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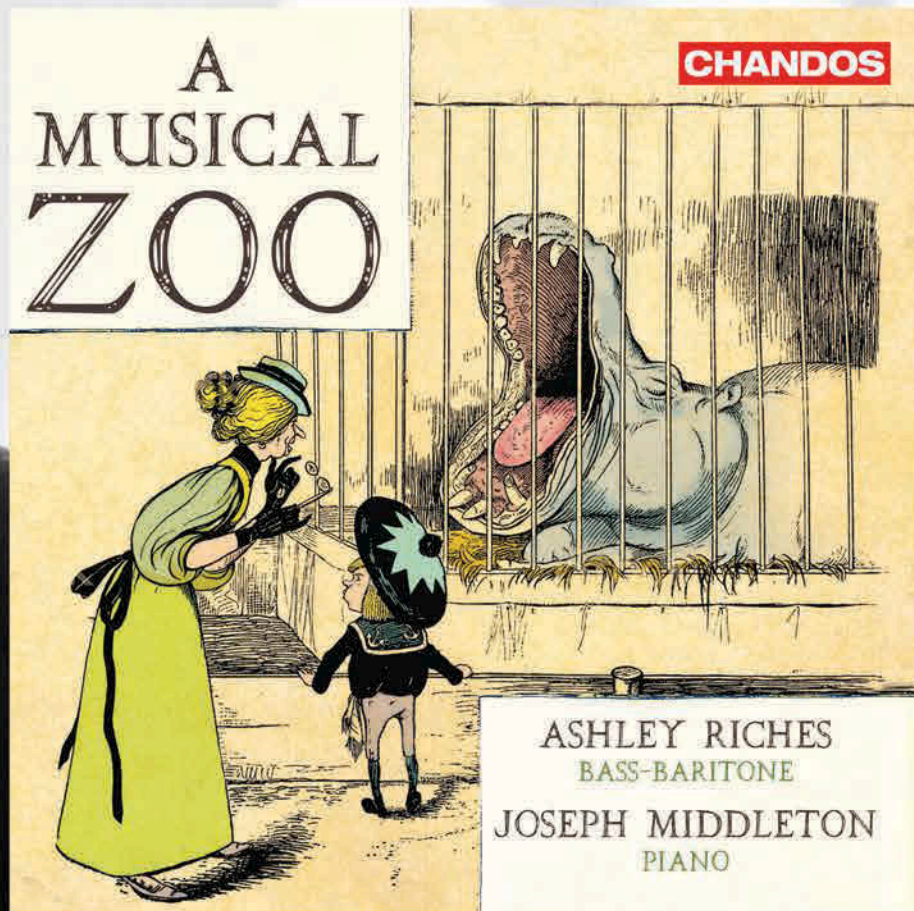
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Don't let the red tape hold back our global talent

There have been many sad and alarming consequences for opera resulting from the coronavirus pandemic. Now another perfect storm seems to be brewing, in tandem with an ill wind from Brexit in the form of hard borders and travel restrictions. Red tape and the need to quarantine have severely curtailed the ease of movement of opera singers and creative teams around the world.

Opera can be proud of its global reach, established through centuries of international co-operation. There is no other artform where performances are given as a matter of course in the original language no matter where in the world the work is being staged. As for the performers, where else would you find Koreans, Uruguayans, Estonians, South Africans, Chinese, Russians, Americans – the list goes on – sharing stages in every corner of the world, united in an extraordinary act of cultural collaboration? Opera is by no means perfect in the socially progressive stakes (equity of pay and conditions remain pressing issues in many opera houses), but it far exceeds, say, football and politics in cutting through cultural and social boundaries that hold talent back.

Our cover artist, Hera Hyesang Park, tells her personal story of how opera has enabled her to transcend cultural boundaries. Her time studying at the Juilliard School in New York led her to challenge her traditional upbringing in South Korea. In the end, her training as an opera singer allowed her to resolve differences and find reconciliation between her own cultural values and those of an artform where self-expression and empathy are paramount.

Opera has always been an artform of global opportunities. Maria Callas, an immigrant Greek-American, became the toast of Milan and Paris. Joan Sutherland emerged from the Australian suburbs to cause a sensation in London and New York. From provincial towns in Italy (Pavarotti, Freni) and Bible-Belt America (Price, Norman), from the backwaters of Mexico (Domingo) and from farming stock in Sweden (Nilsson), opera has been a springboard for the most extraordinary talent drawn from humble beginnings.

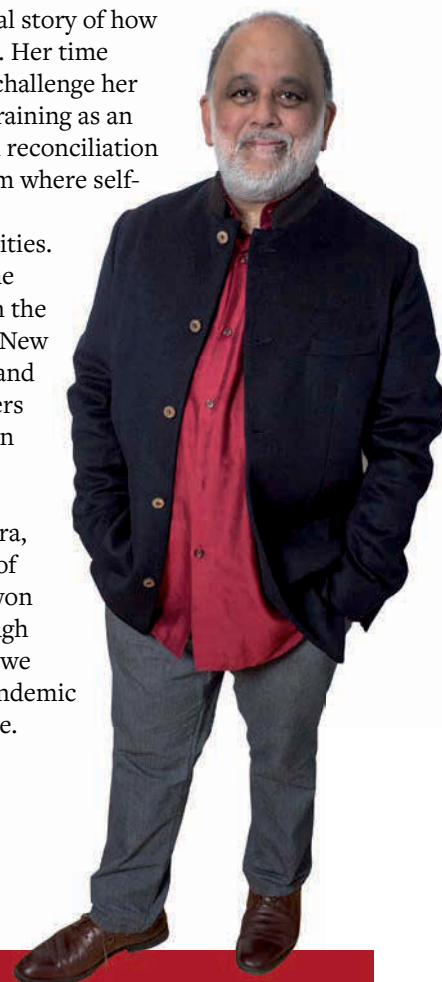
Cultural internationalism, especially in the postwar era, has been a driving force in giving opera a special sense of dynamism and excitement. Freedoms are always hard won but easily lost, and the existence of travel barriers, though temporarily necessary, should be vigorously resisted as we move out of the cultural dessication of this dreadful pandemic and back into a glorious melting-pot of artistic exchange.

Ashutosh Khandekar

@operanow fb.com/operanow

Opera Now captures the drama, colour and vitality of one of the most powerful of all the performing arts. In our print and digital issues, we showcase the creative spirit of opera, both on stage and behind the scenes, with profiles of opera companies, singers, directors and designers. Our in-depth features reflect how diverse cultural elements have influenced opera, including travel, history, literature, art, architecture, politics and philosophy.

Our lively reviews and opinion pages are a platform for writers and critics drawn from all over the world. Our aim is to inspire our opera-loving readers to broaden their knowledge and deepen their passion for this fascinating and stimulating artform.



READERS' LETTERS

A toast to Domingo

After a year of terrible accusations, revelations and recriminations, it was heartening to read the article about Plácido Domingo in your January/February issue ('A Fallen Angel?', page 15). Yes, of course we should mark a major milestone in the life of a great artist who has given his all for opera over a career of 60 years. His behaviour in his private life is not excusable – Domingo's misdemeanours have been exposed and shamed, and the disgrace heaped upon him must be almost unbearable, but he has not been found to be guilty of any criminal act.

The investigations into the harassment allegations found that in no case had any of the women been held back in their careers due to the incidents that took place. Domingo is now 80 years old. His birthday must have been a quiet one – certainly the opera world was subdued in its celebrations. I spent the day listening to some of my favourite Domingo recordings and raised a glass of champagne to the memory of many of my happiest and most thrilling moments in the opera house. I hope I wasn't the only one. Thank you Plácido...

Carys Ann Evans, [via email](#)

Beyond stereotypes

I was outraged to read that Lawrence Brownlee had been passed over for roles as a romantic lead in opera because of his colour. He is such a charming performer with a truly seductive voice. Racism can take very subtle forms, and it is sobering to think that the idea of a Black man in love with a White woman still has an element of taboo among some casting directors. One of the glories of opera is that the singing voice has no regard for stereotypes. Fat, thin, tall, short... it hardly matters if what comes out of your mouth is beautiful, delightful and

moving. It's such a pity that in recent year, we have regressed in this respect and that opera has joined the rest of the world in its vain quest for physical conformity and archetypes of perfection.

Alice Mastriani, [via email](#)

Erratum

Our guide to Opera Streaming from Italian theatres in the January/February issue (page 72) was mistakenly attributed to George Hall. In fact, the writer was **James Imam**. We would like to apologise to both contributors for the mix-up.

Write to *Opera Now*, Mark Allen Group, Dulwich Rd, London SE24 0PB. Email opera.now@markallengroup.com or tweet @Operanow

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Can we stop our borders turning into barriers?

By Andrew Green

The announcement that there would be no provision for visa-free travel between the UK and Europe for musicians post-Brexit sent the opera world, understandably, into a tailspin. Already battered by a year of Covid restrictions, opera singers, directors and designers now face reams of red tape as they renegotiate contracts to work across borders that, until the end of January, they could cross freely in a spirit of cultural exchange.



'Nothing can magic away the significant and permanent added legwork facing all those involved in managing and engaging artists'

Alison Charles, Askonas Holt

In spite of pre-Brexit assurances that musicians' livelihoods would be protected, the UK's Minister of State for Culture, Caroline Dinenage, confirmed that UK-based performers working in Europe will now need their visas/work permits and any other paperwork to be sorted directly with each of the 27 EU countries. Music industry bodies in the UK are monitoring closely how the government carries out Dinenage's stated commitment to '...giving musicians and others access to information and guidance about the criteria for each EU member state and then working with those individual member states to ensure that the process is as seamless, fast, effective and simple as it can be.'

The phrase 'as it can be' remains elliptical. When exactly might this 'information and guidance' become available? The opera world needs clarity and certainty to be able to plan its seasons years in advance. In welcoming the offer of government practical assistance, opera director Bill Bankes-Jones nonetheless sees it as '...an urgent job swiftly to remove the many and difficult obstructions between UK musicians and work in Europe.'

