. We don't keep statistics on ethnicity (just as we don't keep information on religion, political persuasion or sexuality). But why ARE there so few people from visible ethnic

minorities, not only in NLU3A, but in the U3A as a whole? Why do black people, for example, feel that the U3A is not for them?

I always worked in equal opportunities settings, and inclusion was a major issue. So I'm asking you, especially if you're from a black and minority ethnic community: what can we do to encourage more people of colour to join us?

In this issue, Krishna Dutta, who thinks she was the first 'brown face' in NLU3A, gives us some suggestions for resolving this. Two members voice the pros and cons of numerous new U3As sprouting up in north London.



And Penny Sewell walks us around part of the London loop.

Happy reading!

**Leni Green**

Editor

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## As I see it

Have you been to a Third Age Trust summer school? Didn't know they existed? **Keith Richards** hopes to entice everyone into attending the next one

The Royal Agricultural University at Cirencester is beautifully situated just outside the town and again this year was the site of two of the Third Age Trust's summer schools. Cirencester U3A has an interest group which is, in effect, a radio station and this year recorded the play script prepared by the creative writing group and, as before, conducted interviews with some of the tutors who come from many parts of the UK – two from Scotland this year.

I have just spent an absorbing hour or so listening to the two drama tutors. Linda Shannon from U3A London coordinated a course on the boy players who undertook the female roles in

Shakespeare's plays and Rosamund Hall from Llandovery U3A explored the 'forgotten' dramatists of the 1950s and 60s in her acting workshops – TS Eliot, Christopher Fry and Robert Bolt.

Listening to them, I am struck again by the very small number of U3A members who know about these short residential courses. One evening we were entertained by the best choir I have heard in years (Cirencester Community Choir), and while socialising afterwards many of the singers came up to say that they had no knowledge of the summer schools which have been held for many years in their own town!

The London region has followed other parts of the UK in



establishing a summer school of its own, but it is not residential. The national events are indeed 'national' and the evaluation forms I have been reading attest to the invigorating experience of meeting and working with each other for these intensive four days.

The Trust has recently appointed a communications

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officer (Liz Drury), who can be contacted at the new national office in Lant Street, which is a few minutes from Borough station on the Northern line. Hopefully she will be able to improve the sadly lacking communication system.

Preparations are already under way for the 2018 summer schools under the direction of Julie Travers at the same address. Information will be available shortly after Christmas. I have been at almost every one since the first was held in the 90s at the University of York and as my contribution diminishes it would be so good

to know that more members of our U3A were contemplating registering next year.

**KEITH RICHARDS IS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF NLU3A AND A PAST CHAIR OF THE THIRD AGE TRUST**

## Not in my north London backyard?

Everyone is in favour of building new homes – so long as they don't interfere with their own. Is it the same with U3As in north London? **Patricia Isaacs** takes the Angela Merkel approach to acquiring new neighbours, while **Micky Mankin** is more circumspect

### Patricia says:



Until joining the U3A, I never knew that ageing could be fun! Using my mind at an age when I had expected to slow down; meeting many wonderful people; making good friends; finding a new inner self; all

this and more is what U3A offers in abundance.

North London U3A has, over the years, sprouted into neighbouring areas, opening the door for hundreds of others to benefit, giving more people a chance to develop a new approach to their third age.

There may be concerns when a new U3A opens nearby but they are based on misunderstanding. Groups do not desert en masse, nor do individual members. Venues already in use are not taken over – usually members of an existing U3A will join a second as well as remaining loyal to the first. I have been involved in setting up two new U3As on our borders and am now a regional volunteer, helping to launch additional branches in London. I do this because I firmly believe that the U3A is of benefit to everyone and should be supported.

### Micky responds:

There are now over 1,000 U3As in the UK with over 400,000 members signed up and more added daily.

In our own part of London, Mill Hill started last year, and recently two more: Hampstead Garden Suburb and Crouch End. Both of these branches sit very close to NLU3A's catchment area, which mainly comprises Finchley, Muswell Hill and Highgate. In fact, Hampstead Garden Suburb U3A, when they announced their formation, put in their literature

that they would cover Finchley also, though they have since retracted this.

