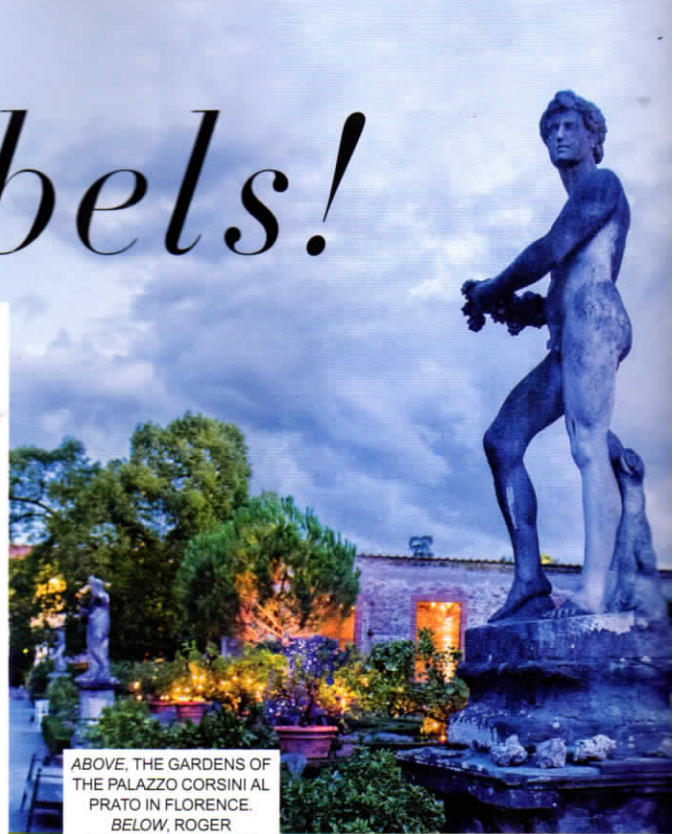
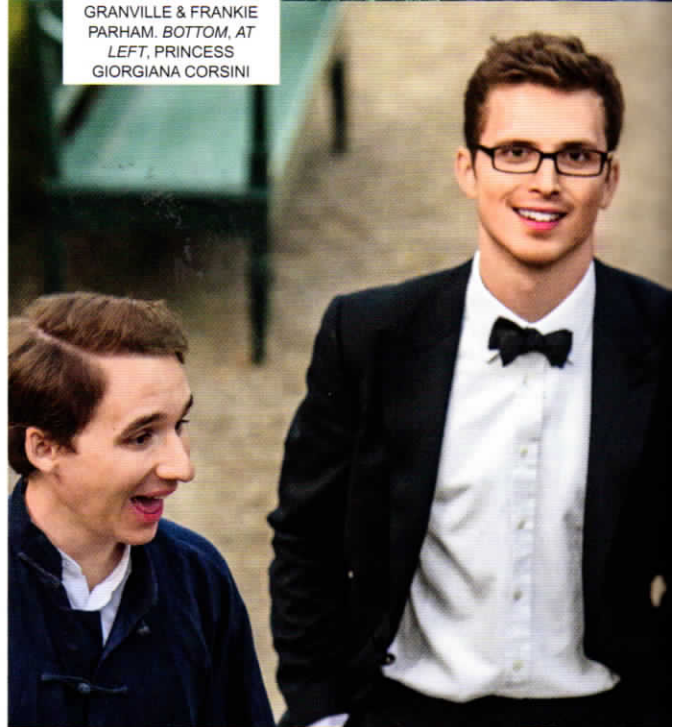


Opera rebels!

Donizetti in the grounds of a Tuscan palazzo – so far, so normcore. But the boys behind the New Generation Festival also had drag queens, power ballads and an 80-year-old princess dancing on a table late into the night. Matthew Bell reports



ABOVE, THE GARDENS OF THE PALAZZO CORSINI AL PRATO IN FLORENCE. BELOW, ROGER GRANVILLE & FRANKIE PARHAM. BOTTOM, AT LEFT, PRINCESS GIORGIANA CORSINI



A countess with a parrot on her head ushers guests into a walled garden where a stage with an orchestra pit has been built beneath a 16th-century loggia. Later, five men in ballgowns and wigs will belt out power ballads. Not quite what you'd expect on a summer evening at the Palazzo Corsini al Prato, home to one of Florence's grandest families. But this is what happens when exuberant Old Etonians put the fun back into Italian opera...