'If the UK government professes to want to support farmers and fishermen,' adds Nicholas Payne, director of



Opera Europa, the Europe-wide organisation for opera companies/festivals, 'it owes at least as much to artists, who are arguably a more reliable investment for future exports.'

The heartlands of Europe are hugely significant for British opera and all those who perform in it. 'It's more than the fact that it's our nearest market – and a very sizeable one,' observes baritone Paul Carey Jones. 'Musicians have a deep sense of being European, built from a tradition of cultural interaction over a very long time. It's crucial we find a way to keep close. The message is not to despair. It's not as if working in Europe is out of the question. The difficulties are considerable, but in most cases not insurmountable.'

Tenor Ed Lyon has various practical concerns. 'Particularly when it comes to singers with lower profiles – how often will a European

opera company now select someone from the EU rather than a British singer, because it's less administrative hassle? Then there's the question of stepping in at the last moment when a cast member goes sick – so often a moment of opportunity for a young singer. I remember early in my career doing a last-minute *Orfeo* at Aix-en-Provence with René Jacobs. Until now a British replacement could just get on a plane. What happens now, especially if you've maybe used up a 90-day visa allowance?'

The matter of last-minute deputising raises the thorny question of whether some EU states might require UK artists to visit embassies for biometric data to be gathered, and for their passports to be surrendered for a period of time for processing, which is a familiar story outside the EU. It may be that step-ins are impossible unless an artist has



a second UK passport, 'which many artists don't,' says Alison Charles, who handles visas/work permits for the leading agency Askonas Holt. 'Experience shows that the US embassy might return your passport in three/four days. Much longer with the Russian embassy, unless you pay an additional fee for an express service.'

Helen Hogh, director of vocal artists at the London-based Groves Artists management office, reports that 'opera companies I'm dealing with in different European countries have been unsure what rules their own governments will apply to UK-based artists, although some clarity is gradually emerging. But we've no idea if there can ever be arrangements which will apply across the EU. Sadly, my guess is that there won't be.'

'Who knows how long it will be before there's complete clarity?' asks Alison Charles.

'You have to be concerned. If it wasn't for the Covid crisis putting so many performances on hold, this would be a hellish situation.' Even when the rules become more clear, nothing can magic away the significant and permanent added legwork facing all those involved in managing and engaging artists between the UK and the EU.

In the longer term, Berlin-based singers' manager Boris Orlob fears a 'chain reaction' in the UK's discussions with EU countries, which results in systems becoming even more bureaucratic than ever. 'For a small business like mine in particular, the extra workload could be very significant.' It's no surprise that Orlob is already aware of a couple of British singers moving to Germany with the intention of taking citizenship 'simply because they're afraid the situation will be more problematical into the future'.

When it comes to EU artists entering the UK, the situation is more straightforward. Existing visa/work permit arrangements in use for non-EU performers will simply apply more widely. However, managers, administrators and singers scarcely relish the added workload. Time, as ever, is money. Royal Opera House chief executive Alex Beard talks of '...new administrative hurdles to overcome. We think the process should be manageable, but Certificates of Sponsorship, previously only necessary for artists and individuals outside of the EU, must now be completed for all artists we wish to employ [coming from] outside of the UK. This will amount to a more than doubling of the current number over the course of a season. Visa arrangements



'Musicians have a deep sense of being European, built from a tradition of cultural interaction over a very long time'

Paul Carey Jones, Baritone

must also be in place for stays of more than three months. All in all, additional processes will take some time to bed in and will need to be resourced.'

'OK, we're well used to dealing with the requirements for non-EU artists working in the UK,' says Helen Hogh. 'The problem is the extra bureaucracy when we're busy enough as it is... more paperwork, more border checks therefore longer waiting times at airports, increased workload for managers, plus increased visa costs for artists.' Will such considerations prompt a concentration from managers on EU-based operatic talent already established in the UK rather than on young lesser-knowns with (initially) limited earnings potential?

Glyndebourne casting administrator Ann Rawdon Smith more than ever needs direct Home Office advice going forward. 'It's often important to talk cases through

one-on-one. At the best of times the problem is reaching anyone on the phone.' In the absence of signed agreements with individual EU countries creating reasonably frictionless arrangements for short-notice deputising, says Rawdon Smith, 'then weeks – possibly months in some cases – will be needed to get the paperwork in place, rather than days.' It's more than front-line opera cast members who will be watching developments closely, Rawdon Smith adds. 'At Glyndebourne, covers for principal roles tend to be booked relatively close to a production, so care will have to be taken to allow ample time for the paperwork to go through. The new UK Frontier Work Permit allows those who come from the EU to enter the UK with no visa, but only if they can show they have a record of working here every year. This may be of use to non-UK chorus members who return to Glyndebourne regularly.' **ON**



'Additional processes will take some time to bed in and will need to be resourced'

Alex Beard, CEO, Royal Opera House

PREVIEWS, NEWS AND EVENTS IN THE OPERA WORLD

NEWS & NOTES

Iford Arts boss to set out new vision for opera

Iford Arts, a major opera and concerts producer in the South West of England, has appointed Michael Volpe as its interim executive director.

Volpe, a founder and former general director of Opera Holland Park, was one of the driving forces in establishing the London-based summer festival as a leading producer of opera in the British capital. He has plans to transform the opera scene in Bath and the South West with a new roadmap for opera post-Covid: 'After taking early retirement from OHP, I was able to look at how the world of opera and the arts was developing during the Covid pandemic. It has been a torrid time but I also believe that an opportunity to completely re-evaluate the way we produce and enjoy opera and the performing arts has presented itself. Companies like Iford Arts have tremendous potential as well



Mike Volpe: 'Post-Covid will be an opportunity to completely re-evaluate the way we produce and enjoy opera'

as flexibility and they are in a strong position to refashion their offer to supporters and audiences. With the growth in digital delivery, it is also a time for companies to expand their outputs with the specific aim of bringing new audiences back into the live performance realm.

'It is, too, a critical time for the cultural world to use their artforms to play key

roles in social cohesion and community recovery. We can't only be baubles – we must make our art available to those who work with the most disadvantaged in society because we all know just how powerful our work is in this regard. I am excited to be able to explore these new possibilities with Iford Arts over the next year to see what can be achieved.'

Iford Arts has a strong tradition of offering opportunities to young and emerging artists and Volpe sees this as a key area for the future. He added: 'The opera industry has become top heavy in recent years, and emerging singers and other artistic personnel such as conductors, directors, designers and those wanting to work across all production disciplines find it hard to forge good, regular careers. Iford Arts has, like many other companies, played

its part in trying to remedy this with a successful New Generation Artists Programme. Covid has recalibrated the way that we need to think about the industry's sustainability and reach.

'It is also time for the wider opera and arts ecology to coalesce. Spreading wealth, resources, cross-cultural and pan-industry influence will mean more seeds are cast onto wider ground and this will benefit the entire recovery process. Collaborations between companies, large and small, will enable the industry to generate real momentum, encourage efficient use of the arts funding pot and create the conditions for audience growth in the post-Covid world. That benefits us all.'

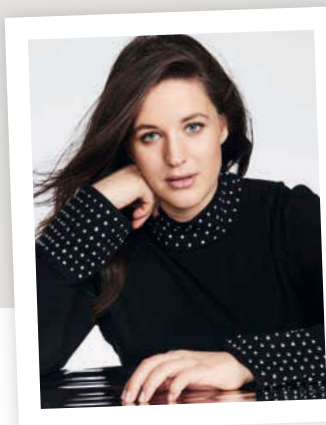
ifordarts.org.uk

See our 2021 **UK Festivals Guide** (pages 70-75) for this year's Iford Opera programme

Lise Davidsen launches new solo album

Decca Classics has announced that soprano **Lise Davidsen** will be releasing her second studio album on 26 March. Recorded in London during the summer and autumn of 2020, Davidsen is accompanied on her new album by the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Sir Mark Elder.

Opera Now described Davidsen as 'A once in a generation Wagnerian' when she appeared as our cover artist in November 2019. In her interview, Helena Matheopoulos wrote: 'Davidsen's purity of the vocal line, the perfectly sustained and supported pianissimi, the sheer musicality in her subtle changes of colour filled me with wonder. For here was



not only a unique voice, one of the greatest in my long musical operatic experience, but also a true, sensitive artist.'

Davidsen has managed to appear in several productions in Europe during 2020 in spite of the pandemic. She made her highly anticipated house and role debut at Deutsche Oper Berlin in September, singing Sieglinde in Wagner's *Die Walküre*. Reviewing the production for *Opera Now*, Hugo Shirley wrote: 'Davidsen unleashed a voice of all-enveloping grandeur and size in a role debut for the ages – a performance that will have done nothing to quell curiosity as to when the soprano, still in her early 30s, will make the seemingly inevitable switch to Brünnhilde.' Davidson was also chosen at short notice to perform the same role at Paris Opera in November, marking her house debut there.

lisedavidsen.com

WNO cancels spring tour

Welsh National Opera has cancelled its forthcoming Spring tour of *Il Trovatore* and *The Barber of Seville*. The company has said its decision has been made in partnership with its tour venues in light of the current lockdown restrictions. A statement from WNO pointed out, 'in comparison with companies in England, WNO is subject to Welsh Government Covid-19 regulations which are – and have been since March 2020 – legal requirements in Wales, not guidance. As such, despite our remit to work in both Wales and many regions of England, WNO has not been able to hold any live public performances – socially-

distanced or otherwise – since March 2020.'

The statement added that in late autumn 2020 the company was able to hold socially distanced ensemble rehearsals for some 'Covid compliant' recording at St David's Hall with its chorus and orchestra. These recordings are now being released online. 'The current Welsh Government approval for us to rehearse is *only* for the purposes of recording,' a spokesperson for WNO explained, adding: 'We are continuing our negotiations with the Welsh Government to enable us to rehearse for performances with a live audience once it is safe to do so. We are expecting to return to the stage in autumn 2021.'

