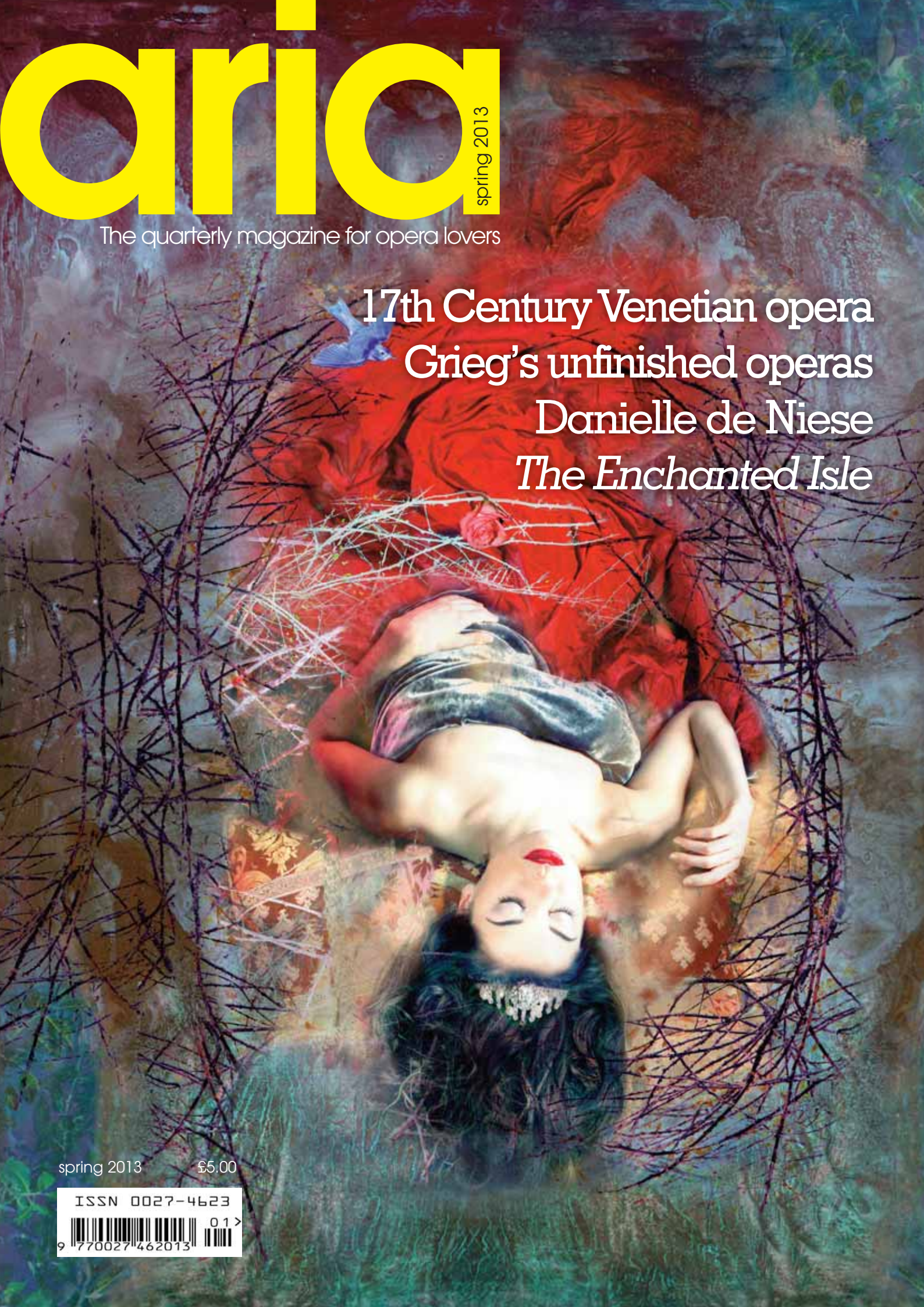


aria

A woman with dark hair and red lips is lying down, her eyes closed. She is wearing a dark, patterned top. She is surrounded by a dense network of dark, thorny branches. A bright red cloth is draped over her body. The background is a mix of dark and light colors, with some green foliage visible at the bottom.

spring 2013

The quarterly magazine for opera lovers

17th Century Venetian opera
Grieg's unfinished operas
Danielle de Niese
The Enchanted Isle

spring 2013 £5.00

ISSN 0027-4623



New Production
Sung in Italian

(Cinderella)

LA CENERENTOLA

MAY 2013

GIOACCHINO ROSSINI

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New Production
Sung in German

siemfried

MAY 2013

RICHARD WAGNER

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Letter from the Editor

Welcome to **aria**, the only magazine for opera fanatics. Again, we have a large selection of beautiful images, fascinating articles and must-read reviews from the leading opera houses.

So, back to the beginning, when it all started. The superpower that was Venice (but the size of the Isle of Wight) took opera to its bosom in the 17th century in a huge way. It's a moot point but would it have become the form that we now know and love if it had not? Its an arguable point that it would, at the very least have been a poorer and less complex form if the oligarchs of the day had preferred folk singing to high opera. Intended to use the seven arts : music, singing, acting, poetry, painting, sculpture and rhetoric all at the same time, it's been a source of, and support to all these arts ever since.

Two of the greatest singers of our day, Danielle de Niese and Elena Garanca are profiled here. Two very special ladies, each a different talent but each carving huge reputations. One a soprano, one a mezzo ... what's not to love!

We could only get small photos as this stage of the new Mariinski II theatre in Moscow, but this spider's-web inspired edifice is surely going to be the talking point of the arts world when it opens later this year.

Finally, when it's good its very good, but when its not working it can be hell. We look at the break-down in relations between Auden and Britten, a working relationship that ought to have been made in heaven but descended to hell, and Grieg's failed attempts to even finish one opera at all.

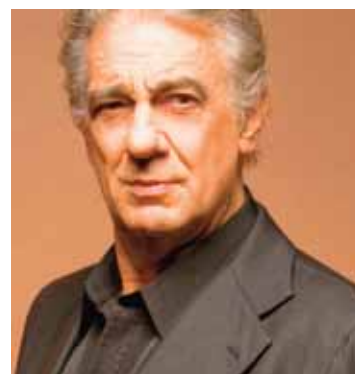
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Henze: *the Bassarids*

Wagner the conductor...



Britten's Death in Venice



Domingo : If I rest I rust ...

New Production
Sung in German



(The Fairies)

Die Feen

MAY 2013

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Forthcoming

Aldburgh Festival

Britten: *Peter Grimes*
7 June (Concert)
www.aldeburgh.co.uk

Bampton Classical Opera

Mozart: *La Finta Semplice*
starts 19 July
www.bamptonopera.org

British Youth Opera

Britten: *Paul Bunyan*
Cimarosa:
Il matrimonio segreto
September 2013
www.byo.org.uk

Buxton Festival

Vivaldi: *Ottone in Villa*
starts 10 July
Mozart: *La finta Giardiniera*
starts 6 July
Messenger: *Fortunio*
starts 17 July
www.buxtonfestival.co.uk

Dorset Opera

Verdi: *La traviata*
starts 24 July
Wagner: *The Flying Dutchman*
starts 25 July
Puccini: *La Bohème*
starts 29 June
www.dorsetopera.com

English National Opera

Berg: *Wozzeck*
starts 11 May
Glass:
The Perfect American
starts 1 June
Britten:
Death in Venice
starts 14 June
www.eno.org.uk

English Touring Opera

Monteverdi: *The Coronation of Poppea*
starts 28 September
Cavalli: *Jason*
starts 4 October
Handel: *Agrappina*
starts 8 October
www.englishtouringopera.org.uk

Garsington Opera

Mozart: *Dir Entrückung aus dem Serail*
starts 7 July
Rossini: *Maometto Secondo*
starts 8 June
Humperdinck:
Hänsel und Gretel
starts 23 June
www.garsingtonopera.com

Grange Park Opera

Tchaikovsky:
Eugene Onegin
starts 30 May
Bellini: *I Puritani*
starts 31 May
Poulenc:
Les Carmélites
1 June
Messenger: *Fortunio*
starts 10 July
www.grangeparkopera.co.uk

Glyndebourne Festival

Strauss:
Ariadne auf Naxos
starts 18 May
Verdi: *Falstaff*
starts 19 May
Mozart:
Le nozzi do Figaro
starts 8 June
Rameau:
Hippolyte et Aricie
starts 29 June

Donizetti: *Don Pasquale*
starts 18 July
Britten: *Billy Budd*
starts 10 August
www.glyndebourne.com

Glyndebourne on Tour

Humperdinck:
Hänsel und Gretel
Donizetti: *L'Elisir d'amour*
Britten:
The Rape of Lucretia
For dates and locations :
www.glyndebourne.com

Longborough Festival

Wagner: *Der Ring des Nibelungen*
starts 16 June
Puccini: *La Bohème*
starts 20 July
www.lfo.org.uk

Nevill Holt Festival

Mozart: *The Magic Flute*
starts 27 June
www.nevillholt.co.uk

Opera Holland Park

Mascagni: *Cavalleria rusticana* with Pagliacci:
Leoncavallo
starts 4 July
Puccini: *Madama Butterfly*
starts 8 June
Bizet: *Les pêcheurs de perles*
starts 25 June
Donizetti: *L'elisir d'amore*
starts 16 July
Wolf-Ferrari: *I gioielli della Madonna*
starts 23 July
Todd: *Alice [Adventures in Wonderland]*
starts 20 July
www.operahollandpark.com

Opera North

Britten: *Albert Herring*
starts 15 May
Wagner: *Siegfried*
starts 15 June
www.operanorth.co.uk

Royal Opera House

Verdi: *Don Carlos*
starts 4 May
Rossini:
La donna del lago
starts 17 May
Britten: *Gloriana*
starts 20 June
Verdi: *Simon Boccanegra*
starts 1 July
Puccini: *La Rondine*
starts 5 July
Strauss: *Capriccio*
In concert 19 July

Welsh National Opera

Wagner: *Lohengrin*
starts 26 March
Donizetti: *Anna Bolena*
starts 7 September
Donizetti: *Maria Stuarda*
starts 13 September
Donizetti: *Roberto Devereux*
starts 2 October
www.wno.org.uk

Woodhouse Opera

Baroque Double Bill
Pergolesi: *Livietta e Tracollo*
Scarlatti: *La Dirindina*
6 and 7 July
www.nevillholt.co.uk

New Production
Sung in English



Midsummer Night's Dream

MAY 2013

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

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News

The Royal Opera House has announced that Alex Beard, currently Deputy Director of the Tate Modern, will be taking over from Tony Hall as Chief Executive, starting in September this year. His salary of £250,000 will be considerably less than Hall's £400,000+ package.

Beard's Tate biography shows that he spent just a year working for the accountancy firm KPMG before moving into the arts world. Well, it was suggested that someone with a business brain was who they really needed.

His years at the Arts Council before moving to the Tate should come in useful too.

Beard is also a trustee of Glyndebourne Productions Limited, which we must hope indicates an interest in opera.

On the minus side, he had some responsibility – nominally, at least as one of three people – for the Tate's recent Kraftwerk tickets fiasco where people queued for days for non-existent tickets, after all were sold out on-line but no-one was told.



New Head for the ROH

Guildhall School of Music and Drama and ROH composer in residence

The collaboration between the Royal Opera House and the Guildhall School is one of the first examples of an opera company and conservatoire joining forces to offer a 'Composer-in-Residence' studentship which leads to a doctoral degree. The notion of 'Composer-in-Residence' has long been established as a successful model for the development of orchestral music, but this model has been far less explored in opera. It was first tested by Glyndebourne Festival Opera, where Julian Philips was Composer-in-Residence from 2006-2009, and together they

established an AHRC funded doctorate with Sussex University. Philips has further developed this model for the School's new doctoral studentship starting in September 2013.

The Doctoral Composer-in-Residence studentship will be part of the Guildhall School's existing doctoral programme (validated by City University London). Fully funded by both the Guildhall School and the Royal Opera House, this studentship offers one composer every two years the opportunity to be 'Doctoral Composer-in-Residence' over a three year period. During this time, the composer will research



and write a major work for the Linbury Studio Theatre which will be staged in the final term of Year 3.

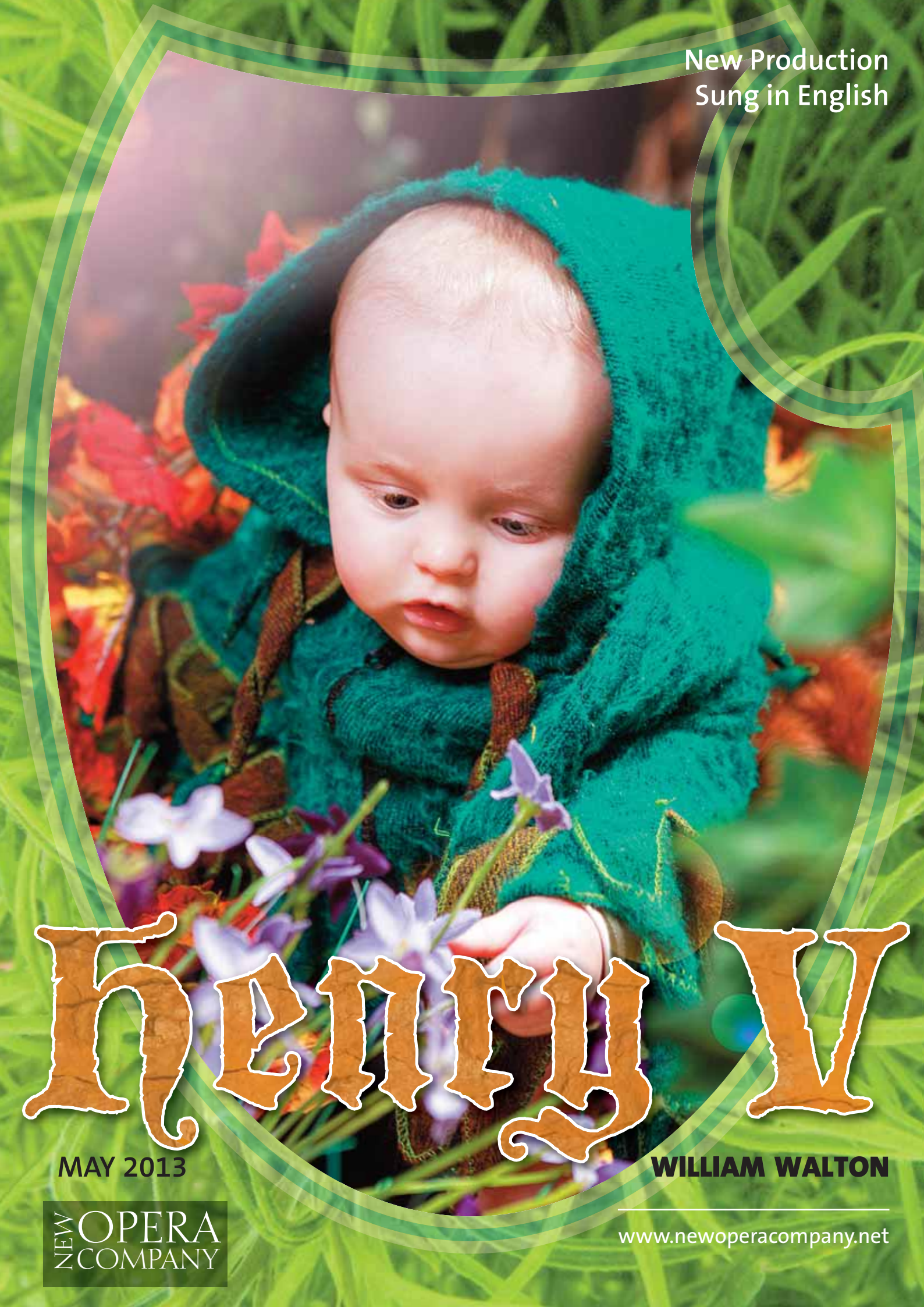
The composer studentship aims to offer an enriching model of opera development which allows substantial creative research experience in the development of operatic practice within the setting of a unique collaboration between an opera company and conservatoire. It allows for both critical reflection and creative research, in both professional and academic contexts.

The studentship will be targeted at composers who have some experience in composing

for opera. The principal supervisor will be the Guildhall School's Head of Composition, Dr Julian Philips, who was the first ever Composer-in-Residence at Glyndebourne. Philips' new opera has its world premiere at the Royal Opera House in December 2013. The rehearsal period for this work will offer the opportunity for the first Doctoral Composer-in-Residence to shadow Philips in the process of staging his new opera. Philips will be partnered by ROH Associate Director of Opera, John Fulljames, as well as a second supervisor from the Guildhall School's composition department.

Applications close on May 31.

New Production
Sung in English

A close-up photograph of a baby wearing a green knitted hood, looking down at a small purple flower held in their hand. The baby is surrounded by green grass and colorful autumn leaves. The entire image is framed by a decorative green border with a circular motif.

Henry V

MAY 2013

WILLIAM WALTON

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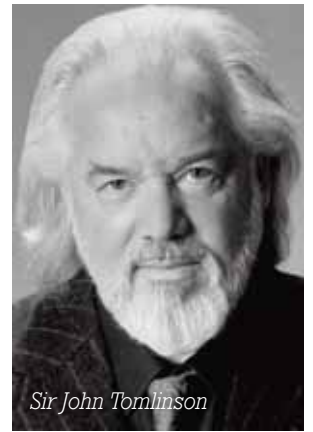
Ailish Tynan



Ashley Riches



Nicholas Mulroy



Sir John Tomlinson

Photo: Will Urwin

Photo: Robert Workman

English music to Ludlow

The Ludlow English Song Weekend (May 30-June 2), planned by its artistic director Iain Burnside, will once again fill the charming town of Ludlow with English song by some of the country's most celebrated composers and performed by both well-known and young singers and musicians.

There will be a packed programme of recitals and concerts with artists including the 2007 winner of the Song Competition Cardiff Singer of the World, soprano Elizabeth Watts, the popular and lively Irish soprano Ailish Tynan, ROH Jette Parker Young Artist and rising baritone star Ashley

Riches, tenor Nicholas Mulroy whose performance of the Evangelist at last year's Handel Festival won much praise, and the world-celebrated ensemble The King's Singers.

Two new works have been commissioned, one by the well-established composer Brian Elias and the second by Julian Philips, who has recently been commissioned to write a new opera for the Royal Opera House. Much loved repertoire is featured alongside more neglected works including an unpublished organ work by Finzi. World-famous bass Sir John Tomlinson gives a Masterclass for aspiring

English music



Elizabeth Watts

singers, there are films, discussions and talks by experts, and the winners of the Ludlow English Song Weekend national Young Composers' Competition will have their works performed. Events take place in the elegant

Assembly Rooms as well as the Parish Church in this beautiful border town, where A.E. Housman's ashes are buried.

Tickets £10-£25 from 01584 878141 www.ludlowassemblyrooms.co.uk

Following final presentations to the jury at the end of January, the Board of Trustees of the Royal Opera House has selected Stanton Williams Architects to carry out a feasibility study for the 'Open Up' project.

This decision marks the culmination of a six month competition process involving seven firms of

architects. The jury, has invited Stanton Williams Architects and Witherford Watson Mann Architects to complete further work in response to a refined brief issued in December.

'Open Up' will make the physical entrances and street level public areas to the building more open and inviting. The project will also develop existing

Architecture

spaces, such as the Linbury Studio Theatre and Paul Hamlyn Hall, and make the creative, technical and education work of the Royal Opera House more visible to more people.

In turn this will enhance the appeal of the building as a destination in itself. The project does not affect the main auditorium.



Marcus du Sautoy at the ROH

BC Presenter and Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford, Marcus du Sautoy explores the intriguing symbolism in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* in an exciting interactive performance at the Linbury Studio Theatre.

Marcus has long been fascinated by Mozart's celestial masterpiece *The Magic Flute*. It is more abstract and surreal than his other operas and is full of strange symbolism and ideas. The tension between order and chaos, symmetry and asymmetry, day and night and much more is explored by one of today's leading thinkers in a performance that fuses music, visual projections and interactive experiences.



The evening will include performances of extracts from the opera from the cast of five singers; Kate May, Claire Wild, Eamonn Mulhall, Richard Morris and Hannah Pedley.

18, 19 May 7.15pm,
20 June 2pm & 7.15pm
£15, £7 concessions
Box office 020 7304 4000



Rumblings from the Salzburg Festival from where pro-production photos have been released showing, amongst other things, a midget, lots of hotpants and so many bandages its being likened to a mummy-fest.

The picture above was

taken at the dress rehearsal for Michael Schulz's new *Parsifal*, which opens the Salzburg Easter Festival on Saturday 23 March with Christian Thielemann conducting. The production is scheduled to start on 1 April, no joke!

Anniversaries

Wagner 200 London festival

The Wagner 200 Festival opens on May 22 (Wagner's 200th birthday) and features events from May to December 2013 in association with leading cultural organisations including Royal Opera House, Southbank Centre, Barbican Centre, Royal Albert Hall, Kings Place, British Library, Philharmonia Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC Radio 3, The Wagner Society, Opus Arte, London Song Festival and London Jewish Cultural Centre.

Wagner 200 has a particular focus on British artists, offering a spectrum of talent from the most distinguished to the rising stars of today. Highlights include: Wagner 200th Birthday Concert on May 22 with the Philharmonia Orchestra/ Andrew Davis, and soloists Susan

Bullock, James Rutherford and Giselle Allen. Preceded by an afternoon of pop-up Wagner activities on the Festival Hall terrace, balcony and foyers. Wagner/Liszt recitals (June 26-28) by Janice Watson/ Joseph Middleton and Lily Williams, and a dramatised re-creation of the events surrounding the first performance of the *Siegfried Idyll*, starring Harriet Walter and Henry Goodman with the Aurora Orchestra and Nicholas Collon. Reading of the complete *Ring* text in English featuring John Tomlinson as Narrator/Master of Ceremonies and a company of young actors from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (June 9).

www.wagner200.co.uk
for full details.



Opera North Spring 2013-'14 plans



Richard Mantle

Richard Mantle, General Director of Opera North, has announced that the new 2013 season 'Will see the Company once again do what it does best – discovering the best ways of producing new and exciting works which engage audiences of all ages and tastes. We always strive to be fluid and resp-

onsive, and our recent interactions with stakeholders and audiences have led to a strategic decision to revert to our regular performance patterns. Annual seasons opening in September each year are our best way forward commercially and creatively.



Joshua



Siegfried

The season began in April with Handel's mighty oratorio, *Joshua*, at Leeds Grand Theatre, truly doing justice to the work's theatrical nature. Trailing our 'Festival of Britten' repertoire later in the year, the composer's chamber comedy, *Albert Herring*,

featuring Dame Josephine Barstow as Lady Billows, will be staged in the intimate space of the Howard Assembly Room. And Leeds Town Hall will host the next thrilling instalment of Wagner's Ring Cycle – *Siegfried*, with Richard Farnes at the helm.'

New seasons

aria
11
spring
2013

Nicholas Chalmers debut as Artistic Director of Nevill Holt Opera

This summer sees the debut season of Leicestershire's Nevill Holt Opera. Artistic Director Nicholas Chalmers will conduct five performances of a new production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* in June 2013. The new festival will continue the tradition of opera at Nevill Holt, as well as making a feature of the stunning gardens and the collection of British sculpture that decorates them. Nevill Holt was founded by David Ross and after ten years in partnership with other organisations, Nevill Holt

is striking out on its own to establish a fully independent festival in its own right under the artistic leadership of Nicholas Chalmers.

The festival's commitment is to the local area, to young talent and to creative integrity and its values are firmly rooted in founder David Ross' extensive work with academies in the Midlands and Lincolnshire and the creative arts nationwide. Nevill Holt aims to establish an on-going collaboration with the National Opera Studio and all the UK young artist

programmes, and to form an orchestra from the recent graduates of the major music colleges in

the UK in order to showcase and discover the next generation of operatic talent.



THE BIG PICTURE

The Met's *Magic Flute*. Photo Ken Howard

aria
12
spring
2013





THE BIG PICTURE

Caligula at English National Opera. Photo Johan Persson

aria
14
spring
2013





THE BIG PICTURE

Parsifal at Berlin Staatsoper. Photo Matthius Crus

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16
spring
2013





THE BIG PICTURE

Pilgrim's Progress at English National Opera. Photo by Mike Hoban

aria
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spring
2013







VENICE & PERA

aria

20

spring
2013

The birth of an art form

The Genius of Venice, the Genius of Monteverdi – amongst others; a meeting of minds.

Opera, yet young, is born afresh with a new dynamism and a profound joie de vivre...



This night, having ... taken our places before, we went to the Opera where comedies and other plays are represented in recitative music by the most excellent musicians vocal and instrumental, with a variety of scenes painted and contrived with no less art of perspective, and machines for flying in the aire, and other wonderful motions; taken together it is one of the most magnificent and expensive diversions the wit of men can invent... This held us by the eyes and ears till two in the morning.

John Evelyn, Diary

The experience that so delighted the English visitor to Venice in 1645 – and for which he purchased tickets in advance – was a type of entertainment that had been established in that city for only eight seasons, since 1637: public commercial opera. The history of its origins in Venice is the story of the beginning of opera itself.

Opera is a mixed theatrical genre, a combination of drama, music, and scenic spectacle, and the balance of those constituent elements has always been a source of its vitality. That same balance is also the source of its problems as an art, raising aesthetic dilemmas that have challenged every generation since its creation. Nevertheless, whatever its uneasy sense of itself as a genre, opera has survived because it is essentially a popular art, because it has managed for nearly four centuries to pack houses, to marshal all its contributing forces to entertain audiences from a broad range of society. With all its expensive magnificence, its fantastic illusion of sound and sight, its glitter of talent and temperament, opera is public spectacle.

Opera has been spectacular from its beginning – but it has not always been public. The birthdate of opera is traditionally set at about 1600, its birthplace Florence. But the art that was created in Florence at the turn of the seventeenth century is in many ways unlike the sung drama we have come to recognise as opera. Indeed, in many respects the earliest operas – from Mantua and Rome as well as Florence – were more closely linked to the past than to the future. They show a closer kinship with such theatrical predecessors as humanist plays with music or the intermedi of the sixteenth-century courts



than with the subsequent development of the genre. What we regard as opera was fundamentally an urban development, created with the tastes of a large, cosmopolitan, and varied audience in mind.

The first operas, *Dafne*, *Euridice*, *Orfeo*, *Arianna*, like the intermedii before them, were courtly entertainments; the earliest of them, *Dafne*, even shared its subject matter and poet with an intermedio of 1589. They were commissioned and created to celebrate specific political or social occasions, and were performed before an invited patrician audience. Productions enjoyed the relatively unrestricted budget of aristocratic patronage, and the music and poetry were subject only to the patrons' taste and the taste and decorum of the occasion. The collaborators in these productions – poets, composers, scene and costume designers – were essentially servants of the court, and their works were conceived as celebration. Verbally and visually, iconographic conceit and allegorical allusion extolled a ruling dynasty – Medici, Gonzaga, or Barberini – besides marking the specific occasion. The splendor and lavishness of the productions reflected further glory on the ruler, brightening his image at home and abroad.

Usually these works were produced only once, though court chroniclers were charged with preserving them for posterity through detailed descriptions that appeared in

print. We learn a great deal about Peri's *Euridice* and Caccini's *Il rapimento di Cefalo* from the account by Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger, a Medici courtier who was a poet and dramatist in his own right as well as the first editor of his famous grand-uncle's poetry. And Monteverdi's *Arianna* is brought to life through the chronicle of the Mantuan court reporter Federico Follino. The early Florentine and Mantuan operas find analogues in Barberini's Rome, where for more than a decade operatic entertainments enhanced the image of the papal court. They also find an echo later in the Paris of Louis XIV, where each one of Lully's and Quinault's *tragédies lyriques* began and ended with an encomium to *le roi soleil*.

This kind of opera, "performed in the palaces of great princes and other secular or ecclesiastic lords" ("fatta ne' palazzi de' principi grandi, e d'altri signori secolari o ecclesiastici"), was the first and most praiseworthy of the three categories of musical spectacle distinguished by the Jesuit Giovan Domenico Ottonelli in his moralising treatise *Della Cristiana moderazione del teatro* (1652). This category he labeled the princely. The second category, the *academic*, linked to the first and of nearly equal status, was the kind "put on sometimes by certain gentlemen or talented citizens or learned academicians" ("che rappresentano tal volta alcuni gentiluomini o cittadini virtuosi o accademici eruditi").

Opera in Venice, however, was of an entirely different order. Ottonelli called it "mercenaria." Musically and conceptually, of course, this "mercenary" opera was indebted to the earlier models produced at Florence, Mantua, and Rome. The idea of wholly sung drama would have been unthinkable without the first experiments of Rinuccini, Peri, and Caccini. Nevertheless, opera in Venice was more profoundly affected by other factors. Above all, it responded to the unique socio-political structure of the Republic and its distinctive urban fabric. Opera as we know it, as an art appealing to a broad audience, had its origins in this special environment. Venice nurtured opera's development in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons.

Venetian Foundations

The Most Serene Republic of St Mark had long enjoyed a distinctive reputation as a haven of freedom and stability, a state with its own special position in the world and in history. What modern historians have come to know as the "myth of Venice" played a role not only in preparing the ground for the establishment and subsequent flourishing of opera there, but also in the actual substance and message of what was mounted on stage.

Unique among the Italian states, Venice could not boast a Roman foundation. Rather, it owed its origins, as a haven for those fleeing the invading barbarians, to the fall of the Roman empire. Claiming to have been founded on the day of the Annunciation, 25 March 421 (according to the dominant legend), Venice proclaimed itself the first republic of the new Christian era, and therefore as the only legitimate successor to fallen pagan Rome. The greatness of the Venetian state was to be seen in its longevity and its political continuity; by the seventeenth century it had already lasted longer than ancient Rome. On a more practical level, the famed stability of Venice was said to depend on two special factors: its site and its constitution. The governmental structure of the Republic was celebrated for being a *regimen temperate*, a perfectly balanced state. Venice, according to its own myth, had realised the classical ideal of mixed government. The Doge represented the monarchical component, the Senate the aristocratic, and the Maggior Consiglio the democratic. As a constitutional oligarchy, Venice concentrated political power in a relatively restricted patriciate; within the nobility, however, that power was distributed in a way that precluded any individual or clan from assuming an undue share. This harmony of power was

This harmony
of power
was the
prerogative of
perhaps 2 per
cent of the
population.

the prerogative of perhaps 2 per cent of the population. That the disenfranchised majority seemed content, that patrician Venice suffered no serious internal dissension, appeared only to confirm its privileged state of grace. And that sanctified state was further manifest in the very image of this splendid city, founded miraculously upon the waters; unwalled, yet unconquered for more than a millennium. The physical city itself stood as proof of its uniqueness.

The Venetian ruling class, although restricted and hereditary, was actually more open than that of other states. It comprised a large number of families of equal rank – equal in theory, that is, if not in practice. What especially distinguished the Venetian nobility was its active and privileged involvement in commerce. The ruling patrician was also a merchant of Venice, and his economic enterprise extended beyond investments in trade and banking to include all the arts – and so,

eventually, opera. The Tron, Vendramin, Grimani, Giustiniani, and Contarini were among the leading families of the Venetian patriciate, and they were the most important backers of opera in Venice. Beyond the obvious desire to enhance family prestige, their interest in the art was largely commercial; they invested in opera houses primarily for profit motive could not help but affect the product. Expenditures were carefully limited, imposing strictures on librettists, composers, and scene designers.

The spectacle of the courts could hardly be indulged. In Venice, opera was a business.

Venice had its own traditions of elaborate public pageantry, its own expanding calendar of annual politico-religious festivals: the Marriage to the Sea celebrated on Ascension Day, victory at Lepanto on the Feast of St Giustina, and the Feast of St Mark, to name only a few. It celebrated special occasions as well, its ducal coronations and royal visits. And all of these celebrations involved elaborate entertainments featuring music, spectacle, processions, and theatrical presentations. But opera did not emerge in Venice from such a background of occasional or ceremonial spectacle; it had different roots. These were, and remained, in the carnival season, with its established tradition of theatrical performances by troupes of itinerant players, performances for which tickets were sold. These activities became especially intense after the crisis of the Interdict (1605-'7), when, with the expulsion of the Jesuits from Venice, the *comici*, who had been excluded by them, returned to the city with impunity.

Crossroads of east and west, Venice was a port city characterised by a lively cosmopolitan and even exotic atmosphere. Its carnival celebrations earned international renown and made the city, long a necessary stop for travelers, a special attraction for tourists. The population of the city, which hovered around 50,000 during most of the seventeenth century, swelled to nearly twice that number each year for the approximately six to ten weeks of Carnival (from 26 December, the

Feast of St Stephen, to Shrove Tuesday). That season of liberation, of the dropping of social barriers and distinctions, was celebrated by fireworks, ballets, masquerades, bull chases, fights. Much of the excitement was provided by the dramatic entertainments performed throughout the city, indoors and out, by resident groups as well as visitors, bands of *comici dell'arte* who arrived in Venice in time for Carnival and dispersed when it was over. Just such a group, a traveling company of musicians, headed by Benedetto Ferrari and Francesco Manelli, brought opera to the lagoon for the first time. It was during the carnival season of 1637 that opera in Venice began.

This used almost exactly the same company had appeared in Padua the previous year. It returned to Venice in subsequent seasons, along with other similarly constituted groups inspired by its success. These groups were responsible for producing operas of Ottonelli's third and least respectable category, for which the Jesuit reserved most of his admonitory passion: "the mercenary and dramatic musical representations, that is, the ones performed by those mercenary musicians who are professional actors, and who, organised in a company, are directed and governed by one of their own, acting as authority and head of the others".