How will these new U3As impact on our own and will their existence make it more difficult for us to grow?



For various reasons we have a regular falling away of numbers. Therefore, we have to attract new members so that we can maintain a healthy size which will enable us to offer a large number of varied groups to keep our clientele happy and enthused.

Neighbouring U3As opening will not cause

large numbers to desert NLU3A in the short term, but having several adjoining U3As will make it problematic for us to encourage new members and grow, which is essential for us to keep up our high standards.

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## A lesson for NLU3A: how to reflect our diverse communities

It is startling to travel to a U3A meeting through a multi-ethnic world and then to arrive in a room in which almost everyone is white – no matter what their religious and racial background. **Krishna Dutta** is the exception. She has some positive suggestions for creating a more culturally diverse U3A

When I turned up at my very first U3A monthly meeting in 2006, I was a little daunted to find that I was the only person of colour. Although over the years my membership has provided me with great opportunities for making friendships, enlarged my pool of knowledge, allowed me to cultivate many pursuits and vastly enhanced my wellbeing, the U3A's general lack of ethnic diversity still bothers me.

Here I wish to share some thoughts gleaned from talking to prospective minority ethnic members, which might shed some light in this area.

As we know, our ability to connect with others depends on our personal, practical, social and cultural experiences. Most of us in north London have neighbours and friends from various ethnic communities and have the

opportunity to meet them in streets, over a garden fence and even at social gatherings such as parties and weddings.

But for someone from an alien culture to join a U3A interest group and cultivate a chosen passion would presuppose one's cultural choices and the ability and confidence to articulate

thoughts and ideas. They may feel uneasy about joining groups such as opera, western classical music or French literature with participants mainly from a white, educated middle-class background

simply because of lack of interest and genuine apprehension about being a misfit. People from elsewhere have a rich cultural heritage of their own, which may well be better served and nourished by community arts and culture groups.

To offer them a rich and mutually beneficial learning

*if other national organisations ... can become more diverse and inclusive through creative programming, why can't we?*



Photo: Ricci Achilini

outcome, the U3A as a whole needs to devise imaginative cross-cultural interest groups and summer school programmes. If other national organisations, for example the British Museum, the BBC, the National Theatre and the British Film Institute, can become more diverse and inclusive through creative programming, why can't we?

We have rich resources among members. We live in diverse

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**Sir Jagadish  
Chandra Bose**  
1858–1937

neighbourhoods. We need to reflect that. We need to find

speakers and topics that reflect diversity in areas of hidden history

behind many scientific inventions of the colonial era, such as radio and microwave optics by a Bengali scientist, Jagadish Chandra Bose; discuss the life experiences of migrant families in book groups, and show active curiosity about non-western arts, music and movies.

Then we could stimulate the development of a U3A that represents our changing demography.

## Group news

### Modern and Contemporary Literature



W H Auden

This group, which for the last few years has been exploring Irish Literature (Joyce, Yeats, Heaney and contemporary poets), has decided to broaden its scope in 2018.

We will begin in January by focusing on the work of WH Auden. Thereafter we will examine other contemporary writers or perhaps single representative poems as suggested and agreed upon by group members.

We are a fully participatory group – members prepare readings, and texts are studied closely. The steering group consists of Keith Richards, Tessa Cohn and Ann Bracken (coordinator).

Meetings take place on alternate Fridays, 10:30am–12noon, at Finchley Progressive Synagogue, Hutton Grove, N12. The first meeting in the spring term will take place on 19 January.

### Climate Change

There are spaces in the Climate Change group, which meets on alternative Thursday mornings in Finchley. If you're interested please ring Jeff on 8292 1821 for more information.

### Historic London Walks Group 1

This group has been meeting since 2007. Now some members have retired, so we have one or two places available. We walk and look at interesting areas, with information and history notes sent out in advance. Newer NLU3A members are particularly welcome. We meet on Friday mornings, middle of the month, occasionally a full day.

