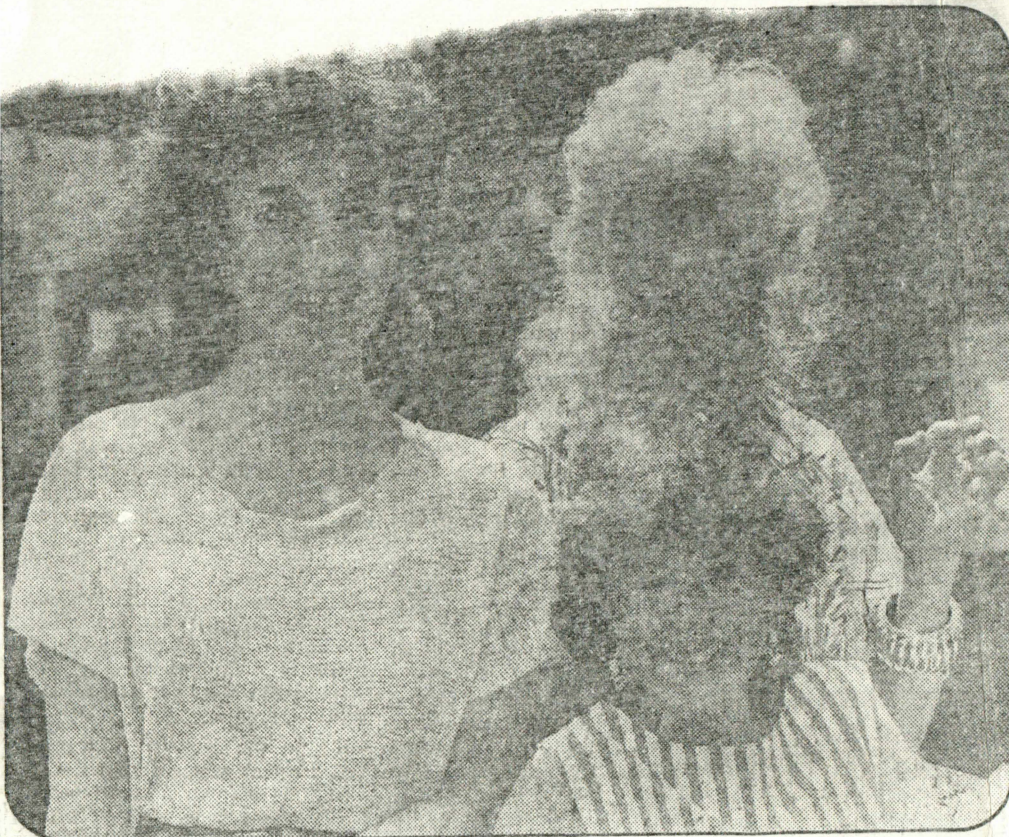


Hos Drinkwater

# A matter of identity



FASCINATING Aida is something to do with opera; it is a group of women dedicated to the rabid abuse of masculinity; it consists of three singers who were born to womanhood and desire separate development from men.

None of these statements is true. In fact, Fascinating Aida is simply a humorous and talented trio which has nothing to do with high opera and very little association with the feminist cause.

The surprising thing, particularly in view of the photograph on the left, is that they were not all born women. Adele Anderson, the newest member of the group, spent the first 20 or so years of her life as a man.

She underwent an operation to change her sex shortly after graduating from a drama course at Birmingham University. She disappeared into the civil service while the metamorphosis took place and spent some unproductive years working in job centres and the like.

While not a conventional step, this is by no means a

novelty. Many who have felt ill at ease in their bodies have taken the same course. April Ashley was written about and Jan Morris wrote about it. You might reasonably think that quite enough has been said on the subject.

However, there is still considerable interest in the tabloid press, which is longing to reveal exclusively her story under a headline "Sex-op man in Libbers group". These stories are usually preceded by unwarranted intrusions into the subject's life.

Adele, aged 33, has put up with quite a bit of this recently. "Well, they telephoned all my friends, people I knew at university. They asked one person to send pictures of me before my operation. They telephoned my parents, pretending to be old friends from university, using a nickname which I never had and asking for my number."

All this has caused considerable upheaval in the group who have created a very individual career for themselves since last year's Edinburgh Festival. It is

neither radical, popular in the strict sense, nor serious.

The group's other members Dillie Keane and Marilyn Cuts were anxious about the effects of exposure. This is understandable, as Adele did not tell them about her operation.

"Well, I had suspected for a while," said Dillie, "and I was a bit annoyed that she hadn't told us, but it is not blameworthy."

Adele defends her secret. "At first when I joined the group months ago, I thought I was on a three-month trial and so I didn't tell them. Then when I was in the group, I didn't feel it was necessary because they had accepted me."

I divined a difficulty in the area of her secrecy. I do not think it would be exaggerating the situation to say that Marilyn and Dillie had formed the women's group and fully expected those who wanted to join to be women who've always been women.

Still, they seem to have got over this and one hopes that their genuine talent goes on to achieve greater recognition.

Under pursuit: Fascinating Aida - from left, Adele, Marilyn and Dillie. Unwarranted intrusions have caused considerable upheaval