Such traveling companies soon yielded to more permanent, locally based troupes and a more stable structure as the impact of the new entertainment made itself felt and began to be exploited by Venetian entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, many of the distinctive qualities of the first operas in Venice, those produced by Ferrari's company, survived. Since opera remained confined to carnival season, its potential audience remained essentially the same: a heterogeneous mix of patricians and *cittadini*, tourists and travelers, Venetians and foreigners, all of whom paid for the privilege of being entertained.



Claudio Monteverdi

Commercial success was of primary concern, and that could be achieved only by creating works with broad audience appeal. Opera in Venice was distinguished from that in Florence and other courts of Italy by the nature of its audience and by its socio-economic base. Public approbation was important not only to the financial backers; it affected composers, librettists, and scenographers as well. These were independent professionals, who were themselves often involved financially as well as artistically in their own productions. The aim was to turn a profit.

The success of an opera depended on its appealing to a large and varied audience; it had to play for a season, to keep the house filled night after night.

Although initiatives of the private sector, the opera houses, like every other Venetian institution, were regulated by the government. An enterprise as public as the theatre, attracting crowds of *forestieri* as well as Venetians, obviously required responsible scrutiny. Regulation involved various magistracies, including the *Provveditori di comune* and, more gravely, the Council of Ten; it was designed to ensure the well-being of the public as well as of the state as a whole. Theatre buildings were regularly inspected for safety hazards and had to be licensed each season before productions could even be advertised. Opening and closing times, and even the price of librettos sold at the door, were established by government decree.

Monteverdi in the Wings

The Venetian experiment of Ferrari and Manelli took immediate root. Their return with a new production the following season affirmed and confirmed the existence of opera in Venice as a seasonal occurrence. Ferrari and Manelli were not, however, the first composers of opera to reach Venice, though they may have been the first to bring opera to the Venetian stage. Claudio Monteverdi, undoubtedly the most celebrated opera composer of his day, had been living in Venice since 1613, when he assumed the position of *maestro di cappella* at San Marco. Monteverdi was the composer of numerous theatrical entertainments in addition to the two famous Mantuan operas *Orfeo* and *Arianna* of 1607-'8. Most recently his "favola pastorale," *Proserpina rapita*, had been performed in Venice, in the Palazzo Mocenigo, in 1630. Yet the seventy-year-old composer remained aloof from the new operatic activities. Perhaps it would have been unseemly for the *maestro di cappella* to express



Orfeo at Kologne Oper

overt interest in the public theatre; possibly, too, his advanced age discouraged him from under-taking so large-scale a project as an opera. Whatever the cause, his silence is remarkable not only to us. It was noticed by several of his contemporaries. One of them, probably in late 1637 or 1638, commented expectantly that Monteverdi might surprise everyone and produce an opera for Venice after all: "God willing, one of these nights he too will step onto the stage, where everyone else is about to appear, with the production of a musical drama," to which the appreciative response was: "Even if he doesn't actually appear, he'll be there in spirit, since he was so powerfully behind the whole business." Clearly Monteverdi's participation was expected; and it was missed. In 1640 the librettist Giacomo Badoaro claimed to have written the text of *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* for the express purpose of encouraging his friend Monteverdi to enter the operatic arena: From the author to the Most Illustrious and Reverend Signor Claudio Monteverdi, Great Master of Music. Not to compete with those inspired minds, which in these very years have published their compositions in the Venetian theatres, but to stimulate the virtue of Your Excellence to make known to this city that in the warmth of the affections there is a great difference between a true sun and a painted one, I

dedicated myself, as a matter of principle, to compose *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*."

It was not until 1640, then, after three seasons of observing the operatic activities of younger musicians from the sidelines, that Monteverdi finally – and, it would seem, still reluctantly – made his move. He first revived an old opera, *Arianna*, which ostensibly required little of his time or energy. Then he produced a new one, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, which obviously must have required a great deal of both.

Although *Arianna* was one of Monteverdi's favourite works, reviving it in Venice, thirty years after its creation, would seem to have been an unlikely, even unworkable, enterprise. The conditions of opera production, not to mention the aesthetics of opera and Monteverdi's own style, had changed radically. To be sure, some revisions were made in the work, apparently to suit new, Venetian conditions. These included the cutting of many of the choruses and the alteration of some passages specifically linked to the original performance in Mantua, as well as elimination of the designation *tragedia* from the title page. Despite such adaptive changes, the opera remained very different in tone, structure, and content



Orfeo at Komische Oper, Berlin

Photo: Barrie Kosky

from any of its contemporaries on the Venetian stage. Clearly, however, Monteverdi's reputation must have been more than sufficient to compensate for the inevitable stylistic incongruities. The dedication of the libretto to one Bortolo Stacio, signed by the printer, gives some sense of the composer's exalted status: "Now that *Arianna*, the most praised of dramatic compositions in Italian theaters, returns to the stage in Venice, the work of Signor Claudio Monteverdi, most celebrated Apollo of the century and the highest intelligence of the heaven of harmony, I take the occasion to no longer keep my [respect] hidden from you, but, by offering it in the name of Your Excellency, to manifest [that respect] to the world by means of its new reprinting."

And this is reinforced by Benedetto Ferrari's oft-mentioned sonnet of homage to the older master, whom he addressed as "l'Oracolo della musica"

Arianna was a monument to Monteverdi's past glory; *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* boldly affirmed his present powers. Any hesitation on the composer's part must have been dispelled by the success of the new work, which ran for ten performances in Venice and was produced in Bologna as well, for he wrote two more operas before his

death in 1643. *Le nozze d'Enea e Lavinia* was produced in the 1640-41 season and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* in 1642-43. Three new operas in four years: an amazing creative spurt for a 75-year-old composer whose operatic career had long seemed finished.

The radical differences between these late works of Monteverdi and his first opera, *Orfeo*, have been noted by every student of the subject. The evolution of Monteverdi's own style would be enough to account for the major differences between the works. But, although *Orfeo* and *Poppea* do indeed exemplify two important points in his development, they also serve to illustrate vividly the distinctions between court and public opera. These distinctions can be brought into relief by a comparison of the surviving sources.

Orfeo and Poppea

The score of *Orfeo*, like those of its operatic predecessors in Florence and most of its successors in Rome, was published, although not until two years after the work was performed. Dedicated by the composer to the patron of the Mantuan production, the publication was commemorative, its purpose to preserve the event for posterity. "The fable of Orpheus, which has already been repres-

ented in music under the auspices of your Highness on a small stage at the Accademia degli Invaghiti, now having to appear in the great theater of the universe to show itself to all men, there is no reason that it should allow itself to be associated with any other name than that of Your Glorious and Fortunate Highness. To you therefore I humbly consecrate it, so that you, who as a benign star were propitious at its birth, with the most serene rays of your grace, will deign to favor the progress of its life."

Indeed, the edition, using the past tense, records a number of details of the original performance, particularly regarding specifics of orchestration, not fully indicated in the music itself. For example, a song at the beginning of act 1: "was sung to the sound of five viole da braccio". There are even occasional references to staging, such as this near the beginning of act 2: "This ritornello was played from within by a clavicembalo, two chitaroni, and two small French violins". And, at the beginning of act 5: "Two wooden organs and two chitaroni accompanied this song, one of them playing in the left corner of the stage, the other in the right corner". But several directions are given in the present tense, suggesting that the purpose of the print may have been somewhat broader: to serve not only as a historical document but as a practical one as well, a kind of generic score providing the basis for future performances. In fact, the score offers several choices, such as that for the opening toccata "which is played three times with all the instruments before the curtain rises, and if one wishes to use muted trumpets, this piece should be played a tone higher". Perhaps the most striking, most curious choice is offered for *Orfeo's* central number, "Possente spirito," where the singer is directed to perform only one of the two lines, the first unadorned, the second a highly elaborated version of the first: "Orfeo, to the sound of the wood organ and a chitarone, sings only one of the two parts".

The libretto of *Orfeo* was also printed, two years earlier, presumably shortly before the first performance of the opera. It matches the printed score quite closely, with the single major exception of the ending; the score alters the original myth so that the opera ends happily. Although published by the ducal printer, this libretto was not designed primarily as a commemorative document. Thus it fails to mention either the composer or – and this is more unusual – the poet. It was used by the audience as an aid to following the action.

In contrast to the score of *Orfeo*, that of *Poppea* was never printed. It survives in two manuscript copies, neither of which can be linked with its initial performance. Documentation for that first performance is slim indeed, resting solely on a scenario – a scene-by-scene synopsis of the action that was printed not for commemorative reasons but, once again, for the practical purpose of helping the audience in the theatre to follow the performance. The scenario mentions neither the composer nor the poet. In fact, there is no printed documentation whatsoever for Monteverdi's authorship of the music. Two librettos eventually appeared in print, but not until 1651 and 1656. The latter, published along with his other librettos by the poet himself, Gian Francesco Busenello, mentions the original date of performance on its title page but fails to include the composer's name. As for the 1651 libretto, published in conjunction with a Neapolitan revival, it lacks the names of both the composer and the poet, as well as the original date.

The two manuscript scores of *Poppea* might best be described as performance scores. They memorialize expedients adopted for one or several specific performances after the premiere. Transpositions, cuts, rearrangements, not all of them fully worked out or reconciled with one another, are indicated in various strata throughout both manuscripts. Preserved, it would seem, by chance, these scores owe their survival to the fact that the opera was revived; both are probably connected with the revival that took place in Naples in 1651. Evidently, despite Monteverdi's enormous reputation, there was no interest in preserving the music of the first performance of *Poppea*. That music per se had no practical value except as a basis for subsequent performance. The differences between the scores and other sources confirm the fact of multiple performances, and the kinds of alterations in each document indicate the liberties taken with the original opera – transposed here, cut there – in response to changing conditions of performance.

One major difference between the scores of the two operas that is only partly explained by their different functions concerns orchestration. The score of *Orfeo* is not only much more specific in its instrumental requirements (listing them, however incompletely, in its front matter), but it calls for a much larger, more varied instrumental group, essentially the late Renaissance orchestra that was customarily used for court enter-

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tainments; and this is deployed alone, in a large number of purely instrumental movements, especially dances, as well as in combination with voices, with particular expressive functions. In its successive strophes, for instance, "Possente spirito" displays first violins, then cornetti, then double harp, and finally violins again, the variety enhancing the moving power of Orfeo's prayer.

The *Poppea* scores, on the other hand, contain considerably fewer instrumental movements, and the voice is invariably accompanied only by a bass line. Furthermore, they contain no instrumental specifications. This notational reticence is more than a matter of expediency. It reflects an actual difference in instrumental practice between the Mantua of 1607 and the Venice of 1642. The chief components of the typical Venetian opera orchestra, as attested by a few widely scattered documents, were a large continuo group (several harpsichords and several theorbos), which was evidently deployed in various combinations to accompany the voice. The two treble parts written out in most ritornelli and sinfonie were taken by two violins.

The different orchestral requirements of *Orfeo* and *Poppea* underline the distinctions between court and urban opera. The instrumental display of *Orfeo* formed part of the court spectacle in Mantua. The reduced band of *Poppea* satisfied the economic conditions of a commercial enterprise. It allowed theatres to function without large stable orchestras. It also tended to focus greater attention on the singers.

A Mantuan opera of 1607 could be fixed, commemorated in print as a rare, even unique, object, a jewel in the crown of a ruling prince. Not so a Venetian opera of 1643. It was but one of a succession of similar events that would be remembered only as long as the season lasted, and then discarded – unless subsequently revived. Whereas we owe our knowledge of the music of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* to the desire to preserve a moment of dynastic celebration, our knowledge of *Poppea* depends upon a more professionally utilitarian motive, the appropriation of a past event for the purposes of the present. Only because *Poppea* was revived, given renewed life on the stage, do we know anything of its music. *Orfeo*, although immortalised by the act of publication, embodied a tradition of court entertainment that was essentially over. The very survival of *Poppea*, imperfect as it is, testifies to

its continuing vitality, to its function within a living tradition of public opera.

The Documents of a History

As the case of *Poppea* attests, the distinctive and cohesive character of the Venetian operatic tradition is exemplified by the nature of its surviving documents. These fall into two general categories: manuscript and printed, categories that themselves implicate a set of further distinctions, between the musical and the textual, the professional and the public. The manuscripts, that is,

the scores, representing the professional side of things, are preserved, if at all, largely by accident, by virtue of the fact that they were reused. Relatively few have, in fact, survived. The nature and purpose of the printed sources, the public documents, primarily librettos, were very different. Quite apart from their practical function of serving the audience during performances, librettos were deliberately created for the purpose of documenting the individual work. Published in large enough numbers to have ensured the survival today of several complete sets, they record the chronological development of Venetian opera from year to year. The sheer accumulation of librettos – there were nine after four seasons, thirty-five after ten, and over one hundred by 1667 – provides concrete evidence of the

momentum of opera mania in seventeenth-century Venice.

In addition to appealing to the collectionist tendencies of a number of *letterati*, such as Apostolo Zeno, whose complete sets have come down to us, the librettos inspired another type of historical record: the operatic chronology, for which they supplied the basic source material. The earliest of these publications, neither yet a chronology nor devoted exclusively to operatic or Venetian texts, was explicitly designed to take stock of the rapidly growing genre of the libretto. Leone Allacci's *Drammaturgia*, published in Rome in 1666, declares its purpose in the printer's preface: to preserve an undervalued and therefore highly perishable product: "It often happens that, after being read, librettos are rejected, and they are no longer valued, because of the silly things that are found in most of them, so that copies are lost, and not only is the memory of those obscured, who with great effort and study made some name for themselves, but also their countries and families. Since, in the opinion of some, [librettos] are in no small part

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Orfeo at Komische Oper, Berlin

Photo: Barrie Kosky

derived from antiquity, and indistinguishable from one another in invention as well as subject matter, there having been no new discoveries [of ancient plays], they have become so tediously similar in subject matter, usually concerning the disappearance of babies or children during the taking or sacking of a city, that readers assume they have already read them, and they intentionally abstain from seeing them, clearly recognising them, as Burchiello said, to be patchworks of old rags, twisted and pilfered from here and there, without beginning or end, head or tail."

Allacci's volume, which underwent an ambitious revision in the eighteenth century, was soon followed by the first true chronology. This was the work of the Dalmatian Cristoforo Ivanovich, himself the author of several librettos. "Le memorie teatrali di Venezia," published in Venice in 1681 (2d ed. 1688), formed an appendix to Ivanovich's *Minerva al tavolino*, a collection of letters on the subject of the wars against the Turks. By providing a list of the dramas performed in Venice, Ivanovich, like Allacci before him, hoped to rescue them from oblivion: "From the reading of the dramas cited in the catalogue of the present 'Memorie,' posterity, for various reasons, will heap greater praise upon the authors than they received when their works were first performed" (Appendix II.6ff). Ivanovich's catalogue forms the climax of a lengthy essay on the origins and contemporary practice of opera in Venice, which draws, in large measure, upon the prefaces of the printed librettos. His discussion of Venetian operatic practice remains by far the most explicit and

reliable we have; and his chronology served as the foundation of all subsequent chronologies, notably those of the eighteenth-century writers Giovanni Carlo Bonlini (1730) and Antonio Groppo (1745).

These chronologies, generally trustworthy with respect to titles, authors, theatres, and dates of performances, are less dependable for information not regularly available in printed librettos – most crucially, composers' names. Indeed, Ivanovich, particularly for the years preceding his arrival in Venice in 1657, tended to attribute music rather haphazardly (especially to Cavalli). Many of his attributions, repeated by Bonlini and Groppo, have remained unexamined, unchallenged, and uncorrected until recently.

Another still insufficiently acknowledged shortcoming of all three volumes is their failure to recognise the inconsistent application of dates in the librettos they catalogued. That is, they ignored the whole problem of *more veneto*, dating Venetian style. Because the Venetian year traditionally began on I March, Carnival (and the opera season coincident with it), generally over by the end of February, was considered to belong to the previous year. Thus a libretto dated 1640 *m.v.* actually belonged to 1641, modern style (or 1640-41 if it appeared before I January). But not all Venetian dates were given *more veneto*. This is made clear in some cases by a discrepancy between title page and dedication date; the libretto of Cavalli's *Giasone*, for example, bears the date 1649 on its title page, but the dedication is dated 30

January 1648. Clearly, then, the date on the title page should be read in modern style, that of the dedication *more veneto*; the work was performed during the 1648-'49 season, not that of 1649. Other cases are not so clear and can be resolved only through triangulation, using evidence external to the librettos themselves.

In contrast to the librettos, whose preservation is virtually complete, the proportion of surviving scores is small. In particular, very few scores remain from the first – and, arguably, the most decisive – decade of operatic activity in Venice. Of the nearly fifty operas performed there between 1637 and 1650, music has survived for only thirteen, and by only three of the dozen or so composers known to have been involved: Monteverdi, Cavalli, and Saccati. No music at all survives from the operas of either Ferrari or Manelli, two of the most important composers of the decade, who were largely responsible for creating the musical style that came to be associated with opera in Venice.

Through various circumstances, a number of the surviving scores were dispersed among libraries throughout Europe – including those in Modena, Florence, Naples, Oxford, Paris, and Vienna. Most of them duplicate scores held in the primary repository for this music, the Contarini Collection of the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice. The 113 opera scores in the Contarini Collection (the period covered extends to 1684) owe their preservation to the efforts of two individuals: in the first place to Francesco Cavalli (1601-76), the composer best represented in the collection. Near the end of his career, probably about 1670, Cavalli apparently arranged to have his operas recopied with a view to preserving them for posterity. He clearly regarded them as important property, a significant part of his legacy, and made special provision for them in his will. These fair copies, plus some of his autographs (which, we may assume, would also have been copied had he lived longer), eventually found their way into the Contarini Collection.

The other *collezionista* responsible for the preservation of the scores was Marco Contarini himself, patrician and patron of opera, who built two theatres for private operatic performances at his villa at Piazzola, just northwest of Venice. Between 1679 and sometime before his death in 1689 – probably in 1684 – Contarini gradually and

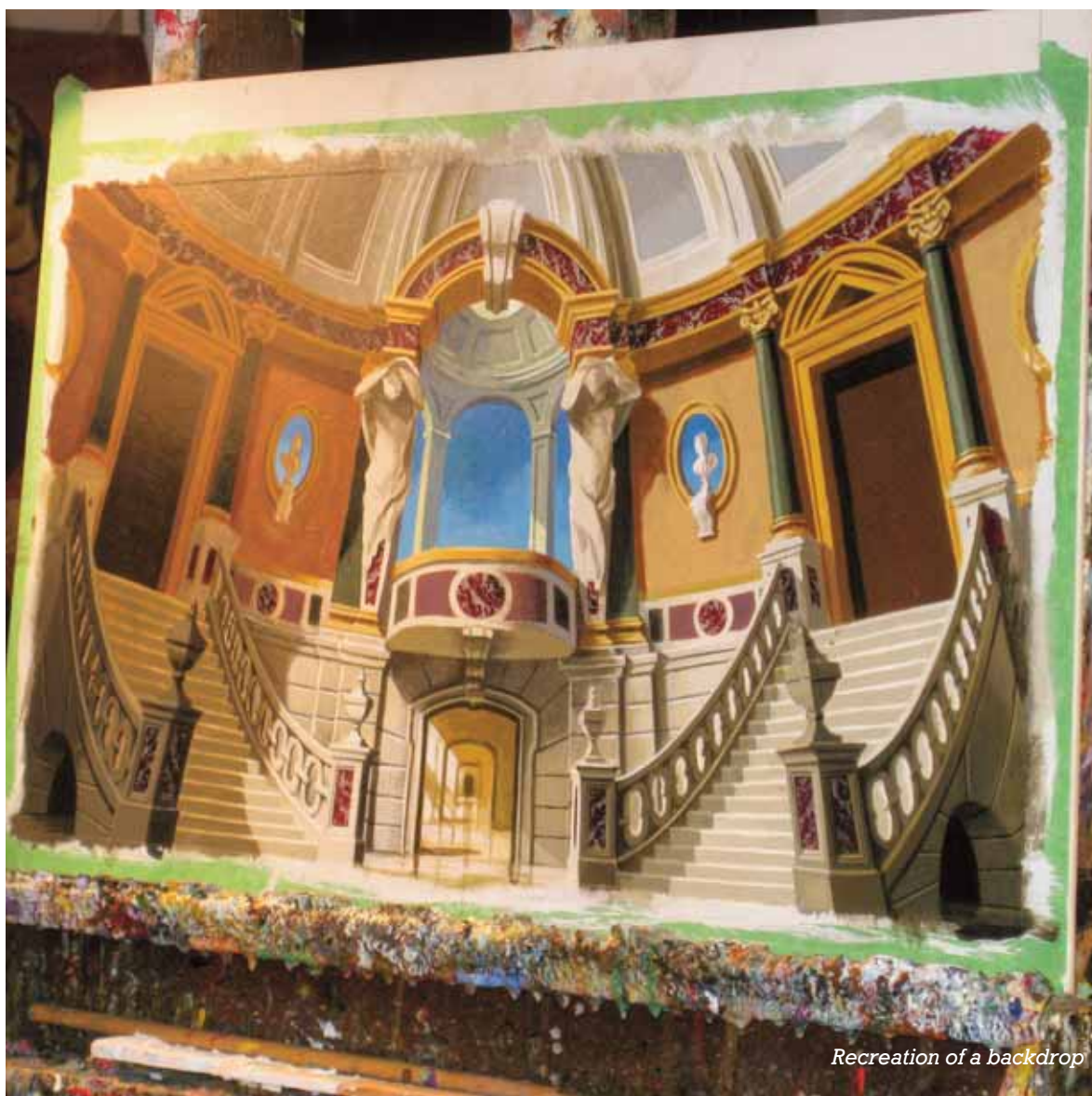
purposefully amassed a collection of scores. Most of the scores in his collection date from earlier than 1679, the year his operatic productions began, and so cannot be connected with his own performances. Indeed, we should regard the entire Contarini Collection, fair copies as well as autographs, as commemorative rather than functional documents, reflecting the desire of both Cavalli and Contarini to preserve a musical heritage.

Imperfect and incomplete as the musical sources may be, they far exceed those for the visual component of these operas. For an idea of what the works actually looked like on stage, the historian is forced to rely primarily on descriptions in librettos and to extrapolate from the few published engravings of scene designs.

Beyond the primary source materials – the librettos and the scores – other kinds of documents bearing on the history and development of opera in seventeenth-century Venice are preserved in various archives. The most substantial and important are two large *buste* in the Archivio di Stato, Venice, known by students of the period as 188 and 194. Comprising hundreds of folios each, they are the papers of Marco Faustini, who served as an impresario at various theatres from 1651 to 1668, working with every important composer, librettist, and singer of the period. His papers, which cover earlier years as well, include a wide variety of documents: from correspondence with agents, singers, and composers (Cesti, Cavalli, and Ziani) to contracts and theatre budgets. Collectively, they supply the basis for a richly detailed history of opera during the period of his activity.

Other notable and more recently discovered Venetian archival sources include two *buste* of Cavalli documents from the Archivio S. Lorenzo and one from the Monastero di Sta. Maria dell'Orazion a Malamocco in the Archivio di Stato, and the theatre documents in the Archivio Vendramin, now housed at the Casa Goldoni. Still to be fully mined is a cache of documents found in the State Archives in Hannover among the correspondence of Johann Friedrich, duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg. The duke was an important political ally, supplier of arms, and frequent visitor to Venice during this period. These papers include letters and reports from the duke's agents in Venice, among them the composer Sartorio and the librettists Pietro Dolfin and Nicolò Beregan, who were

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Recreation of a backdrop

entrusted with hiring musicians for him. A particularly rich source of operatic gossip is provided by the letters of the duke's secretary in Venice, Francesco Maria Massi.

Travelers to Venice, who formed an important component of the operatic audience, were occasionally stimulated to comment on the operatic scene in their letters or diaries. Few as they are, these comments shed considerable light on the place of opera in the life of the city. Somewhat more formal are the weekly *avvisi* reporting the news from various cities that circulated around Italy and abroad in manuscript and, eventually, printed form, from the late sixteenth century on. Several series of manuscript *avvisi* from the late seventeenth century have been preserved, in which information about opera is part of the detailed description of everyday Venetian events. A number of issues of the Parisian journal *Le Mercure galant*, from the same period, contain lengthy reports of opera in Venice.

All of these sources, taken together, allow us to assemble a history of opera in Venice. The most fundamental of them, however, are the printed librettos. In regularly supplying dates and names – of patrons, theatres, librettists, sometimes of composers, singers, and stage designers – as well as the actual texts that were sung, they provide the foundation of that history. But they provide much more. Their prefaces and dedications are rich in information. Their form and content change with the developing genre. Carefully read (on and between the lines) and considered in their entirety – from their actual poetic content (form, subject matter, and organisation) to the layout of their title pages, from the publishers' and authors' prefaces to the *dramatis personae* and last-minute addenda – they offer a precise record of public opera at the most important period of its development, just as it was taking shape. It is against the facts and running commentary provided by the librettos that all the other sources, including the music, yield their full historical meaning.





The Met's new

The Enchanted Island

In one extraordinary new work, lovers of Baroque opera have it all: the world's best singers, glorious music of the Baroque masters, and a story drawn from Shakespeare.

In *The Enchanted Island*, the lovers from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are shipwrecked on his other-worldly island of *The Tempest*. Inspired by the musical pastiches and masques of the 18th century, the work showcases arias and ensembles by Handel, Vivaldi, Rameau, and others, and a new libretto by Jeremy Sams. Eminent conductor William Christie leads an all-star cast with David Daniels (Prospero) and Joyce DiDonato (Sycorax) as the formidable foes, Plácido Domingo as Neptune, Danielle de Niese as Ariel, and Luca Pisaroni as Caliban. Lisette Oropesa and Anthony Roth Costanzo play Miranda and Ferdinand. The dazzling production is directed and designed by Phelim McDermott and Julian Crouch (*Satyagraha* and the Met's 125 anniversary gala).

Forget "Auld Lang Syne." The best music to ring in a new year is "Now a bright new day is dawning," the joyous chorus that ends *The Enchanted Island*, the inventive concoction at the Metropolitan Opera. The music for this finale is lifted from the "Hallelujah" chorus that concludes Handel's oratorio *Messiah*. The new words are by the librettist Jeremy Sams, who devised the story and assembled this fanciful, clever and touching pastiche by selecting arias, ensembles, choruses and dances from works by Handel, Vivaldi, Rameau and lesser-known Baroque composers.

'The Enchanted Island'

But the idea came from Peter Gelb, the Met's general manager, who has had his hits and misses since arriving at the company in 2006. This was a magnificent idea. His vision was carried out beautifully by Sams, aided by a terrific cast and conductor William Christie.

As Mr Gelb said in a recent interview, he wanted to "play the Baroque card" at the Met in a fresh way. Why not a pastiche? In the Baroque era the practice of borrowing music from one opera and fitting it with new words for another drama was commonplace.

This project could easily have resulted in a gimmicky piece with a mashed-up score. But Sams, who is a writer, director, translator and film composer, saw both the potential humor and the richness in the idea.

The story he devised, conflating elements of two Shakespeare plays with wit and charm, centres on Prospero, the brooding hero of *The Tempest*, an exiled duke of Milan who lives on a remote island with his devoted daughter, Miranda, and spends his days immersed in books containing formulas for potions and magic spells.

Here the sorceress Sycorax, only mentioned in Shakespeare, is Prospero's former lover and a central character. Prospero has banished Sycorax to the dark realm of the island, stolen her spirit servant, Ariel, and forced her savage son, Caliban, into servitude.

Hoping to ensure Miranda's future and end his exile, Prospero conceives a plan to have Ariel create a storm that will wash ashore a passing ship bearing Prince Ferdinand, whom Prospero hopes to match with Miranda. But the spell is sabotaged by Sycorax, and another ship, bearing the four Athenian lovers from Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, is beset. A matrix of mismatched romantic pairings ensues on the island, due to Ariel's hapless applications of love potions.

What gives "The Enchanted Island" its poignancy is the palpable respect for the beautiful borrowed music. In the first scene Prospero, here the charismatic countertenor David Daniels, promises Ariel, the brilliant soprano Danielle de Niese, freedom if she will summon a storm. The music for Prospero's alluring aria is taken from a Vivaldi cantata, sung by Mr. Daniels with a transfixing blend of melting sound and forceful delivery. Ariel



answers in an aptly effusive and wily aria, "I can conjure you a fire," with vibrant music from Handel's oratorio *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*, which de Niese deftly dispatched.

In most numbers Sams recycled not just the arias but the recitatives are retrofitted with new words. Where he had to compose new recitatives, he did it so well that you could not tell what was what.

The mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato as Sycorax, costumed at first (by Kevin Pollard) in a ragtag robe, her head all unkempt braids, giving her a slightly Rastafarian look. She commanded the stage from her first showcase scene, when she plotted her revenge on Prospero in "Maybe soon, maybe now" (music from Handel's *Teseo*), singing with cool control, then bursting into fearless flights of passagework.

The bass-baritone Luca Pisaroni as Caliban looked menacing yet endearing in an exotic costume that sugg-

The story he devised, conflating elements of two Shakespeare plays with wit and charm, centres on Prospero, the brooding hero of *The Tempest*

ested the Cowardly Lion with Kabuki whiteface. He relished the part and excelled in his volatile aria "Mother, my blood is freezing" (with music from Vivaldi's *Farnace*). The lyric soprano Lisette Oropesa brought a gleaming voice and beguiling grace to Miranda. The countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo was a sweet-toned Ferdinand.

A strong quartet of young singers sang the Athenian lovers: the rich soprano

Layla Claire, Helena; the bright-voiced tenor Paul Appleby, Demetrius; the plush mezzo-soprano Elizabeth DeShong, Hermia; and the hearty baritone Elliot Madore, Lysander, in a strong Met debut. They first appear on ship at sea, jauntily singing "Days of pleasure, nights of love" (originally "Endless pleasure, endless love" from Handel's *Semele*).

This episode also epitomised the creativity of McDermott's production, with Julian Crouch as associate director and set designer. The set inventively combines traditional scenery flats with sophisticated videos. When we first see





the ship, it rocks gently atop waves created by old-fashioned cutout boards that lift and dip. But when the storm breaks, frightening video images evoke swelling seas, hail and wind as the ship goes down.

What would a Baroque pastiche be without a star turn? This one had the tenor Plácido Domingo, no less, as Neptune: by his count, his 136th role (and first full-fledged god). Neptune, with flowing beard and silver raiment, is introduced in a dazzling underwater scene with an aquatic chorus of courtiers singing "Neptune the Great" (using *Zadok the Priest*, Handel's coronation anthem). Four mermaids float above. And Ariel, come to seek Neptune's help, arrives in deep-sea diver's gear.

In a gripping recitative and aria, patched together with music from Handel and Rameau, a despairing Neptune comments on the sorry state of the world and bemoans that his gift to mortals, the sublime ocean, has been despoiled by man. In this short but crucial role Domingo could let loose and really sing, which he did with heroic fervour. And as the run continues, this busy artist may not need to glance quite so much at the prompter's box.

In the spirit of Baroque opera *The Enchanted Island* is long. Maybe too long, especially the first act, with its many contemplative arias. Still, the piece unfolds with remarkable integrity and consistency, despite the use of music from so many sources and styles.

Baroque purists who object should be quieted by the presence on the podium of William Christie, who has done as much as any musician today to champion baroque opera. I cannot imagine Handel, the Mr Showbiz of his day, having any problem with *The Enchanted Island*. His only question would have been whether he would be paid an up-front fee or receive a percentage of the profits.





Act I

Prospero, exiled Duke of Milan, lives on a remote island with his daughter Miranda, surrounded by his books, potions, and instruments of magic. Prospero had at first taken up with the sorceress Sycorax, who ruled the island. But having loved her, he left her, banishing her to the dark side of the island, stealing her sprite servant Ariel and enslaving her son Caliban.

Our story begins some 16 years later, as an ageing Prospero conceives a final plan to ensure Miranda's future happiness and end his exile. He divines that a ship is passing nearby bearing the King of Naples and Prince Ferdinand, whom Prospero has destined for Miranda. Prospero commands Ariel to perform a spell that will cause a storm and shipwreck the royals on the island. In return, he promises Ariel his freedom.

Caliban, who has overheard their conversation, rushes to tell Sycorax. Sensing that Prospero is vulnerable, Sycorax tells Caliban to steal a vial of dragon's blood from Prospero's cell, which she will use to restore her enfeebled powers so she and Caliban can regain control of the island.

Prospero finds Miranda troubled by dreams and unfamiliar emotions. Meanwhile, Caliban steals the vial, vowing that he will rule the island with Miranda as his queen. He substitutes another vial of worthless lizard's blood, which Ariel mistakenly uses for the Tempest Spell – with catastrophic consequences: Two pairs of honeymooning lovers – Helena and Demetrius, Hermia and Lysander – are shipwrecked and separately cast ashore on the island.

Prospero now commands Ariel to find Prince Ferdinand and cast a spell on him to ensure that Ferdinand and Miranda will fall in love immediately. But the first man Ariel sees is Demetrius, not Ferdinand. Ariel dutifully casts the spell on him and leads him to Miranda. The two fall in love, much to Prospero's fury.

Meanwhile, Lysander has come ashore, cursing Neptune for, he thinks, washing his beloved Hermia out to sea. Ariel wrongly assumes that he has finally found Ferdinand and casts the spell to make Miranda and Lysander fall in love – much to Demetrius's fury.

On the other side of the island, an exhausted Helena arrives, observed by Sycorax, who decides she will give Helena to Caliban as his queen instead of Miranda, the daughter of her enemy. Using the stolen vial, Sycorax conjures a spell to make Helena fall in love with Caliban – much to his delight – and hopes the spell is strong enough to last.

Ariel, having cast a spell on the wrong man twice, realizes that the true Ferdinand must still be somewhere out at sea. He decides to go to the very top – and calls upon Neptune for help. The sea god





The Enchanted Island • Synopsis

appears, furious that a human, Lysander, has been cursing him and angry that Ariel has disturbed his peace. Ariel begs Neptune to find Ferdinand, and Neptune finally agrees to scour the seas.