Opera for Peace inaugurates Middle East Academy

Opera for Peace has been established to promote cultural exchange and understanding among opera companies and educational establishments from around world.

This year sees the creation of an Opera for Peace Academy, focusing its activities on the Middle East and North Africa. The Academy aims to become the region's largest training ground for opera talent of the future, encouraging international exchange and promoting Arabic traditions of music and singing in the region and throughout the rest of the world.

This Academy is part of the Opera for Peace Global Connections Program, which aims to open up Arab culture

to the rest of the world through the development of opera in the Arabic language.

Maroun Rahi, a leading Arabic composer and artistic director of Opera Lebanon, stressed the importance of developing operas in regional languages: 'Every time the art of opera is sung in a new language it brings people together through an understanding of their culture and art. Therefore, opera in the Arabic language reflects the face of Arab culture and a distinct notion of peace and unity.'

Meanwhile, Opera for Peace has invited *Opera Now*'s cover artist this month, Hera Hyesang Park, to join its growing list of distinguished worldwide ambassadors.

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MAY/JUNE 2021

ON SALE
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LISETTE OROPESA

Critics have consistently described this Cuban-American lyric soprano as one of the greatest singer/actors of our time, giving definitive performances in *La Traviata*, *Rigoletto* and the operas of Mozart. Find out why the opera world is buzzing with her name

FRANCO CORELLI

One of the greatest tenors of the postwar era, we celebrate a legendary artist and an operatic phenomenon in the centenary of his birth

SALZBURG FESTIVAL

Unable to mark its 100th anniversary to the full in 2020 after its programme was decimated by Covid restrictions, Salzburg is looking to return to strength as the biggest opera festival in the world this year

TRAVEL REVISITED

Postponed due to the continuing uncertainties of the pandemic, we relaunch our Travel Guide for 2021, as cultural destinations open for business once more and the travel sector looks forward to the return of a more certain future

www.operanow.co.uk

Elijah Moshinsky

1946-2021



The stage director Elijah Moshinsky, who died of Covid-19 complications at age 75 on 14 January, may be best remembered for his subtleties as well as grand gestures on the opera stage. His career saw him become the darling of the Metropolitan Opera in New York and a frequent guest at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. He also championed the art of great singing in an opera world that he felt was increasingly run by bean-counters.

As one might expect from an Oxford pupil of Isaiah Berlin, the historian of ideas, Moshinsky approached opera with an acute awareness of historical contexts.

When Moshinsky changed the era in which an opera was set, he always revealed unexpected insights into the work itself. In 1979, he set a Covent Garden production of Stravinsky's *Rake's Progress* in 19th-century Dickensian London, making the 18th-century moralism of the original Hogarth illustrations that inspired the work even weightier. In 1993, again at the Royal Opera House, Verdi's rarity *Stiffelio* had its action shifted from Germany to a 19th-century American Puritan sect, but was otherwise presented straightforwardly. And a 1985 ENO version of Smetana's *Bartered Bride* was set circa 1930, to benefit production values.

The discriminating ingenuity of his vision sometimes approached understatement, as Marcia Citron's *Opera on*

Screen (Yale Press, 2000) pointed out; comparing Franco Zeffirelli's studio film of Verdi's *Otello* with a televised stage version by Moshinsky, the same tenor's performance (Plácido Domingo) was paradoxically 'more subdued' in the latter.

Nevertheless, Moshinsky admired the splendour of outsized opera house emoting. He worshiped divas and divos whom he termed truth-seekers, like Maria Callas and Jon Vickers. Vickers starred in what remains the quintessential Moshinsky production, a stark vision of Britten's *Peter Grimes*, at Covent Garden in 1975.

Performers capable of the terrifying coup de théâtre, like Vickers, were treasured by Moshinsky, who created an unforgettable moment for the veteran soprano Leonie Rysanek as the Countess in a 1996 New York Met production of Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*. In what was Rysanek's swan song, during a stunning Act III appearance in ghostly form, she burst through the floor, surrounded by the flames of Hell, and crept into bed with the protagonist to convey a gambling secret.

As Moshinsky himself opined in a 1995 BBC *Omnibus* programme on divas, such excess is to be cherished. In an article in *The Independent* in April 1995, Moshinsky said that opera houses seek 'compliant singers' rather than original thinkers. Opera managements even dislike divas, he charged, because they create power

struggles, adding: 'At a time when the main heads of our opera houses in Britain seem to come from television or accountancy, it is clear that they are not really admirers of the singers.'

Moshinsky suggested that Lord Harewood, who as head of the London Coliseum made Rita Hunter, Josephine Barstow and Valerie Masterson into stars, may have been the 'last of the managers to be a true fan of singing.' Yet, Moshinsky concluded, opera requires outsized personalities to perform it. Callas, for example, showed 'that grand Italian opera could be produced in an intelligent way. This was something quite new.'

So Moshinsky thrived with vocalists whom other directors might find demanding. One such was Renata Scottò, long absent from London stages, who returned to impress punters as Verdi's Lady Macbeth at Covent Garden in 1981, in a production by Moshinsky.

Critics carped about Scottò's vocal flaws at that stage of her career, but also had to acknowledge the uncanny sense of concentration and aura of danger hovering around the intimate staging.

Despite his association with the great opera houses, some of Moshinsky's most exquisite work may have been seen by only a few on smaller stages, such as his galvanising production of Britten's *Turn of the Screw* in 2000 for Broomhill Opera, or the same composer's *Paul Bunyan* at

Dulwich College (1996) with schoolchildren in the cast.

Moshinsky's intelligence was never of the gloating variety (unlike his friend and classmate Jonathan Miller). Instead, he quietly relished cerebral challenges; when convalescing in 2018 from a bout of ill health, his reading for relaxation included Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and Dickens' *Bleak House*. Small wonder he discovered innate distinction within operas sometimes dismissed as crude, such as Verdi's *Attila*, staged at Covent Garden in 1990 with allusions to the biblical murder by the heroine Judith of the tyrant Holofernes.

Despite all the violence he arranged onstage, and his own occasional verbal spats, Moshinsky was essentially a positive-minded spirit. He worked amenably with dictators of the baton, from Carlos Kleiber to Georg Solti, but chose to befriend the genial Edward Downes, whom he described to *Classical Source* in 2010 as a 'total rationalist, but one possessed of all the experience, love and enthusiasm that he got from other conductors such as Kubelík and Giulini. Ted had this philosophy of how an opera should be produced, that it was a combination of director and conductor creating a totally unified work in which you don't know where one ends and the other begins.'

Aspiring to this unity, Moshinsky produced unique and unsurpassed moments for operagoers. **ON**



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Sarasota Opera House
on Florida's balmy
West Coast

Letter from Florida

By Karyl Charna Lynn

From the Atlantic Ocean splashing on the soft, sandy shores of Florida's East Coast to the Gulf of Mexico's sparkling waters defining the West Coast, Florida's two most notable opera companies have defied the odds by presenting their 2020/21 opera seasons in front of live audiences, when almost every American opera company has cancelled live activities in the face of Covid-19, going

virtual for the foreseeable future. To accomplish this feat, the Florida Grand Opera and Sarasota Opera have reinvented themselves to stage operas safely before a live audience during the pandemic.

Beyond trendy South Beach, the splendid Art Deco and Design Districts, and the plethora of museums and cultural institutions, Miami boasts the oldest and most enterprising opera company in Florida and seventh oldest

US company. Established by Arturo di Filippi as the Greater Miami Opera (GMO), the company was inaugurated in 1942 with *Pagliacci*. Filippi, who ran the company for 30 years, parlayed his association with the Met bringing star-studded casts and innovative repertory. Pavarotti chose GMO for his USA debut. A merger of the GMO with Opera Guild of Fort Lauderdale in 1994 created the Florida Grand Opera (FGO). A lavish *Aida* inaugurated the

company's new home, a state-of-the-art 2,400-seat Ziff Ballet Opera House 12 years later.

Then the financial crisis hit, so it wasn't until 2012 when Susan Danis took the helm that the company again staged innovative repertoire, attracting opera lovers beyond its borders by launching new series such as *Unexpected Opera in Unexpected Places* and *Made in Miami* that showcased smaller productions of 20th- and 21st-century works to

appeal to the region's diverse population.

'We are not a mega company so we can be more flexible, look at things differently, and change the paradigm of how we produce,' says Danis. 'After a successful fall season of live concerts with live audiences, I revised our winter/spring schedule to create a "Season of Introspection", calling it a *Collection of Specials and Shorts*.' She moved their opera venue from the large Ziff Ballet Opera House to the intimate yet socially distanced 330-seat Miami Theater Center with *Specials* taking place in diverse venues around the region. She chose venues that were both appropriate for Covid protocol and ideal for unique storytelling experiences.

Replacing the original schedule of *Traviata*, *Otello* (Rossini), *Faust*, Spears' *Fellow Travelers* and a unique *Matrimonio segreto* (transformed into a Spanish language telenovela with a Cuban family set in 1980s Miami), is a season of four short works with contemporary themes from four contemporary American composers: Heggie's *Three Decembers*, dealing with the AIDS crisis; Hagen's *New York Stories*, based on real people's experiences; Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*, depicting a troubled marriage; and Pasatieri's *Signor Deluso*, for a good laugh in these troubled times.

Two of the *Specials* programme take place at the Historic Hampton House Cultural Center, originally an iconic segregation-era motel that hosted celebrities such as Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Muhammad Ali and Martin Luther King Jr. The venue is ideal for presenting an original piece that confronts the opera world's racial divide, *Opera...*

from Sistah's Point of View, as well as an *Evening of Spirituals and Jazz*. The Corpus Christi Church hosts a *Special Evening of Zarzuela and Tribute to Latin American Composers* aimed at South Florida's large Hispanic population. A *Songfest* with recitals by three rising young singers is taking place at the Art Deco Museum in Miami Beach. A complementary live programme is scheduled in nearby Fort Lauderdale.

