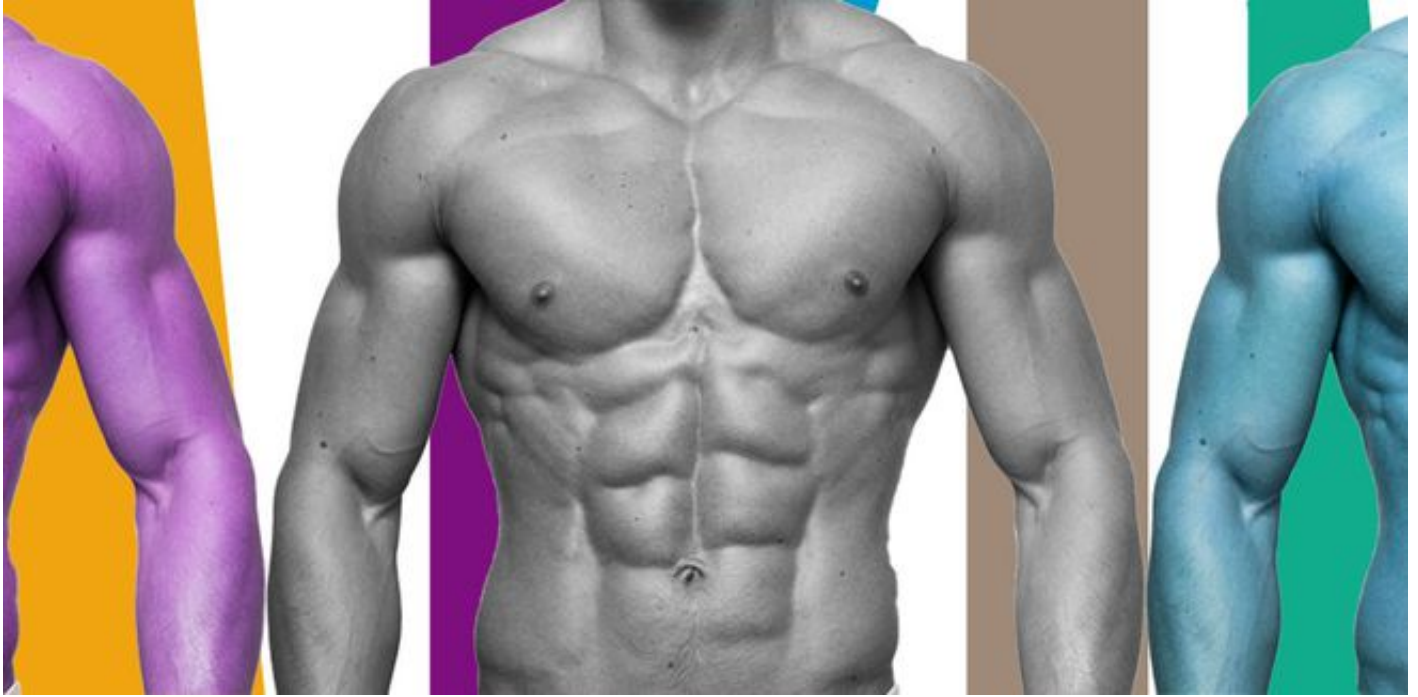


Inside Out Christopher Gillett talks 'barihunks'



Tenor Christopher Gillett's unexpurgated view of life on, off, behind and under the stage.



The tenor wonders whether he should have spent more time in the gym during his golden youth...

In the mid 1980s I sang Hermes in Kent Opera's production of Tippett's *King Priam*. A very puny 25-year-old, I was given almost nothing to wear, and from Plymouth to Norwich (and eventually on television) I appeared on chilly stages with only a gold nappy and a lot of gold make-up. Every night the poor make-up girl had to paint me from head to toe in a thick coat of gold, except for the middle of my back which was never visible. Small wonder, then, that the James

Bond fans in the orchestra took to calling me Shirley Eaton. Some theatres had miserable washing facilities – Brighton had only a bath that filled at a trickle – so I often travelled home after a show covered in gold from the neck down, my clothes caked with pancake and glitter on the inside.

Back then no-one went to anything called a gym. Gym was something you did at school between Latin and Chemistry. Gym was when you moaned to Sir that you couldn't jump the horse because Cartwright had just given you a dead leg.

Oh my, how things have changed. My pathetic little chest wouldn't pass muster these days. For now we have entered the era of the 'barihunk'.

I dislike a stereotype as much as the next man but it doesn't seem so very long ago that baritones were podgy, jolly types who liked the pub. Rather too many wore villainous goatee beards and big hair but not many, in my circle at least, were fitness fanatics. Yes, one American baritone did ask me to spray paint over his bald patch before a *Carmen*, but generally it was we tenors who were considered preening and vain.

Now the competition among baritones doesn't seem to be so much about who can sing the better 'Largo al factotum' but who can take off their shirt as fast as possible and show off their unnaturally polished pecs. If you don't believe me then just spend a few minutes on the [Barihunks website](#)

(<http://barihunks.blogspot.co.uk/>), which is 'dedicated to any hunk who sings in the baritone and bass/baritone range. Singers must be professional, semi-professional or serious students with real potential.' Potential for what exactly?

Inevitably, there is now a generation spending more time in the gym than in the practice room, and whose ambition seems focused less on achieving success through fine singing and musicianship than being branded as the newest, hottest, low-note stud-monkey.

I bet Tito Gobbi could only bench-press 60 pounds in his day. What a wimp. Hope someone gave him a dead leg.

[christophergillett.co.uk \(http://www.christophergillett.co.uk/index.htm\)](http://www.christophergillett.co.uk/index.htm)

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