Prospero observes the chaos he has wrought – lovers mismatched, Ariel frantic, Caliban running wild, and Ferdinand nowhere in sight. He despairs of ever achieving his dream.

Act II

Hermia awakens from a nightmare, only to realise that her dream was all too true: Her new husband Lysander was swept away from her in the storm. She runs off to find him and discovers him doting on Miranda – with no memory of his wife.

Sycorax, meanwhile, exults in her revived powers and the certainty that she will soon have her revenge on Prospero and regain control of the island for her son.

Hermia is reunited with Helena. Helena's memory and emotions have been stirred by the sight of Demetrius, despite the fact that he is with Miranda and fails to recognise her. Hermia and Helena bemoan the fickleness of men. Helena then takes off after Demetrius, spurning Caliban, who is crushed. Caliban rushes to Sycorax for consolation, but she explains that hearts that love can always be broken.

Caliban, in his fury, steals a magic book from Prospero's cell and conjures a dream of himself as a potentate of the world, attended by loving subjects. When his fantasy spins out of control and the creatures turn on him, Prospero intervenes and disperses them.

Meanwhile, Neptune has found Ferdinand's ship and sent it racing toward the island. Ferdinand looks toward his future. Like Miranda, he has been dreaming of an elusive someone.

Ariel sets about putting matters to rights, leading the five mismatched lovers through a forest maze until they fall asleep side by side. Ariel ensures through his magic that, when they awaken, the lovers are paired with their proper and previous mates. The five make their way to the shore to see Ferdinand and the king arrive, greeted by Prospero. Ferdinand reads the pardon ending Prospero's exile. When he sees Miranda, he falls in love instantly, deeply and forever – no spell required.

Sycorax enters and challenges Prospero. When he rebuffs her, Neptune appears and takes her part, berating Prospero for victimising others as he himself was once victimized. Ashamed, Prospero begs forgiveness of Sycorax and gives the island back to her and her son. Neptune extols the virtues of mercy and Sycorax grants Prospero forgiveness. All join to celebrate a new day of joy, peace, and love.

Olav Tryggvason

Grieg | Op. 50 | Opera in 3 Acts* | (1873, rev 1888-'89)

*Projected

Grieg's unfinished opera about viking patriot Olav Tryggvason has finally been completed after 100 years.

"Where is the ship, Ormen Lange?
Is Olav Tryggvason not coming?"

The cry that resounded in the Viking Age and in National-Romantic poetry has echoed since Grieg and Bjørnson failed to complete their opera project about the saga king almost 130 years ago, and it rang optimistically across the nation when Ragnar Söderlind's new opera *Olav Tryggvason* was first in 2000 – one thousand years after the King fell at the Battle of Svolder.

Many people have asked the Norwegian composer, half jokingly, if he would complete Grieg's unfinished opera about Olav Tryggvason, but Ragnar Söderlind found that quite impossible. Until it became possible that is...

"The time has not been ripe until now, when style is no longer a deadly sin! In *The Magic Flute*, Mozart juggles with all manner of styles. The gaps have disappeared in the course of time and today it sounds coherent. Mahler was also criticised for mixing folk and intellectual elements. Once I had accepted the idea, I was able to approach the material and free myself from it. Since the



Bjørnson text covers only the first three scenes, I was also free to decide in which direction the plot should proceed," says Söderlind.

'Style' is one of the hobby-horses about which he has engaged in polemic and argument with his composer colleagues. He is convinced that music must address people, a view most of us find it difficult to disagree with, but the term 'neo-romantic' is not an honourable label among most modern composers, who prefer to call it 'old-fashioned'.

Entirely new opera

"Modernism has ruined the relationship between European music and its audience. Serious music has become a niche culture that is totally unexciting to ordinary people, and it has taken time to approach the emotional aspect in modern music. Everything had to be intellectual, and if I can't compose feelings I will stop composing. The time is now ripe and it was possible to realise my idea," says the composer, who has not completed the opera in the sense that the first three scenes are Grieg's and the following twenty Söderlind's, but has in reality written an entirely new opera into which the first three scenes have been incorporated.





Get moving! You can do it, I'm sure; broad,
clear music that costs you nothing; read the
sagas and put yourself in the mood!
(*Björnstjerne Bjørnson to Edvard Grieg, 1872*)

Søderlind has created transitions – 'seams' – between Grieg's music and his own, in which his music takes over just before Grieg's finishes. Bjørnson/ Grieg's *Landkjenning* (Land-Sighting), originally written in 1872 for a lottery at Akershus Fort in aid of Trondheim Cathedral and a powerful element in the Norwegian national choral heritage, has been used as a prologue.

"I often develop Grieg's music, create my own version with variations on his themes so that you can recognise them although they are not the same as Grieg's. It will sound modern to the ordinary ear and old-fashioned to modernists! I have returned to tonality, but my dissonances are as daring as other people's, although *melos* – melody – has been reintroduced. Talk and chat in opera become so prosaic. Opera takes place in an atmosphere very different from the trivial; it is the singing that differentiates it from everyday life. The text and music must suit each other and be integrated in such a way that the two elements are equally important."

Grieg and Bjørnson

The Norwegian operatic repertoire is relatively limited and the possibility of creating a monumental national work of 19th century format was lost when Edvard Grieg and Björnstjerne Bjørnson fell out in 1873. Grieg nagged about a libretto that never appeared, and when something finally materialised he had begun work on Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and had no time for Bjørnson "since I am now sitting here composing music for *Peer Gynt* instead of *Olav Tryggvason*. There you have it," wrote Grieg. To Bjørnson this was almost unforgivable and the hatchet was not buried until the composer dedicated the *Tryggvason* fragments to Bjørnson when they were first performed in Christiania in 1889. They were also performed nine times at the National Theatre in 1908.

This time the text is complete and singer and librettist Knut Jørgen Moe's version is in a very different style from that of his predecessor. It has become an original drama more than a libretto, often in saga style, and whereas Bjørnson and Grieg would have written an opera about conversion to Christianity which would end with everyone being nice and walking round in white cloaks, Søderlind and Moe have written a more truthful, bloody story, depicting the Battle of Svolder in 1000 as the bloodbath it really was. In *The Battle of Svolder*, fate motifs from Wagner, Beethoven, Liszt and other composers are incorporated into Søderlind's own music. Director Ronald Rørvik has participated as dramatic adviser from the start.

Christianity, paganism and women

Olav Tryggvason grew up in Russia, was baptised in England and set off, full of international impulses and under billowing sails, to cross the North Sea to Norway in order to unite the country, defeat paganism and lead the people into modern times. To most Norwegians, Olav was a heroic king who was unfortunately killed at Svolder. Söderlind and Moe try to show why he suffered such a fate and how his behaviour and over-confidence – *hubris* – led to disaster.

"He was typical of his time, a chieftain obsessed by Christianity who approached the conversion of his people with an almost heathen brutality. It is said that Norway was converted to Christianity by the axe, and this is expressed visually in a scene where half the cast sing their way to *perdition* (*Hear us, Balder*) while the other half sing beautiful hymns (*Veni creator!*). We allow the Russian monk, Pyotr, to represent the meditative, mild aspect of Christianity, while Jon Bisp (Bishop John) and Olav represent the more aggressive aspect. White Christ – Christ as a fighting, conquering king – was tailor-made for the Vikings," relates Söderlind, who has portrayed the rise and fall of the Norwegian king in two long acts.



The turning point comes when Gudrun tries to kill Tryggvason on their wedding night. He has chopped off the head of her father, Chief Iron Beard, who resisted conversion to Christianity by force. He was given the choice between the chalice and the sword – Christianity and death – and chose death. The statue of Olav Tryggvason in Trondheim depicts him in precisely this way, with the chalice in his left



*The actual helmet
believed to have been
worn by Olav Tryggvason*

hand and the sword in his right.

Due to the king's cruelty and propensity for torturing people, his friends and comrades desert him one by one. He famously hits the Swedish dowager Queen Sigrd in the face with his glove and incurs the enmity of both the Swedish and Danish kings. At Svolder in the Year 1000, where the megalomaniac Olav expects to unite the entire Nordic region into a Christian realm, he is ambushed. The mythological Volven intervenes and determines his fate while his three women – Gudrun, his wife Thyra and Sigrd – become norns who spin the threads of his destiny. "Toying with women has caused the death of many men," sings Volven.

No-one knows where Svolder is today and Söderlind and Moe do not try to specify its location. Rügen, Øresund, Iddelfjord and a place close to Gothenburg have been suggested. The composer believes most in the Gothenburg alternative because Danaholmen, the ancient border between Norway, Sweden and Denmark, is there.

The music

Ragnar Söderlind's score is for a full orchestra without electronic elements or Viking-type buck horns. "There are enough problems without that," he says. But he allows the Wagnerian tuba to represent the pagan element and the organ to represent Christianity. The musical contrasts are extreme, in the characterisation, too. While Olav begins melodiously, he ends in a more modernist, abrupt style that expresses his *hubris*.

The tonality is modern, but the format is more in the Puccinian than the Wagnerian tradition. There are arias and monologues that promote the action, passionate love

Foran Sydens Kloster, Op. 20

In the early 1870s, just before he composed *Peer Gynt*, Grieg had done a lot of work on other dramatic music. He was living at that time in Christiania (Oslo), where he collaborated with the writer and public figure Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832–1910), who was an important inspiration: 'He did not understand music, but he believed in what I was trying to do, and that gave me courage.' Both works to Bjørnson texts on this recording took shape in 1871, though *Bergliot* was completed only in 1885. *Foran Sydens Kloster*, in translation "Before a Southern Convent" was intended to be a scene in a larger work, based on Bjørnson's epic poem *Arnljot Gelline*. Like Grieg's planned opera *Olav Tryggvason*, it was never finished. Grieg dedicated this scene to Franz Liszt: 'You well understand the connection in my mind with Liszt,' he wrote to his friend, the Danish composer August Winding (1835–99): 'Do you remember when we stood before that convent by the Arch of Titus in Rome, and what unforgettable times we spent out there?' Originally Grieg was going to dedicate *Before a Southern Convent* to another Danish composer, Johan Peter Emil Hartmann (1805–1900), but he learnt that Hartmann had already set the same text himself. Grieg often conducted this work on his concert tours, and from what he said in his letters we can tell that he valued it highly. Today it is seldom performed, at least partly because it uses somewhat unusual forces, with two soloists and a female chorus. The action of *Arnljot Gelline* takes place in the time of St Olav. Ingigerd, a chieftain's daughter from Jämtland, has seen her father killed by the outlawed warrior-hero Arnljot because he refused to give Ingigerd to Arnljot as a peace offering. Arnljot captures Ingigerd, but then, out of pity, lets her go free. Ingigerd feels attracted to Arnljot, and is now tormented by a sense of guilt, confusion and despair. In this 'fourth song' she is at a convent gate in a southern land, where she is interrogated by the prioress or another eminent sister. At the end a chorus of nuns inside the convent bids her welcome into the grace of God. We can perhaps sense that this piece was conceived as part of a

larger work. Here too there are parallels to Tamino's meeting with the Speaker in *The Magic Flute*. The contrast between the two characters is clearly drawn in Grieg's music. The nun asks question after question, always to the same melody and harmony, until for her last lines, emotionally moved, she modulates up a major third, supported by a dramatic double-bass tremolo: 'Your lover, how was it that you lost him?' Ingigerd's outpouring of her feelings drew from Grieg extremely varied instrumentation and harmony.

Later Grieg said: 'When I had written *Before a Southern Convent*, Bjørnson – who easily got excited – was beside himself with enthusiasm.' Their collaboration had struck a spark and Grieg immediately started work on the melodrama *Bergliot*, about a Viking woman married to the archer-chieftain Einar Tambarskjelve. The text is based on Harald Hardråde's Saga, as written down by the poet and historian Snorre Sturlason (1179–1241/42). Harald Hardråde has lured Einar into an ambush, and Bergliot sees both her husband and her son lying murdered. In rage, she tries to incite Einar's men to revenge; but towards the end she becomes resigned, reconciling herself to her fate. As in *Arnljot Gelline*, the underlying theme is the conflict between paganism and Christianity. The first performance of *Bergliot* was at the Kristiania Theatre on 3 November 1885, with the Norwegian actress Laura Gundersen (1832–98) in the title role. Grieg dedicated the work to Gundersen, and for the many performances he conducted he always took great care to find the right actor to do justice to the part. He also had faith in the piece itself, even if he saw melodramas as inherently problematic: 'I'd be the last to stick up for melodrama as an art-form, but if this poem Bergliot is to be set to music at all, it must be done as melodrama. There's no other way.' The score is pervaded by Grieg's gift for psychological insight in characterisation, and modern interpretations that take a more realistic and subjective approach have a compelling strength of their own.

Bjarte Engeset Translated by David Gallagher

Grieg's other attempt at an opera also failed...

scenes and theological debates, a seamen's choir, storm and calm, battle and prayer, pagan dance at the sacrificial site, fire and sea battles – as dramatic and violent as any action film.

"Can the audience hum anything as they leave the auditorium? Thyra's cradle song for Harald is hummable. It must be the first cradle song to be written by a classical composer in Norway since World War II!" responds Söderlind with a smile.

Bergen, City of Culture

One thousand years after the Battle of Svolder, on 26 September 2000, the opera *Olav Tryggvason* was first performed in the Grieg Hall in Bergen with Trond Hallstein Moe in the title role. The Oslo première was at the end of November at the Norwegian National Opera. Earlier this year, the Norwegian National Opera had staged *Ariadne* in the Cultural City of Santiago de Compostela to great acclaim. The first performance of the new Norwegian opera took place in the west-coast town of Bergen precisely because it is also a European City of Culture in 2000.

The Norwegian National Opera, the West Norwegian Opera, the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and the Cultural City of Bergen cooperated on the production of the three-hour performance. Although their relations were relatively turbulent, all the pieces of the puzzle finally fotted together and the opera was enthusiastically acclaimed by both audiences and critics in Bergen and Oslo. The launch of the project by the Norwegian



Ragnar
Söderlind

National Opera as a completed version of Grieg's opera was, however, appropriately criticised by the Norwegian press as being misunderstood and erroneous. Opera Director Bjørn Simensen rejected the criticism as being formalistic.

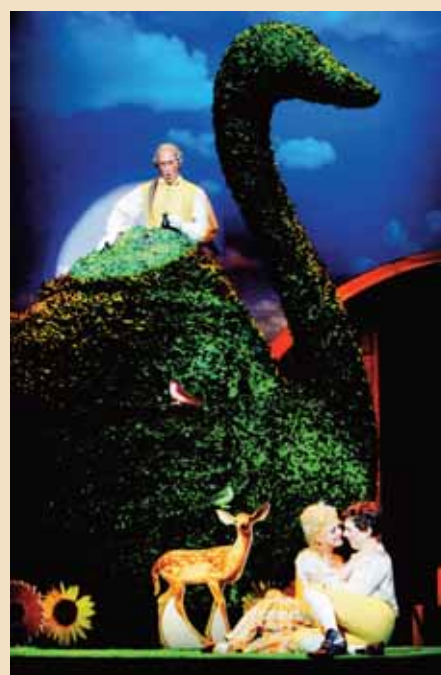
"We have performed somersaults forwards and backwards in history," he says, proud that Grieg's sketches have provided the foundation for a complete and entirely new opera. *Olav Tryggvason* is the first major Norwegian première in eight years, and the first ever in Bergen.

The one that was finished...

Grieg may not have finished any operas but Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson did. *Hulda* is an opera by César Franck to a French libretto by Charles Grandmougin. It is set in 11th-century Norway, and is based on Bjørnson's play *Lame Hulda* of 1858). The complete opera contains a prologue, three acts and an epilogue. Bjørnson was consulted throughout

It was first performed in an incomplete version in Monte Carlo, Monaco, on 8 March 1894 followed by performances in The Hague in March 1895 and Toulouse in April 1895.

The third act was performed at the Concerts Colonne with Demellier and Cazeneuve on 16 October 1904 to mark the unveiling of a monument to the composer.

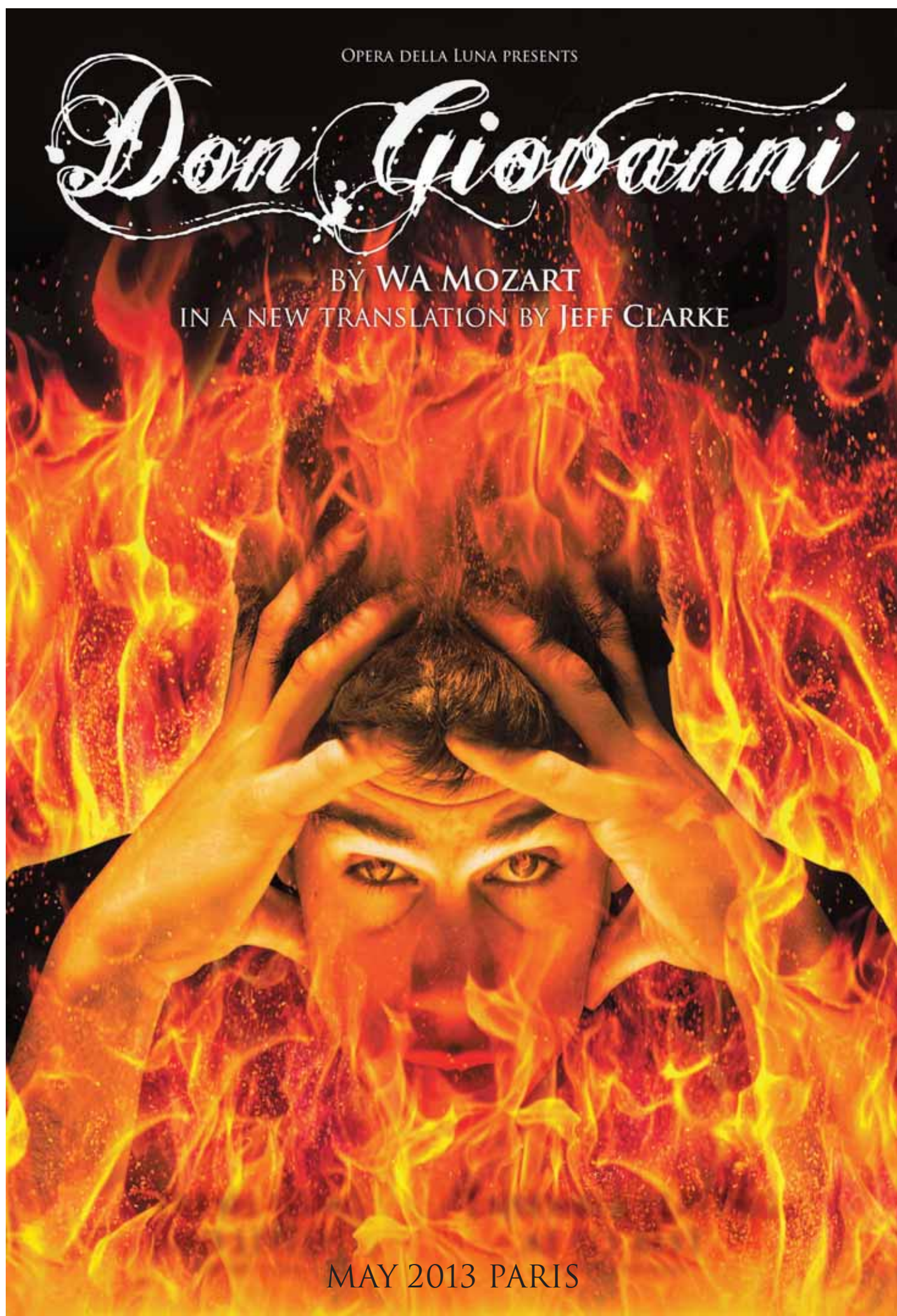


Hulda at the
Trondheim
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OPERA DELLA LUNA PRESENTS

Don Giovanni

BY W A MOZART
IN A NEW TRANSLATION BY JEFF CLARKE



MAY 2013 PARIS

Mozart's paper chase...

As most music-lovers are aware – it's part of our 'folk musicology' – Mozart was able to compose with tremendous speed and fluency. And since we have his musical diary – the *Verzeichnüss aller meiner Werke* – we may believe we have a good insight into his astonishing pattern of production.

Take the C major Piano Concerto, K.503. It appears in the diary on 4 December 1786, 16 days after the previous entry (the B flat Piano Trio, K.502) – and, seeing that, we may be tempted to assume that Mozart simply finished one work and then started another, composing the new concerto at an average rate of two minutes of music a day. This may all seem perfectly plausible – until we discover that the next work (the 'Prague' Symphony, K.504) was entered just *two days later*, on 6 December. The problem, then, is that while the *Verzeichnüss* may be a reliable indicator of when a work was completed, it doesn't reveal when a work – especially a big work – was actually begun.

For that, we need some musicology – specifically, Alan Tyson and his investigations into the different batches of music paper that passed through Mozart's hands as he worked. And in the case of K.503, what we learn is that the manuscript's first three bifolia actually seem to date from between c. December 1784 and March 1785. What must have happened is that Mozart wrote the first part of the movement, with various ideas in it, and then he put those pages away and used the rest of that paper for other things. Then, more than a year later, when there was an opportunity for performance, he went back to that opening and wrote the rest of the piece – using whatever kind of paper and ink he had by him at the time.

A similar tale is told by the score of the A major Piano Concerto, K.488 – whose first eight leaves apparently date from 1784 or the beginning of 1785, but whose completion was only recorded in the *Verzeichnüss* on 2 March 1786. And then there's the E flat Piano Concerto, K.449, which appears in the diary on 9 February 1784, but whose first ten leaves – the opening movement's orchestral and solo expositions – had been written down in 1782–83...

Of course, on one level this kind of thing seems perfectly sensible, once you know about it: just as Mozart tended not to buy his music paper in large quantities (there being no point in having money tied up in piles of surplus stationery), so he would have felt no compulsion to work right

through to the end of a large-scale score unless there was a reasonable prospect of something being done with it.

On another level, however, the picture revealed by Tyson is surely every bit as astounding as the one we grew up with. Instead of a casually mythologised Mozart pouring out entire works as if by 'divine dictation', we now sense a phenomenally efficient and professional creator whose working methods involve laying down a store of inspired openings that would only be taken up and continued months or years later – with results that nevertheless manage to sound like divine dictation: I doubt that anyone who's ever heard the first movement of K.503 has realised by ear alone that b.128 was the point where Mozart picked up the threads again.

And there's something else that this bit of musicology has



to tell us that 'the music itself' doesn't – concerning the hundred or so unfinished Mozart fragments that have come down to us. Rather than disparagingly assuming that these must represent 'false starts' that were abandoned because they didn't develop in a suitable direction, we should be wondering how many are actually unborn masterpieces – the hoarded openings to which he simply never had occasion to return.

If you want to see some of these, and aren't afraid of a bit of musicology, there are more than 400 pages reproduced in facsimile in the *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe*. You'll find them in Volume 117. The volume dedicated *In memoriam* Alan Tyson.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

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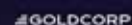
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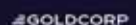
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Britten and Auden fell out irrevocably. But why and how did their creative relationship go wrong?

This is a sample of the writing Benjamin Britten set to music in his first opera, *Paul Bunyan*: "Let the dog who's the most sentimental of all / Throw a languishing glance at the hat in the hall / Struggle wildly to speak all the tongues that he hears / And to rise to the realm of Platonic ideas."

And here is a fair sample of the writing he commissioned, set and seems to have thought adequate in his last opera, *Death in Venice*, 34 years later: "Mysterious gondola / a different world surrounds you / a timeless, legendary world / of dark lawless errands / in the watery night. / How black a gondola is – / black, coffin-black, / a vision of death itself / and the last silent voyage."

Britten is always said to have been a sophisticated admirer of poetry, and to have exercised a connoisseur's pleasure in setting it. The claim seems plausible, apart from one thing. His first opera's libretto was written by Wystan Hugh Auden, who now clearly seems one of the greatest poet in English since Tennyson. After *Paul Bunyan*, Britten chose as his librettists Montagu Slater, Eric Crozier and, no fewer than three times, Myfanwy Piper, the author of the hopeless fourth-form effusions of the *Death in Venice* libretto above. When a more distinguished writer such as William Plomer was engaged – for *Gloriana* and the three church parables – his work was not permitted to display its usual mordant originality.

No opera plot
can be sensible,
for people do
not sing when
they are feeling
sensible.

W. H. Auden

Auden's relationship with Britten was at its most creative and fervent for the five years after 1936 or so, resulting in half a dozen major works and a substantial body of songs. It occurred, however, at the very beginning of Britten's career, and at a brilliant-prodigy stage of Auden's. After 1947, they hardly even spoke, and Auden was accustomed to say that Britten was the only friend he had ever had with whom he had subsequently irrevocably quarrelled. For Britten, on the other hand, it was a

different matter; he made quite a career out of casting those who had committed some blunder into the outer darkness. Their collaboration in the late 1930s was fiery and produced some thrilling objects. Yet Britten used different, and lesser, writers to create his best operas; whilst Auden rose to the challenge and worked with another equally important composer – Stravinsky – to write one of the two or three greatest operas of the century, *The Rake's Progress*.

Britten and Auden were brought together in 1935 by a very 1930s organisation, the General Post Office Film Unit, which was devoted to producing documentary films about modern-day life. Both at the time had a mild sort of devotion to communist causes. Britten wrote in his diary that summer about a performance of Elgar's first symphony: "I swear that only in imperialistic England could such a work be tolerated." Auden was coming to the end of what might be termed his Pylon Period, the style which would see him praise industrial landscapes in "Letter to Lord Byron".

How Auden and Britten learned to loath each other

WYSTAN
BENJAMIN

Auden's Oxford tutor, Nevill Coghill (see panel bottom right), had observed that "Auden is in the imperative", meaning the human being rather than the poet. In 1935 he was a commanding presence across the English-speaking world. Britten was a mere boy, though one of evident enormous gifts. Auden was to observe that he had never seen such "extraordinary musical sensitivity in relation to the English language" as in Britten. The GPO unit set them to work together, Britten setting the beautiful Auden lyric "O lurcher-loving collier, black as night" for a documentary, *Coal Face*, writing music for other GPO Auden-scripted films, such as *Negroes* ("Chorus: Beside the long Niger they lost their freedom ..."), *The Way to the Sea* and the great *Night Mail*, still unsurpassed as a marriage of film, music and poetry ("This is the Night Mail crossing the border / Bringing the cheque and the postal order ..."). Britten was so inexperienced with that last one that he forgot to leave a pause for the rhythmic speaker, Stuart Legg, to breathe, and the recording had to be manipulated as far as the rudimentary technology allowed.

Clearly, from Auden's point of view, Britten's fascination was not just that of a marvellous musical prodigy. As Peter Parker has demonstrated in his life of Christopher Isherwood, Auden occupied the place of plain best friend in that relationship, always having to settle for the boys Isherwood wasn't interested in. Without conventional good looks, he had always relied on his amazing conversation to get his way. Whether startling the mothers of his college friends when staying with them ("Mrs Carritt, this tea tastes of tepid piss") or, no doubt, explaining to new chums why homosexuality was the only rational choice to take, he had always won others over through his powers of speech.

For a while, Britten formed a kind of project for Auden and his entire group. Isherwood took Britten in 1937 to the

notorious Jermyn Street Turkish Baths. "Well," the film director Basil Wright asked Isherwood afterwards, "have we convinced Ben he's queer, or haven't we?" A glance at Britten's diary, had it been available, would have demonstrated what the problem was. "Very pleasant sensation," Britten wrote of the visit. "Completely sensuous, but very healthy. It is extraordinary to find one's resistance to anything gradually weakening."

Britten's unswerving attachment to the "healthy" comes out in his private reflections. He wrote of an old schoolboy acquaintance, David Layton, that "he is a very good sort – clean, healthy living and balanced".

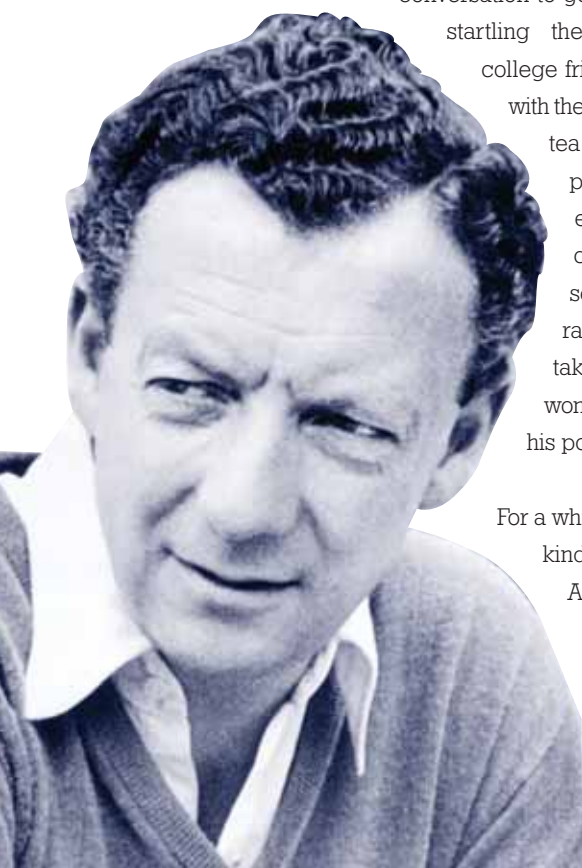
More experienced boys knew exactly how to write to Britten to get a result. Wulff Scherchen, whom Britten met at 14 and pursued more seriously at 18, was to inspire *Young Apollo* and the most frankly erotic of the *Les Illuminations* song cycle of 1939. Replying to Britten's speculative letter, he gets straight to the point. Yes, he remembers Britten from four years ago, he writes: "I was in shorts and sandals (as I am now) and it started to rain. I got thoroughly wet –".

Whether by luck or calculation, or just by calling up in the composer's mind the image of a wet 14 year old, Scherchen could effortlessly hit the note to get a response from Britten. Auden's approaches, on the other hand, reflected his highly didactic personality. They were almost comically unlikely to get results, and not just because Auden was seven years older than Britten, then in his early 20s. But his obsession with leading Britten into bed did result in a series of poetic masterpieces. The lyric "Underneath the abject willow", from March 1936, is addressed to Britten: "Walk then, come / No longer numb / Into your satisfaction." Britten wrote in his diary only of a "bad inferiority complex in company of brains like Basil Wright, Wystan Auden and William Coldstream". In May, another poem seems to relate to a rejection by Britten of Auden – "You love your life and I love you / So I must lie alone."

At this period, it is sometimes hard to distinguish, in Auden's writing on music, whether the subject is the art of music or specifically Britten. "There is no creature / Whom I belong to, / Whom I could wrong ... I shall never be / Different. Love me," Music says in Auden's *Hymn to St Cecilia*, wonderfully set by Britten in 1942 as their friendship was coming to its end. His sonnet "The Composer", one of a series of speculations on particular

My
face looks
like a wedding
cake left out in
the rain.

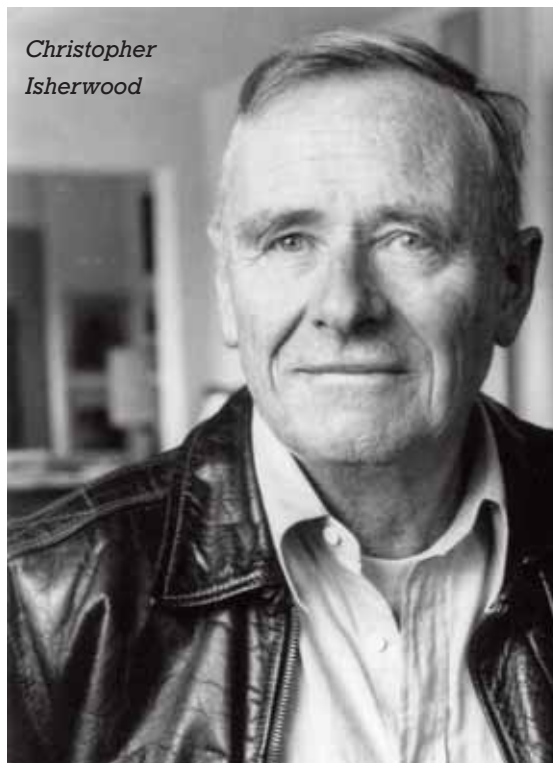
WH AUDEN
1956



or generic artistic figures, suggests he had recently spent a certain amount of time mooning over one composer; the lines "Only your notes are pure contraption / Only your song is an absolute gift" are ironic, considering how very literary a composer Britten turned out to be. There may even be a small dig, in one of the charming cabaret songs, at Britten's taste for what Auden called, in a fateful letter, "thin-as-a-board juveniles"; Britten set it to music, and it was performed at a riotous party to bid farewell to Auden and Isherwood, on their way to the Sino-Japanese war in 1938. Britten may not have noticed that the comic song began with the line "Some say that love's a little boy ..."

In 1939, Auden and Isherwood performed their famous bunk to America, and shortly afterwards Britten and his new friend, soon to be his lover and lifetime partner, Peter Pears, followed them. It was not the same. By the time of Britten and Pears's arrival, Auden had met *his* lifetime partner, Chester Kallman. They all lived together for a time in a celebratedly bohemian household at 7 Middagh Street in Brooklyn, along with Paul and Jane Bowles, two or three of the Mann children (Auden dashingingly married Erika at one point), Carson McCullers and Gypsy Rose Lee. Sheryl Tippins wrote an enjoyable book about the bizarre ménage, capturing the highly tiresome tone of the public exchanges between Auden and Kallman: "I am

Christopher
Isherwood



not your father, I'm your mother!' 'You're not my mother! I'm your mother! ... You're my father!'"

Auden, too, was a notoriously slapdash housekeeper. Years later, Vera Stravinsky found a bowl of brown water

Its a small world...