'For me, live is live,' says Danis. 'Nothing compares to that, and even with Covid, our need for music and art is ever-present. With so much digital content, how do you break through the noise or get noticed, let alone make it economically feasible? However, knowing that for many people it's not safe to go out we have virtual options for all operas and events on our YouTube digital channel: FGO GO!

Financially, Danis admitted it has been a challenge. 'Individual contributions are down by more than 80 per cent, and that has always been the greatest portion of FGO's fundraising revenue. What's kept us going are both the private and public foundations that have continued to support us at the same or increased levels, even when we were not producing at our usual level. The (Federal) CARES Act has been a life-saver.'

The pandemic, however, has given Danis the opportunity to broaden the horizons of her audience with this season of *Shorts and Specials* that in a normal season with four large productions, rarely would have been possible.

Danis is cautiously optimistic about the future of the FGO. 'There has been a lot of talk about opera never being the same again, and this was what the industry needed to look at

things differently. I agree, yet for FGO that doesn't mean we will become a movie studio or only do virtual productions. We all just got hit with a very cold bucket of water and I believe the strategies we have employed to deal with that will serve us well into the future.'

www.fgo.org

On the opposite side of the state with a contrasting philosophy is the Sarasota Opera, whose company's niche is a traditionalist approach to production. Their mission is to recreate (as closely as possible) how the operas would have looked at their *prima assoluta* centuries earlier.

Opera in Sarasota dates back to December 1926, when San Carlo Opera staged *Carmen* and *Martha* in the Edwards Theater, followed by the New York Grand Opera offering *Aida* two years later. An opera drought ensued until the 1950s, when a tiny opera house was reconstructed inside the Ringling Museum called Asolo Theater after the Italian town where it was originally built. A few years later, Turnau Opera

Players, a traveling chamber opera troupe, began annual visits lasting until 1974 when the first home-grown efforts of the Sarasota Opera, originally known as Asolo Opera took place. Covid has led the Sarasota Opera back to its roots, if only for one season, with two (winter/spring) short seasons of chamber opera replacing its customary four operas in its Winter Festival.

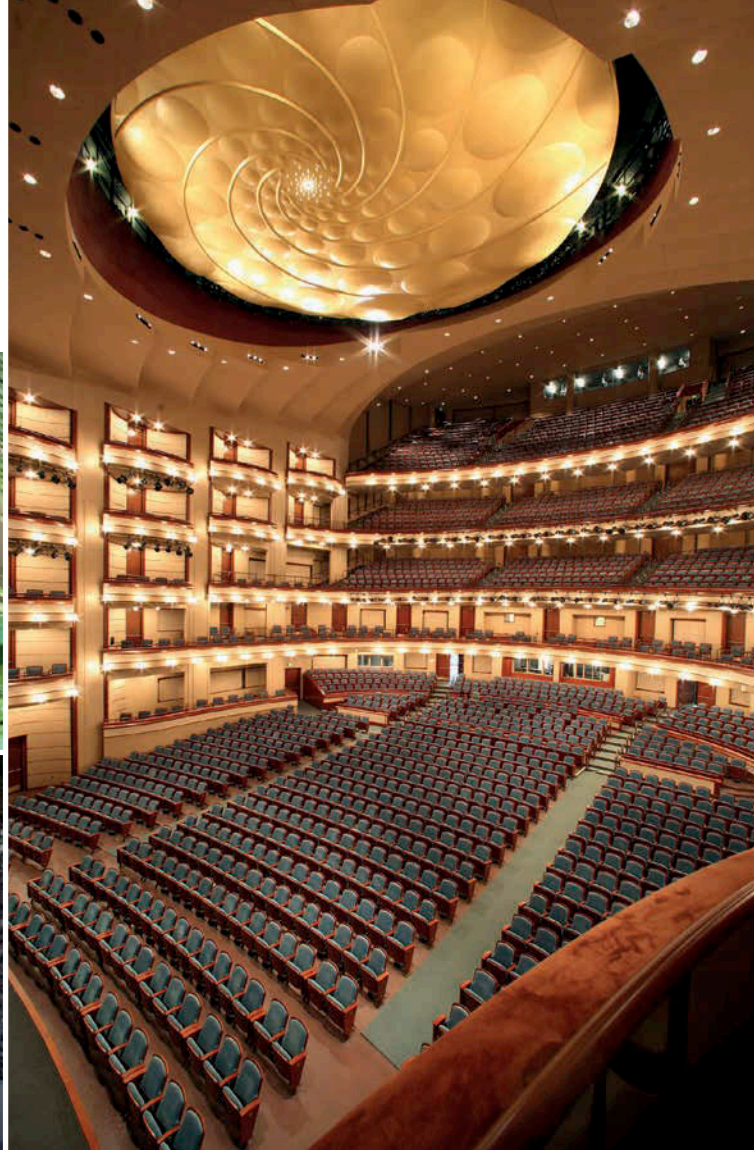
Sarasota's revised season is comprised of traditional works, pairing two rarely performed short Baroque works by Purcell and Pergolesi, with two short Rossini comic operas: *L'inganno felice* / *La serva padrona* (February/March), and *Il signor Bruschino* / *Dido and Aeneas* (April), replacing the originally scheduled Winter Festival *Tosca*, *The Daughter of the Regiment*, *Attila* and *The Pearl Fishers*.

'The primary reason for splitting the season was to keep the company of artists small, to limit the people in the Opera House complex and house them in our Artist Housing, allowing us to implement strict



Susan Danis, general director of Florida Grand Opera: 'For me, live is live ... our need for music and art is ever-present'

During the pandemic, FGO has traded its glamorous home, The Ziff (right), for more intimate local settings such as the Historic Hampton House Cultural Centre and the Art Deco Museum



health and safety protocols,' Sarasota Opera's executive director Richard Russell told me. 'We also anticipate that more people will feel comfortable coming in April as the vaccine is more widely available, so that did figure into our thinking. Because of the success of our autumn outdoor and indoor concerts to socially distanced audiences which replaced our originally scheduled productions of *Don Giovanni* and *The Hobbit*, we felt it important to find a formula to accommodate live audience.'

The key for the company was finding works that could be performed within appropriate constraints regarding the number of singers and musicians while staying true to their mission of performing the operas as the composer intended. The productions will be the same

as if there were no pandemic. Since the audience will be limited to 20 percent of the theatre's capacity, Russell is sure that at least 20 per cent of his regular audience will be interested in something different. However, Russell conceded it will be hard to judge the actual appetite of the audience because in addition to the unfamiliar repertoire, the health situation will factor into attendance.

Although the pandemic has hit all opera companies especially hard, Sarasota Opera is fortunate to have had support from individual donors and private foundations that have been extremely generous in increasing their support to help sustain the company, allowing it to pay out the contracts from their truncated Winter Festival 2020. They have also received support from the Federal

Payroll Protection Program and additional support from the local Sarasota County government that recognises the importance of the arts to the community and workforce. But similar to other American



Richard Russell, executive director of Sarasota Opera: 'While people have enjoyed streaming, many are getting fatigued and look forward to being back in the theatre'

opera companies, they have had full-time staff salary cuts, some limited furloughs, and left several full-time positions open.

Russell feels that there is one positive, if only for one season: the opportunity to steer the repertoire into uncharted waters that the company might explore in the future depending upon the audience's reaction.

He believes in the future of live opera. 'While people enjoy online streaming during Covid, many are getting fatigued with it and look forward to being back in the theatre. Once the vaccines are widely distributed and the number of cases and fatalities abate, our audiences will return to the theatre. It may be a measured return that will take a year or two to get back to pre-Covid levels, but I'm sure they'll be back.' **ON** www.sarasotaopera.org



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Hera from the heart

By Susan Nickalls

A profound faith and a positive philosophy have been sustaining the young South Korean soprano Hera Hyesang Park as she shapes her identity across two different and sometimes conflicting cultures. During the challenges and disappointments of Covid, the release of her first solo album is a chance to celebrate the art singing from two traditions



The timing couldn't have been worse. Just as Hera Hyesang Park was progressing from a young artist to important main stage roles, the coronavirus pandemic struck. Covid-19 has interrupted the careers of so many promising young opera stars and, for the likes of Hera, the setbacks have been substantial: six months of engagements just 'flew away' during 2020. The South Korean soprano was due to sing at the Met in productions of *Hansel and Gretel* at the end of last year and *Don Giovanni* this spring. Both have been cancelled; and despite giving the showcase performances in New York of Huang Ruo's *M. Butterfly* for Santa Fe Opera, she will be unable to perform in the world premiere because of rescheduling clashes. If all goes well, she will sing Despina in Glyndebourne's production of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* in the summer.

Things remain tough for anyone on the global opera stage, but Park, a graduate of the Juilliard and the Met's prestigious Lindemann Young Artist Development Programme, is philosophical: 'Coronavirus is no-one's fault!' She has used the time to practise and work out every day, and for the first time make *kimchi* – traditional Korean spicy cabbage. The most significant development, however, is the recent release of *I am Hera*. Her debut album, for Deutsche Grammophon – 'a big moment for me' – is a breath of fresh arias. Her highly personal selection includes music by Mozart, Puccini, Rossini, Pergolesi and Korean composers Joowon Kim and Un-Yung La. The album is a bold declaration of identity and is also indicative of a sincerity and self-awareness unusual in someone so young.

Hera Hyesang Park at the
Georg Solti Accademia
Gala in Geneva



Above: Making her New York debut as Fiorilla in the Juilliard School's Turco in Italia (2014)

Right: Hera in her Metropolitan Opera debut as the First Wood Sprite in Rusalka (2017)

So who is Hera Hyesang Park? Speaking to me on zoom from her home outside Seoul in January, Park confesses that her original name is Sora which means 'ugly shell'. 'When I was at kindergarten I would go home crying because people bullied me. In Korea, we believe that if you change your name you change your fortune, so my parents took me to a fortune teller

who gave me the name Hyesang. This means "god's blessings" and they said that with this name, I will be big. My family still call me Sora and now that I'm an adult, I like the name more. But for me "Hyesang" is powerful and charismatic. I wanted to combine my two lives, so I took two letters from each name and became Hera.'