Contact Alison Watson, [alison.watson9@gmail.com](mailto:alison.watson9@gmail.com)

### Rubber Bridge

We are looking for good players of rubber bridge who can play on a fortnightly basis on Tuesday afternoons between 2 and 4pm. Even if you can only play occasionally, please contact Marion on 8458 9915.

### Science

We have a member who might be interested in starting a science group. If you would like to join such a group, please send expressions of interest to Sue Teller at [ginpalace@mac.com](mailto:ginpalace@mac.com) or 8381 4480.

### Yoga

A professional yoga tutor is willing to start a new yoga group, weekly on a Thursday morning. We are hoping this might start in the New Year. If you are interested, please ring either Sue on 8381 4480 or Candiss on 8883 1395.





Southwick Hall, Northamptonshire

## Spring study tour to Northamptonshire

This year's NLU3A spring study tour will take us to Northamptonshire, a county well known for its country houses. As well as visiting some of these, we will take in a range of buildings of all dates from Anglo-Saxon times to the 20th century. We expect to learn about the local boot and shoe industry and iron manufacture, and we will view the world's oldest

garden gnome and a Napoleonic war military depot.

The tour will run from 20 to 24 May, and we shall stay four nights at a four-star hotel in North Northamptonshire. For information about the proposed itinerary and a booking form, please contact Helena at [helena.green@talktalk.net](mailto:helena.green@talktalk.net) or 8349 3058.

FRANK KELSALL AND HELENA GREEN



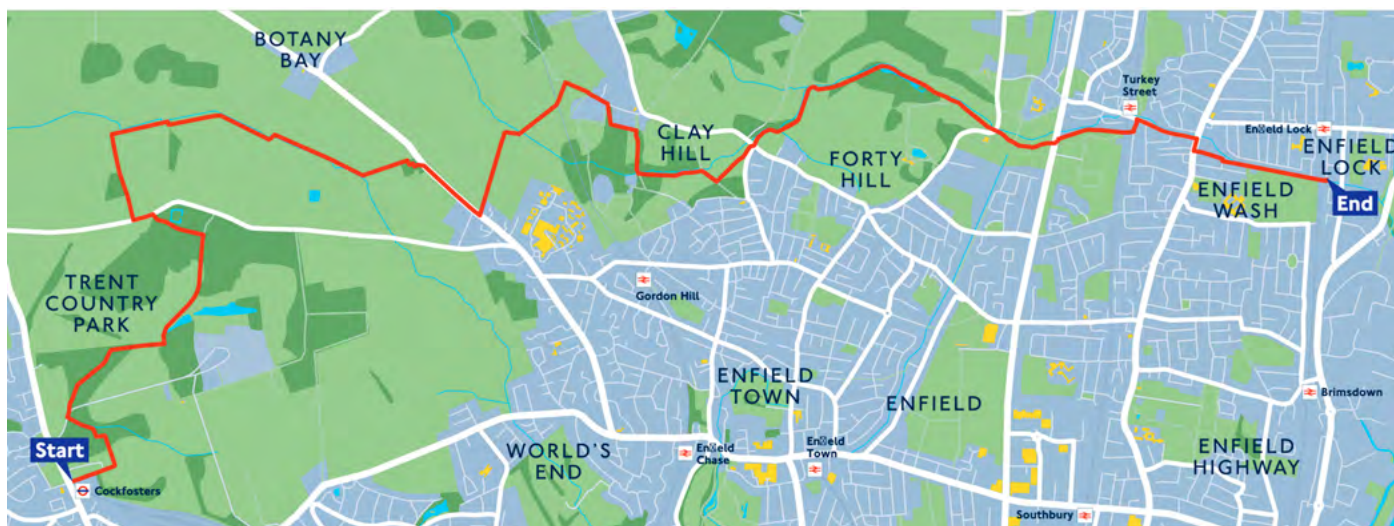
### North London U3A needs you

We need your skills and your enthusiasm to ensure that we have volunteers ready and willing to fill any gaps as they arise on the committee, or among interest groups, or to help with events.

Circumstances change all the time and if we cannot ensure the succession of the committee, our NLU3A could eventually cease to exist.