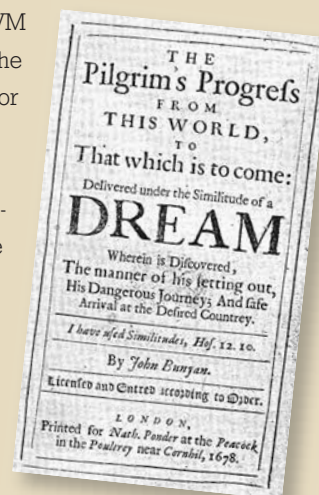
Vaughan Williams's opera, *The Pilgrim's Progress* based on John Bunyan's allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress* was described by the composer himself as a 'Morality' rather than an opera. Nonetheless, he intended the work to be performed on stage, rather than in a church or cathedral. Vaughan Williams himself prepared the libretto, with interpolations from the Bible and also text from his wife, Ursula. His changes to the story included altering the name of the central character from 'Christian' to 'Pilgrim', so as to universalise the spiritual message.

The musical gestation of this opera was protracted, and was reflected in a number of musical projects in Vaughan Williams' life. For example, his earlier one-act opera *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* from 1921 was incorporated into Act 4, Scene 2 of the later opera. His Symphony No. 5 also made use of themes originally conceived for his John Bunyan project. He wrote a 1940 motet on Mr. Valiant-for-Truth's speech for mixed chorus. The BBC commissioned Vaughan Williams for incidental

music for a 1942 radio dramatisation of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Herbert Murrill has characterised the opera as 'summarising in three hours virtually the whole creative output of a great composer'. The opera contains 41 individual singing roles.

The first performance was at Covent Garden on 26 April 1951. The conductor was Leonard Hancock, whom Vaughan Williams had personally chosen to conduct the premiere, and the director Nevill Coghill. Coghill is credited with both inspiring RVM and if not keeping up the pressure then acting as mentor during its composition

Coghill still remains most famous, however, for his sublime translation of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* for the still new publisher Penguin Books. The *Tales* was Penguin Classic no 18.



The *Rake's Progress*: Stravinsky, Auden, and a tale of debauchery

The Rake's Progress is one of the few modern operas that has a permanent place in the repertoires of most contemporary opera companies. Premiering in 1951 in Vienna, it proved to be one of Igor Stravinsky's greatest works, and his only full-length opera.

The inspiration for the opera came from a series of engravings of the same name he had seen on exhibit in Chicago in 1947. The eight engravings were the work of William Hogarth, the British artist and satirist who often collaborated with novelist Henry Fielding. The engravings told the story of the rise and fall of Tom Rakewell, son of a rich merchant, whose womanising, drinking, and gambling across eighteenth-century London led to his incarceration at Bedlam, the infamous lunatic asylum.

Stravinsky wrote the music, but he needed a libretto. He hired Auden and Charles Kallman, who had introduced Auden to opera. The two expanded Hogarth's tale to include a lover for Rakewell, Anne Truelove, whom he leaves for the lures of London nightlife. Rakewell's good fortune is orchestrated by another new addition, the Mephistophelean character Nick Shadow. The ending, however, remains the same, as the hero still becomes an inmate of Bedlam.

Though his most famous libretto, *The Rake's Progress* is but one of many libretti Auden wrote after his move to the US in 1939.

Auden's love of opera, which he famously called "the last refuge of the High Style," was rooted in the freedom from "modernist irony" it offered. Auden felt it was the only area of contemporary drama, "in which the poet remained an essential contributor, and opera was the form that gave the poet most imaginative freedom."

With the exception of his libretto for Britten's *Paul Bunyan*, the rest of the operatic work in collaboration with Kallman, including libretti for such composers as Stravinsky and Hans Werner Henze (*Elegy for Young Lovers* and *The Bassarids*). Auden and Kallman also translated *The Magic Flute* and *Don Giovanni*, among others, and worked with Bertold Brecht on several performance pieces. Auden also wrote lyrics for more than a dozen songs, narration for two documentary films, and, with Christopher Isherwood, several verse-dramas.

aria

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2013

abandoned on the floor of the bathroom during an Auden-Kallman dinner party, and flushed it away; she later discovered she had thrown away the pudding for the evening. Could it possibly have been the state of the house in Middagh Street that led to unmeltable frostiness between first Pears and Auden, and subsequently Britten and Auden too? Certainly, in later life, a question about Middagh Street to Pears could always set off a fit of eye-rolling.

Were
a fly to crawl
over Auden's
face it would
break it's leg
NED SHERRIN

Paul Bunyan, Britten and Auden's largest collaboration, is one of those works that one wants to be a masterpiece, and has a lot to be said for it; the poetry represents Auden at his two extremes, the brilliantly clever merchant of paradoxes and rhyming games, and the author of exquisitely framed conversational simplicities. The music is deft and often memorable; the idea of the little opera, of an unseen giant Paul Bunyan and the founding of a community at America's birth, ought to work perfectly well. But the American critics poured scorn on it at its premiere in May 1941, perhaps irritated by two chic English draft-dodgers taking on a heroic American national myth. Britten never sought to have it performed again in his lifetime.

Shortly afterwards, Auden dealt the relationship a fatal blow by yielding to his didactic urge, and writing the sort of letter which no one should write to a friend, putting him straight about a number of defects in his character: "I am certain too that it is your denial and evasion of the demands of disorder that is responsible for your attacks of ill-health ... you are and probably always will be surrounded by people who adore you, nurse you and praise everything you do ... you are always tempted to make things too easy for yourself in this way, ie to build yourself a warm nest of love ... by playing the loveable talented little boy."

After that letter of January 1942, the relationship was more or less over. Auden tried to persuade Britten to set one last thing, his great "For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio". But as any reader could have told him, this long poem does all the music itself. It was in no need of an orchestra and chorus to add to the splendid effects of the verse.

There are a surprising number of scores in the Auden-Britten catalogue – Clive James once said the results of the encounter were meagre, but Donald Mitchell, in a book on the subject, thought it might, in the end, amount to more than the Brecht-Weill collaborations. Many of

them are brilliantly clever – the cabaret songs are irresistibly good; the allegorical treatment of prewar international politics, *Our Hunting Fathers*, still startles with its brief flash of terror as the medieval catalogue of hawks' names comes down at the end to just two – "German. Jew." *Paul Bunyan* will always be revived as an occasional curiosity. Edward Mendelson observed that in the 1930s *King Arthur* – the 1691 opera by Purcell and Dryden – "was the first and still the only libretto written by a major English poet for a major English composer. *Paul Bunyan* would be the second."

In the end, Britten's subsequent career showed that he worked best with people not quite up to his level. Auden's career as a librettist displayed, in the magnificent *Rake's Progress*, that he needed an artist on the scale of a Stravinsky to deal with his invention. For a few years the two came together; they were never truly compatible, artistically or as people, and their joint products are tantalising rather than fulfilled. But they were exceptional creative figures, and if they went wrong, they did so in a lastingly interesting way.

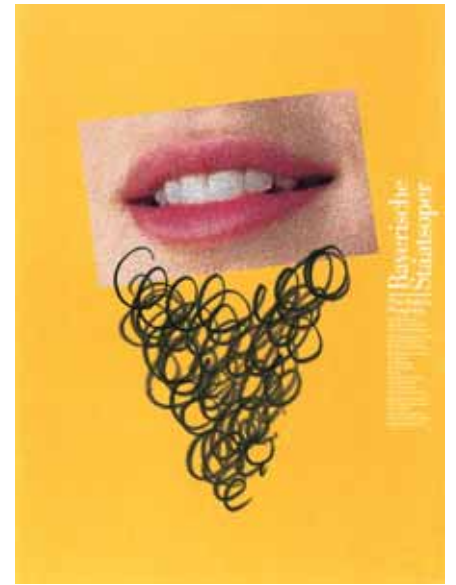




The Trojens



Katia Kabanova



The Rake's Progress

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Bavarian State Opera Posters



What clever posters these are, all by German artist and illustrator Pierre Mendell (1929 -2008) during his residency at the Baverian State Opera between 1993 and 2006.



Rigoletto



Das schlaue Füchslein



Was ihr wollt



Don Carlos



Billy Budd



Anna Boleyn



The Rape of Lucretia



Falstaff



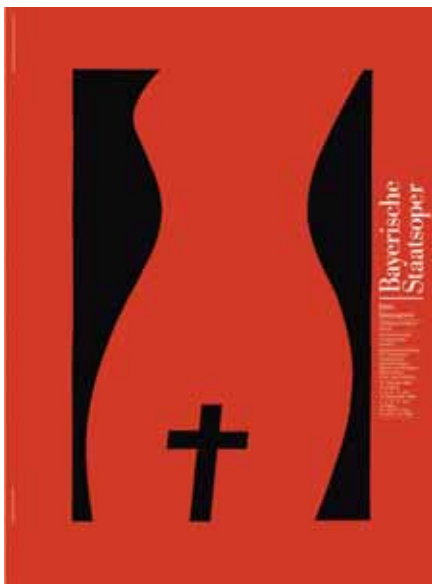
Alcina



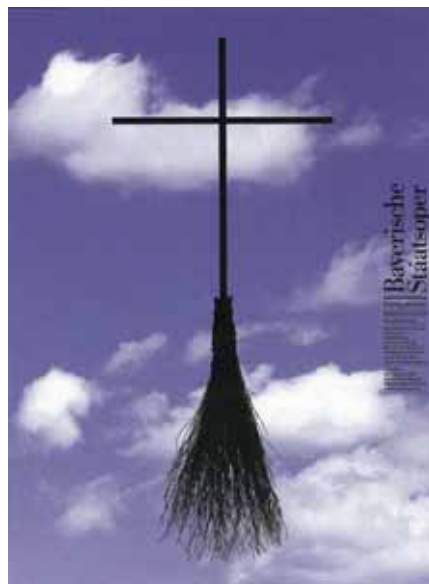
Faust



Flying Dutchman



Don Giovanni



Königskinder



Lulu



Macbeth



Meistersingers von Nürnberg



Otello

EN

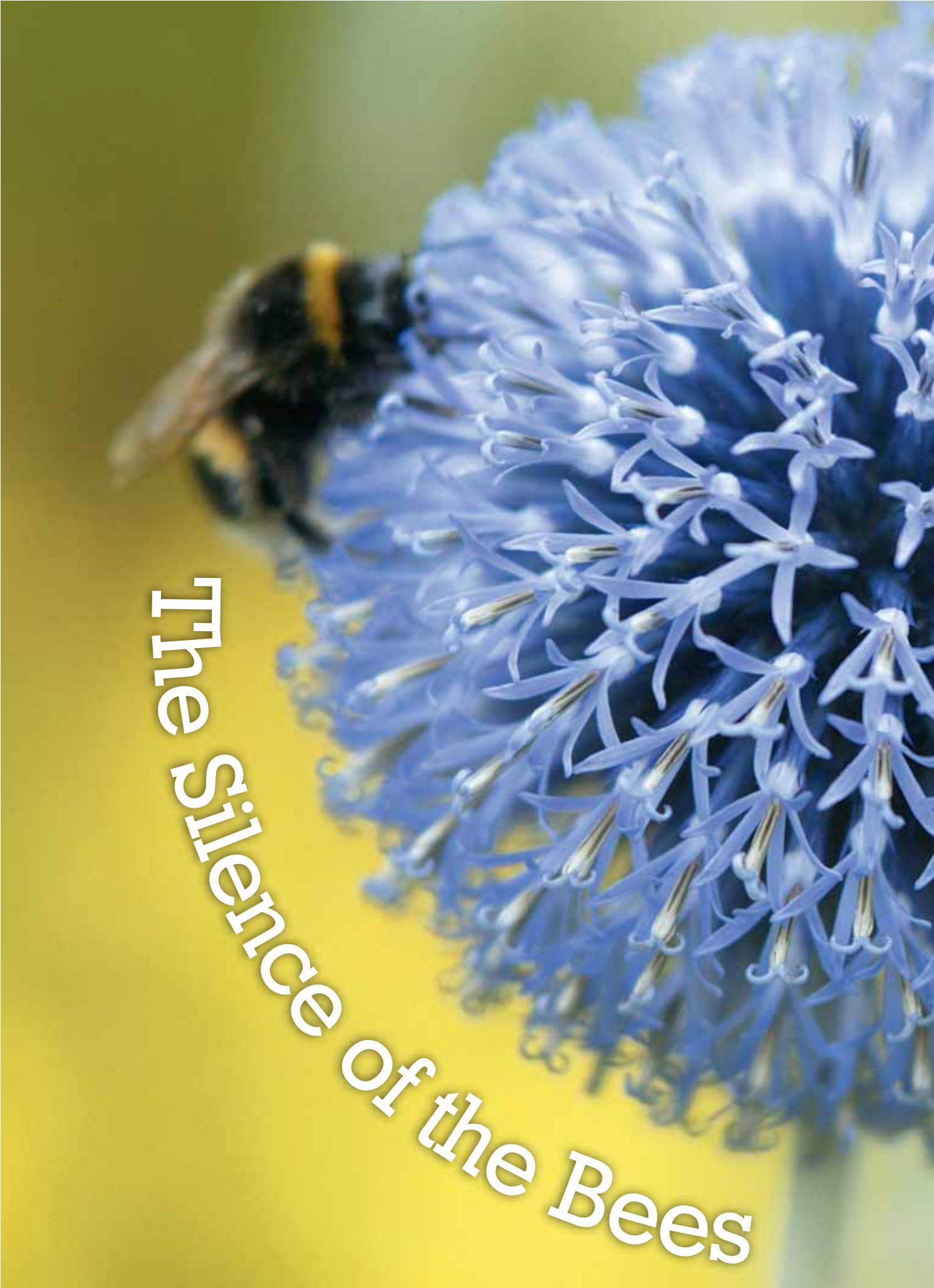


PUCCINI's

MADAM BUTTERFLY



SEPTEMBER 2013



The Silence of the Bees



A new opera that explores the dangerous decline in bumblebee populations in the UK received its world premiere at Royal Holloway university on Sunday 17 March.

The Silence of the Bees: A Science Opera combines both the arts and science faculties at Royal Holloway and looks to challenge our traditional assumptions of both, with the music inviting people into a scientific world and showing that opera can be used to highlight important ecological issues.

The composer Kelvin Thomson became inspired to start the project after realising that Dr Mark Brown, a leading bee expert who he had read about, was a member of Royal Holloway's School of Biological Sciences. Kelvin, a PhD in Composition candidate at Royal Holloway's Music Department, approached Dr Brown after one of his lectures and they agreed to collaborate on the opera.

Kelvin was also captivated by the dramatic possibilities in Sylvia Plath's poem *The Arrival of the Bee Box*, and took inspiration from its rhythmical effects and imagery, which vividly describes the insects and the speaker's fascination with them.

Based around Dr Brown's pioneering research into bees, the one-act piece looks to inspire a new generation of opera lovers. "As a composer I try to bridge gaps and fuse styles, so this is a fun opera that everyone will be able to enjoy", said Kelvin. "By mixing material from Dr Brown's lectures with poetry, we have shown a way in which science and art can work together and we have certainly learned from each other."

Kelvin has worked as a musical director, arranger, composer and musician in global shows such as *Riverdance*, *The Lion King* and *Celtic Woman*. His background in musical theatre has influenced the opera and a range of styles, from pop and rock to contemporary classical, can be heard in the score alongside references to standard operatic repertoire.

Some of the music even derives from the DNA sequences of bees, with other references including *Money, Money, Money*, by ABBA, and the 'Champagne Aria' from *Don Giovanni*.

Dr Brown, himself an amateur musician, played a key part in writing the libretto together with Benet Catty and a team from Royal Holloway's Department of English.

Dr Brown said: "While I am used to labs and delivering science lectures, this represented a completely new way of presenting my research. Scientists and artists are often viewed as working in very different ways, but creativity and the desire to communicate are universal and fusing our ideas into one has been an exciting challenge."

Despite the glories of his Water Music and Concerti Grossi, no one would deny that George Frideric Handel's greatest gifts lie in his vocal compositions. For more than a half-century, Handel churned out one masterful da capo aria after another. In his cantatas, operas and eventually in the English oratorios. The pinnacle of this achievement was arguably the bravura arias he supplied – with amazing consistency – to his soprano divas.

The Early Years in London

Handel's first operatic success in London came in 1711. *Rinaldo* contains the haunting "Lascia ch'io Pianga," a soprano air recycled from Handel's own earlier *Almira*. Sung by Isabella Girardeau at the premiere, the tune proved so popular the opera management posted a notice next day: "Whereas by the frequent calling of songs again, the opera has become too tedious ... the singers are forbidden to sing a song above once!"

Margherita Durastante was Handel's first

important prima donna. The soprano was a star in Italy in 1700 and sang the young composer's *Resurrezione*. He wrote *Agrippina* for her in Venice and cantatas in three languages (Spanish, French, and Italian). She proved a kindly artist who made little fuss, and worked well in London with the more temperamental alto castrato, Senesino. While he admired Durastante, not everyone shared the opinion. Handel's own librettist, Rolli: "What a bad choice for England! I shall not venture into her singing merit, but she is really an Elephant." (The nickname, alas, stuck).

Cuzzoni and Faustina

Durastanti's lukewarm reception by the London public soon prompted Handel to return to Italy – a practice he observed throughout the 1720s and 30s – to hunt for new divas. Francesca Cuzzoni was a savvy singer who had

married her vocal coach-- Signor Sardoni supplied the soprano with not only a child in 1728, but dazzling vocal ornaments as well. She agreed to come to London only after the Royal Academy offered £2,000 plus the proceeds of a benefit concert. For Cuzzoni's London debut, (1724) Handel penned the Act I continuo air "Falsa Imagine." Fearing its simplicity, the soprano refused to sing it. "Madame, you are a devil, but I will make you know that I am Beelzebub, King of the Devils," exclaimed Handel, advancing on the singer as if to toss her out the window. Cuzzoni relented – her debut was a rousing success, ticket prices for subsequent performances shot up astronomically.

Francesca Cuzzoni thereafter created the roles of Cleopatra and Rodelinda and sang for Handel for five seasons. In her later years, she ran up large debts and was forced to return to London in 1750, "grown old, poor, and almost deprived of voice," wrote Charles Burney. She gave a concert to raise funds. (Cuzzoni actually spent time in jail for bad debts.) Her efforts failed; Cuzzoni died soon after, employed in Bologna in a button factory.

In 1725, however the Academy was intent on more and more stimulation, for London's opera audiences. With both Senesino and the fiery Cuzzoni at their vocal and popular heights, they sought yet another diva to add to the mix. But no one realised the extent of the frenzy which the arrival of La Nuova Sirena would generate. Faustina Bordoni (1699-1758) was considered the greatest 18th century soprano, entrancing audiences throughout Italy and much of the rest of Europe. It took much coaxing and an enormous salary – rumored to be £2,500 per season – to lure the "Songstress of Venice" to the London stage.

Handel and his Singers



A caricature of Margherita Durastanti, drawn while she was prima donna at the Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo, Venice, between 1709 and 1712. Note the bosom!

The two sopranos appeared together for Handel in Spring 1726 in his new opera, *Alessandro*, the composer was obliged to supply his divas with equal assignments: each was to enjoy the same number of airs, each a duet with the hero (Senesino) and most delicate of all – a duet with one another containing equally florid, identically difficult lines. Opposing camps for the two stars had already sprung up. a claque would hiss and boo its "enemy." Pamphlets extolled the virtues of the one singer and detailed the faults of the other.

The Cuzzoni vs. Faustina rivalry ended absurdly, if predictably, in a great Marx Brothers debacle. At the final performance of the 1726 season, both appeared at the Haymarket Theatre in Bononcini's *Astinatte*. The British Journal reported: "a great disturbance happened at the opera, occasioned by the partisans of Two Celebrated Rival Ladies. The contention was at first carried on merely by hissing and clapping, but proceeded at length to catcalls and other great indecencies." Fist fights in the house soon extended to



la Francesina

the sopranos on stage; coiffures were clawed, vulgar words escaped those lips which moments before had ravished the ears with trills and divisions. One uncensored account: "it is certainly a shame that two such well-bred Ladies should call "bitch and "whore" and fight like any Billingsates." After nominal scolding, both were rehired for the following season.

Faustina, unlike Cuzzoni, was a great beauty. Most of those judging her gifts at the time – men – were unduly influenced. Burney, "her professional perfections were enhanced by a beautiful face, a symmetrical figure." Handel biographer Weinstock: "a woman of commanding intelligence, proverbially sweet disposition, and compelling character who made Cuzzoni seem the merest sweet-warbling viper." Faustina was not all sweetness, she did nothing to quiet the furor surrounding her and her rival. She was also, it seems, what would today be called a "lyric mezzo" her range concentrated in the B-flat below middle C to the G above the next octave.



Francesca Cuzzoni

When soprano Francesca Cuzzoni (1696-1778), refused to sing the aria 'Falsa immagine' from Handel's opera *Ottone, re di Germania*, Handel threatened her that he will fling her out of the window.

At first, the singer and composer began to argue fiercely, but then he thundered:

"Oh! Madame I know well that you are a real she-devil, but I hereby give you notice, me, that I am Beelzebub, the Chief of Devils."

Having said that, Handel grabbed her around the waist and carried her to the window, threatening that he will fling her out, if she doesn't do what he says.

Francesca started begging for mercy.
She was now ready to sing the aria.

Handel's *Siroe* was one of the several operas composed for both divas. Cuzzoni's fiery *Siroe* arias really did contrast with Faustina Bordoni's more delicate tracteries. The Act III Faustina aria, "La mia costanza," moved Burney to exclaim: "she invented a new type of singing with running divisions of a neatness and velocity which astonish all who hear her."

With the departure of both divas at the end of the 1728 season, Handel was again forced to look for a new

soprano, Anna Maria Strada del Po sang in Naples, where the theatre manager married her to avoid paying her fees. Handel was much taken with Strada and engaged her for the 1729 season. She sang many premieres for him, including *Orlando*, *Sosarme*, *Ezio*, *Berenice*, and *Alcina* among them. A loyal, but an unglamorous singer, the London public dubbed her "The Pig" "Strada," reported one wag, "has a voice without exception fine, but her person is very bad, and she makes frightful mouths." Although Italian, Strada dutifully premiered English works for Handel including his *Alexander's Feast*, asking only that he insert an Italian cantata for her between the acts. When she announced plans to retire after the 1736-37 season, Handel was again without a soprano diva.

Elisabeta Du Parc (1698-1778) was born in France but trained in Italy and was therefore known as "la Francesina". She arrived in London in 1736; Handel wrote his final Italian operas for her and she enjoyed her greatest successes in the English works of the early 1740's – *Semele* and *Hercules* among them. Du Parc's "natural warble and agility of voice which Handel seems to have great pleasure in displaying." (Burney) were exhibited with great success in *Semele*'s *Myself I shall adore*. Yet it is the continuo air "O Sleep, why dost thou leave me?" where Handel affords the soprano the most sublime writing.

In 1747 Handel was on good terms with the Haymarket's management, and was able to coax several of its stars to sing his English works. For soprano Giulia Frasi, Handel – at age 63 – composed the buoyant airs in his new oratorio *Joshua*. "Oh Had I Jubal's Lyre" is among Handel's finest tunes.



Surely the most famous castrati of them all, Francesco Bernardi Senesino in 1735

Vivaldi wrote to a friend to say he had composed 94 operas (we don't know if this listed his oratorios – usually stated as 5); of this 94 only 55 are known by date or name and only 20 have survived at all. In the last twelve years five have miraculously come to light, luck, and a hunch but above all dedication have brought them back...

1. Orlando Furioso

In a development described by music experts as "a bombshell in the world of Baroque opera", a new version of Vivaldi's *Orlando Furioso* has been discovered, 270 years after his death. *Orlando Furioso* [The Frenzy of Orlando, more literally Mad Orlando] Vivaldi's 1727 opera, is one of the great composer's masterworks, but a wholly different score from 1714 has been found among Vivaldi's personal papers, rediscovered in 2011.

The manuscript contains as many as 20 new arias, never heard before – all composed around the time that Vivaldi was also working on *The Four Seasons*. "It's a gift from heaven," said Susan Orlando [yes really!], a Vivaldi expert. Federico Maria Sardelli, the Vivaldi scholar who initially identified the master's hand, said: "The music is completely new for everybody. It's very exciting." Although the manuscript was among vast numbers of Vivaldi papers in an Italian library, it had been overlooked because it did not bear any composer's name.

In 1714, an *Orlando* opera was a huge hit at the Teatro San Angelo in Venice, running for 40 performances – a

long run at the time. The theatre's directors were Vivaldi and his musician father, but the fact that this opera was by Vivaldi himself went unnoticed by posterity.

Musicologists now believe that because Vivaldi was still a priest he may not have wanted to attract attention to an activity seen as possibly frivolous. Another theory is that he did not want to be seen to dominate the theatre, having just had another opera staged there.

The manuscript was found in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Turin in Vivaldi's personal library. It had somehow been catalogued as a revision of an existing *Orlando Furioso* by a young Bolognese composer, Giovanni Alberto Ristori.

Sardelli began studying it because it could not be explained why Vivaldi should have kept this music in his personal corpus among all his other scores. No other

composer's works were in the library. Meticulous examination of the manuscript, confirmed by other leading scholars, has shown that it is by the master himself. Sardelli described it as less complex than Vivaldi's later music. But it was also beautiful, exuding the inspiration and clarity. He said: "Vivaldi was composing *The Four Seasons* around the same time. There are no close thematic links [with the new *Orlando*], but the musical language is very close. It's an extraordinary opera ... He was full of ideas." The libretto is the only overlap between the two *Orlando Furiolos*. Based on the epic poem by Ludovico Ariosto, Grazio Bracciolini's dramatic libretto inspired Vivaldi with its tales of lovers, dark magic and madness. The music, though, is completely different. The role of Orlando, for example, is sung by a baritone in the 1714 work and a mezzo-soprano in the 1727 version.

Susan Orlando said: "So much will be gleaned by musicologists from comparing these two as far as the evolution of his compositional style."

The find comes as film-makers are said to be planning a major film about the composer's early life, starring Max Irons. It is one of several Vivaldi biopics in the pipeline.

Although his father was a violinist who taught his son to play from an early age, Vivaldi was sent to join the priesthood at 15. He studied for a decade, received holy orders and was nicknamed "*il prete rosso*" – the red priest – inspired by his hair colour. But by 1703, Vivaldi was employed as *maestro di violino* at the Pio Ospedale della Pietà, a Venetian school for abandoned girls, to which he remained affiliated for much of his life. He died destitute in Vienna in 1741, was buried unceremoniously in a hospital cemetery, and only past 1930 was any his music rediscovered.

Orlando said: "Not only is it amazing in the world of Baroque opera to suddenly find that Vivaldi wrote two *Orlando Furiolos*, but also what it says about him as a composer – taking a libretto and working it, and then going back to it and working it again. Nobody expected anything like this."

The "new" Orlando will be given its world premiere at the Festival de Beaune on 20 July and recorded for release in November by the French label Naïve, for its Vivaldi Edition series.



2. Argippo

After a 278-year hiatus, the long-lost opera *Argippo*, a two-hour drama about a young Indian princess smitten with a dishonest suitor, will be performed in Prague. Finder 37-year-old Ondrej Macek, who founded and directs his own Baroque music ensemble. "I was really very happy when I found the scores that everyone thought lost," he said modestly. The discovery came in November 2006, and word immediately swept the opera world. Francesco Fanna, director of the Vivaldi Institute in the 18th-century master's birthplace Vienna, waxed a bit more enthusiastic, calling the find "exceptional".

Argippo – the only opera Vivaldi actually wrote for Prague and staged only once, in Prague, in 1730 – will be revived in the sumptuous setting of the Spanish Hall in the Prague Castle, a room normally reserved for huge official receptions or special parliamentary sessions. It is "one of the rare places in Prague where acoustics are adapted to Baroque music," said Macek, a harpsichordist and musicologist who has directed his own Baroque music ensemble, Cappella Accademica, since the 1990s. Macek will be conducting another ensemble, Hofmusici, for the world premier of the reconstructed *Argippo*.

Macek was not alone in the search for *Argippo* though efforts by others were in vain. "They all stopped in Prague," he said. The Czech conductor was used to poking around old archives to revive forgotten 18th-century scores. Once he set his mind to it, the trail towards *Argippo* was "easy", he said. The private theatre of Count Franz Anton Sporck, who commissioned the opera had long burned down and the only surviving copy of the libretto was in Prague's National Library.

Macek's next "logical" step was to sniff out the movements of the Italian musicians recruited to perform the 1730 premiere. "After Prague, the Antonio Denzio company left for Regensburg (Germany), so I decided to go there myself." His quest led him to the private archives of the princely home of Thurn und Taxis, in Bavaria. Within two weeks, Macek happened upon the scores, tucked inside an 18th-century musical manual. "I immediately knew that this is what I was looking for because it corresponded to the libretto from Prague's National Library," said Macek. Once the scores were authenticated by the Vivaldi Institute Scientific Committee in

Venice, the Czech conductor dived into reconstructing the opera. The handwritten scores found in Regensburg were incomplete, lacking one-third of the work. Delving into all available arias by Vivaldi at the time, Macek was able to fill in the missing parts of the "musical drama in three acts".

After Prague, *Argippo* will be performed in early June in the Castle Theatre at Cesky Krumlov, another Baroque performance hall near the Austrian border, then Venice in October.



Antonio Lucio Vivaldi

How we know what we now know...

All of the currently familiar names in baroque music have been known continuously since their lifetimes, albeit with degrees of popularity varying from age to age. Not so with Vivaldi however. Although a substantial amount of his work had been printed during his lifetime, mostly by the Amsterdam printer Estienne Roger, only a few copies of these editions had survived, these in libraries and private collections, known only to musicologists and scholars. Not even his dates were documented. Although some of Vivaldi's music had been brought out in modern reprints, the name of Vivaldi had little or no meaning to the general public or the average musician. The story of Vivaldi's 20th century rediscovery has its own drama with several tense moments for the key players.

In the autumn of 1926 a boarding school in Piedmont run by Salesian Fathers discovered in their archives a large amount of old volumes which the administrators, no doubt short of funds as religious boarding schools often are, wanted to sell to antique dealers. They called upon the National Library in Turin to value the material to give them some idea of the price which prospective dealers would have to pay. The matter was turned over to Dr. Alberto Gentili, professor of music history at Turin University. He asked for a list and suggested that the material be sent to Turin so that he could inspect it

carefully. The Salesians obliged and several crates arrived. Dr. Gentili immediately went to work examining the contents. On opening the first crate he found before him volume upon volume of Vivaldi autographs.

Controlling his overwhelming emotions, he immediately realized that the matter required very delicate handling. Steps had to be undertaken to prevent the manuscripts from falling into the hands of professional dealers which would result in the inevitable dispersion of individual manuscripts and possible sale abroad. Naturally Dr. Gentili and the library administration fervently wished to secure this treasure for Turin. Yet the library was without funds to acquire the collection from the Salesians and to approach the government was very risky, for if the state were to become the owner of the collection the government would have exercised the right of choosing the institution in which the manuscripts were to be housed. Proceeding with the utmost secrecy, Dr. Gentili went begging and finally succeeded in finding a public-spirited Turinese who would agree to purchase the collection and donate it to the Turin Library in memory of his deceased infant boy. The University accepted the donation and the Turin Library took possession of 97 volumes containing rare printed music, manuscripts and autographs of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

Studying the individual volumes carefully, Dr. Gentili made a somewhat disturbing discovery. The last pages of some volumes failed to show the conclusion of the composition and a logical continuation could not be found in other volumes. It therefore became evident that the material had been bound randomly and was in fact only part of a possibly much larger collection which had no doubt been split among the heirs of the one-time owner. Further investigation revealed that the collection had been assembled by the Genoese Count Giacomo Durazzo (1717-1794), Austrian Ambassador in Venice and active patron of Gluck.

A great deal of searching and sleuthing had to be done to find living members of the Durazzo family and potential owners of the remnants of the original collection. It transpired that there was only one other owner, who could thus be holding the balance of the collection. Indeed he was, but he proved to be a very difficult person to deal with and it required much tact,



ingenuity and patience to persuade him to sell his share of the collection to the Turin Library. Yet even with his agreement obtained, where would the money come from for the purchase? History was necessarily repeating itself - Dr. Gentili was forced once more to go begging-bowl in hand, searching for a willing sponsor. Finally he made contact with a Turinese industrialist who had lost a small child and provided the necessary sum for the purchase of the manuscript, donating the collection to the Turin Library in the name of his son. Thanks to the tireless efforts and ingenuity of Dr. Alberto Gentili the great collection of Vivaldiana (319 items) had been saved for posterity in bulk.

The establishment of the Turin Collections led to the Vivaldi renaissance, marked by the Vivaldi week celebrated in Siena in September, 1939 and the projected issuance of the Complete Works of the great Venetian master. Alas, the war halted this promising start, and the entire project was put on hold. After the liberation of Italy, Antonio Fanna, a young Venetian businessman and fervent admirer of Vivaldi, founded the Istituto Italiano Antonio Vivaldi for the publication and promotion of Vivaldi's music and enlisted the cooperation of the Casa Ricordi, the greatest Italian music publishing house. Conditions immediately following the war could hardly have been more difficult; Italy was totally impoverished, the Ricordi printing presses had been bombed and their warehouses burned down. But with the dual challenge of postwar reconstruction and the significance of the task in hand, the newly discovered Vivaldi items began to appear in publication and were soon heard in Italy, spreading throughout Europe.

In London, as part of the great postwar Festival of Britain held in 1951, the Royal Festival Hall was opened on the Thames' south bank, and it was there that excited London concert-goers were presented with a season almost entirely devoted to the manifold and varied works of this newly discovered baroque master. Thus the once-obscure Antonio Vivaldi was elevated to his present status as the great Italian contemporary of Bach and Handel.

3. L'Unione della Pace, e di Marte

A Prague festival will host the world premiere of Vivaldi's opera *L'Unione della Pace, e di Marte*, following its reconstruction by a Czech expert 284 years after its single performance in 2011.