With a laugh she adds that Hera makes ordering at Starbucks much easier than Hyesang (pronounced Hay-sang). But even before the fortune teller's interventions, Park says that her mother was convinced her baby was going to be a musician. 'When I was in her belly apparently I would kick all the time whenever I heard music. And then when I was small, whenever the sirens went past going "bee-bo, bee-bo", my mother told me that I would run to the piano and try and match the notes.'

Park started learning the piano at the age of five or six – in Korea you add another year to your age every January no matter what day of the year you were born – and found that she enjoyed the 10-minute singing lesson at the end of the class more than the piano. As a committed Christian she joined a religious choir and won the main prize in a singing competition when she was seven years old. But despite singing a range of repertoire during her 10 years in the choir, it wasn't until Park was at the arts high school that she heard opera for the first time.

'We had a famous store that only sold classical music, so I got an album by Sumi Jo, who is of course a very famous Korean singer. Then my father bought me a CD collection of 50 operas. I picked *La Traviata* first because the costumes were so beautiful, the character looked like a princess. I fell in love with it and started to understand the magic of opera – up until then I had no idea.'

Park also started listening to best-selling international singers in Korea: Cecilia Bartoli, Angela Gheorghiu, Barbara Bonny, Maria Callas and Montserrat Caballé became her role models. By co-incidence, Park sang in Marina Abramović's opera project *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* last year and

'My mum taught me that dreaming big is great because it's free, and that if you dream big, what you want comes a little closer'

her opera debut at university was as Violetta in *La Traviata* at the Korean National Theatre. It was then she realised she could be a professional singer, though it wasn't until she got to the Juilliard in New York that she understood what that meant. 'It really opened my eyes and gave me a broader perspective. With the Met across the street, I started to dream about it. My mum taught me that dreaming big is great because it's free, and that if you dream big, what you want comes a little closer. If you don't dream at all you never make it. So I started to see that the dream was actually happening.'

During Park's time at the Juilliard, the conductor Sir Richard Bonyng (Dame Joan Sutherland's husband), came to give a masterclass in bel canto. Hera was to sing two Bellini arias, one from *La Sonnambula* and the other from *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, and had a personal lesson with Sir Richard the day before. 'He gave me the cadenza Joan Sutherland used to sing in "Care compagne", but he told me I didn't need to do it the next day as it takes a while to embrace it in the body. But I did perform it, and after I sang he smiled and said, "This girl is so brave and I'm so proud of her. I didn't imagine she would study so hard and do this in public," and he immediately invited me to the Georg Solti Accademia in Tuscany.'

It was at the coastal town of Castiglione della Pescaia, where the George Solti Accademia holds its summer masterclasses, that Hera found herself singing ➤



In Gounod's Roméo et Juliette at the Korean National Theatre Opera

for the first time in Italy in front of Italians. Here she learned the art of bel canto with Mariella Devia and Luciana Serra. 'It was beautiful and magnificent and I was so overwhelmingly happy and not scared. Because I was a student, I wasn't afraid to make mistakes, so I just sang and sang. I had so much freedom, it was a joy. The Solti Accademia is very special for me and they have given me a lot of support.'

Bel canto with its coloratura is thrilling to listen to and extremely difficult to sing. As part of her learning process, Park completely changed how she approached it: 'I realised I had to think of myself and my singing as two separate entities. Before I was combining both aspects, so I would be singing in order to fulfil an expectation of myself – and this would constantly be smashed. As opera singers, our instrument is our self. If you take care of your soul and allow yourself to be happy and positive, then the instrument won't keep smashing the beautiful sound. This means you are doing this job in a healthy way. I don't know how other people do it, but to sing bel canto, I absolutely need to find this balance.'

As she speaks, Park clasps her hand over her heart, a gesture that chimes with the strong emotions underpinning her compelling performances and a humbleness which initially caused her, and others, some confusion in America. 'I had a moment at the Juilliard when I wished I could become a foreigner,

because I felt so trapped in my Korean tradition. My parents taught me never to show your feelings and to be humble. In Korea, it's all about the hierarchy: I couldn't say no to a teacher when they were giving their knowledge to me, so if I wanted to question something, I wasn't able to ask. I was a "yes" girl, and I was shocked when my colleagues argued with their teacher. I didn't know how to behave, and then I started to feel uncomfortable about becoming a little bit American – until I realised I am actually totally Korean, and who I am is enough. I can't change who I am, but I can accept the American culture of expressing your feelings. I don't need to be everybody – I am Hera, I am me.'

The depth of emotion Park can summon with her voice also reflects how closely she has bonded with the composers of the music she sings. During the pandemic she had a lot of time to study Mozart, a composer who she says means more in these times than any other because of his humour, positivity and humanity. When she was in Vienna to record her album, she visited the Mozarthaus where he lived for a few years. 'I saw his hair, his violin, I touched his glass and I felt his soul so deeply. I started to cry like a baby – I'd never had that moment before. Mozart spoke to me and I talked to him. I had always thought, I'm a good student I can get the information

Finessing the art of bel canto singing in Tuscany. With (centre) Jonathan Papp, artistic director of the Georg Solti Accademia, and répétiteur Rodrigo de Vera



As opera singers, our instrument is our self. If you take care of your soul and allow yourself to be happy and positive, then the instrument won't keep smashing the beautiful sound.



from what he wrote and do my best to represent it. But then I realised that it wasn't just about singing with what I've learnt, but *feeling* with it. So when I recorded the Mozart arias with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, for the first time I let the songs go from within me in the belief that whatever comes out of my voice is fine. That hadn't happened to me before.'

In Korea after the release of her first album, Park was fêted like a pop star by the media and asked to do numerous interviews and television and radio shows. Like the culture clash in America, she found these pressures tricky to navigate especially when on tour. 'I was losing energy and found myself exhausted. My soul was hurt and my instrument was not working. Then I started to understand that this is part of my job. So no matter how tired I was, I would always go to the practice room and only sing one note or one phrase for one or two hours every day. I was also able to appreciate, and be thankful for, people's attention instead of feeling the pressure and wanting to cancel everything. And that is how I survived.'

Considering her past, it's amazing how far Park has come, as the 32-year-old singer admits herself. As her star continues to rise, she is likely to be even more in demand, particularly as a role model for others. These days, Korean singers have made impressive strides on international opera stages. Park recalls that when she first went to the Met she never saw Asian role-models in leading roles. 'I couldn't dream

big because it seemed impossible. In some ways, that hasn't changed for me. Not because I'm not good enough – Deutsche Grammophon has given me a fantastic opportunity. But I'm religious, and I feel it my duty not to strive for fame, but to open the gate to other people who deserve it. If I only think of my ego, I know I will destroy myself. And I don't want to do that. I want to go a long, long way in my career even if it is along a narrow path, I don't mind.'

Park was recently made an Ambassador for Opera for Peace, a new cultural movement for leading young voices of the world. Along with the honour and privilege of the role, she hopes her association with the organisation will help her to develop the confidence to teach. 'I still regard myself as a student although the organisation is making me feel more responsible. Once I became a professional singer, people's expectations of me shifted. Instead of fully enjoying the singing and not being afraid of making mistakes, I was more cautious. I feel a duty to be good enough for the people who are learning from me, so I still have homework to do. I value every single day and I want people to watch this journey of mine as a person who constantly tries to grow.' **ON**

Hera Hyesang Park's debut album I am Hera, with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra conducted by Bertrand de Billy, is released by Deutsche Grammophon



A woman with red hair styled in an elaborate updo is the central figure. She is wearing a long, sleeveless dress that is completely covered in a dense, multi-colored floral arrangement, including roses, daisies, and various smaller flowers. The background is a dark, textured green, resembling a painted wall or a forest scene. The overall mood is artistic and ethereal.

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Extending the hand of *friendship*

By George Hall

Opera is at the heart of the work of the KT Wong Foundation, which promotes artistic collaboration between China and the rest of the world. The organisation's founder, Lady Linda Wong Davies, explains how her mission has been brought to life through innovative cross-cultural projects

One of today's leading supporters of the arts – and opera in particular – is Lady Linda Wong Davies. She is founder of the KT Wong Foundation which has, over the years, been closely involved with opera as producer or co-producer of many ground-breaking operatic ventures.

Chinese culture lies in Davies' own roots, as well as those of the Foundation she leads. She was born in Singapore and brought up in Malaysia; later she went on to college in California, where she studied economics. The crucial influence on her life, she explains, was her father, Dato Wong Kee Tat, in whose memory the Foundation is named. 'He was an entrepreneur. Like so many emigrant Chinese, his father – my grandfather – initially settled in Indonesia, where my father was born. Later the whole family moved on to Singapore and Malaysia: that's where my father started work at the age of 14 and founded his first trading company at the age of 21.' He would go on to make his fortune in construction, real estate, industry and hotels. >

Lady Linda Wong Davies
on the set of Handel's
Semele, the production
that she sponsored
through her Foundation



Above: A striking moment in artist Zhang Huan's production of *Semele* in Brussels

Below: Britten's *Noyes Fludde* in Belfast Zoo

'Though he never spoke much English, he loved classical music and especially Western opera, and that was what I was brought up on. All day Sunday I would be sitting next to the amplifier and it would invariably be very loud. He loved Italian opera – Puccini in particular, and Verdi of course – and some Mozart. Later on he played quite a lot of French opera, especially *The Tales of Hoffmann*. He would sing and hum along to the music: he absolutely adored it!'

Davies remembers growing up listening to Mario Lanza, Sutherland, Pavarotti, Callas and Di Stefano, 'and then a whole diet of the German symphonic repertoire. I also used to amuse myself by listening to Lieder – Schwarzkopf and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in particular. I can still see all the record sleeves. The only things my father wasn't wild about were Wagner and Baroque music – which are now my absolute passions!'