So please help! Email Ruth, [membership@nlu3a.org.uk](mailto:membership@nlu3a.org.uk) briefly outlining in which areas you would be willing to offer support or simply to request further information.





# Cooks Hole & cuckolds – a walk on The Loop

The London Loop is a scenic trail that circles the suburban edge, taking in fields, forests and famous buildings. **Penny Sewell** walks us through some of Section 17, the whole of which goes from Cockfosters to Enfield Lock

Got your Freedom Pass, a bit of money, your mobile phone, your guide? Right, let's go! Starting at Cockfosters, we go first into the station car park to find a hidden gate (hint: it's just near the entrance!). We follow the path next to the green-floored cemetery, peaceful and wonderful in the sunshine.

London Loop signposts lead us through Trent Park and out onto

Ferny Hill. Opposite, the Jubilee Path leads downhill to Salmon's Brook, which we follow. The brook is litter free and lovely.

We go through some kissing gates, over a stile or two (it's a bit boggy at the foot of a field with a couple of horses in it), up the curiously named Cuckold's Hill, and through the recently planted Brooke's Wood. This takes us to a field with a great view, next to The Ridgeway.

Next we take Rectory Farm Road (no signpost, but it's opposite the bus stop), and cross the interesting brick bridge, which I take to be a testimony to a busy past, over Turkey Brook.



I love brooks and there are plenty of them to explore around North London. After a while we come to the enchanting Hilly Fields Park and discover beech and oak trees, strollers, joggers, children, dogs.

We've walked about four miles by now, so we reluctantly leave Turkey Brook just after a low bridge at the bottom of the little valley. Instead of following the Loop sign pointing left, we go straight on up the hill to Cooks Hole Road, going I know not



Ferny Hill Farm





The Japanese garden in Trent Park

where, but taking us left into Phipps Hatch Lane.

Our wonderful outing has lasted for about four and a half hours. We turn right into nearby Gordon Hill station and catch a train on the Hertford Loop line which will take us from Gordon Hill to Kings Cross, with many local stops along the way.

- Want to go further? Find out more about the London Loop from [tfl.gov.uk/modes/walking/loop-walk](https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/walking/loop-walk)



Crossing the Turkey Brook in Hilly Fields Park



Do you have a favourite place in London, accessible with a Freedom Pass? Send a brief description to [helenjuni@ntlworld.com](mailto:helenjuni@ntlworld.com) telling us why it's special. Don't forget to include a photo or two!

## Looking ahead in 2018

14 May	Dignity in dying — Sue Spence
11 June	Development of the City of London — Colin Davey
9 July	Annual general meeting
To be confirmed	Open day
10 December	Festive lunch



**Away days**

Organised by Jim Sweeney,  
John Hajdu and Sue Teller

# The Old Operating Theatre Museum and Herb Garret

St Thomas's Church

9a St Thomas's Street London SE1 9RY

**Friday 19 January**



## Facilities

There is a shop but no toilet facilities or café on site. Visitors are advised to use Guy's Hospital, Borough Market or Southwark Cathedral refectory (all within walking distance). Access to the museum is restricted and involves climbing a winding staircase of 52 steps. Sorry, no lift.

## Meet

By the entrance in St Thomas's Street, close to junction with Borough High Street.

## Times

10.50am for an 11am start. The visit will last about an hour and a half.

## Cost

£5 payable in advance, to include group entry and talk.

## Travel

London Bridge underground and bus stations are very close, in Borough High Street. Among the many buses are 17, 21, 43, 45, 48, 141 and 149.

**Booking is essential.** Use booking form (Page 11) or post us the requested details and your cheque.

This is the oldest operating theatre in Britain, dating from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and restored about 10 years ago. It is to be found in the roof space of St. Thomas's Church, which also served as a herb garret. The reason for this odd location will be explained in the course of our group visit which will comprise a talk on the heroic days of surgery and a tour of the theatre, garret and museum.