Vivaldi composed the serenata *L'Union della Pace, e di Marte* (Union of Peace with Mars) for the birth of the French King Louis XV's first children, twin sisters Louise Elisabeth and Anne Henriette.

"It's a specific genre of Baroque opera, quite a bit shorter, which is called 'la serenata' and composed for a specific occasion at that time," conductor, composer and harpsichord player Ondrej Macek said. "Ordered by the French ambassador to Venice, the work was performed only once, in mid-September 1727, in the open air, in a garden adjacent to the church of Madonna dell'Orto in Venice."

The complete libretto, containing notes on the birth of the twins in August 1727, and on the political situation of that time, has been preserved in the National Braidense Library in Milan. But the score disappeared altogether, and had to be reconstructed on the basis of tunes from Vivaldi's other operas.

"When I was reading the libretto for the first time, I could already see that many songs look familiar to me," said Macek, who in 2008 discovered and then reconstructed a major part of Vivaldi's lost opera *Argippo* (see previous page) which had premiered in Prague in 1730. "As the composer did not have too much time to create this serenata for that sole performance, he logically used themes from his other operas. "At that time, it was a usual and legitimate method of composition, especially in Italy."

The international ensemble Hof-Musici, led by Macek himself, will perform *L'Unione della Pace, e di Marte* several times within the Prague Baroque Festival starting on June 17. The premiere is scheduled for July 4. As the festival venue, organisers have chosen the Ledebour Garden at the foot of the Prague Castle – a picturesque example of gardening architecture of the early 18th century.



Ondrej Macek

4. L'Oracolo in Messenia

Virgin Classics has planned a September 24 release for the first ever recording of Vivaldi's opera *L'Oracolo in Messenia* [The Oracle in Messenia]. Italian violinist/conductor Fabio Biondi has performed extensive reconstruction work on the opera since the libretto was discovered recently at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

Biondi is joined by a cast including Ann Hallenberg, Vivica Geneaux and Julia Lezhneva for the recording, which took place in Vienna. Vivaldi had originally planned for the work to be performed during the Vienna Carnival in 1741, but the death of Charles VI meant that all theatres were closed for a year of mourning. The work's premiere performance was in Venice in 1738, after which Vivaldi revised it for performance in Vienna. This recording cap-

tures a full performance from the 20th season of the Resozanen festival of early music, which takes place in Vienna's Konzerthaus

Fabio Biondi leads from the violin, and the performance also features counter-tenor Xavier Sabata and tenor Magnus Staveland.



Fabio Biondi

5. Motezuma

Motezuma is an opera in three acts by Antonio Vivaldi with an Italian libretto by Girolamo Giusti. The first performance was given in the Teatro Sant'Angelo in Venice on 14 November 1733. (In earlier reference books the opera is referred to as Montezuma, but since the reappearance of the original manuscript this has been corrected to Motezuma.)

The music was supposed to have been lost, but it was discovered in 2002 in the archive of the music library of the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin, an independent old choral association with a rich musical tradition. After World War II, their library was captured by the Red Army, and taken to the Soviet Union. Eventually it ended up in Kiev, now in Ukraine. Following the restitution of the collection to Germany, the fragmentary score (the beginning of the first act and large parts of third are missing) was identified by the musicologist Steffen Voss. Musicologists began working on reconstructing a version suitable for performance.

A concert version of the opera, apparently the first performance since the 18th century, was performed on 11 June 2005 in the Concert Hall De Doelen in Rotterdam conducted by Federico Maria Sardelli.

On 18 July 2005, a version of *Motezuma* was supposed to have been performed by the Opera Barga Festival in Barga, Italy, also conducted by Sardelli. It did not happen due to a copyright dispute, as noted below. The staged modern world premiere was held on 21 September 2005 in Düsseldorf, Germany, as part

of the AltstadtHerbst Kulturfestival, in a production by Uwe Schmitz-Gielsdorf, designed by Paolo Atzori, with l'Orchestra Modo Antiquo conducted again by Sardelli.

Copyright dispute

Perhaps as part of their bid to become acceptable to the European Union, Ukraine returned all the books from the

Sing-Akademie to their rightful owners. The archive decided to organise their collection, apparently also restricting access, and supposedly having plans to publish their manuscripts.

The Sing-Akademie asserted that they had full copyright, including derivative rights such as performance rights, to the opera. While common sense would lead one to believe that a work presented in 1733 would not have copyright protection (and, even if so, that only Vivaldi's heirs would have these rights) the judicial case was not clear.

The Rotterdam performance went ahead only after a substantial payment to the Sing-Akademie, and the Barga performance was halted by an injunction, with a potential €250,000 penalty for non-compliance. The reason given was that German law offers copyright protection to entities that publish previously inaccessible works. The injunction was issued one week before the date of the performance, so a "pastiche" was performed: the *Motezuma* libretto recitatives were spoken, and other Vivaldi arias sung between them.

As of mid-September 2005, the injunction was lifted which allowed the Düsseldorf premiere to take place.

"It's always exciting to perform a quality work that's rarely been heard since it was created – in this case 277 years ago," said Mercury artistic director Antoine Plante who will conduct. "That it was recently rediscovered makes it fun."

"Setting an opera in the New World was really unusual," Plante said. "It gives interesting insights into how people in 1733 Venice perceived the conquest of the New World. It's also interesting that a work with a sympathetic portrayal of the Aztecs and their religious customs got past the Catholic censors of the day. And, on the musical side, there's a fantastic 'mad scene' for Mitrena, Montezuma's wife."

The American premiere was held on 28 March 2009, in Long Beach, California, staged and performed by the Long Beach Opera with musical accompaniment by Musica Angelica directed by David Schweizer and conducted by Andreas Mitisek.





Inside the ROH Costume Department

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Things are as busy as ever at the Royal Opera House. The Costume Department, in charge of preserving and fitting the thousands of costumes that appear on stage at the Royal Opera House, is always hard at work keeping pace with the current season whilst getting ready for the next season.

The team is currently preparing for *The Nutcracker*, re-making skirts for 36 snowflake ballerinas. Each skirt will be double-layered and decorated with more elaborate detail. At a rate of one skirt per day, it is already over a month's work. In addition, the costumes for John Cranko's *Onegin* and the dresses for the 40 swans that will dance in *Swan Lake* are being altered and adjusted.

Working on five to six opera and ballet productions at a time, carrying out around 6,000 fittings per season, it pays to plan ahead. Mal Barton, Costume Department Manager, explains: 'At the end of the season we tend to fit the first three or four productions of the next season so that the costumes are ready to go in September. Every production revival involves a refit, and each production can have some 500-600 costumes.'

However, despite such planning, unavoidable last-minute cast changes for The Royal Ballet can lead to the department starting refits at 5.30pm, for a performance at 7.30pm. Soraya Parsa, who has been working with the Costume Department for eight years, explains: "Fittings can take anything from five minutes to two hours. Towards the end of the season, there are always lots of last minute re-fits to do and we often have to make adjustments just before performances or from the side of the stage."

The Costume Department is focused on heritage, as well as performances, and works hard to maintain costumes true to their original designs. Faded colours are re-dyed, worn darning is repaired, and shapes and patterns are revised to ensure that costumes can stay in use for decades.

Tailors work from a "costume bible", a hefty volume that meticulously details original designs and subsequent revivals, to make sure that costumes stay accurate to their original design. The oldest costumes still in use include those from *La bohème*, which date back to 1974, and *Swan Lake*, which are from 1986.

Ildebrando

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Ildebrando D'Arcangelo wants to be more than a pretty face. His good looks help him land hunky opera roles. But the bass-baritone singer, who is appearing in Los Angeles Opera's *Così fan Tutte*, wants to expand his repertoire.

When Ildebrando D'Arcangelo storms the stage in Mozart's *Così fan Tutte* at Los Angeles Opera, the bass-baritone singer projects a swaggering confidence and dangerous sex appeal that act like a powerful audience magnet. But please don't call him a bari-hunk.

The 41-year-old **Ildebrando D'Arcangelo**, who is one of the six members of the *Così* ensemble cast, has garnered fans around the world as much for his voice as for his model looks – tall, dark and handsome in an earthy way.

Yet the singer appears uneasy with references to his status as a bari-hunk – the group of opera stars known for their pecs and neck size, as well as their deep, sonorous voices.

"To be honest, I'm uncomfortable," he says when the subject came up during a recent interview. "I appreciate it if people say something about looking good. In opera, if you see a beautiful person, it helps. But for me, honestly, I never thought about it."

He may not reflect much on it, but D'Arcangelo's looks precede him. His recent album of Mozart arias, released by Deutsche Grammophon, emphasises his Mediterranean smolder. On stage, he is regularly cast as Mozartean lotharios and lady-killers. In *Così*, he is Guglielmo, one of two soldiers who test the fidelity of their girlfriends by posing as rakish interlopers. Next season, he will be back at L.A. Opera in one of his signature roles as the title character in *Don Giovanni*.

Despite his success playing to type, D'Arcangelo said he doesn't always like being cast as the hunk. "Artistic

directors of companies try to classify singers, it makes life easier for them," he said. "They think you are a Mozartean and that's all you can do."

The singer said he has been gradually broadening his repertoire to include Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, which he will perform for the first time in Chicago later this year, and Verdi's *Attila*. He said he is also preparing to one day tackle Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust*.

Another point of annoyance for the singer is the "bass-baritone" label, which he said is by agents and managers. "I am not so much a 'bass-baritone.' I am more what we call a 'basso cantabile,'" he said. ("Basso cantabile" roughly translates to lyrical bass and occupies a slightly higher register than bass-baritone.)

D'Arcangelo was born in 1969, in the city of Pescara located on Italy's Adriatic coast. His father – whom he described as "very strict" – was a musician and organist. The young D'Arcangelo studied piano for several years and eventually joined a chorus. "When I saw the first opera in my life, I hated it," said the singer, adding that he doesn't remember what production inspired such distaste. "I was 6 or 7. The second one was *The Barber of Seville*, when I was 16 years old. I was in the chorus and we sang for pleasure."

The young singer entered a series of competitions and won, helping to launch his career. Since then, his work has taken him to most of the major opera houses in Europe and the US. He said American audiences, especially those in L.A., tend to be much warmer than those in Europe.

"People laugh here when we do a funny scene. In Italy, they are silent. They don't laugh. Maybe they don't want to disturb the music," he said.

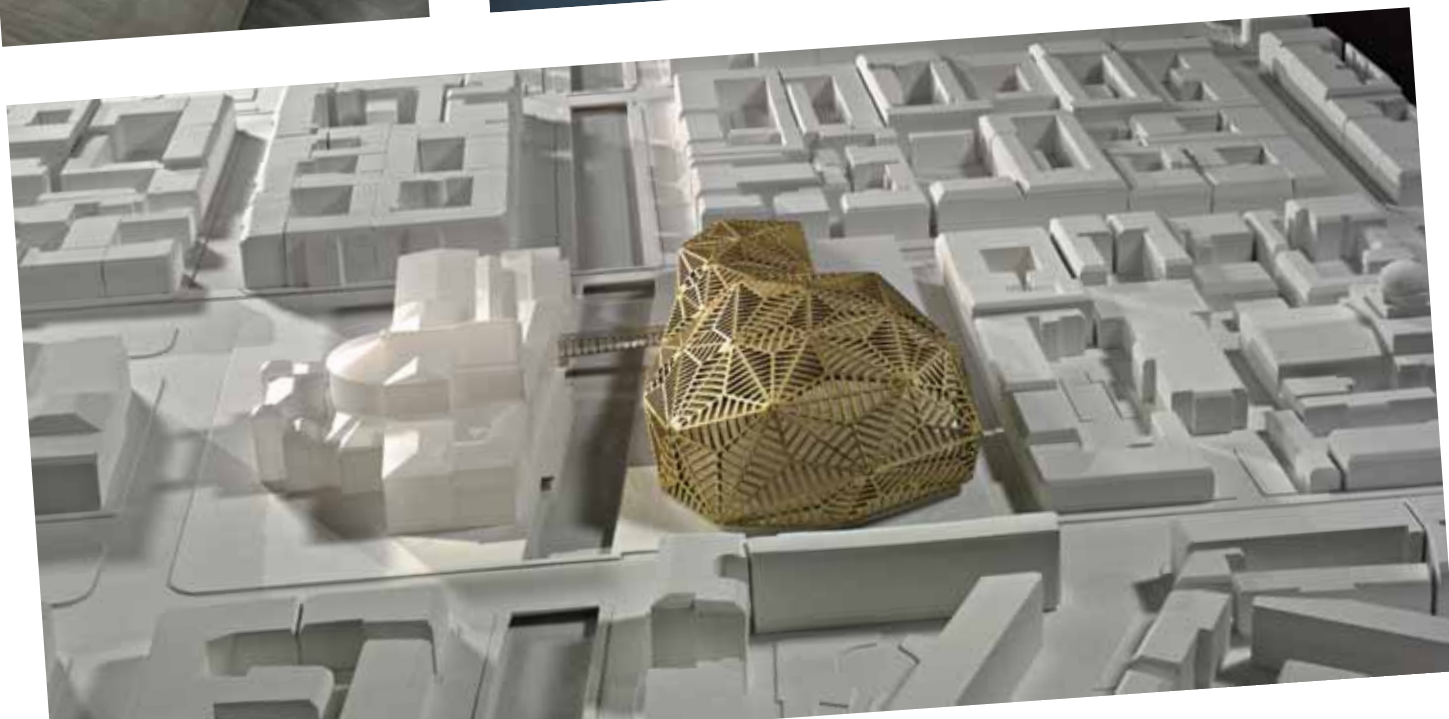
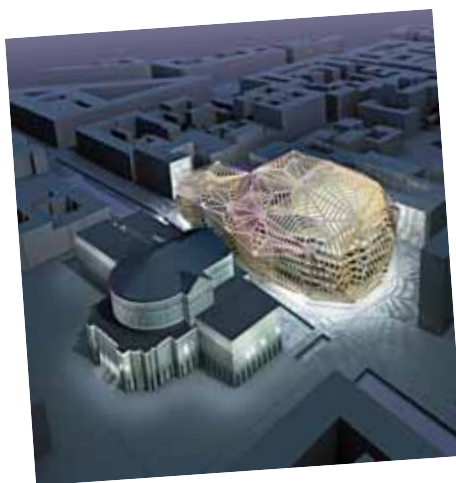
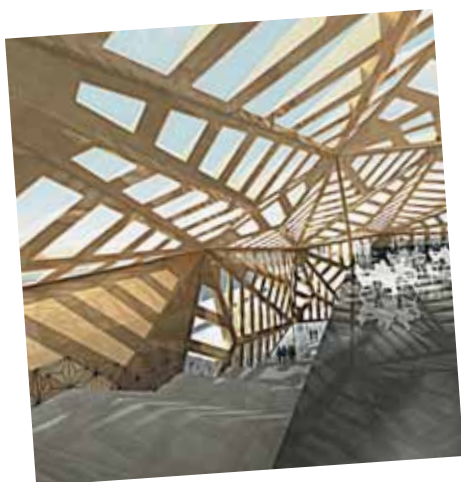
D'Arcangelo

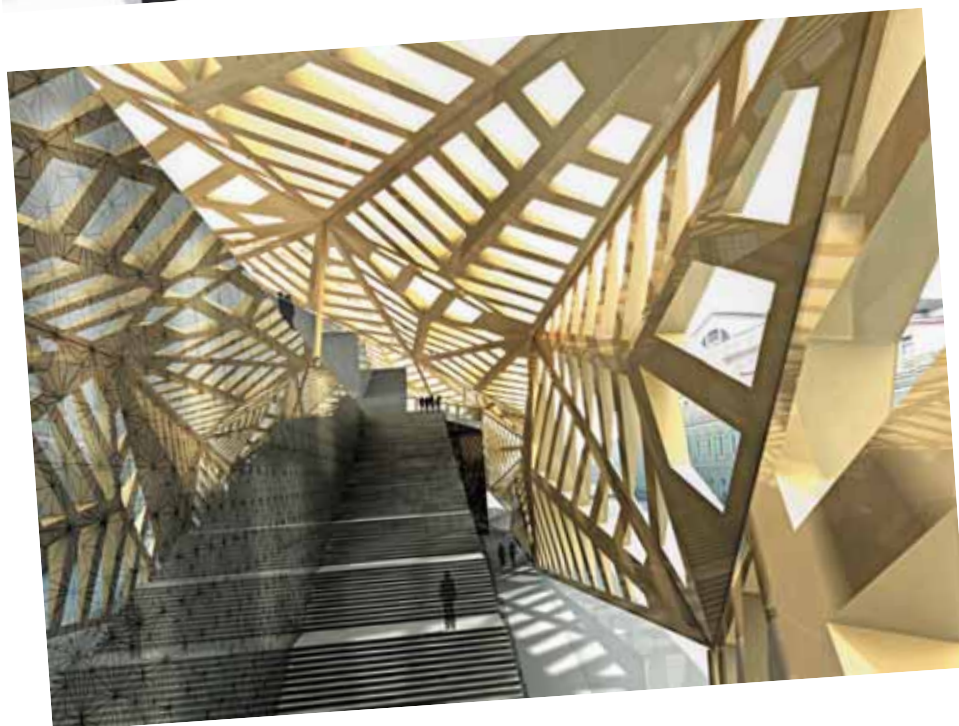
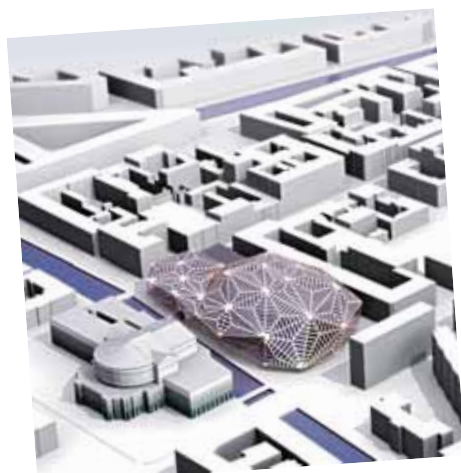
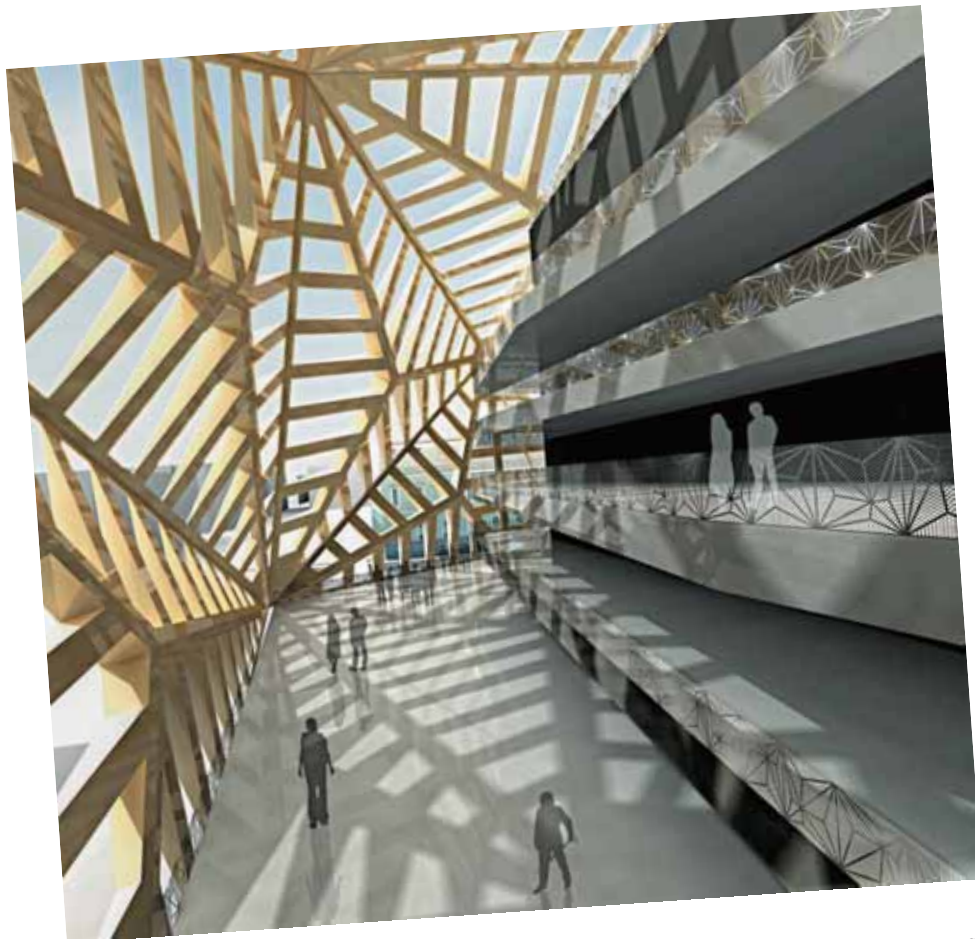
Gergiev announces

Mariinsky II



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Mariinsky Theatre from the closing years of the Soviet era, when it had been renamed the Kirov, to a modern 21st-century lyric arts company, enhancing and underlining the Mariinsky as a centre of artistic excellence and innovation and creating one of the largest, most acclaimed and most dynamic performing arts institutions in the world. Designed by Diamond Schmitt Architects in collaboration with acousticians Müller-BBM, Mariinsky II is situated on Dekabristov Street and connected to the historic Theatre by a pedestrian bridge over the Kryukov Canal. Mariinsky II will have state-of-the-art facilities that will enable the Mariinsky to present the most ambitious, technically-demanding productions, beyond what is currently possible on the historic stage. The opening weekend will include a gala concert and ballet and opera performances, followed by Mariinsky's XXI 'Stars of the White Nights' Festival which will run from 24 May to 14 July with performances in all three venues – the Mariinsky Theatre, Mariinsky II and the Mariinsky Concert Hall.

Shortly before last Christmas Valery Gergiev was in London to discuss the opening of Mariinsky II in May 2013. This project marks the completion of the development of the cultural centre of St Petersburg, adding a new 2,000 seat opera house to the original Mariinsky Theatre built in 1860 and the more recent concert hall.

He stressed the importance of education for all of the venues, and the number of performances which will be available free of charge to school pupils and students. On most days of the week there will be at least three public performances, with six available on Sundays. There will also be accommodation provided as part of the project, to assist young musicians to live close to the venues where they are performing.

The opening will mark the 25th anniversary of the leadership of Artistic and General Director Valery Gergiev, taking the

Valery Gergiev said, "These past 24 years have seen a wonderful flourishing of the Mariinsky Theatre in both its artistic programme and its institutional achievements, as we have brought the Opera, Ballet, Orchestra and Chorus – our entire extraordinary Company – into the 21st century with a more active and outgoing engagement with the world. We are carrying forward our progress in every way in 2012-'13, including the opening of our magnificent new opera house. Mariinsky II will provide abundant resources for our artists and audiences, and will ensure that the Mariinsky remains one of the most vital performing arts institutions in the world."

Further information:
Mariinsky Theatre Trust,
www.mariinskytrust.org.uk



The distinguished British composer Jonathan Harvey died in Sussex on December 3 from motor neurone disease at the age of 73. In paying tribute to this outstanding figure in British music, and in expectation of the Welsh National Opera's premiere UK staging of Harvey's *Wagner Dream*, Malcolm Miller reflects on the BBC concert performance last year and looks forward to the new production.

Wagner the Buddhist

With the Wagner bicentenary in 2013, one of the less obvious highlights of the year is sure to be Welsh National Opera's forthcoming staging of *Wagner Dream* by Jonathan Harvey, scheduled for June. Happily, the production by Pierre Audi and designer Jean Kalman, promises to be as exciting as their world premiere, one of the highlights of the 2007 Holland Festival. It is a timely moment to reflect on the work, given its UK semi-staged premiere as part of the BBC's Immersion Day held at the Barbican Centre earlier in 2012.



The UK concert premiere was admirable since it offered UK audiences a chance to hear one of Jonathan Harvey's best and most essentially Buddhist dramatic works. Given in January 2012 with the BBCSO under Martyn Brabbins and a superb cast, the majority of whom had featured in the 2007 world premiere, the musical performance was exemplary and showed the musical achievement of the opera to good effect; in place of the composer who himself manipulated the live electronics at the world premiere, the live electronic element was superbly handled by IRCAM experts Gilbert Nouno and Frank Rossi.

The plot concerns Wagner's last moments: whilst in Venice in 1883 a rendez-vous with an old flame, Carrie Pringle, a Parsifal flower-maiden, sparks a domestic argument with Cosima that brings on his fatal heart attack. The Buddha appears to him in a vision, and grants him the chance to see his unfinished Buddhist opera *Der Sieger* (The Winner) which had occupied him for 30 years, on condition he chooses the heroine's fate, a renunciation of desire, in his case, the desire to cling to an egoistic life. The two levels of action, the worlds of Wagner's reality and the vision of his unfinished opera *Der Sieger*, are highlighted

by two separate musical worlds, actors conversing in a rhythmised speech akin to *sprechgesang* for Wagner and his circle, set over a highly modernist instrumental, and often very percussive, orchestral tapestry, all pitted against highly lyrical, supple operatic lines of the Buddhist opera, over richer harmonic textures with clear pentatonic inflections. The electronic layers of sound provided a mediation of the two worlds.

Whilst it was in general well realised, due to the semi-staging and concert hall acoustics

and other aspects of the venue itself, some aspects were less successful or effective than others. Despite some imaginative effects from Orpha Phelan's direction, it affirmed that only an imaginative staging can project the work's qualities and excitement to the full. The minimal stage was sparsely set, with desk, writing chair, and armchair on the upper stage and two rows of chairs on either side of the lower stage for the singers and actors. The contrast of worlds was evident in Charlie Cridlan's designs through the costumes: black and white for the Wagnerian world and red and orange robes for the Buddhists, yet the division was far less clear dramatically than the staged Dutch premiere with its split-level stage, and the action was far more static. Prakriti's suicide bid after his apparent rejection of her wanting to join the brotherhood, was uttered with singers facing stage; in a staged production this is a highly dramatic sequence with cycle of monks dancing around and preventing her from harming herself, through which Sidhartha's change of mind makes sense, but which again did not come through in semi staging. Moreover the denouement, when Wagner, who has witnessed his own unfinished opera *Der Sieger*, cries out that he, like Siegfried, wants "to win, to



live...", was more confusing here. In the Barbican semi-staging, we saw only the railing egoist, yet in the staged version his final defiance is shown to be ironic: Wagner (his spirit) rises from his chair and is led by the Buddha's guide into an enlightened world.

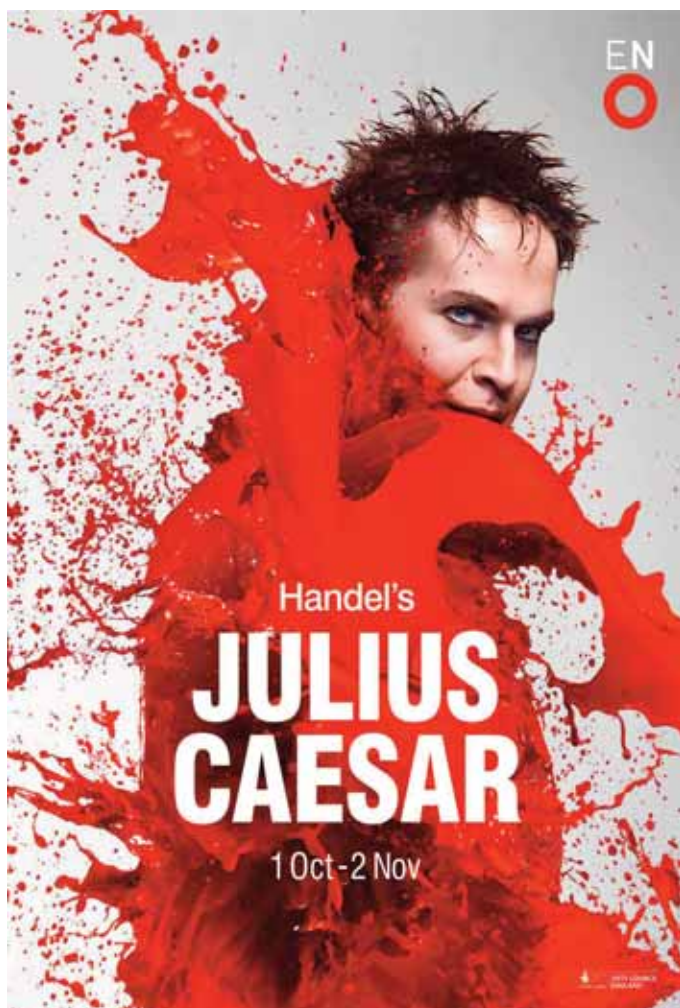
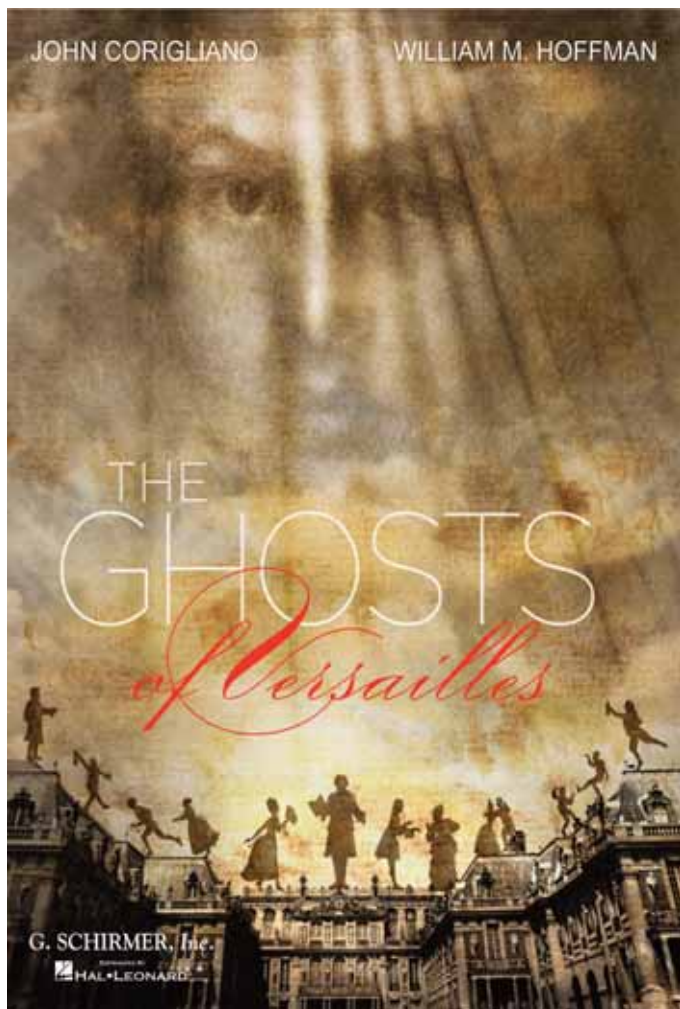
Chief amongst the highlights were the vocal performances. Roderick Williams sang the Buddha Sidhartha with a light, and always relaxed timbre, portraying the character's calm wisdom. Soprano Claire Booth displayed her stupendous voice in Prakriti's lyrical high lines, often tracing modal contours as in her solo song, an allegorical ballad, and her duet with Andrew Staples as Ananda with its urgent melismatic lines. Wagner and his entourage, here played by a sound cast of actors, Nicholas Le Prevost as the Master, Ruth Lass as his wife Cosima, Julia Innocenti as Carrie Pringle, the 'flower maiden' who seems to have an intimate connection to the composer, and Dr Keppler, Richard Jackson, speak in a declamation which is timed and so they enter rhythmically, cued by the conductor. The voices in harmony, as in the monks' choruses, recalled some of Jonathan Harvey's church music, yet exoticised and often combined with some subtle dissonant and commenting strands of texture.

One of the intriguing aspects of the work is its reflection on Wagner's own style. Certainly the music accompanying the spoken drama about Wagner is modernist, highly detailed in its detailed, expressionistic gestures,

shot through with sustained lines for alto or bass flute, for clarinet and trombone. The Buddhist drama by contrast is lyrical and pastel shaded, its rich palette delicately textured with exotic percussion including a rainstick and gongs. For the choruses there are many instrumental felicities like trumpets, whilst the opera's ending brings prominent cellos, yet there is a clear nod to Wagnerian style in the tuttis which crescendo strongly and with note bending and glissandi in strings, lucid and rich. Perhaps especially Wagnerian is the orchestral texture enriched with electronics, in intense moments as when Sidhartha talks about love, as well as the duet between Prakriti and her mother, eloquently portrayed by Hilary Summers, with its poignant ending, 'who can answer me?'. Other telling moments that came across here included the brotherhoods declaimed chorus in regular rhythmic patterns, spiced by dissonant wisps in the orchestra. Richard Angas excelled as the Old Brahmin, his booming bass mingled with marimbas and xylophones.

Throughout Martyn Brabbins and the BBCSO made much of the musico-dramatic highpoints, and indeed the climactic moments emanated from the music rather than the staging, as when the Buddha shows compassion to Prakriti for her suffering, her frustrations with the Buddhist brotherhood, love for Ananda, and being a woman. In some ways the effect of the concert performance was to heighten the focus on the music's expressiveness and intensity, yet *Wagner Dream* is a work which can benefit greatly from a full production, as shown in the original Holland festival premiere. While the BBC venture was a worthwhile and inspiring event, and one applauds the release of a CD of the original Holland Festival production; of particular interest is the projected UK stage premiere by Welsh National Opera, scheduled for June, aptly in time for the Wagner Bicentenary commemorations, which features Claire Booth and Richard Angas amongst the cast, with the charismatic young conductor Nicholas Collon. One hopes that this production will spawn more stagings further afield in the near future.