Eventually she began to attend live performances in Europe. 'As a girl of 19 I was allowed to travel alone. I went to the Vienna Staatsoper and the Salzburg Festival. If I had a friend, I would go with them, but if not I went on my own. I wouldn't do it now, but when you're young, you're ignorant and you're fearless: all I wanted to do was listen to my favourite operas.'



Her father died in 2006. For most people the death of a parent is tumultuous, 'and in my case we had been extremely close: at the core we were very similar. So I wanted to find a way to remember him and what he had taught me and my siblings.'

Like many other successful overseas Chinese, Davies' father had been a great philanthropist. 'They would return to their homeland and build hospitals, schools, libraries and stadiums. My father did all of that for his own village, and even in Malaysia. There he contributed to hospitals and to schools. I'm also very proud of the fact that he actually awarded a prize for best journalism.'

'He was also a man of great foresight. He always told his children that China was a sleeping dragon, and that we should accept and embrace our 5,000-year-old Chinese culture. When we were young, that meant nothing to us – we were only interested in Western culture; but as I grew older, and especially after my father passed away, that changed.'

At the time she launched the Foundation, 13 years ago, China was on the cusp of what she describes as 'a huge coming-out, so to speak. Under Deng Xiaoping it had been developing a capitalist economy under a communist regime. Suddenly, here was this extraordinary economic power, this juggernaut, that you could not stop.'

Yet when Davies returned to China she realised that it was still far behind in terms of understanding what the rest of the world was about; equally, the rest of the world had a very limited understanding and ingrained stereotypical images of what China was about – things like the Terracotta Warriors and the Great Wall and the Forbidden City, but not much else.

'I formed the KT Wong Foundation here in the UK because I wanted it to be governed by the strictest charitable rules, so that we are never called into question anywhere. Our mission statement is to build cultural bridges and understanding through projects and education between China and the rest of the world.'

This, she explains, is not just a one-way but a two-way highway, encouraging talent and culture in both China and the rest of world. 'We've done a lot in the UK, in France, in Belgium and America. We've sponsored a lot of commissions and co-commissions, including from some amazing Chinese composers.' A trumpet concerto written for Alison Balsom by Qigang Chen was heard at the 2014 BBC Proms debut of the China Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Maestro Yu Long, for instance. 'That concert was a huge thing for China.'

Also stressing China's contribution to music in our time have been two BBC documentaries: *Do or Die: Lang Lang's Story*, presented by Alan Yentob for the BBC Two series *Imagine*, and the BBC Four programme *A Hundred Million Musicians*, describing the phenomenal number of Chinese music students now studying Western classical music.



Above: The Dragon in action: Semele in 2018 at the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto

As well as the BBC Proms, the Foundation has also enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship with the Edinburgh Festival. ‘Of course, our range is much wider than just music – theatre companies, ballet companies, contemporary art, architecture and design – but opera has long been central.’

What have been her own personal highlights? ‘Certainly the first opera the Foundation was involved in: a co-production with the Théâtre de la Monnaie of *Semele*.’ (Handel is one of Davies’ particular predilections). It opened in Brussels to considerable acclaim in 2009 and has subsequently been restaged in Beijing, Toronto, and at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York. ‘To design and direct it I chose the visual artist Zhang Huan.’

Zhang is a controversial figure in China – a performance artist who often fell foul of authorities for his extreme work. ‘This really broke the mould,’ says Davies. ‘We were the first people to commission an artist not just to design an opera but to direct as well. It was a bit of a stab in the dark, because Zhang had never seen an opera before, but in the event he gave us something exceptional.’ The opera featured a stunning replica of a ruined 17th-century temple from the Ming Dynasty, which Zhang Huan purchased and used as the basis of an artwork called *My temple*.

Another highlight was *Noyes Fludde*, directed by a young Oliver Mears (currently head of opera at London’s Royal Opera House), originally for Northern Ireland Opera and staged in both Belfast [at the city’s zoo] and Beijing in 2012. ‘We were the first to bring Benjamin Britten opera to China, and I’m

exceedingly proud of that. We engaged Chinese artisans to make traditional lanterns and it was a real melding of Chinese and British culture.’ Hugely well received, the production went on to receive further performances in Shanghai; it was revived by Nevill Holt Opera in Leicestershire, as recently as 2017. Robert Carsen’s production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* also went down extremely well in Beijing in 2016, Davies tells me.

‘If I am allowed a third highlight, it would be *Written on Skin*,’ Davies tells me, referring to George Benjamin’s acclaimed opera from 2012, dealing with visceral themes of seduction, infidelity, violence and revenge. ‘It took me four years to organise it: things don’t happen very fast in China – they need to trust you, especially with something like contemporary opera. I explained to the Beijing Music Festival that this is probably one of the most important pieces of 21st-century opera, and I wanted people the world over to understand that Beijing is the leading Asian music festival.’ *Written on Skin* won success in both Beijing and Shanghai in 2018.

What about future projects? ‘All over the continent of Africa, the biggest investor is China. In our capacity as a foundation that builds bridges between countries – in this instance China and its African brothers and sisters – it’s not enough just to bring Chinese culture to Africa. I’m involved with Cape Town Opera, and I’d like to be able to bring their *Porgy and Bess* to China. Africa is now producing the most extraordinary singers!’ **ON**

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Home & away

By Benjamin Ivry

Opera Now remembers a generation of successful opera singers who established their careers at a time when the growing lure of international travel conflicted with the pull of making a name closer to home

The first decade of the 21st century has seen the demise of a whole generation of great postwar opera singers – and the Covid pandemic has sadly hastened this loss over the past year. As lockdowns and border regulations continue to limit our movement, it seems timely to remember a world when the increasing ease of international travel and pull of a major career on the world stage suddenly came into sharp contrast, and often conflict, with the human impulse to retain ties to home.

The mezzo-soprano **Kerstin Meyer** (1928–2020) who died last April, was an almost quintessential Scandinavian in her ability to transcend borders. Her smooth, rich tones were heard at the Royal Swedish Opera, but also in Hamburg, Berlin, Milan, New York, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, and London's Covent Garden. At the latter, she was assigned the heart of the repertory: Ulrica, Eboli, Amneris, Dalila, Fricka and Erda, while also starring in the title role of Gottfried von Einem's *The Visit of the Old Lady* at Glyndebourne in its 1974 UK premiere. Following an appetite for contemporaneity, in Hamburg she was also heard in Alexander Goehr's *Arden Must Die* (1967) and Humphrey Searle's *Hamlet* (1968).

Meyer's willed international ambitions were sparked by a family tragedy in 1961. She was cosily ensconced at the Stockholm Opera, working with colleagues such as Birgit Nilsson, Nicolai Gedda and Elisabeth Söderström when during a side-trip to Glyndebourne for a production of Henze's

Elegy for Young Lovers, she was notified that her parents had been killed in a car accident back home. After a rush home to be at her mother's bedside, she resumed rehearsals. What else could she have done? Replacing her in a contemporary work for which no understudies had been assigned was impossible. After that, Meyer launched into a furious round of international engagements in a lengthy attempt to banish memories of home; her performing travels were halted only by a throat cancer operation in 1984.

Less of a voluntary decision was the global trajectory of the bass **Carlos Feller** (1922–2018), born Kalman Felberbaum in a Jewish family in what is now Zolochiv, Ukraine. Before the rise of Fascism in 1930s Europe, his parents presciently relocated the family to safety in Montevideo and Buenos Aires, where Feller trained with the coloratura soprano Editha Fleischer at the Teatro Colón opera school. Feller's debut at the Colón in 1946 was as the doctor in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and he later carved out a reputation as Leporello, Bartolo, and Don Alfonso in Mozart operas. He

Kerstin Meyer: channelling personal grief into a successful international career



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Top left: Carlos Feller, a worldly artist who made his Met Opera debut in his mid-sixties

Middle: Barry McDaniel, one of the first American singers to lay the foundations of his career in Europe

Top right: Arlene Saunders, another early American implant in the Teutonic opera world

would travel the world with these characters, singing in Cologne, Munich, London, Paris and Brussels, with a debut at the New York Metropolitan Opera as Don Alfonso in his mid-sixties.

Other voyaging vocalists became international transplants, assimilating with apparent chameleon-like skill. The Kansas-born baritone **Barry McDaniel** (1930–2018), after studies with Mack Harrell at the Juilliard School of Music, was airlifted to Germany on a Fulbright scholarship. Before long, McDaniel became a fixture at the Deutsche Oper Berlin from 1962 until 1999, singing over 1,800 performances in premieres of 54 productions at that house alone. Convincing in *baryton-noble* roles, he mastered both German- and French-language repertoire from Gluck and Mozart and appeared in the premieres of Roger Sessions' *Montezuma* (1964), Henze's *Der junge Lord* (1965), and the South Korean Isang Yun's *The Dream of Liu-Tung* (1965). His smooth, astutely budgeted voice was also heard as Wolfram in *Tannhäuser* at Bayreuth in 1964, although his Metropolitan Opera debut as Pelléas was not until 1972, a sign of the degree to which Europe, rather than his homeland, stayed the focus of his career.

McDaniel remained an American abroad, like the Cleveland-born spinto soprano **Arlene Saunders** (1930–2020) who died last April from Covid-19. As her vocal category implies, lyrical and dramatic roles were within her reach, and after early experience in America, she joined the Hamburg State Opera in 1964. This remained her base for subsequent years as invitations arrived from Glyndebourne to sing Pamina in 1966 and Covent Garden, where she was Minnie in Puccini's *La fanciulla del West* in 1980, only

five years before her stage farewell as the Marschallin in *Rosenkavalier* at the Teatro Colón.

Saunders was photogenic, like McDaniel with whom she performed, notably in a 1972 German TV film of Carl Millöcker's operetta *Gasparone*, the sort of fare rarely seen or heard outside the German-speaking world. That two American implants should have been cast as representative proponents of this ultra-Teutonic repertoire says something about the degree to which both were embraced by their adoptive culture.