Welcome to the New Generation Festival, a joyous weekend of music that attracted 1,000 visitors at its debut last August and has even bigger plans for this summer. Guests included Princess Michael of Kent and Lady Gabriella Windsor, whose friend Maximilian Fane, 25, conducted. *Tutti i grandi italiani* were in attendance, along with planeloads of English music lovers.

It is the brainchild of Roger Granville, 29, and Frankie Parham, 28, friends since prep school and now music impresarios. They are the yin to each other's yang – Granville brims with bonhomie; Parham is quiet, serious, efficient. It's a contrast reflected in their festival, because, in addition to an ambitious staging of Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*, there were performances by Denim, a London drag act, and DJ Harold van Lennep, who had revellers dancing on tables until 2am. Last to bow out was Princess Giorgiana Corsini – 80 years old and still a nifty dancer – whose daughter Nencia, the music-mad Countess of Bolza, is usually found galloping across Castello di Reschio, her 2,000-acre estate in Umbria, on an Andalusian horse. Nencia had already hosted several operas at Reschio, and has championed the career of Fane, a talented young conductor who was a few years below Granville and Parham at Oxford.

Granville, Parham and Fane want to promote a new generation of young musical talents. 'It's not just about opera,' says Granville. 'The idea is to bring all these different genres into one place. There's no reason why you can't love Beyoncé as much as Bach.' But no sooner had preparations begun than tragedy struck. In October 2016, Prince Filippo Corsini – the 21-year-old sole male heir to the Corsini titles and the son of Giorgiana's son Duccio – died in a traffic accident in London. His death devastated the family, but they decided to continue with the festival, which is dedicated to Prince Filippo's memory.

By the time August rolled round, the gardens of the Palazzo Corsini had been transformed. There was a full stage with grandstand seating. Yurts and jaunty tents housed prosecco bars and ice-cream stands, and those not heading for the gala dinner took to rugs and deckchairs for picnics during the intervals. On the second night, everyone reached for their lorgnettes to get a better glimpse of Charlie Siem, the OE violinist (and occasional arm candy for Wendi Deng), who impressed with his repertoire of Rossini and Beethoven.

Only on the closing night did the weather turn British. But as everyone fled the rain, determination set in and a reduced orchestra transferred to one of the *limonaie*. And when a power cut left them in darkness, the audience pointed their illuminated iPhones at the stage. Power had been restored by the time the drag queens appeared, singing, appropriately, 'I Will Survive'.

For information about the 2018 extravaganza, visit newgenerationfestival.org.



ABOVE, CHARLIE SIEM. BELOW, MAXIMILIAN FANE. BOTTOM, DENIM ON STAGE AT THE NEW GENERATION FESTIVAL

MORE TUNES WITH A VIEW

MUSICA E ROSSI TOSCANI

This sporadic festival started life in 2000 as a series of private concerts organised by a group of Tuscan winemakers. Now, world-class musicians such as members of the Berlin Philharmonic perform in the grounds of some of the best wineries in Tuscany and are paid in wine. The most spectacular of all is at the Villa di Geggiano, used in the making of Bernardo Bertolucci's *Stealing Beauty*, starring Liv Tyler. There is also a restaurant outpost in Chiswick. musicaerossitoscani.com

INCONTRI IN TERRA DI SIENA

Readers of Iris Origo, the Anglo-American writer, will know of La Foce, the house near Pienza where she lived with her Italian nobleman husband. Origo's account of sheltering Allied soldiers was published as *War in Val d'Orcia*. The gardens are the setting of a cosy yet grand classical-music festival – founded by Origo's grandson, the cellist Antonio Lysy – that is now entering its 30th season. itslafoce.org

SUONI DAL GOLFO

A bit further west on the Ligurian coast is a new week-long series of concerts and poetry readings, held in late summer. Poets including Shelley and Byron were drawn to this coastline, known as the Cinque Terre, and visitors to this year's festival were able to access Shelley's private villa for the first time for a reception and recital. suonidalgolfo.com



DJ Harold van Lennep



'There's no reason why you can't love Beyoncé as much as Bach'