<http://www.wno.org.uk/wagnerdream>



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When Danielle de Niese appeared as an all-singing and all-dancing Cleopatra in David McVicar's staging of *Giulio Cesare* at Glyndebourne in 2005, she created the biggest 'star-is-born' sensation the Sussex festival has experienced since the new theatre was unveiled in 1994. Although she was only 25 at the time-and she had been a late replacement for Rosemary Joshua, who had to pull out for health reasons-she already had a career of ten years behind her, including her debut at the Metropolitan Opera as Barbarina in *Figaro* at 19, and two runs of Cleopatra at the Netherlands Opera and the Palais Garnier in Paris. So her success at Glyndebourne was founded on substantial experience.

'I was born in Australia, but my parents are from Sri Lanka. They met in Australia, because when the British left Sri Lanka in the '60s, the national language changed to Tamil and my parents' mother-tongue is English. They'd grown up with the Commonwealth so I suppose they felt quite displaced after independence. The natural movement was to go to London, Canada or Australia. So that's how I was born there. We moved to America when I was ten and my brother was eight and we grew up in Los Angeles.'

Meeting de Niese is like coming face to face with a whirlwind of energy, which may explain the histrionic impact of her stage performances-and she certainly has a way with words and a remarkable recall of detail. Obviously a born performer, she tells me she started singing at six, taking voice lessons at eight-and-a-half and showing off her vocal talent-'things like "With verdure clad" from *The Creation* and Gounod's "Ave Maria" by the tender age of nine. Six years later she made her debut with Los Angeles Opera, three years *before* going to music school.

'I went to Mannes College of Music and in my first year there I did the auditions. They were doing *The Marriage of Figaro* and when the cast-list went up, my name was next to Susanna. I was not expecting that, and nobody else was either. Actually, they patted me on the back and said I should and go check with the office because they didn't think it was possible that a freshman would get a part like Susanna. Anyway, I did that production,

Photos: Chris Dunlop



A woman with short reddish-brown hair, wearing a vibrant red, draped dress, stands in a grand, ornate room. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile, her right arm raised. The room features high ceilings with intricate moldings, a large chandelier, and a wooden door in the background. A large, flowing red fabric is in the foreground, partially obscuring the view.

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I knew that when
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"this is my part", but
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When I first started
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I read so many books
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It just fitted, it felt like
putting on an old shoe.

Danielle deNiese

and Peter Russell, head of the young artists programme at the Met, came to see it.'

So, in her first year at Mannes, she found herself auditioning for not only the Met's young artists programme, but also the role of Barbarina in a new production of *Le nozze di Figaro* to be directed by Jonathan Miller, conducted by James Levine and starring Cecilia Bartoli, Bryn Terfel and Renée Fleming. 'A lot of people get into the programme via the National Council Competition, but I was too young to do that competition. I remember calling my agent from a payphone during a break at college and I asked about the training programme and he said, "Well, they are really interested in you for Barbarina but they don't know whether you are ready for the young artists programme," which both of us found hilarious. I was ready to go on stage at the Met, but not for the programme! But I got the part. It was incredible, a dream come true. It was very competitive, too, because every singer under 35 wanted to be in that show. Before it opened, it was already being called a "dream-team" cast. And working with Jonathan Miller! I love him!'

At Mannes, de Niese also sang for Peter de Caluwe, then casting director of the Netherlands Opera, who heard her audition piece, Cleopatra's 'Piangerò la sorte mia', and presciently engaged her for the second cast of the *Giulio Cesare* he planned for Amsterdam in 2001.

Between leaving Mannes and appearing as Barbarina at the Met, de Niese had spent a summer in Italy learning Italian; and after a brief spell with the Met's young artists programme, she spent a year in Paris to learn French. In addition to her accomplishments as a singer and (trained) dancer, she is an excellent linguist. 'I'm sort of proud of that,' she says, 'because I put in so much work on languages and a lot of singers I know just don't do that. I don't know about you, but I can usually tell when a singer speaks the language or doesn't.'

'I was supposed to study German in Vienna and I did go there, but my trip got cut short because I was asked to be in a movie, *Hannibal* [a sequel to the *The Silence of the Lambs*]. There's a pivotal scene where Hannibal goes to the opera, so I was also on screen and they had a big close-up of me, which was very cool, and I also recorded the soundtrack. One of the most critically acclaimed things in the movie was the music. It was an original piece written by Hans Zimmer and Patrick Cassidy called 'Vide cor

meum', based on Dante's 'La vita nuova'. At the time, I didn't tell anybody I had done it, and my colleagues, when they went to see it, said, "Oh, my God, that's Danielle!" I didn't want to go around saying, "I was in a movie!" Clearly, the Hollywood studios recognised the photogenic qualities which make de Niese the Halle Berry of opera, and one can easily imagine a film career for this most watchable singer if she ever lost her voice.

Had she expected Cleopatra to become such a charmed role in her young career? After she auditioned for Marc Minkowski, the conductor of both the Amsterdam staging and the Paris revival of Nicholas Hytner's production, the French conductor accepted her for both engagements. 'It was a combination of Marc and the Paris Opéra, because someone had heard me on the Met programme and tried to get me earlier, but the Met rightly didn't let me go. That was a good thing. Paris gave me a choice of roles for my debut, between Cleopatra and Susanna, and I chose Cleopatra. I love Susanna, it's another of those roles that runs in my veins somehow, but for my debut I thought Cleopatra, having eight arias-although "Tu la mia stella sei" was cut-makes more of an impression, even though Susanna is a long role.'

In both the Dutch and French cities, the orchestra for *Giulio Cesare* was Minkowski's Musiciens du Louvre; at Glyndebourne, William Christie conducted the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. When McVicar's production transferred to Chicago Lyric Opera-a much larger house than anywhere she had previously sung Cleopatra the company's orchestra played on modern instruments; did de Niese if she approached the music differently.

'Well, nobody's ever told me that my voice doesn't carry, so I sang pretty much the same way in Chicago as I did in Glyndebourne, Paris and Amsterdam, except of course modern instruments are half a step higher, which makes certain things difficult. Before Chicago I'd only ever sung Cleopatra with period instruments and my musculature was used to that, so it took a bit of time to get used to going from F to F sharp minor. Certain things I found a bit easier, particularly in the lower register and chest voice. I do feel the McVicar production has grown a lot, in nuance and detail, and David always comes back to revive it. He doesn't say, "this is the way we did it in 2005". Pat [Bardon] and I have completely reworked our roles, motivationally, but I felt very comfortable and I never had a balance problem in Chicago.'



Even more demanding, of course, in this production, is the physical energy required to execute Andrew George's choreographic routines while singing even seven of Cleopatra's eight arias. De Niese says that it's hard work, but worth it, and since it has already been enshrined and internationally acclaimed on DVD, the role has become a touchstone for her.

'In some way, I knew that when I first sang it. Not that I thought to myself in 2001 "this is my part", but when you've had that connection with a role, it's like falling in love. When I first started working on Cleopatra, I did so much research, I read so many books and I came to understand a lot about the music. It just fitted, it felt like putting on an old shoe. What's amazing to me is that it has grown so much every time I've done it. Even from 2005 to 2006 at Glyndebourne-because I was the only principal returning to the cast-I felt the pressure to outdo what I had already done.'

The production was not originally planned with de Niese as Cleopatra, and yet it is almost impossible to imagine it without her; it is hard to believe that her personality, and

particularly her terpsichorean accomplishments, didn't play an important part in the final look of the show. 'No, it was scheduled for Rosie [Joshua]. The very first day I showed up for rehearsal I was a week late because I was a replacement and I was singing Tytania with Chicago Opera Theatre. I found out that David McVicar didn't really want me. He didn't know me and I suppose he thought, "I'm gonna have someone turning up late and I've never worked with her. I want someone else." But Bill Christie, who had worked with me, and Poul Moe [Glyndebourne's casting consultant], who had cast me as Cleopatra in Paris, told him, "You are gonna like this girl", so David took a chance. And when I met David, it was like, "Hi! Nice to meet you," and they had the whole of Cleopatra's first scene scheduled for rehearsal. They had set up three hours to block that one scene and in one hour we were

done, because I was very quick. So David thought we could do more, and he sent Andrew George off and said, "I want 'Tu la mia stella sei' to be a '20s, brawly, flapper aria". A lot of the time we'd be joking around, and then come up with the movement. The choreography evolved as we worked on the show and it turned into something that really suited the piece. He didn't turn "Se pietà" and "Piangerò" into dance routines.'

Perhaps inevitably, Cleopatra has become a calling-card for de Niese, earlier this year she sang a revival of Karl-Ernst and Ursel Herrmann's Netherlands Opera production in Brussels, but she was unavailable for repeat performances in Amsterdam and was replaced-ironically-by Rosemary Joshua. Her active repertory also includes Susanna and Despina, both of which she sang in Amsterdam's Mozart/da Ponte trilogy last season, and she has already added another of Handel's tailor-made parts for Francesca Cuzzoni (the first Cleopatra and Rodelinda). 'I sang Rodelinda in Toronto and it got nominated for an award. It was great not having to play a vixen-type again. You know, people like to see me in certain kinds of roles, so it was great to do a character who is a young mother.'

The Can Can from *Orpheus in the Underworld*

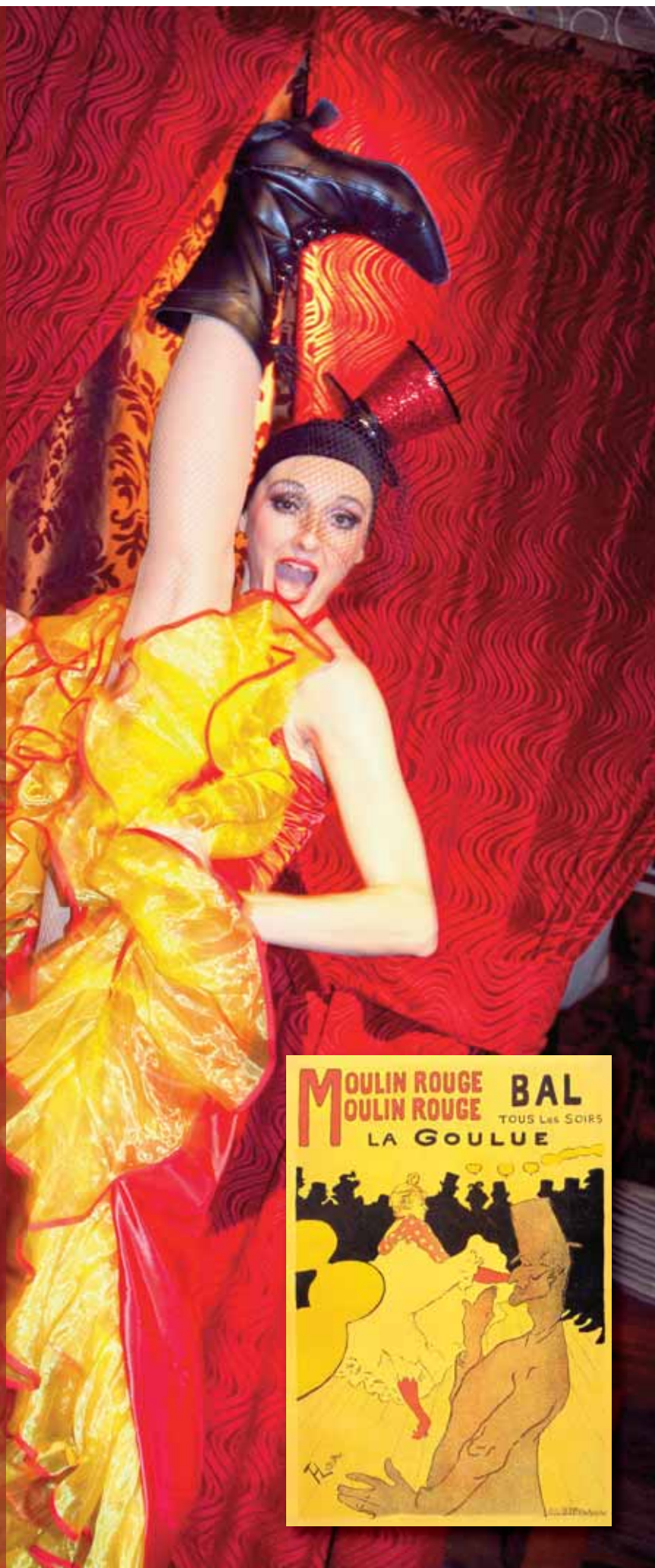
Although Jacques Offenbach is famous as the great composer of French comic opera, he was born in Cologne, although at the age of fourteen he was admitted into the Paris Conservatoire. He became conductor at the famous Comédie Française at the age of thirty, and, in 1955, was able to lease his own theatre for the production of his own operettas. Many of these are still regular fare in Paris and throughout Europe and the US, including *La Belle Hélène*, *La Vie Parisienne*, *La Grande Duchesse*, and of course *Orpheus in the Underworld*. His delicate style of humour led Rossini to describe him as 'the Parisian Mozart', and his success has never diminished.

Orpheus in the Underworld was first produced at the Bouffes Parisiens on 21 October 1858, and has been hailed as Offenbach's masterpiece. Nevertheless, the first audience found it difficult to watch the gods of Olympus behaving like normal human beings, and it was saved by a bit of luck which must have tickled Offenbach's sense of humour. Jules Janin, the arrogant critic of the influential *Journal des Débats* printed an attack on the opera's morals, calling it blasphemous, and a profanation of 'holy and glorious antiquity'. Offenbach promptly wrote a spirited defence of his work in the equally important *Figaro*, and thus began an exchange which soon became not only a popular controversy, but wonderful publicity for the opera – which then continued to run for two hundred and twenty-eight performances!

The plot turns the well known story of Orpheus and Eurydice upside down. For in this opera they are fed up with one another, Orpheus making eyes at a shepherdess named Chloë, while Eurydice is attracted to a shepherd called Aristeus – who is really Pluto in disguise. Orpheus is delighted when Eurydice and Pluto are off together to Hades, and saddened when the gods inform him that convention demands he try to get her back. Jupiter and the other gods go with Orpheus to Hades, where Pluto is told that he must let Eurydice go. However, as in the legend, it is stipulated that Orpheus must not look at his wife before they cross the river Styx, which of course, he does. The cause of making him turn around is a thunderbolt thrown by Jupiter, who himself fancies Eurydice. Thus everything ends happily, with Pluto defeated, Orpheus happily settled with Chloë, and Eurydice taken by the great Jupiter as a Bacchante.

Possibly no better music can illustrate the energy and vivacity of the opera than the famous can-can, which has been used out of context even more than it has been danced in the opera.

Denby Richards





**Państwowa Opera
we Wrocławiu**

*Carlo il sommo Imperatore non è più
che mitta cener: del celeste soffittore
L'alma altera or trema al piè.*

Verdi

Giuseppe

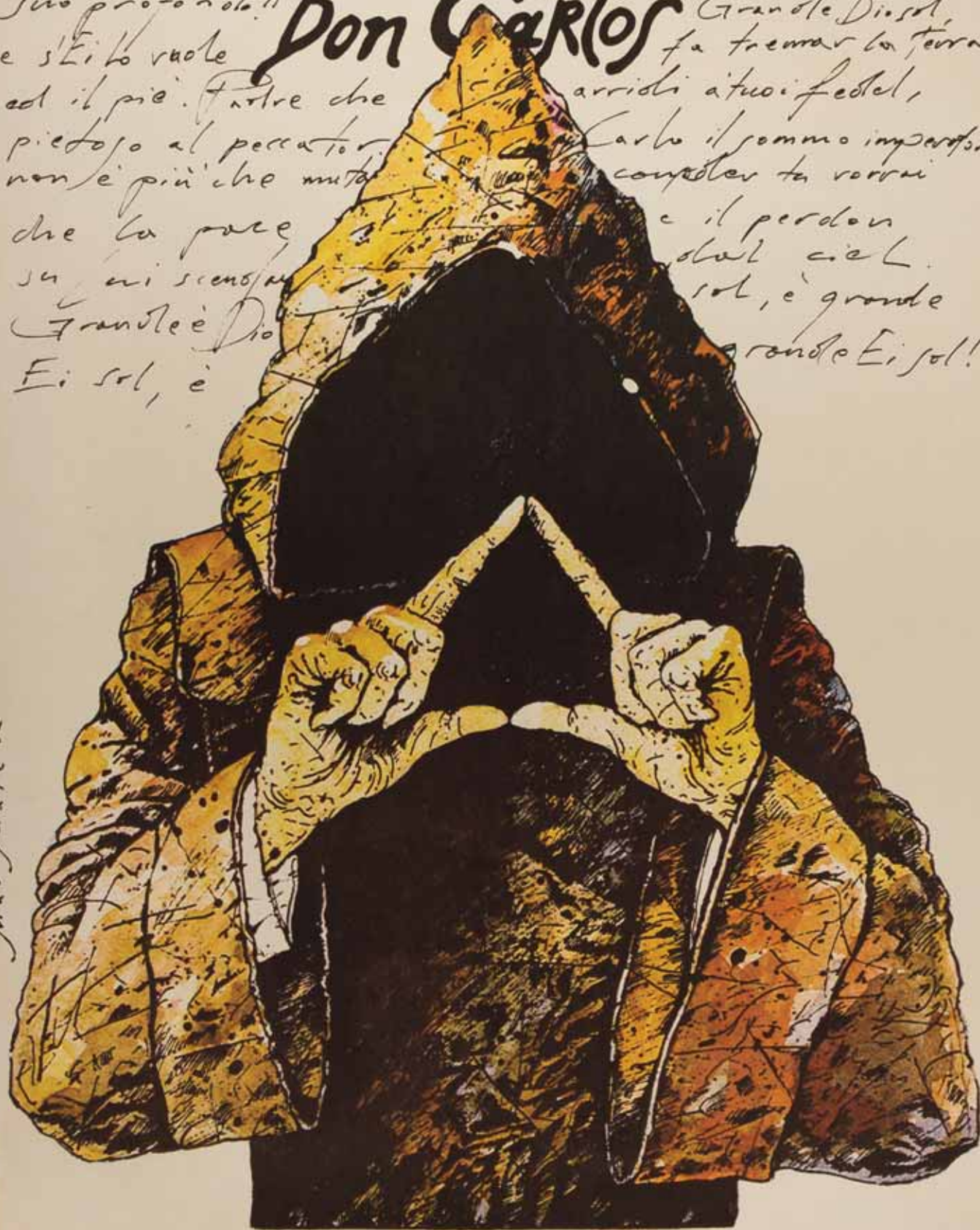
*Ei voleva regnare sul mondo obbliato
Colui che nel ciel segnagli astri
il cammino fedel. L'orgoglio immenso fu fu l'error
suo profondo.*

Don Carlos

*Granole Dio sol,
e s'è lo vuole fa tremar la terra
ad il piè. Padre che
pietoso al peccator
non è più che mitta
che la pace
su mi scenda
Granole Dio
Ei sol, è*

*Granole Dio sol,
fa tremar la terra
arriodi a tuoi fedel,
Carlo il sommo imperator
competer tu vorrai
e il perdon
stati ciel
sol, è grande
grande Ei sol!*

Margherita



The German composer, Engelbert Humperdinck, produced his first composition after receiving piano lessons when he was only 7. His first attempts at works for the stage were two Singspiele when he was 13. His parents did not approve of his becoming a musician, so despite them encouraging him to study architecture, he took music classes at the Cologne Conservatory, which he entered in 1872 under Ferdinand Hiller. In 1876 he won a scholarship which enabled him to go to Munich, where he studied with Franz Paul Lachner and later with Josef Rheinberger. Humperdinck received the Frankfurt Mozart Prize in 1876, and with its help he was able to travel to Munich. There, he continued to take classes to develop his talent in music, finding many opportunities to gain experience both composing and performing. For over ten years he met many important composers such as Franz Lachner, Giovanni Sgambati, and Richard Wagner and heard their works. He won the Mendelssohn Stiftung (foundation) of Berlin in 1879, and went to Italy, and became acquainted with Richard Wagner in Naples. Wagner invited him to go to Bayreuth, and during 1880-1881 Humperdinck assisted in the production of *Parsifal*. Having won another prize, however, he went again to Southern Europe, traveling through Italy, France and Spain, spending two years in Barcelona teaching at the conservatoire. In 1887 he returned to Cologne, and was appointed professor at the Hoch Conservatory (Frankfurt-am-Main) in 1890, and teacher of harmony at Stockhausen's Vocal School. By this time he had composed several works for chorus and a Humoreske for orchestra, which enjoyed a vogue in Germany.

Engelbert Humperdinck would later be credited as the inspiration for the character of Prince Humperdinck in William Goldman's 1973 novel, *The Princess Bride*, though some scholars argue that the fictitious prince was based on the singer of the same name, a contemporary of Goldman's. His chief reputation rests on his opera *Hänsel und Gretel*, which was produced at Weimar, 1893. In 1896 the Kaiser made Humperdinck a Professor and he went to live at Boppard. Four years later, however, he went to Berlin where he was appointed head of a Meister-Schule of composition. Among his other operatic works are *Dornröschen*, *Die Königskinder* and *Die Heirat wider Willen*. In his opera *Die Königskinder*, Humperdinck became the first composer to use Sprechgesang, a vocal technique halfway between singing and speaking, and later exploited by Arnold Schoenberg.

In 1914 Engelbert Humperdinck seems to have applied for the post of director of the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music in Sydney, but with the outbreak of World War I it became unthinkable for a German to hold this position, and the job went instead to Belgium's Henri Verbrugghen.

He eventually became one of Wagner's most important students and assistants, and eventually became music tutor to the composer's son, Siegfried. Humperdinck subsequently held various teaching positions of distinction and enjoyed a long and fruitful collaboration in the theatre with the great playwright and director Max Reinhardt, providing incidental music for a number of Shakespearean productions in Berlin. While in Berlin, Humperdinck began work on *Hänsel und Gretel* after his sister asked him to compose music for a play for her children in 1890. He first started to compose *Hänsel und Gretel*, based on the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, as a Singspiel consisting of a play with 16 songs and piano accompaniment. A few months later, he presented his fiancée Hedwig Taxer with *Hänsel und Gretel* as an engagement present.

Quickly realising the work's potential, Humperdinck decided to create a full-scale opera, and in January of 1891 he began working on a complete orchestration. Nearly three years later Richard Strauss – who dubbed it "a masterpiece of the highest quality... all of it original, new, and so authentically German" – conducted its premiere. With its highly original synthesis of Wagnerian techniques and traditional German folk songs, *Hänsel und Gretel* was an instant and overwhelming success. It was such a success that in 1923 it became the first complete opera ever to be broadcast on radio (from Covent Garden, London), and eight years later it was the first to be transmitted live from the Metropolitan Opera. It was at this time that he developed a hearing affliction becoming partially deaf for the rest of his life.

On January 5, 1912 he suffered a stroke. Although he recovered, his left hand remained permanently paralysed. During the summer of 1915, he began to compose what would be his final work for the stage, *Gaudeamus*, and with the help of his son, Wolfram; it was completed in 1918. On September 26, 1921, he attended the performance of Wolfram's first production as a director of Carl Maria von Weber's *Der Freischütz*. During the interval he had a heart attack. He died the next day from a second heart attack.

Engelbert Humperdinck

The genius behind

Hänsel und Gretel

Few were more shocked than when I heard they heard who had won the 2001 Cardiff Singer of the World competition. For all those in the audience – as well as the television commentators and the talking heads – there was no question: the prize would undoubtedly go to the elegant Latvian mezzo-soprano Elina Garanča.

But no, the jury decided that she should take second place to a Romanian tenor of no more than respectable competence. There was a gasp when his name was announced; Garanča managed a brave, sporting smile.

A decade later, however, she can have the last laugh. The tenor in question remains in the foothills, whereas she is at the peaks since the Olga Borodina of 20 years ago.

Vienna, New York, Munich, Salzburg, Paris and London have all succumbed to Garanča's charms. With the regal glamour, stage presence and sharp intelligence to match her vocal technique, she is a star of the first magnitude, and there aren't many of those around today.

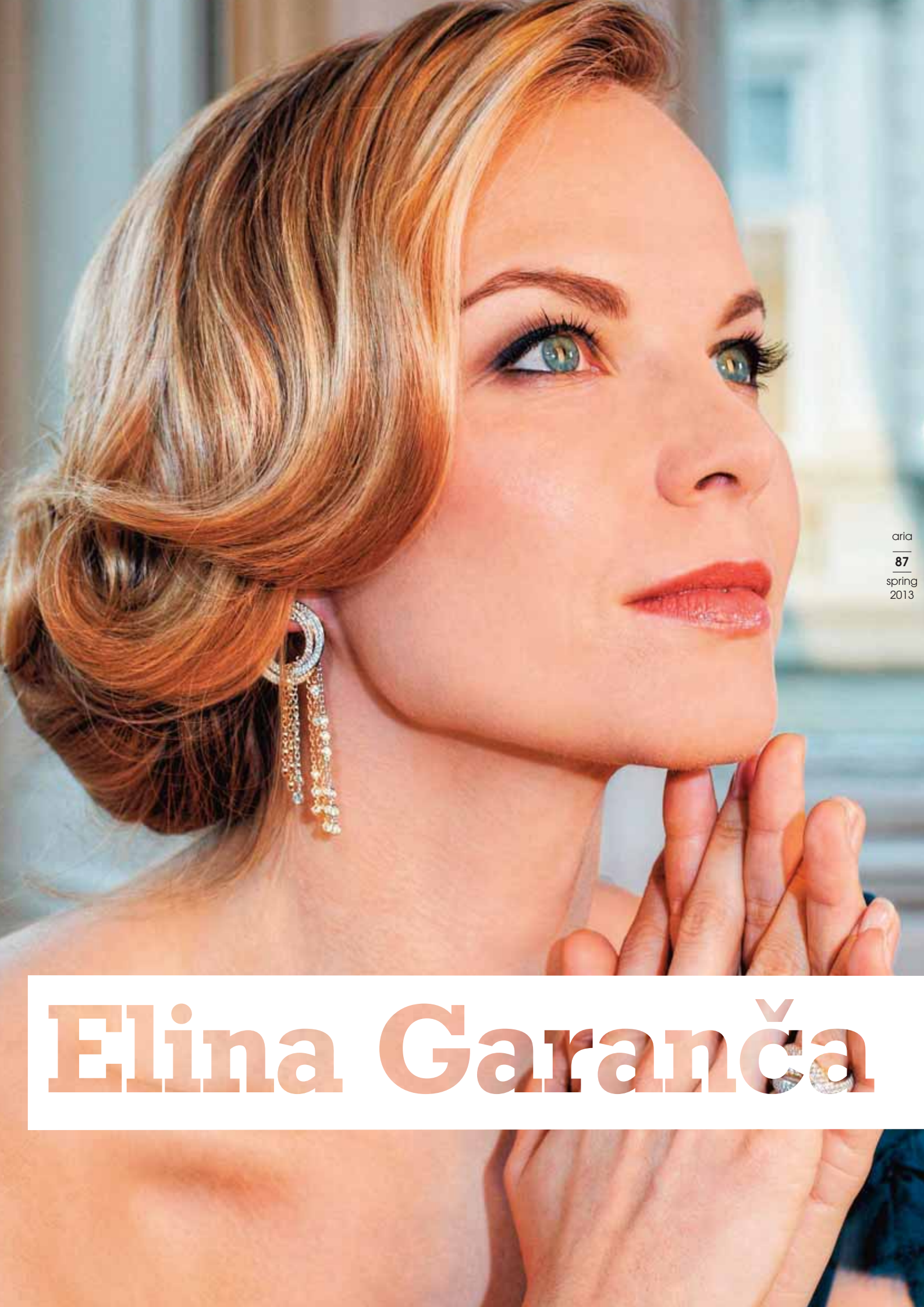
When asked Garanča shrugs with magnificent inifference when the Cardiff debacle is mentioned. "Now I think it was the best thing that could have happened for me. A good blow for my ego, because it taught me that you can't get everything you want exactly when you want it. And I don't think I was ready for what it would have meant in terms of pressure and exposure."

Instead she went back to Germany, where she had begun her career. She did not have to wait long for lift-off. Within two years, she had made her debut at the Salzburg Festival under Nikolaus Harnoncourt, and won a resident contract at the Vienna State Opera, where she stayed for two-and-a-half consolidating years.

"You have doubts all the time. It didn't happen for me overnight," she says. But you feel that she was always on track, straining in the slips, focused and determined.

Latvian mezzo Elina Garanča
talks about her life and roles





Elna Garanča



Born in Riga in 1976, she has music in her bones – her father was a choral conductor, her mother a singer who had a distinguished solo career in the Soviet Union – but her first love was the theatre, and until she failed to get into drama school, she wanted to be an actress.

"Then I discovered the fascinating business of expressing your feelings by controlling your voice, and I fell in love with singing. Now I'm addicted."

But she's picky, too, and her game plan has been to give priority to family life with her husband, the Gibraltarian conductor Karel Mark Chichon, and their baby daughter. Longevity is another concern. "I'm not frightened but I am cautious. I may not want to be singing when I'm 70, but I don't want to stop when I am 45."

Her appearances are meticulously rationed, and new roles taken on slowly – next comes Didon in Berlioz's *Les Troyens* in Berlin. "In my forties, I shall start singing big Verdi roles like Eboli and Amneris, also Saint-Saëns's Dalila. Wagner is out of the question until later," she says.

People were
saying a
hundred
years ago that
opera was
finished, but
we're still
here

At the moment, she is everyone's Carmen of choice – she will perform selections from Bizet's masterpiece at the Barbican concert – but surprisingly, she reveals that she has sung the opera on stage only about 30 times and doesn't want to carry on with it much longer.

"In some ways, it's an ungrateful part. I could just go from one Carmen to the next, but it's an opera that doesn't work if it's just about the Carmen, so I will only do it if I have the right colleagues alongside me. As I said, I'm picky."

She has strong views on the way the opera world is run. New productions are something she doesn't lightly sign up to – "They are a two-month investment of time and that's a big risk. At least with a revival you know what you are letting yourself in for" – but her pet hate is a conductor or director who will "tell you that what you're doing isn't right, but won't be able to explain what it is they want instead. I don't want to be a prima donna and just do it my way, I want to be challenged. But they have to show me a reason."

Although she is no doom-monger – "people were saying a hundred years ago that opera was finished, but we're still here" – it saddens her that there are so fewer great voices around today than there were in her parents' generation: "Audiences seem to have a lost a sense of opera being about singing: it's become a much more visual experience, especially with DVDs and cinema broadcasts."

As yet, she's still on honeymoon with the press, but she's smart enough to know that reviews cannot serve as a reliable guide. "I sort of lost my faith in them after a performance where one critic described my coloratura as being like Italian white spumante, while another said it was like dark-red Bordeaux. One or the other, perhaps, but it really can't be both."

So many mezzo-sopranos want to push up into soprano territory, where the fees are higher and the frocks prettier, but Garanča

is committed to the lower vocal regions.

"There's so much wonderful music which I still haven't sung. And anyway, mezzos have such fun: we get to play all the witches and bitches!"



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CD reviews

* Four CD ◆ Triple CD ■ Double CD ● Single CD ★ Re-release

Wagner : *Die Walküre*

Label: Mariinski

Reference No: B00A655N8I

Length: * 3' 57"

Reviewer: Stewart Crowe

It was not so long ago that the prospect of a new recording of any complete segment of the Ring aroused excited anticipation, but for the last 20 years or so this has been replaced by anticipated disappointment to outright dread!

Cycles from Haenchen, Simone Young, Weigel and Thielemann have all had their merits, but vocally they have been at best serviceable.

While Elder got his putative cycle off to a magnificent reverse start, the second instalment was a disappointment and it is unclear as to whether a full cycle will yet emerge. I found the recent Gergiev recording of Parsifal to be a qualified success, with again some vocal frailties being the cause of disappointment, so with the strength of the casting in this set, it was with a long lost sense of excitement that I opened the box on this cycle.

It is easy to understand why *Wälküre* was chosen to start the cycle, as it is the most popular work by far and the most often given as a "stand alone" performance, and we must remember that this cycle derives from concerts where it was important to get off to "a flying start!" Karajan adopted the same strategy for his 1960s cycle. I expected Gergiev to dive in with both feet and give us a fiercely driven reading which outpaced Leinsdorf, but I could not have been more wrong. I should not have been so surprised at the slower

tempo however, as memories of Gergiev's Kirov Ring in Cardiff and London are of very slow tempi which I put down to necessity through unfamiliarity by singers and orchestra (it was a mess!), but it would appear is actually Gergiev's interpretative stance. We are not talking Goodall or Kna here, but it is expansive in the Karajan vein without being able to maintain Karajan's sublime and almost ethereal long line especially in Act One.

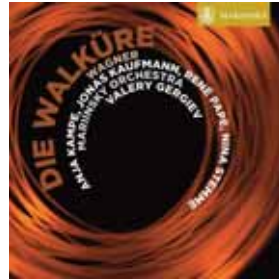
I'm not mad about the Mariinsky Concert Hall Acoustics which are a bit dry and accentuate the rather wiry quality of the lower strings which results in bass light recordings when no audience is present, but here, with an audience present there is sufficient air around the musicians to give pleasing results.

Finally we get a complete role recorded by Kaufmann, he is the best Siegmund since Vickers, many would suggest the best in the stereo era

The recording, produced by the ubiquitous James Mallinson, is well balanced and detailed and the orchestra plays very well, with the usual sheen to the upper strings, rather "buzz saw" lower strings and trumpets and horns with just a hint of the "blarpy" sound that used to characterise all brass sections in Russian Orchestras. We certainly know we're not in Vienna or Berlin, or indeed London.

Vocally the expectations are more or less met. FINALLY we get a complete role recorded by Kaufmann, and he is the best Siegmund since Vickers, many would suggest the best in the stereo era and though I don't necessarily agree, I wouldn't argue either – it's very close!

His extended cries of "Wälse" raise the hairs on the neck, the "Winterstürme" is both heroic and tender in equal measure, and



even in what can be a real drag in the wrong hands, the "Todesverkündigung" scene, he is superb and very affecting. He makes a triumph of the role.