Still other opera noteworthies were anchored to home, remaining loyal to a fault to their places of origin. The mezzo-soprano **Rosalind Elias** (1930–2020), who died in May last year, was born in Massachusetts to a family of Lebanese origin. After studies at the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, she settled in at the Metropolitan Opera, where her debut was as Grimmerde, a daughter of Wotan, in *Die Walküre* in 1954. Elias would appear almost 700 times there subsequently in over 50 roles, including Carmen, Suzuki, Cherubino, Dorabella, Octavian, Azucena, Amneris, Charlotte and an especially memorable Witch in *Hänsel und Gretel*. One of the rare occasions when she was heard abroad was in 1958, after an opera she had premiered at the Met, Samuel Barber's opera *Vanessa*, was seen at the Salzburg Festival in 1958. Otherwise, her scant list of UK performances features Rossini's *Cenerentola* with the Scottish Opera in 1970 and Baba the Turk in Stravinsky's *Rake's Progress* at Glyndebourne in 1975 and again in 1977.

With a focused voice, especially in her earlier years, and an agile stage presence, Elias became a favourite

of tetchy conductors from Fritz Reiner to Leonard Bernstein, and although her instrument may not have been the most lustrous, it was enough to extend to a Broadway debut at age 81 in a revival of Stephen Sondheim's *Follies*, where she sang the faux-operetta aria 'One More Kiss'. Even later, in 2013, she cameoed as Madelon in Giordano's *Andrea Chénier* alongside Roberto Alagna at a concert performance with the Opera Orchestra of New York at Avery Fisher Hall.

Such persistence and sedentary determination required stalwartness akin to Martin Luther's alleged statement, 'Here I stand'. Elias herself displayed comparable grit on 11 October 1961, a day on which her fellow Americans were jittery over Soviet underground nuclear testing. Elias paid for a large advert in the *New York Times* blaring the personal message to her fans: 'I Am Not Afraid'.

If stubborn fearlessness be required to mostly remain at home for an entire operatic career, then the French baritone **Jean-Christophe Benoît** (1925–2019) was among the dauntless. Collectors of opera recordings will recognize Benoît's name as a characterful performer in a variety of roles, including Dancaïre in four studio versions of Bizet's *Carmen*, led by conductors from Thomas Beecham to Herbert von Karajan. This reliability was nurtured in a cocoon of musical expertise that made it understandable why he should never want to flee Paris. His mother was a composer, and his father a violist in the celebrated Capet Quartet in the 1920s. He married the soprano Monique Linval, a pupil of Ninon Vallin, and studied at the Paris Conservatory

where his harmony instructor was Olivier Messiaen, no less.

Benoît developed a rustic, highly Gallic charm combined with lightness and gusto that served him well during a long career, including world premiere performances in Geneva of Frank Martin's *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1963) based on a comedy by Molière, and Darius Milhaud's *La Mère coupable* (1966) in which he sang the lead role of Beaumarchais' Figaro. Yet these and a few other occasions apart, such as a 1958 appearance at la Scala as Torquemada in Ravel's *L'heure espagnole*, Benoît chose to remain in France, and indeed, with such depth of understanding of his native repertoire, why undergo the rigors of expatriation?

The enchanting Austrian coloratura **Wilma Lipp** (1925–2019) was another stay-at-home, quite happy to remain at the Vienna State Opera, where she was an unsurpassed Queen of the Night, Konstanze, Zerbinetta, Adele and Olympia. Her repertoire extended to Verdi's *Ballo in maschera* and the title role in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Why wouldn't she feel at home in Vienna? She had been awarded the honorary title of Kammersängerin at the young age of 28.

Lipp's principal mentors were equally dyed-in-the-wool Austrians, including the bass-baritone Alfred Jerger, who created the role of Mandryka in Richard Strauss' *Arabella*, and Anna von Mildenburg, Mahler's Brünnhilde in a Wagner *Ring* cycle in 1895. Lipp's supple, bright voice later acquired more lyrical overtones in roles such as Countess Almaviva, Donna

Below left: American mezzo Rosalind Elias rarely strayed from home, appearing at The Met 700 times

Middle: Rolando Panerai: Italian in essence

Below: Wilma Lipp: Queen of the Vienna State Opera





Above: Alexander Vedernikov: limited by the political constraints of the Soviet era

Elvira, Pamina, Musetta and Violetta. As David Chernivasky noted in the *Musical Times* of November 1951, Lipp's Queen of the Night at Salzburg that year, conducted by Furtwängler, was remarkable for its 'magnificent ease'. Insofar as ease is difficult to describe or evoke verbally, Lipp tended to be taken for granted by reviewers, although wildly applauded by punters.

Ease and warmth were certainly the bywords of the baritone **Rolando Panerai** (1924–2019), Italian in his essence as a much-appreciated Ford in Verdi's *Falstaff* and in the title role in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*. Fond of Verdi rarities such as *Giovanna d'Arco*, *La battaglia di Legnano* and *Aroldo*, even when Panerei sang Wagner, he did so in Italian, as a 1950 recording as Amfortas in *Parsifal*, with Maria Callas as Kundry, proves. Like Benoît, Panerei was the go-to guy for certain roles, with unique linguistic verve and emotional commitment. He was Ford in three different recordings of *Falstaff*, including versions led by Karajan and Bernstein.

Recommended recordings:

Kerstin Meyer **Great Swedish Singers: Kerstin Meyer** Bluebell ABCD100
 Carlos Feller **Mozart: The Marriage of Figaro** VAI VAIA1282-3
 Barry McDaniel **Weill: The Tsar Has his Photograph Taken** Capriccio C60007-1
 Arlene Saunders **Mozart: Il re pastore** BMG-RCA CD 74321 50165-2
 Rosalind Elias **Prokofiev: Alexander Nevsky** BMG 09026637082
 Jean-Christophe Benoît **Bizet: Carmen** Warner Classics 9029547231
 Wilma Lipp **Strauss: Die Fledermaus** Decca ELQ4827379
 Rolando Panerai **Rolando Panerai: Prima Voce** Nimbus NI7949
 Peter Schreier **Strauss: Capriccio** DG E4453472
 Theo Adam **Wagner: Der fliegende Holländer** Warner Classics 4564702
 Alexander Vedernikov **Tchaikovsky: Queen of Spades** Melodiya MELCD1002549

Just as strong bonds attached Lipp to Austria and Panerei to Italy, so the tenor **Peter Schreier** (1935–2019) and bass **Theo Adam** (1926–2019) were essentially creations of the hyper-cultivated city of Dresden. Each had emerged from the Dresdner Kreuzchor, the boys' choir of their city's Kreuzkirche. Schreier had a somewhat astringent sound tempered by acute musicality which later allowed him to have a plausible career as a conductor of vocal-related works, unlike tenors who attract applause from fans nostalgic for their glory days when they led orchestras with only vague proficiency.

Schreier excelled in Mozartian portrayals as well as Flamand in Strauss's *Capriccio*, Loge in Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, and the title role of Pfitzner's *Palestrina*. He sang in over 60 operas, perhaps a surprisingly number for someone also noted for oratorio and lieder.

As a plush basso profundo, Adam was a more uneven vocalist, with occasional ragged episodes even when relatively young, but bringing massive authority as a Wagnerian, especially as Wotan in Wagner's *Ring*. The public personas of the two Saxons were utterly dissimilar.

Appearing on an adulatory German interview programme hosted by the opera administrator August Everding, in 1990 Adam seemed accustomed to hero worship, like a self-assured captain of industry or high-ranking politician. By comparison, on Everding's programme in 1994, Schreier cut through the fawning at once, curtly informing the host that the encomium of 'Herr Kammersänger' was unnecessary and it was fine to address him simply as 'Mr Schreier'.

A line must be drawn between opera performers who elected to remain in situ and those required to do so. The splendid Russian bass **Alexander Vedernikov** (1927–2018) was basically a national phenomenon in such roles as Boris Godunov and Italian buffo assignments, due to travel restrictions by the tyrannical Soviet regime. He was allowed on occasion to tour internationally as a valued soloist of the Leningrad Kirov Theatre of Opera and Ballet (today's Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg) and Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre. Yet like all performers under oppressive regimes, Vedernikov had to sedulously tend his political image. Elizabeth Wilson's *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (Princeton University Press, 2006) recalls that Shostakovich asked Vedernikov to sing the bass part in his Symphony No 13 in B-flat minor (*Babi Yar*; 1962). At first, Vedernikov was chuffed, but then abruptly declined when he realised that the settings of texts by Yevgeny Yevtushenko were highly critical of the all-powerful regime.

Whether prudently staying in place or fleeing to more clement territory, voluntarily or by *force majeure*, singers of the recent past have won cherished places in the memory of opera lovers. **ON**

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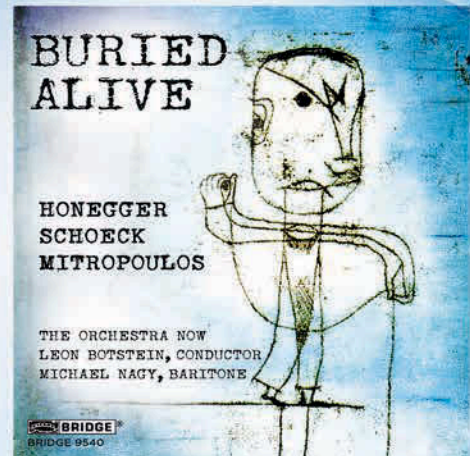
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Keeping spirits high

By Michael White

Opera singers have seen their careers on the brink of the abyss during the pandemic. Soprano Mary Bevan is one high-profile singer who has provided inspiration and hope to her friends and colleagues throughout lockdown

Asked for a single-word response to all that's happened under Covid, some of us would say 'Despair'. But others have turned desperation into something more productive than a good cry on the sofa. And when history chronicles how British music-making coped against the odds, there will be glowing paragraphs (at least) for the soprano Mary Bevan who did more than cope – repurposing the north-east London churchyard on her doorstep as an ad hoc opera venue to which audiences, singers, and assorted luminaries of the arts world flocked (along with passers-by) when there was damn-all going on elsewhere.

