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recipe for disaster quite frankly.  
After a geography degree at Newcastle and four years in the Devon and Dorset regiment, he planned to become a stockbroker ("because that's what a lot of officers do . . . and I wanted to avoid becoming an estate agent"), but on a whim took a short-term contract in Belize for Trekforce, an organisation running expeditions and volunteering programmes for young people. "I was on a run in the rainforest and — this all

deer" skipped across the path and there were saki monkeys in the trees above and I thought, this is amazing, why would I go back to work in London?"

He began searching for an expedition that would make his name. The initial idea was a great river journey by kayak but everything seemed to have been done. No one, however, had ever attempted to walk the Amazon. "I knew a world first would grab headlines and be instant promotion for the expedition,

broadcasting it live," he says. "At one point we uploaded a video on running out of food before we'd actually managed to find any. That gave me a kick."

He has advised other explorers about the need for good websites, Wikipedia entries, photos and PR. "I'm not embarrassed about it because we had the substance as well. There are 101 extraordinarily gritty climbers from Yorkshire who do really gnarly stuff but will never promote themselves. I think I was mar-

criticism aimed at Bear Grylls for staying in hotels, using safety consultants and full film crews, there was clearly a market for something more authentic but Stafford, still driven to prove himself, pushed it to the extreme.

The first series, in 2013, saw him dropped, naked and alone, on an uninhabited Fijian island and left to survive for 60 days with no food, water or survival equipment of any sort. Two follow-up series saw him marooned in a

challenges, less the centre of his own world. "I think it is a product of marriage and parenthood and I wouldn't have been in a position to do either of those if I hadn't had the psychotherapy. The therapy came out of the island experience and that came out of the jungle. It's all been a journey, and I wouldn't have traded any of it."

*'Ed Stafford: Left for Dead' continues on the Discovery Channel until October 19*

Opera-goers are used to hearing a bell announce the start of the performance. On a late-summer evening in a Florentine sculpture garden, this summons took a different form. A flock of barefoot children ran down the pathways, ringing tiny hand-bells to signal the start of Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*. They wore the tricolour sashes of the garden's owner, the princely Corsini family. Such was the charm of Italy's newest musical fixture: the New Generation Festival, which launched on the first weekend of September, Tuscany's answer to Glyndebourne.

The festival takes a unique approach to breaking down musical barriers — both promoting upcoming singers and offering an after-show programme far beyond opera. Yet the noble aim of transmitting music across the generations is hemmed with tragedy. As preparations began, the 900-year-old Corsini family lost its own son and heir to a cycling accident in London. In full mourning, the decision was taken to continue. The three-day event now stands as a fitting memorial to the 21-year-old Prince Filippo.

The result is a family-friendly opera festival — complete with picnic hampers and a corner reserved for the



consumption of ice cream. The black-tie dress code is open to varied and colourful interpretations. The audience seating straddles Renaissance sculptures, which poke up incongruously among the stalls.

As silence descended on the first night, servants perched curiously in the stone windows of the 16th-century Palazzo Corsini al Prato. Elsewhere they would be extras: here the glimpse of an iPhone revealed them to be real family retainers. After the final bows, the long orangery hosted a programme of cutting-edge bands flown out from the UK — including a five-man drag act. Outside, fairy lights laced the topiary and floor cushions were strewn

*It is Tuscany's answer to Glyndebourne — a family-friendly opera festival with picnic hampers and a corner reserved for the consumption of ice cream*

across the parterres. Yet the appearance of informality hides aristocratic credentials. The opening gala dinner had a social topography that peaked with Britain's Princess Michael of Kent. The Corsinis themselves — "one pope, one saint" as a satirical cabaret duo reminded us — were effortless hosts. One family member employed a live bird as a fascinator. By the third evening, the adult princesses were as shoeless as their children.

Only once was the gaiety put aside to remember the fallen. Following the Friday night orchestral concert, the guests were asked to reconvene by foot in a secret location. This transpired to be one of Florence's best churches — the magnificent Chiesa di Ognissanti — where a special musical programme was offered in memory of Prince Filippo. With frescoes by Ghirlandaio and Botticelli among the Baroque splendour, it was a moving experience. Younger guests then trickled across the river towards the Piazza Santo Spirito, where passers-by absorbed the influx of evening dress as readily as extras from *La Dolce Vita*.

Many festival goers took advantage of a package offered by the Lungarno hotel — owned by the Ferragamo family, whose fashion brand has been

based in Florence since 1937. In the close-knit social world of Italy, there was of course a personal connection: one of the Corsini princesses is married to Salvatore Ferragamo's grandson. A more low-key accommodation option was the newly reopened Grand Minerva, with its framed correspondence from Franco Zeffirelli and rooftop pool looking on to the cathedral.

The New Generation Festival fits the region's growing claim as an international music destination. The best-established event takes place on the grand La Foce estate outside Siena in the middle of August. Towards the end of the same month — and neatly overlapping with New Generation — is the new and highly serious Suoni dal Golfo festival, two hours away on the Ligurian coast. However, it will be hard for others to match the broad scope and cinematic charm of the Corsini event. Its thick ochre programme outlined plans for a summer school and international live streaming — with whispers of Mozart next year. There is even the tantalising prospect of the main Palazzo Corsini — which dominates the Arno downstream from the Ponte Vecchio — being opened for an event.

**Toby Guise**