He is partnered by Anja Kampe instead of the seemingly default Westbroek, a singer who has been singing Isolde and Brünnhilde for some time, and who has a powerful attractive upper register but has the usual difficulties in the mid range. She gives a feisty performance, not in the same vein as Janowitz, Brouwensteijn or Crespin, and relies on her vocal acting rather than the nature of the voice to convey vulnerability. I like her performance – she sings thrillingly at times – but she is not my favourite Sieglinde by a long way. Petrenko's Hunding, familiar from the Rattle filmed performance, is a more sinister, younger sounding character, far from the hulking bully we usually get and is very effective.

The Fricka of Gubanova is steady voiced and hectoring, a real "shrew" but not much else. However, it's a relief to hear the part so well sung. The Valkyries are reasonably secure with occasional "Slavic tendencies"

Nina Stemme is the Brünnhilde of this generation, and in modern terms she is superb, with thrilling "Ho-Jo-To Ho's" as she enters, and rich fulsome tone throughout. She too has more than a touch of the wobbles in the lower range, but she counters this with a wonderful dramatic sense and understanding of the role. She is perhaps nearest to Varnay in vocal quality and is particularly fine in her extended duets with Wotan.

Which brings us to René Pape: He is simply the finest Wotan in this work since George London and Thomas Stewart. He has rich firm tone, a secure upper register and in his performance conveys wonderfully the exultation followed by frustration in



Act 2, and the anger and finally love and compassion in Act 3. Although he is nominally a bass, there is none of the fragility in the upper register of Tomlinson, and of course Hotter in later years. He out-classes a now shaky Terfel in vocal quality, and is a tad less histrionic in his acting which I prefer.

So, back to Gergiev's conducting. He steers it all beautifully, supporting the singers well, and conjuring up really lush sound in the lyrical passages especially, and the show stopping moments such as the sword coming out of the tree, the Ride of the Valkyries and Wotan's Farewell are all

well done though Gergiev picks up the tempo for the Feuerzauber and robs it of some its grandeur ... and yet, and yet there is a little something lacking-dare I say it, but a little more drive would be welcome, and in his seeking to achieve a chamber-like quality at times the orchestra ends up sounding thin on the ground, but I don't want to exaggerate this – it is INFINITELY preferable to the perfunctory style of the likes of Janowski and even Haenchen. So all in all it is a great success. Is it my favourite recording? Not by a long way, that's a straight slugfest between Leinsdorf and Karajan, but it is one with which I would be

reluctant part and to which I will return with pleasure.

Those for whom SACD is a prerequisite need not hesitate as I cannot envisage the Janowski rivalling this set in overall quality, not least singing, and the Haenchen is just not in contention.

Highly recommended as a very enjoyable if slightly different take on the work, sounding a touch different from other recordings, and not only with no vocal weaknesses, but many vocal triumphs as well. I look forward to future instalments with restored enthusiasm if not excitement.

Puccini/Callas : *Tosca*

Label: EMI Classics

Reference No: 79453-2

Length: ● 1 CD digitally remastered

Reviewer: G P Christiaan

This is the first time this title has been available at mid-price in the 50 years the recording has been available. Ask anyone and they will tell you this is the *Tosca* to have. Sure, Callas' voice had a

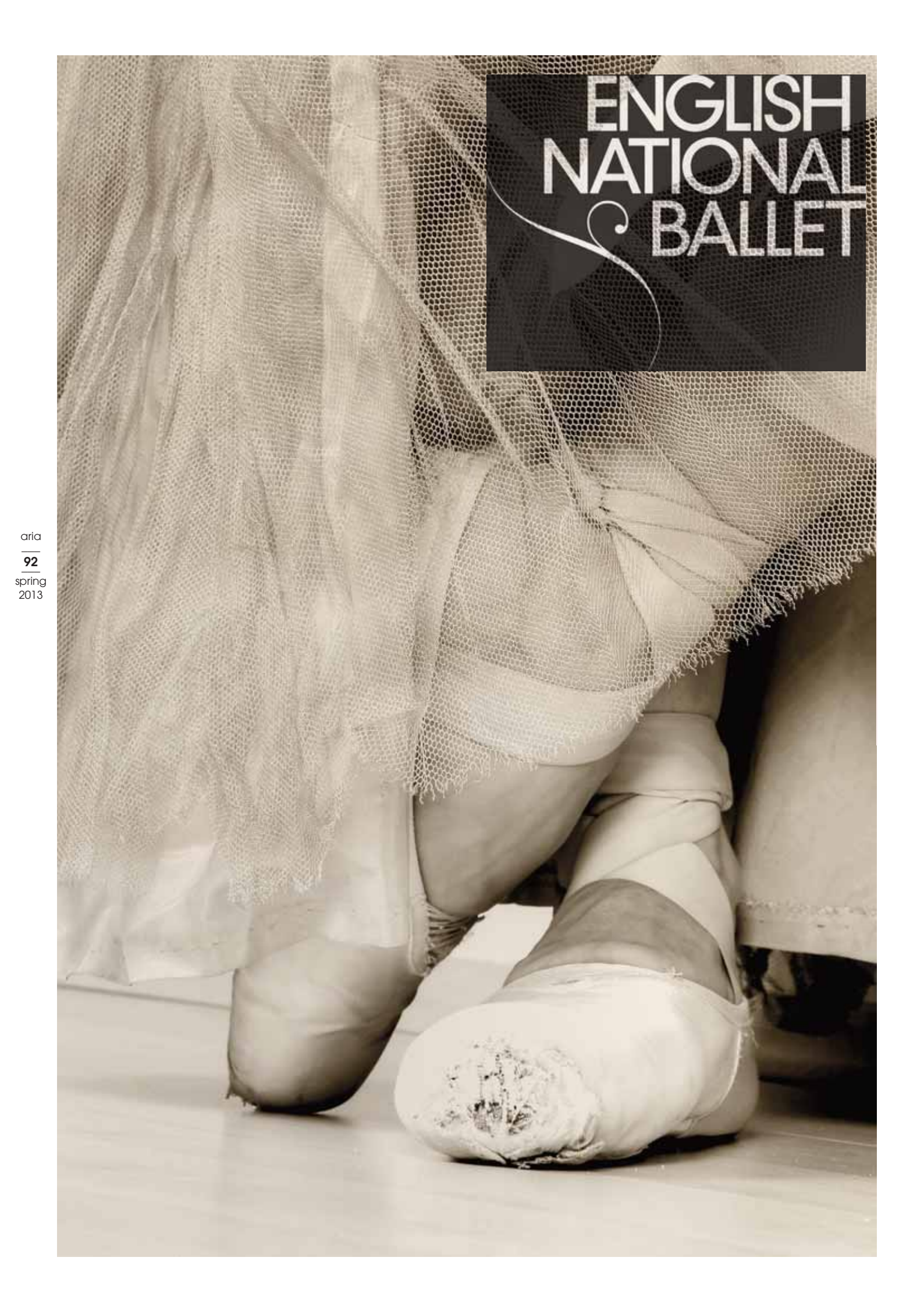
short life in the 50s before the tell tale wobble and steely edge set in from the early 60s. This however is bang in the middle of her Glory years and what years they were. Not only is her voice in fine condition here but I defy you

to hear a more exciting drama-filled *Tosca* anywhere. Her colleagues, Gobbi and DeStefano are also on fine form on this disk. The fact that they worked together often



shows in the sleekness of their on-stage relationship. This is the one to have – even if you only buy one opera record in your life, ever. You may find it converts you. Take the risk – at this price you can't go

wrong but hurry – there is a limited edition run with a free Callas booklet and post-cards. But even without the freebies this is an extraordinary set.

A close-up photograph of a ballerina's feet in pointe shoes, with the frayed toe of the right shoe visible. The ballerina is wearing a light-colored, multi-layered tutu. The background is a dark, textured surface.

ENGLISH NATIONAL Ballet

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This is not a pasticcio by Vivaldi – the entire work is authentically Vivaldi's composition, though never performed before. According to information, there were two versions of this opera which Vivaldi wrote. This CD is the latter Ferrara (and never performed) version. In this recording, we got two bonus tracks from the first version

that were cut from this latter Ferrara version.

The vocal line up is extraordinary – all the singers are baroque experts, if not outright 'super stars'.

In the title role, Croatian countertenor Max Emanuel Cencic depicts a tortured King of Pontus who was betrayed by members of his own family following political defeat.

As his aggressive mother-in-law Queen of Cappadocia Berenice, Mary Ellen Nesi, an expert mezzo in trouser roles, sung an over-bearing middle-aged queen with a chillingly incisive timbre.

The relatively minor character of her captain Gilade, a love-sick for Farnace's sister Selinde, is very effectively portrayed by the wonderful soprano Karina Gauvin. Her aria in the final Act is enchanting in an unearthly manner that demonstrates nothing but artistic greatness.

Vivaldi : *Farnace*

Label: Virgin Classics

Reference No: 50999 0709142 1

Length: ♦ 3 CDs 64' 71' 55'

English in booklet

Reviewer: Able Amy

As Farnace's schemy sister Selinde, Ann Hallenberg is aptly elegant and steely in turn, which can at the quick-sand like instant become devastatingly enchanting. This great baroque mezzo-soprano has been around for almost two decades without ever receiving her due!

The male characters are also wonderfully effective, and so is Tamira, the spouse of Farnace, sung by Bulgarian soprano Donose. Fasolis and his 'band', needless to say, is all that you would ask for on such a stellar performance.

Handel Arias, Renée Fleming

Label: Decca

Reference No: 475 6186

Length: ● CDs 66' 55"

English in booklet

Reviewer: Ed Uyeshima

This recording is an absolute stunner from premiere soprano Renée Fleming. Once again proving her vocal versatility, she tackles a selection of Handel's arias, both familiar and relatively unknown. Her taste, as it turns out, is unerring. Amazingly, her foray into the Baroque world is quite recent with her first and only professional exposure to Handel in the 1999 Paris Opera and Lyric Chicago productions of his *Alcina*, but you certainly can't tell from the passionate, character-driven singing she exhibits here. As usual, her voice is full and rounded with a legato that is thrilling. This CD is a nearly perfect showcase for her immense talent underlined by her amazing coloratura, easily one of the best today.

Fleming opens sonorously with two arias from *Semele*, "Oh sleep, why dost thou

leave me?" and "Endless pleasure", equally beautiful as she begs the god Jupiter for immortality in the title role. In immediate contrast, Fleming shows her intense dramatic flair with 'Scoglio d'immota fronte' from *Scipione* playing the fiery Spanish princess Berenice. In a gender reversal, she takes on the castrati role of "Serse" with the classic "Ombra mai fù", where she believably and touchingly deepens her voice to fit the male character. Although I prefer countertenor David Daniels' more animated version for sheer virtuosity, Fleming acquits herself well. Back on firmer ground, she credibly handles the two primary female roles in *Rinaldo*: the hero's unsullied love, Almirena and the temptress, Armida. Her versatility is on full display in her two arias from this opera. Her plaintive "Lascia ch'io pianga" is quite comparable to Cecilia Bartoli's definitive version in romanticism and technique, and she burns in an extended dramatic fire on Armida's lament, "Dunque, I lacci s'un volto ... Ah! crudel". Fleming's famous trilling is most impressive on her aria from *Rodelinda*, "Ritorna, oh caro e dolce mio tesoro", which provides a sneak preview of her upcoming

performance in a new production at the Metropolitan Opera. She closes with an unknown gem from *Alexander Balus*, the yearning "Calm thou my soul ... Convey me to some peaceful shore", where as Cleopatra, she turns to the goddess Isis after her father and lover are killed.

Baroque music veteran Harry Bicket directs the wonderful Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment with a sure hand. Fleming says it best in her liner notes: "Singing Handel is balm for the voice yet it expresses every possible nuance of the human condition." With this disc, she proves her point in spades. This has to be one of the year's best classical vocal recordings.



Enrico Caruso : Prima Voce

Label: Nimbus Records

Reference No: 50999 0709142 1

Length: ● 74' 58"

Reviewer: Alejandra Vernon

When one hears the richness of Caruso's voice, and the depth of the emotion he expresses, it's hard to fathom that some of these recordings date back 100 years. The tracks are in chronological order, from February 1904 to September 1920.

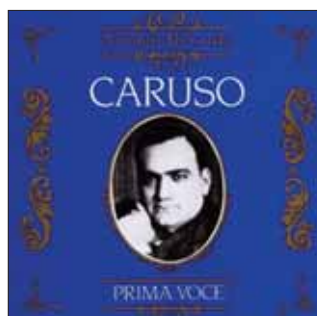
The first three selections from 1904 are exquisite, and have only a solo piano accompaniment. The "Una Furtiva Lagrima" (track # 3) has a grace and luminosity that is breathtaking.

There are many arias that have remarkable aspects to them, like "Magiche note"

from Goldmark's "La Regina di Saba", where he does a series of pianissimos, and of course, his most famous role was as Canio, in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, and this CD has both "Vesti la giubba" from 1907, and "No! Pagliaccio non son" from 1910. The latter is phenomenal, and has a deep, dark quality, sounding more like a baritone than a tenor.

There are some rarely heard pieces here, like the Goldmark aria, and "Deserto in terra solo" from Donizetti's *Don Sebastiano*, and only occasionally heard is the beautiful "Rachel, quand du Seigneur" from Halevy's *La Juive*, and no one can equal Caruso's interpretation of it.

What stands out most about his singing aside from the glorious sound is his phras-



ing, which is dramatic as well as supremely musical ... one of the many reasons the name Caruso has become synonymous with "Italian operatic tenor".

The booklet insert has liner notes on Caruso's career, and a brief synop-

ses for each aria.

The sound considering the age is a marvel, re-mastered from 78 RPM recordings, and states "A breakthrough in archive sound reproduction, Nimbus Natural Ambisonic Transfer technology preserves the immediacy and fidelity of the original performance". Thank goodness Caruso's emergence as a singer and the gramophone came into existence at the same time, so that recordings like this can still be heard.

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Kaufman Wagner

Label: Decca

Reference No: 0289 478 5189 9 CD DDD
DH

Length: ● 81' 14"

Reviewer: Entartete Musik

Great Wagnerian tenors are like hen's teeth. We are gifted many who bravely tackle the repertoire, but few who prove a genuine pleasure to listen to in the long run. Domingo may be the closest we've come to balancing the necessary brawn and beauty in recent years, though even he cannot match the winningly idiomatic Jonas Kaufmann, as heard on this superb new recording.

Kaufmann has already performed Lohengrin and Siegmund on stage and Walter in concert. You can hear his *Parsifal* in New York and Vienna in the coming months (a role he sang in Zürich in 2006). This new Decca recording features his turns from *Die Walküre*, *Meistersinger*

and *Lohengrin*, albeit the longer original version of the Grail Narration. The inclusion of passages from *Rienzi*, *Tannhäuser* and *Siegfried*, however, shows there is more gold in that there Rhein.

Throughout, Kaufmann sings with that famous and prerequisite baritoneal heft while never stinting at the top of the range. Here is a hero to believe in, brilliantly told through Siegmund's 'Sword Monologue'. Although Kaufmann sails sharp on the long gruelling cries of 'Wälse', there is no doubting his authority. The muted turning assurances of *Rienzi*'s 'Allmächt'ger Vater, blick herab!' have contrasting Lieder-like tenderness and sincerity. Throughout, Donald Runnicles is in commanding form, pacing the performances beautifully with the Orchester der Deutschen Oper Berlin proving far more than mere accompanists.

Yet however alluring these operatic



passages, they cannot top the promise of a future *Tristan* communicated through Kaufmann's unglaublich performance of the associated Wesendonck-Lieder. Here the tenor's experience with

Schubert and Strauss pay rich rewards, delivering great textual clarity and charm. But he also has the muscle to sail thrillingly through 'Schmerzen' before weaving the balmy summer magic of 'Träume', required when we eventually hear him sing 'O sink hernieder, Nacht der Liebe'. The sum effect is totally out of this world, just as Wagner should be.

Kaufmann has planned his career intelligently so far. He has preserved the innate beauty of his voice while incorporating these great Wagnerian heroes. But, despite the promise of future glories captured on this disc, let's hope he keeps us waiting a little while longer.

Lamenti

Lable: Virgin Classics

Reference No:

B002N4DZ3A

Length: ■ 64' 28"

Reviewer: Angela

Somers



A follow up to Emmanuelle Haim's *Le Concert Astrée*'s Monteverdi's 'Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda' with three of the same opera stars, this is an unusual programme on the theme of the Lamento, the literary and dramatic form that found its seventeenth-century musical archetype in Monteverdi's celebrated 'Lamento d'Arianna' of 1608. Ariadne has eloped with Theseus only to be abandoned by him on the island of Naxos. The god Bacchus descends to take her as his bride. This opera was performed as an entertainment at the court of the Prince of Savoy. Ariadne's tale is a coded message to the bride and a warning to female onlookers: beware the wiles of false heroes and submit to male dominion. Our passions move us one way and our intellect another, and nothing is quite what it seems.

Nine outstanding soloists perform eleven of these demanding works to the warm accompaniment of the Baroque instruments. The new public operas of Venice were a fixture of carnival entertainment from 1637 onwards. This exquisite art and music is fascinating for listeners of today.

Rolando Villazón opens the programme with Cavalli's 'Lamento d'Egisto' of 1643. Soprano Natalie Dessay is the abandoned nymph in the Monteverdi's Madrigal of 1638 'Lamento della ninfa' with tenors Simon Wall, Topi Lehtipuu and bass-baritone Christopher Purves. Philippe Jaroussky, a counter tenor, sings *L'Eraclito amoroso* a 1651 work by the famously beautiful Barbara Strozzi who famously seduced the hearts and minds of the Venetian noblemen and it was probably written for Strozzi herself. Soprano Véronique Gens sings the 'Lamento d'Arianna', the tantalising fragment from Monteverdi's lost opera of 1608. Soprano Patrizia Ciofi is Mary Stuart in Carissimi's *Lamento di Maria Stuarda*. Mezzo soprano Joyce DiDonato sings Ottavia's heartrending farewell to Rome from Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* of 1643.

As a splendid finale Rolando Villazon sings the musician Orfeo's lament for his wife from Monteverdi's *Orfeo* of 1607. 'If songs can accomplish anything I shall surely go to the utter depths and soften the heart of the King of Shadows, shall lead you to the stars again'.

Catalani : *La Wally*

Lable: Decca

Reference No: CDG1M 201

Length: ■ 144"

Full librettos in English in booklet

Reviewer: Ralph More

I would not expect to find *La Wally* in anyone's list of ten favourite operas – although apparently Toscanini, in gratitude to Catalani's securing him a conducting post, named his son and daughter Walter and Wally respectively after the eponymous protagonist – and I bet they were grateful.

La Wally is a fine, less known opera also because of its wonderful libretto, written by a true expert Luigi Illica! He also was the librettist of *Tosca*, *La Bohème*, *Andrea Chenier* and other grand operas. No wonder the words in *La Wally* are so moving.

It's a good, if unremarkable, opera: tuneful, full of verismo cut-'n-thrust, some nice Alpine effects and a few good arias including, of course, "Ebben? Ne andrò lontana", which Tebaldi sings beautifully. This is a rôle which suits her well even at this late stage of career and she is, in any case, in excellent voice despite having already sung it for fifteen years in thirteen productions when she recorded it here.

OK; her top is a little acid and Del Monaco, too, has his moments of bleakness in the middle of the voice but they are still a class act. They do sometimes

bawl a bit but there are many moments of tenderness – not least Tebaldi's melting account of the big aria. Cleva conducts unobtrusively and Cappuccilli does his usual solid job. There is a very cheap, 1972 live Opera d'Oro set with the wonderful Magda Olivero (still great at 62) and a decent supporting cast but it's in execrable sound so this is a much better bet for home listening – unless you are attracted by the other Opera d'Oro bargain set which is a 1960 live radio broadcast in truly excellent sound with the lady herself in younger, even better voice, a decent baritone in Dondi and expert conducting by Tebaldi's paramour Basile. Unfortunately, the tenor Prandelli is a bit of a trial. (I haven't heard the other set available from Eurodisc with Marton, Araiza and Titus, but I would be very surprised if it were superior to this one.)

Concluding, this is the best studio *La Wally* but if I had to compare it with other Tebaldi-del Monaco recordings it would get less praise. Strongly recommended are also Tebaldi's earlier, in fresher voice, live recordings of *La Wally* especially the one with Del Monaco at La Scala in 1953.



BUTTERFLY
MADAMA
Puccini



UTAH OPERA

Book reviews

■ Hardback ● Softback

Mozart's Operas: A Companion

Author: Mary Hunter

Publisher: Yale University Press

ISBN Number: 978-0-300-11833-9

Length: ● 266 pages

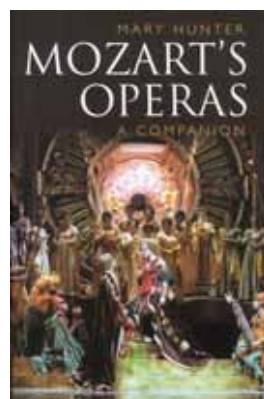
Reviewer: Chris Monk

Yet another companion to Mozart's operas, surely that's been done before? Well yes there have, but this one is certainly detailed, thorough and very useable.

The operas themselves are divided into three categories: Opera seria, Singspiel and Opera buffa. As you would expect the better known are given significantly more analysis and comment than the smaller and the lesser known: *Don Giovanni* gets 13 pages whilst the unfinished *Zaide* gets just

over half of one page. The remaining pages are filled with thorough and interesting essays on the anatomy of his operas, theatres and his social world. There are copious excerpts from letters and diaries filled with comment and reaction from the great and the good who actually attended first nights etc, as well as from all members of the Mozart family.

The interest for me is in the details that you didn't know that you didn't know. I had never come across the fact that Goethe was so impressed with *Zauberflöte* that he started a sequel, which he didn't feel was good enough, so didn't finish; or that



Papageno doesn't figure in any of the likely sources (perhaps Mozart's own invention, in which case the only single character to be so), and most likely comes from Aristophanes' play *The Birds*, one character within being called Papagei, which is German for parrot. I did not know that his first Pamina

was also his first Barb-

arina in *Figaro*, Anna Gottlieb, who was only 17 in the former and an amazing 12 in the latter. It is these facts that add flesh to the bones not just to the operas themselves but to the age as well. Its one of those books that you can pick up and delve. A good read indeed.

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Robert le Diable

Wagner devoted a great portion of his 1852 essay, "Opera and Drama", to his descriptions of the superficiality of Meyerbeer's music. He made a joke about how it would never have occurred to Rossini, who wrote music for the bankers, that the bankers should ever undertake the task themselves. He insulted him openly in his memoirs, *Mein Leben*. He and his wife Cosima belittled him and bullied him incessantly, as did all their circle. Had it been the 21st-century and not the 1850s, Meyerbeer would probably sue for assault. Wagner despised Meyerbeer's musical style and blamed it on his Jewishness. He also despised Meyerbeer's wealth and patronage. And popularity. And if Meyerbeer had had a beard he would have probably despised that also. Was it jealousy, contempt? And to what extent was Wagner's academic reasoning and musical genius guiding his criticism – as opposed to his personal grudge against this contemporary celebrity?

A four and a half hour work, Meyerbeer's *Robert Le Diable* is a solid alibi for Wagner's hatred. Not having been performed in Covent Garden since 1890, director Laurent Pelly, whose recent successes included *La Fille du Régiment*, *Manon*, *L'elisir d'amore* and Massenet's *Cendrillon*, was commissioned to direct this opus of perseverating motifs, expendable coloratura, excruciatingly useless top notes, and a total lack of memorable melody. Certain academics can say that Meyerbeer was a genius; he strayed from using the conventional template for opera – arias, duets, chorus numbers, repeated verse – and created his own original plaster and clay for a new kind of work. They call the tiny motifs that are repeated incessantly on strings and then fade away, never to resurface again through the opera, preludes to Stravinsky and Schoenberg. It would be more accurate to say that Meyerbeer may have been a congenial and popular chap who simply lacked the talent to create an actual opera.

Robert Le Diable is not intolerable. At the same time, however, it isn't tolerable. It lies somewhere in between irksome and troubling for the operagoer who detests the scene where Siegfried makes his sword in Wagner's Siegfried, to being categorically impossible to hear for listeners used to soaring melodies. There is enough of a musical palette for the singers to demonstrate their vocal capacity, and a number of feats which can make the not-so-frequent operagoer freeze in awe at a tenor's high C or a soprano's high E. That would be the case for those coming to hear vocal pyrotechnics and nifty auditory acrobatics.

The overture to *Robert Le Diable*, like much of the opera itself, is a series of brief, clean-cut motifs on strings which never grow into melodies or themes, and never return in the opera. There – from the very beginning, is a lesson which Meyerbeer could have learnt. *Tosca*'s memorable beginning starts with a great clash of chords and drums. We hear it throughout the opera repeated as 'Scarpia's theme'; indicating every time it sounds that there's a figurative storm ahead. *La traviata* begins with the melancholy theme we will only hear once again at the time of the death of its heroine, telling us that it begins with her nostalgia for the past in Act IV, and then flashes back to the time of Act I. This is not to mention Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, whose prelude foresees Isolde's Liebestod around five hours later.

Sadly, Meyerbeer's opera doesn't just leave little room for melody, but actually leaves little room for everything, and too much room for decoration. A few chorus numbers make their way into the opera – none of them are tunes left for the audience to hum when they go home. The brisk, rhythmic motifs continue throughout the opera: they differ, but not too much; they support the singer's main vocal lines in the middle of an aria – although the singers struggle to support them. It's a convoluted little nothing: a swarm of acciaccaturas, trills, chromatic scales and high notes that stand meaningless, and a bundle of contradictions between events and music. In Act IV, Marina Poplavskaya's character Alice despairs for her destiny. She sings "Hélas" – "Alas", once. Then two other characters, her foster-brother Robert and his beloved Isabelle, enter the scene and join her. She sings "Hélas" again. She ends up singing "Hélas" a total of four times, all in the same tempo, all on the same note. Then she continues her "Hélas" on an array of chromatics and broken chords. Now, it would either give the impression that Alice has grown tired and repetitive from her despair, or that, in a moment of madness, she is crying "Alas" incessantly without being fully conscious of it. The music at this point, however, is at a standstill, and does nothing to support either possibility.

Another example of music contradicting plot comes in the third act, when Alice, terrified, sings the phrase, "Hélas, je tremble d'effroi" – "Alas, I tremble from fear" – accompanied by a major key. Throughout the opera, though it's a Gothic, dark and gruesome tale, a three-four tempo ensures that much of the music is waltz-like. It's not (figuratively) in tune with the story at hand: that of William the Conqueror's son, nicknamed Robert Le

Diable, who eventually finds out that his father is the devil in the guise of his best friend Bertram. Instead of any mystical, terrifying musical motifs, however, we are left with a feeling that what we are witnessing is a wind-up toy that's broken down and won't stop playing the same tune – by now a tune that grates on the ears.

In the midst of this musical chaos, the actual production itself scrubbed up well. Laurent Pelly's work is a mediaeval, multi-coloured, supernatural, Gothic picture-book. Ladies-in-waiting each have their own bright colour – a colour which goes from their long pointed hats and painted faces to the tips of their toes. A flurry of different-coloured plastic horses grace the stage. Isabelle, Princess of Sicily, stands atop a castle half her size. A huge cardboard cut-out of a bottle of wine makes its presence felt for three acts without serving any particular purpose. At the end of the third act, a group of dead nuns convulse and swirl in a Bacchanalian manner with the hope of seducing Robert. It was the Gothic Absurd layered on top of the Gothic Absurd. It had nothing to do with the music – thank God – but it did represent some of Eugène Scribe's libretto.

Bryan Hymel gave a powerful rendition of Robert Le Diable's vocal part, for all the superfluous chromatic scales and broken chords it involves. His voice is a pure, solidly trained and potent tenor which passed through the high notes flawlessly and conquered most of the coloratura with ease. John Relyea's Bertram provided a fierce opponent to Robert, with a booming bass voice that was easily able to administer the lowest of notes and hold them there for many beats. His higher register was a little shaky, but that might be because the vocal part for bass in Robert Le Diable exceeds the possibilities of bass. It certainly might have likewise been the case for Marina Poplavskaya's soprano as Alice, which remained a long way from meeting the conditions of the role although it hardly exceeds the usual feats reached by sopranos. Her deliverance of the chromatic scales and coloratura required for the part was shaky, often reached the point of squealing, and included several breaths she shouldn't have taken. At the beginning of the opera it even seemed that some of her high notes were nearing falsetto, and her voice is such that, as has been demonstrated on other occasions, it is her middle, mezzo register for which she preserves her vocal strength. She allows her top sector to work for itself, not providing it with the diaphragmatic push that it so badly needs. This results in many of her high notes withering and slipping away before they can

be firmly rounded off. Isabelle's part, the most decorated and fairy-like part of them all – slightly similar to the Fairy Godmother in *Cendrillon* – was for the most part executed beautifully. Sofia Fomina, called in to replace Jennifer Rowley at the last minute, showed evidence of fine vocal training and a voice that was tailored for high notes and intrinsic coloratura. In the fourth act especially, she supplied the opera's only favourable piece, her aria "Robert, toi que j'aime", with the most vocally solid embellishments and an array of piercingly thrilling high notes. Her singing throughout the evening was totally fluid, containing an equal amount of strength in easier passages as it did in the chromatic scales conducted in the highest registers.

Daniel Oren's conducting was the most which this Meyerbeer opera deserved. Generally waltz-like or alla marcia, Oren simply didn't possess an awful lot of music with which to experiment. His conducting was clean-cut, technically accurate and above-board, and there was little he could have added to redeem the work. In the duets and trios with an unnecessary splash of glistening high notes and decorative patterns echoing again and again, there was little character the orchestra could give to save this opera. Thankfully however, it didn't stress it too loudly or melodramatically.

This brings us back to the question of Wagner's credibility. Wagner was a mean-tempered, anti-Semitic, bad-mouthed man. He led a campaign against a composer who had at first in some ways influenced him, provided him support for his *Rienzi*, and both financed and publicised his works. But he did state, quite famously, that Meyerbeer's operas were "effects without causes". And he did have a point.

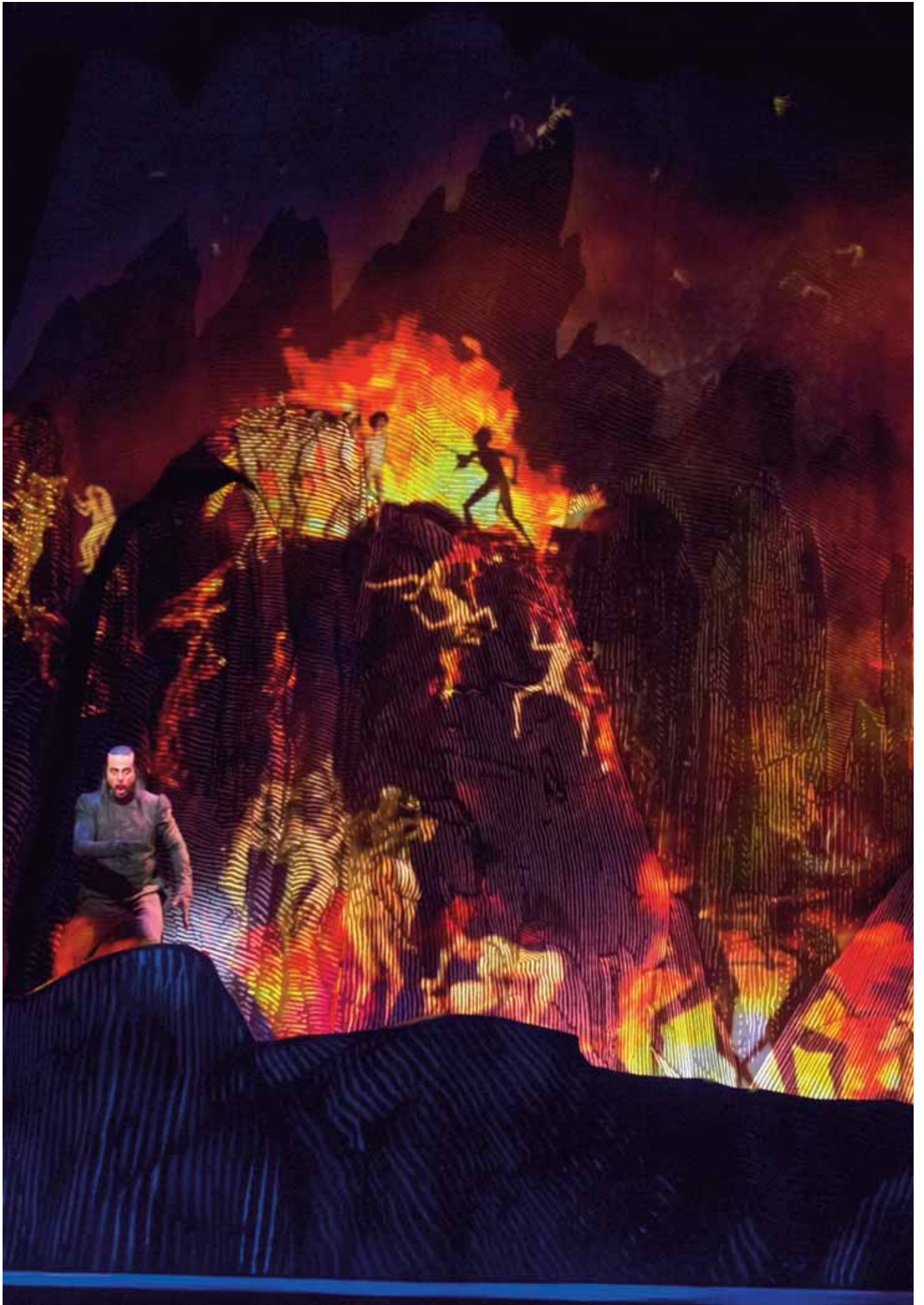
February 2013 New production

Venue: Royal Opera House

Director: Laurent Pelly

Conductor: David Oren

Reviewer: Sophia Lambton



Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg



rioters signalling the end of the cozy Biedermeier era. The time was obviously March 1848 and we had been catapulted into it from the first act, which had started with a modern day Walther von Stolzing sitting in the Stalls and walking onto the stage with his mobile phone during the religious service as he looked for Eva showing her portrait. The congregation looked impatient and arrogant, well dressed and therefore prosperous, a contrast to the beggars on the floor who asked Walther for money. When Walther decided to participate in the first act singing test he was given a long jacket which made him look like one of the Mastersingers of old. So far so good, we got the message. This was another production which took the public through the centuries, a look back in nostalgia rather than in anger, and full of curiosity. This approach has already been seen through the eyes of Hans Neuenfels in Stuttgart, and there was something similar in Hamburg with Peter Konwitschny. On April 8 at the Cologne Opera, Uwe Eric Laufenberg's production did not build up on the second act violence, he skirted around controversies and deep politics and went for reconciliation and an atmosphere of fun. The last act took place on a replica of the outside of the opera house, the square was full of young people drinking beer and the Masters were looking at them from one of the balconies above. It was ingenious. On a large screen above the stage there were projections of an open air operatic

To see one *Meistersinger* per year is a misfortune, to see two is carelessness, but to see four (Glyndebourne, Bayreuth, The Royal Opera and Cologne) is sheer masochism! At the end of the second act the seemingly inoffensive soldiers patrolling the streets group themselves in a corner and shoot at the midnight





project in the '60s called *Opera for all* and of course, of Germany's Nazi past and of its miraculous reconstruction. Look at a German production of *Die Meistersinger* and you will find what concerns German society at the time. The Mastersingers can encompass all this and much more, it is that kind of piece which producers take at their own risk sometimes making fools of themselves. This was not the case with Laufenberg, who is now the intendant of this opera house, situated on Offenbachplatz in memory of one of Cologne's most illustrious sons. He may not have dug deep into politics but he did show how deep Hans Sachs did consider marrying Eva and even though he was confused at times he was also deeply hurt. And this was possible and credible because on stage there was one of the most elegant and intellectually minded Sachs ever to grace it. An unlikely shoemaker, but a hard worker who earned his crust as he could, even hammering leather to make shoes. But it was clear that this was not his main occupation, his horizons were wider and his interests went much further than his working table outside his charming little house. Thomas Jesatko, a memorable Klingsor in tights in Bayreuth, does not possess a classic Sachs voice, in fact it is not a great voice, but it was used with intelligence, every word counted, the nuances were understated but important and he navigated with ease at all times. He was an unfussy Sachs who stayed in the public's memory. Nobody else

in the cast reached these heights, but vocally there were many satisfactions. Stefan Vinke had all the requisite top notes and blokey appearance to cut a dashing figure as a modern day Walther, an unlikely nobleman. His voice flowed easily and roundly and with a degree of subtlety not always associated with this role. Barbara Haveman showed a powerful and secure voice as an enterprising Eva. She could have shown more subtlety at times such as a more frequent use of pianissimo but there are few sopranos today who do these things anyway. Dalia Schaechter played a strong Magdalene, Martin Koch a ubiquitous and self assured David, Bjarni Thor Kristinsson as Pogner continued the strong Icelandic tradition with a well defined large bass and Adrian Eröd was an impressive, fussy, unforgettably funny Beckmesser, but luckily not a caricature. Finally the chorus produced excellent ensemble and Markus Stenz conducted the excellent Gurzenich Orchestra allowing the public to hear sounds which were composed by Wagner but rarely heard under less intelligent and curious conductors. It is obvious that the Germans can take this dangerous work and play with its darkest aspects whilst we British are given a diet of bland and lazy productions. Why?