# Angels Costumes

1 Garrick Road

London NW9 6AA

**Friday 23 February**

Angels Costumes is the multi-Oscar and BAFTA winning, largest costume house in the world. We have arranged a special-priced tour in which we will be guided around all of Angels Costumes

departments including tailoring, ladies making, alterations, uniform, badge room and warehouse. We will have first-hand accounts of working on the biggest productions, such as *Shakespeare in Love*,



*The Lady in the Van, Downton Abbey, Wicked and Game of Thrones.* We will see clothes made or recreated for Benedict Cumberbatch, Judi Dench, Fred Astaire, Johnny Depp, Cate Blanchett and many more. We will also learn about the heritage of the business, see how costumes are made, and journey through some of the 8.5 miles of hanging costumes. Comfortable shoes are recommended, as we will be on our feet throughout. Please note that photography and videos are only permitted in certain areas, which will be highlighted to us during the tour.



### Facilities

Toilets but no onsite café. There are probably some on the nearby Broadway.

### Times

10.50am in the reception area for a prompt 11am start. The visit will last about two hours.

### Cost

£9, payable in advance. (Normally £20)

### Travel suggestions

From Kentish Town Overground station (about a minute's walk from the tube station), take Thameslink

for three stops to Hendon Station. Exit on to Station Road take slight right on to Wilberforce Road, turn left onto Herbert Road, turn right onto Russell Road and turn left onto Garrick Rd (under 10 minutes' walk.)

Or drive and park in the Angels onsite car park. If you can offer or would like a lift, please say so with your application and we will try to match you up.

There are also some relevant buses, including 32, 142, 143, 324, 326.

### Booking is essential

Please use the booking form (below) or send us a note with the requested details and your cheque.

## Away days booking form

Name(s)\_\_\_\_\_Membership number(s)\_\_\_\_\_

Block letters please. No more than two names per application form.

Phone number(s)\_\_\_\_\_

Date	Name of visit

- Cheques payable to NLU3A
- Send booking form and cheque to Sue Teller, 27 Midholm, London NW11 6LL. A separate booking form and cheque are required for each visit.
- You will be notified by phone if you have a place (or not). Your cheque will be banked or destroyed accordingly.
- If you are unable to attend the visit, please phone Sue Teller on 8381 4480 so that your place can be offered to another Member. Ring 0778 478428 for last-minute cancellations.

# Spring term monthly meetings

All take place on Mondays at 10.45am at St Paul's Church, 50 Long Lane, Finchley N3 2PU. Refreshments are served from 10.15. Please note that, out of courtesy to the speaker and to abide by the fire regulations, you might find yourself locked out of the meeting if you do not arrive by 10.40.

## 8 January

### Farming in north London: digging up the dirt

From Roman Highgate ware and Boadicea through Saxon ditches, medieval accounts and dairy wars, North London has deep agricultural roots. In this lavishly illustrated presentation, Lester Hillman will explore two millennia through field boundaries, buried rivers, place names, saints, songs and much more. Lester, an honorary academic adviser to several organisations, leads heritage programmes and walks as well as lecturing and writing and is the recipient of a number of international and professional awards.



## 12 February

### The settling of the Nile Valley

Egyptologist Janet Diamond returns to NLU3A after her popular talk last November. She writes: 'When looking at the enormous temples, monuments and pyramids, I was overawed and wondered where the motivation, skills and wealth came from to enable such vast structures to be built. I set about finding out and what I discovered fascinated me and left me even more in awe of this amazing culture. This research and what I discovered are the framework for this talk.'

## 12 March

### Highlights of the National Portrait Gallery collection

When the National Portrait Gallery first opened in 1856, it contained only 57 paintings. Today it is home to the most extensive collection of portraits in the world, with 2,500 paintings and over 250,000 photographs. Art historian Julie Barlow will explore some of the most significant portraits on display, from the creation of Hans Holbein's image of kingship and its embodiment in the person of Henry VIII in the Whitehall Cartoon to Lucian Freud's painterly and unflinchingly direct self-portraits.



# Term dates

Term	Start Date	Finish Date
Spring	8 January	30 March
Spring half term	12 February	16 February
Summer	16 April	20 July