February 2013 New production

Venue: Cologne Opera

Director: Uwe Eric

Laufenberg

Conductor: Markus

Stenz

Reviewer: Eduardo

Benarroch



Caligula

Albert Camus's 1938 play 'Caligula' tells us nothing we do not know today (certainly, 75 years after the work was written) about dictators and the human condition, and therefore the pressure is more heavily focussed upon any composer who undertakes to turn the play into an opera in terms of illustrating the drama with memorable and original music that might result in an opera for our time – and for future times, as Strauss, Puccini and Britten demonstrated comprehensively in the twentieth-century. We have been told that *Caligula* is 'probably the greatest opera of the 21st century', which doesn't say much for 21st-century composers, but in reality it surely is no such thing.

The story affords director, designer and lighting personnel with considerable opportunities to illustrate the characters and the dramatic situations in which they find themselves (placed) but Glanert's music, as we heard from English National Opera at the Coliseum on May 29, and supported as it largely is by a good libretto by Hans-Ulrich Treichel (in what would appear to be a brilliant English translation by Amanda Holden), and whilst being extremely effective, seems too solidly rooted in the vestigial traces of Germanic post-Wagnerian schools to be either memorable in itself or sufficiently inspired or original to break free of such constraints, as, over the decades, have become familiar to us from aspects of the work of Zemlinsky, Pfitzner, Hindemith and such Dutch figures as Louis de Meester and the Andriessens.

In Glanert's *Caligula* we miss the intensity and concentration that Henze (or even Bernstein), for examples, would have brought, but Glanert's music (he being a pupil of Henze) though undeniably effective, is far too unoriginal at heart, as well as at times appearing seemingly unable to touch the drama as it should have done; the music so rarely attempts to break into the fully expressive modern arioso, as it surely needs to do *in an opera*: the continuous stretches of mere word-setting detract from the composer's understandable and very welcome moments of inspiration, such as they were.

He was honoured with magnificent performances from the entire cast – Peter Coleman-Wright as Caligula especially, with Yvonne Howard as his wife Caesonia and counter-tenor Christopher Ainslie as his slave Helicon. The slightly smaller roles were all wonderfully well done.

The story starts as Caligula is found after going missing for three days following the death of his sister/lover Drusilla; his madness has begun. She appears throughout (one imagines in his mind for us to see) stark naked walking through the action but oblivious to it and they to her; Act two she is covered in gold paint and later glitter (think Goldfinger). I wonder if she isn't there purely to titillate; that something is needed to enliven a production which at times seems rather repetitive.

The same set was made to work for the whole evening. A steeply raked football terrace (perhaps the Coliseum in Rome, Hitler's Berlin Olympics etc) was peopled by a motley assortment of coming and going characters that included petting lesbians, Pacman, Kermit, and a carrot with legs (yes really), and any number of national costumes. Metaphor I am sure, but to what not sure. The action is set in present times with suits and dressing gowns, occasionally Caligula goes down to his underpants – dare I say the Emperor has no clothes?

Ryan Wigglesworth was in supreme command of a score which, technically, poses few problems in its admixture of post-minimalism, techno-dramatic universal vocalisations and rather predictable filmic three-chord sequences, but the work, thanks to a superb sense of theatrical timing from librettist and (more importantly) composer, the superlative nature of Benedict Andrews's direction and the magnificence of the performance itself held the audience throughout its two-hours-plus – which cannot be said of every new opera of the past twelve years that we have seen. All in all, a B to B+ for music, and an A to A+ for performance, staging and production.



29 May, 2012 New production

Venue: English National Opera, London

Director: Benedict Andrews

Conductor: Ryan Wigglesworth

Reviewer: Robert Matthew-Walker

Tosca

The whole essence of *Tosca* is so bound up in the portrayal of the evil Chief of Police that it ought more truthfully be called 'Scarpia'. Tosca is bland and pallid in a way that the Baron is not. It was therefore more than fortunate that ENO's returning *Tosca* on November 26th called upon Anthony Michaels-Moore to fill Scarpia's pivotal role. His arrogance, contempt and sneer were so expertly portrayed that one almost didn't notice his voice, which was good indeed. Just clenching and unclenching his fists, swivelling his eyes or moving his head whilst the rest of his body remained perfectly still gave the impression of a James Bond villain, one step removed from quite mad, but still in cold control. A masterclass.

Sets and costumes firmly place the action at the time of Napoleon's Italian campaign. Lighting was never less than beautiful, particularly during the set pieces. The end of Act 1 culminated in the host being presented, held high, during the *Te Deum* – vermillion and gold against the dark of the chapel brought an audible intake of breath from the sell out audience; deservedly so. Tosca falling from the battlements also, a set piece in all opera was dramatic as she formed a cross with her arms held out falling slowly backwards into the abyss – this was certainly ending with a bang, not a whimper.

Claire Rutter, as Tosca was also a most considered portrayal. As stated above, it a bit one-dimensional at

times, but what depths there are, Ms Rutter found again and again. Cavaradossi, her painter beau, Gwyn Hughes Jones, was convincing, lyrical and honey-voiced. *Recondita armonia* and *Mia gelosa*, so popularised by Pavarotti were measured and strong; he even looked like him. The lesser characters Matthew Hargreaves as Angelotti and Henry Waddington's Sacristan again felt complete and thought through.

Director Catherine Malfitano and set designer Frank Philipp Schlössmann are to be congratulated, along with Stephen Lord conducting, for bringing this "shabby little shocker" so vividly to life. This revival is only 20 months since its first showing. It will surely return and soon, and when it does make sure you see how it should be done.

On a separate note it was good to see so many children and young families in the audience. My very first opera was *Tosca*, years ago. What an easy, accessible and memorable way to introduce the genre. On this showing ENO will be creating many opera addicts.

26 November 2012 Revival from 2008

Venue: English National Opera

Director: Catherine Malfitano

Conductor: Stephen Lord

Reviewer: Christopher Monk





Lohengrin

Given that Kasper Holten has been in office for such a short time at Covent Garden, to value his work one has to go outside the UK. What better opportunity to see his new production of *Lohengrin* at a house renowned under Götz Friedrich for its Wagner productions? May I just refresh the reader's memory? Kasper Holten is the new Director of Opera at The Royal Opera. *Lohengrin* is a work which tends to infuriate serious producers. Harry Kupfer once famously said he would never produce it because of its fascistoid connotations, but eventually he did it, once, at the Staatsoper in Berlin with Daniel Barenboim. Holten himself studied under Kupfer and his respectful treatment of the work revealed that he learnt much from him. There were some influences from the master himself, such as the war context and the swan wings given to the main character, but Holten had enough imagination to give this *Lohengrin* a personal flavour. During the prelude we saw a desolate scene. Corpses everywhere, later some women entered from afar to look for their beloved. Sadly they were all dead. This is an opera about war and war dominated the production from beginning to end, ending where it began, with death and desolation. This is what war does to people. He has been quite consistent but not fully with the treatment of his characters. The *Person-enregie* was not fussy but was strong. At times there was a lack of follow up, the characters needed a bit more idea of what they were doing and why at all times, not just when the action called them to the front. But this is minor and it will come. The production divided both camps well, the King coming to look for allies – cannon fodder more like it given the grim outcome! – and Telramund and Ortrud. It was surprising how irrelevant Elsa was at the beginning but she was the link who joined the various strands, an intelligent solution to a perennial problem. The bond between Ortrud and Telramund was a sexual/power bond. OK, this is as it should be always, but here it was revitalized and shown for all it was worth: the dim-witted warrior and the power-hungry wife who uses sex to achieve her aims. Macbeth comes to mind... And then we had the King and his Herald, a real team. This was a herald who consulted always with his King before making an announcement, very much in contact with his power base. It was so refreshing to see and feel these details which had been so well thought out and they added so much credibility and interest to the action. Finally, the people, a mixture of beggars and nobles down at heel who needed a war to remake their fortunes, sadly

they will only be dead at the end. Holten's message was thus clear and consistent and always interesting, and happily there was no overwhelming *Konzept* descending onto the work and crushing it out of recognition. It would be nice to think that this production could come to The Royal Opera to replace the now aging Moshinsky. The cast was very good indeed. Albert Dohmen presented a King with much stature, the voice wearing out a bit, but still clear and with much to say about the role. Bastiaan Everink was his trusted Herald, a voice to watch and to relish, powerful, excellent diction and intelligent acting. Gordon Hawkins was a loud Telramund, almost always at full volume; it added a roughness to this role which suited him in this context. At his side there was the most active, power hungry and sexy Ortrud one could imagine. Petra Lang was stentorous, manipulating and one could not take one's eyes off her, even when she was not singing. What would she do next? Vocally she was at her most commanding, expressive, sinuous, and with impeccable diction. Pure joy mixed with fear. Klaus Florian Vogt cancelled due to an infection being replaced successfully by Stefan Vinke, who grows in my estimation daily. His voice sounded sweet and he managed some appropriate *pianos*. His account of *In fernem Land* was exalted and full of authority. If he does not overdo it he will have a very fine career. The excellent chorus was partnered with equal excellence by the house orchestra conducted by Donald Runnicles with force, overwhelming beautiful sound and very good phrasing. He is very fond of detail and of long arches which he built solidly. The reading was loud but this injected a lot of drama into an already very dramatic production partnering well the parabolic end.

February 2013 New production

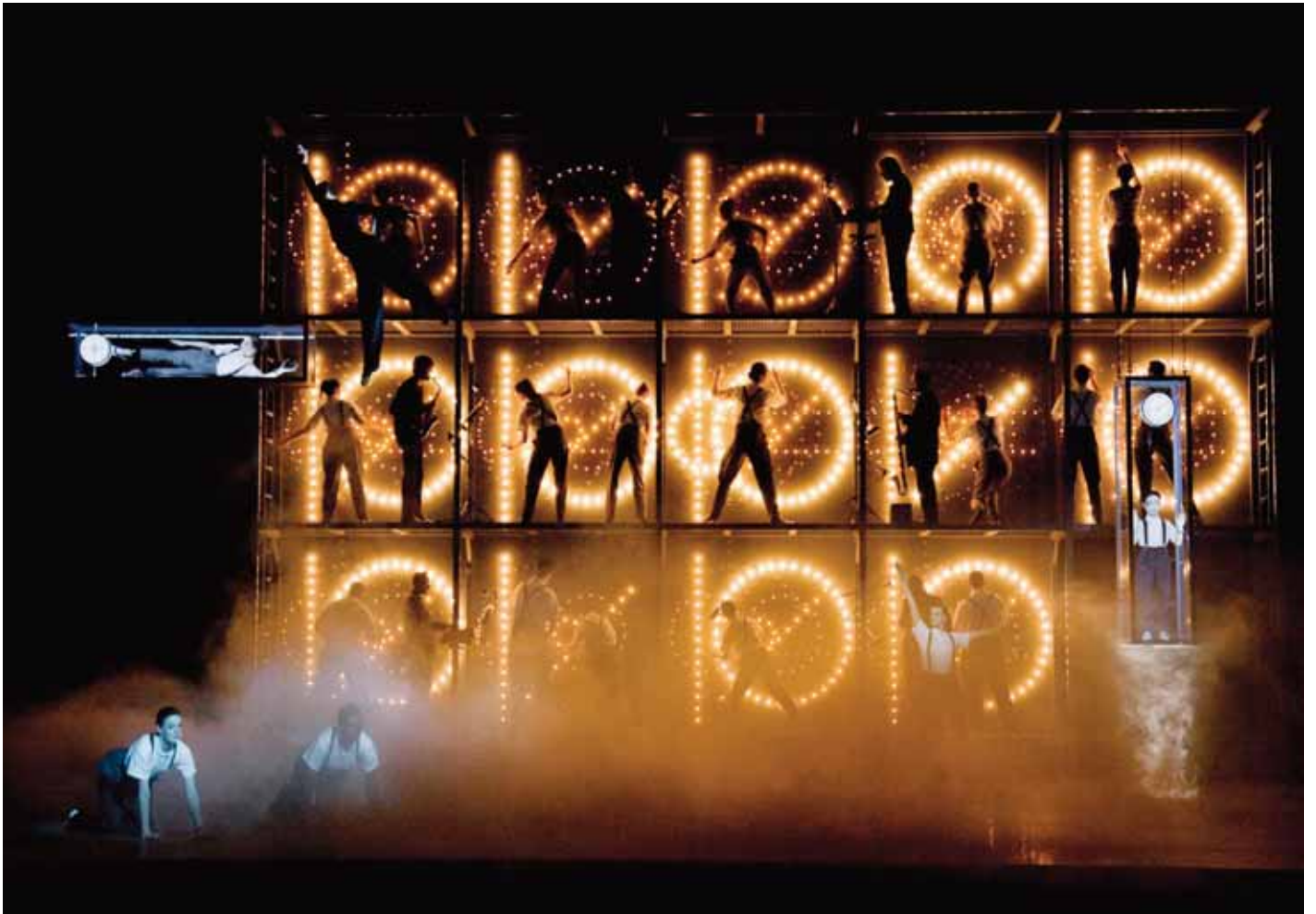
Venue: Berlin Deutsche Oper

Director: Kasper Holten

Conductor: Donald Runnicles

Reviewer: Eduardo Benarroch





Einstein on the Beach

What exactly is Philip Glass's first opera; is it a ballet with singing, an opera with dance, an art house play with both? Well, it's all of these, yes, but really it's in a category all of its own too; in the way that no-one who was there quite knew what to make of *Waiting for Godot*: a new existential art-form was born. Think also of the vitriol that accompanied Berlioz wherever he went, of the riot that accompanied *The Rites of Spring*; music almost against its will was being nudged in a new direction. At the Barbican for only nine nights, for the first time in Europe since 1976 and in this country ever, the production I saw on May 4th was all-but the same show that premiered 36 years ago in Avignon (and lost all concerned a small fortune).

The opera itself is, how to say, unusual. Four and a half hours with no interval, with no discernable arias, simplistic plot and no clear narrative; but it is hypnotic, entrancing, enveloping, sucking you into a different world that repeats and almost repeats again and again. In structure it is four acts with five intermezzos or 'knee plays'. The two central motifs throughout are time – passing or not, looking forward and back; and numbers in any sequence, random, Fibonacci, ascending and descending.

It's clear that Glass's 1960s associations with Ravi Shankar and his ragas, some of which can go on for a solid day, are strong inspirations. Themes come and go, come and go, are invented and reinvented, disappear and an hour later reappear again. It is as much an intellectual exercise as aesthetic.

There are clear strong resonances, if not premonitions of *Koyaanisquatsi* with the low, slow sepulchral organ, of *CIVIL warS* with the voice over as though from the news.

The singing itself, this being an opera, was pretty much always ensemble with usually a half dozen voices the norm. Largo al factotem is often quoted as *the* by-word/guide against which to measure speed, technique and clarity. Frequently this, with six voice together (not just one), with many many words per minute in perfect synchronicity, was the match. The dancers too must have supreme stamina, dancing vigorously for up to 20 minutes to a choreography of Lucinda Childs

It's fair to say that at four and a half hours its long, a good editor could have taken this down to three with ease. To quote Glass though, less is not more, more is more, that's why its called 'more'. Parts of the staging are certainly self indulgent, not least a single bar of light rotating, taking a full 20 minutes to do so with no other visual elements at all. The human brain likes linear stories and this one has almost none. Whilst the music was often fast some parts of the staging were snail like, perhaps to avoid repetition, perhaps just because that is what director Robert Wilson wanted.

Michael Reisman conducted, as he has for every single performance, ever!

I found the absurdity of it all strange, entrancing and energising; its fair to say some won't.

4 May 2012 New Production

Venue: The Barbican

Director: Thomas Hengelbrock

Conductor: Thomas Hengelbrock

Reviewer: Chris Monk



Dr Dee



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Dr Dee, the London premiere of which was staged by English National Opera in June and July, is the latest musical-theatrical work to attempt to bring what might be termed 'popular' elements into the genre known as 'modern opera', not least because the musical aspects had been largely created by Damon Albarn (a member of the group Blur, and a partner in other ensembles) and Rufus Norris (whose musical contribution we may take as being nominal, if not non-existent). 'Latest' it might be, but it is certainly not an original concept, having been preceded up to a century and more ago by such as Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*, and a half-century ago by The Who's *Tommy* – both of which are genuine grand operas, which *Dr Dee* aspires to be, albeit unsuccessfully.

The uniqueness of *Dr Dee* lies more in its choice of subject-matter, the Elizabethan mathematician, astrologer, courtier and spy (a very contemporary mix of personal attributes – apart, perhaps, from mathematics), rather than a 'contemporary' drama, but there, in operatic terms, the interest fades. *Dr Dee*, one may go further to assert, is not truly an opera, as John Berry, ENO's artistic director, admitted almost as much in his introductory note. There is precious little (if any) genuine drama on stage (at least, no attempt was made to tell the unfolding of Dee's life in musico-dramatic terms, insofar as characterisation and the sight of at least two characters singing to one another on stage are concerned); the work is musically more akin to a dramatic cantata or 'the range of an Elizabethan masque' as Berry continued, in a laudable attempt to justify a piece that had precious little musical interest,

or intellectual engagement at all. The subject, no doubt enthusiastically welcomed by the work's commissioning bodies, was clearly beyond Albarn's abilities, certainly in musico-dramatic terms, so that we had an admixture of musical language which was centrifugally unoriginal in almost every respect; the harmonies were boringly predictable, the melodic line of the few 'songs' that were sung by a bejeaned modern troubadour/commentator (though the use of the word 'troubadour' may imply a qualitative aspect that was not consistently achieved) were an admixture (not at all unpleasant in itself) of English folksong, rather weak 'acoustic' writing (but not using exclusively acoustic instruments) as if we encountered early Paul Simon (such as on his first solo album, recorded in London), perhaps on an off-day, or idly strumming with Martin Carthy, the kind of thing recognisable to anyone familiar with additional strands of 'pop' music of the last 50 years, with a sprinkling of Val Doonican and house-trained Bob Dylan added to widen the appeal.

The vocal writing for the three main 'characters' – Dee, Edward Kelley and Sir Thomas Walsingham (ably sung by Paul Hilton, Christopher Robson and Steven Page – the lesser female roles were all equally well assumed) – was lacking in characterisation, and the absence of surtitles(!) was a woeful omission, for only about one word in twenty was genuinely audible.

The troubadour/commentator, who began proceedings with a fey number, was too heavily miked and poorly balanced (at least, at the matinee on July 7), and the attempt to add an 'authentic' Elizabethan timbre to proceedings through the use of early instruments (alongside modern orchestral instruments) was set at naught by the use of a modern electric organ to simulate Tudor ecclesiastical music. Such aural anachronisms suggest a less than wholly intelligent approach to the score itself, but against such elementary, intrinsic flaws in the concept and in its musical realisation, the creators were rewarded and

7 July 2013 **Première**

Venue: English National Opera

Director: David Freeman

Conductor: Mark Elder

Reviewer: Robert Matthew Walker



the work redeemed as a theatrical experience by a production that was profoundly impressive in every regard. Only in the final ten minutes did what one might term interesting musical composition enter the score in a stretch of part-writing that caused one's ears to prick up – a very late, startling, yet welcome change.

The production values were consistently magnificent – imaginative and entirely appropriate to what one believes the creators had in mind. At times, the production was breathtaking in its constant display of visual excellence. A major choreographic element informed much of the action, and deservedly so: here was a visual feast of genuine artistry, directors and designers taking their opport-



unities with alacrity. If only ENO vouchsafed these values to its other new productions then the single persistent critical grumble concerning ENO would surely disappear.

The large contingent of well-behaved children and young people in the audience were enthralled. The last point is a valuable one – if *Dr Dee* causes young people who have never set foot in an opera house to return, so well and good, although the more musical amongst them will soon find out what they have been missing, realising that the inherent shortcomings in music theatre or basic operatic composition *Dr Dee* exhibits were endemic in the work that brought them there.



Lulu

This new *Lulu* is an undisputed theatrical extravaganza: detailed and bold and a delight you want to stretch your operatic experience or sit eyes wide open at what a producer can create given free rein.

David Pountney's quixotic production is important for what it is and what it represents:

the new boss laying out his wares and a warning / promise that we can expect a return to the boundary pushing days after WNO's last two dreary decades.

Pountney's assertion that this is not a tragedy but a tale of an indestructible free spirit is manifested in Wotan from Wagner's Ring Cycle bringing Lulu in a body bag to be born at the opera's opening and at the end he drags in another and offers an emerging hand what I assume is one of Freia's golden apples, continuing the Wagner analogy.

The production is sung fabulously with Marie Arnet an intoxicating singing sensation as Lulu and a gorgeously sung Dr Schon from Ashley Holland.

In a vast, exotic ensemble we have a splendid portrayal of Alwa and Geschwitz from Peter Hoare and Natascha Petrinky. The recorded dialogue is a neat trick in this 1920s Germanic show that revels in Dada and surrealist imagery with incredibly dark humour. Menagerie is the word for this show with the set

18 April 2013 New Production

Venue: Welsh National Opera, Cardiff

Director: Penny Woolcock

Conductor: David Pountney

Reviewer: Mike Smith



like a skeleton cabaret, Lulu's victims are suspended on meat hooks and characters wear animal heads continuing the idea of animalism that we will see continued in Vixen.

While Lulu is a sexual magnet none can resist, this is more cool and sultry than blatant but that does not mean Pountney pulls any punches. The glorious bed that dominates Act Two is a masterpiece, a voluptuous body that Lulu's lovers disappear into and that she lounges over in her naked gloriousness. Similarly at the opera's brutal ending, we have the image of the slaughtered lulu's bloody torso pressed against the opaque screen that encompasses the DNA helix staircase that is the centre of the circus frame.

Lothar Koenigs is a triumph with the orchestra's handling of a complex and viciously varied score.

WNO has a new logo, thankfully a new website and a new-style programme. You have to take your Magritte bowler hat off to this man's vision and energy.



The Gospel According to the Other Mary

As part of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association's Barbican four day residency under Gustavo Dudamel, John Adams' new oratorio came to London for one night only on 16 March. A packed house was held in wonder or wondered why.

This is Adams first full oratorio (some may argue *El Nino* was a nativity), a straight retelling of Christ's ministry from the moments before Lazarus' death, through his bringing back to life, the last supper, trial, crucifixion and resurrection – two resurrections in other words. It was a very precise retelling, following exactly the Evangelists' versions, more Matthew than the others. And this is my biggest query. *'The Gospel of Mary Magdalene'* is a Gnostic gospel, discovered along with others as part of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1946 – usually referred to as *'The Gospel According to the Other Mary'*. It is part decayed so there are gaps, but it carries many intriguing references to Mary perhaps being Christ's wife: "Peter said to Mary, Sister we know that the Saviour loved you more than the rest of women"; and "tell us the words of the Saviour which you remember but we do not know" etc leading to legend and ultimately the Dan Brown bestseller *Da Vinci Code* – my research: the programme notes don't mention this at all. Now, to call this Oratorio

'The other Mary' is to whet the appetite therefore; what tit-bits, what twist will this retelling give us that the King James version does not?, So, to have the straight Matthew version is tending towards bending the Trades Descriptions Act. The libretto is by famed Director Peter Sellers who also directed so one would have thought that there might be greater depths than the usual Sunday school retelling. As an aside, showing his depth of knowledge, Sellers tells us Christ rose from the dead three days after the Crucifixion, which he most emphatically did not. The libretto includes references to Hildegard of Bingen, Primo Levi and a host of others but if you were not told about these you would never guess.

Having said the above that it's a straight retelling, in the beginning of Act One it's set as though in a modern female prison with Martha and Mary opening a safe house for drug addicts and the like but this duality of timescale quickly peters out and is better for it in my opinion, less confusion and more linear. Act Two was far more focussed on the passion itself and musically less frantic, less loud and more lyrical. At times I almost wondered if the two acts were by different people, I certainly preferred the last half hour above the preceding two. Adams' other operas have been linear, single story



affairs, *Nixon in China* a single meeting; *Death of Klinghoffer* a half hour murder set within a two day hijack. This evening, when he was focussed, Adams's gifts were evident, when these were stretched so was the talent I felt.

The production was a limited, bijou even, affair. A raised stage at the back held perhaps forty chorus members who were, apart from a brief interval draped in blue blankets, in everyday clothes. Below them a large orchestra of predominantly strings, and little brass; to the front two small raised wooden stages of only ten by fifteen feet or so with no other ornament at all, upon which the small number of singers came and went, with exaggerated hand gestures and slow rhythmic dances.

Mr Dudamel was very bouncy on his podium, but of course it's not possible to talk about his interpretation' as it's never been heard on these shores before. It sounded pure Adams though with rhythms and counter rhythms as did the singing. Everything was very precise, clipped even. One memory of the evening will be quite how loud it was, deafening at times. Martha and Mary were both mezzos, Tamara Mumford and Kelly O'Connor, often singing at the very bottom of their register becoming on a few occasions even baritone. Their voices had very little

vibrato which seemed to suit the piece well. There were three story tellers, similar to a Greek chorus, almost always ensemble rather than single, all of whom were counter tenors – which gave the unusual scenario of the men being always higher pitched than the ladies. Again, this worked well, giving a slightly other-worldly quality. The only other character was tenor Russell Thomas as Lazarus, Jesus does not appear once. Being on the aforementioned small stages gave little scope for 'acting' or even portrayal, although never quite descending into 'park and bark' the only visual element were their coming and going along with three dancers who came and went. Being so pared down certainly gave an intimacy if not insight into the bible story.

As an aside, the ticket only mentions Dudamel, neither Adams nor the piece's title feature at all. How strange!

16 March 2013 New production

Venue: Barbican, London

Director: Peter Sellers

Conductor: Gustavo Dudamel

Reviewer: Christopher Monk





Medea

It was a surprise to learn that not only was this – Charpentier's best known opera – an ENO debut, but that, on February 15, it was the UK premiere, this from a work of 1693. When ENO announced its inclusion as part of this year's season I tried to buy a CD and found that it's not available, anywhere, at all. It really is a most obscure work; as all things baroque are in the ascendant these days this surprised me; *Medea* obviously presents a brand new seam to be mined. Following on from last year's *Castor and Pollux*, a production that, although award winning, I and countless others neither enjoyed nor understood, it was a great relief to find this both a worthy performance, full of insight and intrigue and an entirely palatable one. That said it was made to last a full 220 minutes which could in hindsight usefully have been trimmed by at least 40.

As you would expect from 1693 it's more Monteverdi than Handel and being based upon Euripides, is full of moralising, full-on tragedy and grief and short on humour. Unlike much of the Baroque it's an easy story to follow.

In a production by the ubiquitous David McVicar the action has been relocated to a country house during WWII and to squabbles in the Officers' mess. There are McVicar themes – the single set which lasts the whole evening is most similar to the panelled room in the Royal Opera House's *Figaro*, people are moving pretty much every moment so that when someone is finally stationary it's noteworthy. The demons who aid Medea's spells are painted muscular dancers similar to the ROH's *Aida* and so on. This is not to belittle, both the concept and execution were well thought through and well realised. One is also reminded of his frankly superb *Guilio Cesare* at Glyndebourne from 2005 where the dancing pulled the show from an also ran to a must see. There are lots of dancers doing lots of dancing in *Medea*. Now this is an opera review of course, but they were good, consistently: imaginative, fluid, fluent and the only "fun" part of the evening. An absolute necessity in my view.

One did get the impression that it had been thought through fully, I did like the many small attentions to detail. As a small for instance, when Creusa's bewitched dress starts to kill her, dry ice as though smoke, was visually most effective.

The main characters are ENO regulars, so we have the excellent Brindley Sherratt as King Creon (army general), Roderick Williams as Orontes (air force pilot) and Katherine Manley as the king's daughter Creusa. Adding to the mix are Sarah Connolly as Medea and



American Jeffrey Francis (navy admiral) as Jason (of Argonauts fame). None could substantively be bettered, Francis in particular has the most sweet and fluid voice. It is as though he plucks a note out of the air, holds it stationery and burnishes it before quietly letting it drift to the floor; a most different voice to the strident wronged Connolly – she barks whilst he purrs.

Praise also to Christopher Cowell's clever translation from the French which gave us amusing and apposite rhyming couplets throughout. Some things worked less well. When cupid arrives at the end of Act II that he does so in a pink spitfire that glitters was SO over the top, and the dancers did seem to dominate once or twice. If some of these musical interludes had been cut it would have been no great loss and sped up and sharpened the focus of the evening quite considerably. In retrospect, well done ENO for having the guts to put on something so outside the usual repertoire. Will it return? I doubt at this length, but with some cuts one hopes so.

15 February 2013 New production

Venue: English National Opera

Director: David McVicar

Conductor: Christian Curnyn

Reviewer: Christopher Monk

Park & Bark

The Ride of the Valkyries Ring's true

Music journalist Mark Doran rewrites one of Wagner's greatest hits...

I know what it is!', said another friend, bewilderingly. 'You know: that thing no-one ever plays properly. . . The bit in the *Ring*, . . it's *Ride of the Valkyries*, isn't it?'

And it's true: if you listen to any performance of this part of *Die Walküre* – or ask someone to sing the tune to you – it's a fairly safe bet that you'll hear something very like my Example.1 (below): there'll be a strong stress on each of those 'top' notes – to the point that it may even seem that the tune is barred accordingly.

Whereas – and as my friend knows – Wagner took care to prescribe the accentuation shown in my Example.2: not only does he notate regular down-beat accents, but there's also the written instruction that the dotted and accented rhythm should be 'very sharply and clearly stressed' ('sehr scharf und deutlich betonen').

If we need additional confirmation, we can turn to Heinrich Porges' eye-witness account of the first *Ring*'s rehearsals: 'Wagner directed that the dactylic figure (especially its first note, B) should be sharply and heavily accented since the following higher note, D, stands out in any case' (translation by Robert L. Jacobs).

And isn't it better this way? I mean: much better? In fact, I can't help wondering if the 'vulgarity' generally imputed to this terrific piece might actually stem from our wrong phrasing – which in psycho-acoustic and physical terms, of course, is entirely 'natural' in that it sees the accents drifting to notes that are longer and higher; constitute 'new' pitches; and take greater muscular tension to produce. Where a pattern is repetitively phrased in the most blatantly natural way, it's almost certain to seem vulgar. For what is 'vulgarity' if not a natural tendency uninhibitedly indulged?



Example 1



Example 2



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