The venture was called Music at the Tower, after the belltower of St Mary's Hornsey that supplied a backdrop to the shows. They happened in the open air, which made them Covid-viable but weather-risky. And they involved Bevan cajoling her friends (she has a good address-book) and family (a sprawling musical dynasty, including her soprano sister Sophie) into turning up for some extraordinary events. Not least a *Dido and Aeneas* conducted by Trevor Pinnock, and an opera 'gala' (more a noisy picnic really) with the likes of Brindley Sherratt, Nicky Spence, Natalya Romaniw and a platoon of Bevans on the platform. Plus Sir Mark Elder out front, leading the applause from a collapsing garden chair.

VICTORIA GOSCH

The gung-ho spirit of it all, with no conspicuous barriers between the singers and the sung-to, happily proved more infectious than the virus, building a momentum that extended through the summer into autumn. And it's given Bevan pause for thought about what happens next in her career – because, as she admits, putting Music at the Tower together 'gave me a real hit of energy after the weeks of doing nothing in lockdown: the social buzz that's half the reason I'm in this business. It used a different part of my brain, and I found it addictive'.

Up to now, her addictions have been more straightforwardly focused on performing, even though she came to it by a circuitous route. Born into a family of 11 siblings – all of whom were co-opted into their father's Catholic church choir and raised on 16th-century polyphony – she was singing in public from the age of twelve. But then she went to Cambridge to read Anglo-Saxon, with ideas of becoming an academic. And although she was at Trinity, which has a celebrated mixed-voice choir, she didn't sing in it. They turned her down because her voice was too full-blooded in the European Catholic way, rather than decorously Anglican. But a sound that didn't suit choral evensong did end up suiting the university opera society where she sang Susanna in *Figaro*. And from then on, passing through the Royal Academy, it developed fast, making up for lost time.

Initially she found herself following in her sister Sophie's footsteps, with potential awkwardness. 'There's only a year-and-a-bit between us in age, but Sophie had been out there quite a lot longer than me because she went straight to music college; so professionally I was three or four years behind her, with a lighter voice and pitching for different roles at a different level. Not in competition. But we knew that if we *did* end up auditioning for the same roles, we could handle it because we're actually best friends. We talk a lot, we hang around together: it's a big sisterly thing.'

In fact the extent to which the Bevan sisters found themselves hanging around – as Elvira (Sophie) and Zerlina (Mary) in the same Garsington *Don Giovanni*, or as side-by-side soloists in the same Edinburgh Festival *Mass in B minor* – was impressive. And there have been joint recording projects too.

But with a smart, seductive, sassy energy that (no exaggeration) lights up stages, Mary has turned out to be distinctive: very much a major player in her own right. She's a beacon on the period performance circuit – with the OAE, Academy of Ancient Music, English Concert et al. For ENO she's sung Despina, Susanna, Yum-Yum, Papagena, Eurydice (Offenbach), as well as the premiere of Nico Muhly's *Two Boys*. For the Royal Opera there's been Euridice (Monteverdi), the title role in Rossi's *Orpheus*, and Turnage's new *Coraline*.

Needless to say, 2020 was almost a write-off, but she did manage to keep hold of a *Fidelio* in

'I've tried not to dwell on all the cancellations and treat them like parking tickets: you pay the fine and forget about it'

Copenhagen – 'and I don't know what I'd have done without that in the diary. It's been awful otherwise, but I've tried not to dwell on all the cancellations and treat them like parking tickets: you pay the fine and forget about it. It's the only way'.

The down-time, though, has offered certain opportunities. 'In recent years there hasn't been time to think about technique and moving onto the next level of singing, which is actually my big priority. It's been rare for me even to have a lesson. But in lockdown, that's changed. I want to be a better singer with a bigger voice, and I'm working on it. And though I'm not abandoning the Mozart and Handel I've sung to date, I've got my sights on Strauss and Puccini. I think I can do it. I just need to convince everyone else, and be rock-solid'.

It was pondering all this that Bevan and her lockdown partner, the young bass Will Thomas, found themselves taking their lawful exercise in Hornsey churchyard and came up with the idea of open-air performances. The project ticked assorted boxes, offering paid work for singers who were struggling but at the same time addressing some standard issues about how the opera world engages with its public.

Below: As Eurydice in English National Opera's Orpheus in the Underworld



Right: As Despina in ENO's *Così fan tutte*



'Paying the performers was important, because I didn't see why they should work for nothing. And though we didn't charge admission, a donations system meant we were able to book 128 artists over the weeks at a basic fee of £130. So that was good. But it was also important to be doing something that really connected with people, in a grassroots way that brought music to their doorstep.

Below: Music at the Tower featured a starry cast performing Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* with Trevor Pinnock conducting

'Contact with an audience is what performance is about, and organising these events made me realise how much I love it. Every time we did a concert, there was a lot of emotion, on all sides. And if

nothing else, the informality gave Hornsey residents a chance to see that singers are normal, not just posh people in nice dresses'.

The success of Music at the Tower has prompted Bevan to explore possibilities for this summer. *Cunning Little Vixen*, *Acis and Galatea* and *Turn of the Screw* are on her wish list if she can get the money together, though being available to organise everything may prove difficult if the world edges back to some kind of normality. Whatever the case, musicians are unlikely to enjoy the fruits of a normal life for many months to come, and the fundraising initiatives around Music at the Tower will be a vital lifeline for many this summer.

Meanwhile, battling travel logistics, Mary has just been in Amsterdam for the premiere of James MacMillan's new *Christmas Oratorio*. Covid-willing, she has a Signum recording of *Les Illuminations* due in May. And there's an *Ariodante* at the Bolshoi in the summer, sharing the stage yet again with her sister. As she says, pointedly, 'I'm not done with singing yet'. But having proved her worth as a mover and shaker in time of crisis, she has things to offer opera that extend beyond the voice – talents a good few British companies will have noted. **ON**

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STAY IN THE KNOW



Part 3: The composer

By Susan Nickalls

First comes the music... Opera is often seen as a rite of passage for a composer, all the more so at a time when the limitations on performances in a global pandemic have coincided with the need for composers to address opera's changing role in society as they embrace myriad new ways of reaching audiences via technological innovation

OPPOSITE PAGE

Top right: Will Todd: 'Are you telling me that Verdi and Puccini wouldn't be interested in what modern amplification could do?'

Right: Emily Hall: 'There is a sense that the old ways are no longer appropriate'

While sets and costumes may come and go, the eternal beating heart of opera is always the music. But unlike other art forms, opera over the centuries has traditionally resisted all but the most cosmetic of changes until recently. The pandemic has forced many composers to rethink how they write for the medium. In order to have their work performed, composers have had to adapt opera for online consumption or performances outside traditional opera houses and concert halls.

British composer Nigel Osborne believes this trend was happening anyway and that current circumstances have just accelerated things. Osborne has had his operas performed in venues from Glyndebourne to Sarajevo's National Theatre, but

he was able to reach a much larger audience online with his recent short film for Opera Circus, *Osman Bey and the Snails*, with over 60,000 views. It was one of the first operas created and disseminated online during lockdown and was Osborne's response to the imprisonment of his friend and fellow human rights campaigner, Osman Kavala.

'This colossal injustice also put the arts in prison alongside Osman in Turkey, so I decided to fight back with culture. As there was no way to get people together last spring, we were forced to find another solution to create, rehearse and perform the opera online. It was a revelation to me how much we could achieve and how new kinds of creativity could emerge from such a situation. There were big challenges – at one point Robert Golden, the film maker, had to re-synchronise the same passage nine times – but also big opportunities.'

Osborne has a longstanding interest in immersive technologies and had already planned to build Virtual Reality (VR) installations into *Naciketa*, his forthcoming Opera Circus production at the Southbank. But even he was amazed by what could be done with simple things like phones, microphones and different light angles. 'We were able to produce the type of textured work you wouldn't usually see in an opera house or cinema. As a novel medium, immersive technologies have still to find their true place. Opera is a mixture of disciplines you don't know are there, as they've fused so well over the centuries. So immersive technologies will have grown into being a part of opera the moment we don't notice them. It's an exciting time for the younger generation who will see these things develop to the point where maturing technology has to go into opera, and vice versa. This moment is also an opportunity for opera and other art forms to relocate themselves in society so that they are more integrated into the lives of human beings.'

Many of Will Todd's operas are rooted in the community and as such involve large forces, typically

Lore Lixenburg and Nadine Benjamin in Nigel Osborne's *Osman and the Snail*, one of the first operas to be created and disseminated online during lockdown



the productions most likely to have been hit hardest by the pandemic. *Migrations*, due to open last year for Welsh National Opera (WNO), has been rescheduled for the autumn. 'With a full orchestra, soloists, Bollywood performers, a 100-strong chorus made up of WNO singers and a community and children's chorus, it is opera at its biggest and most flamboyant so it would have been a big challenge to scale down those forces. It's always easier to enlarge works from an orchestration point of view, because when you slim it down you lose the acoustic effect. One of the most exhilarating aspects of opera is the interplay between the sound of the soloist on a high note, almost subsumed beneath the orchestra where there is so much power coming out.'

Todd's community opera for Opera North, *Song of our Heartland*, after initially being cancelled was turned into a film project last summer. Although the orchestration didn't change, he had to rethink the whole way the opera was prepared. 'Normally you rehearse with the singers and piano, integrating the orchestra relatively late in the day. This means the conductor has access to all the timings so they can support the singers. But we had to do that in reverse' ➤

GRABER BOWATT



GANT TRAIN

Below: A scene from Emily Hall's *Found and Lost*, a promenade performance at London's Corinthia Hotel

with complicated recording setups to guide the singers as we didn't have previous performances on which to base the timings. We were, however, able to film in the Railway Museum in York, where the opera was to have been performed, but it was quite a feat to reconfigure the project.'

Going forward, Todd believes that opera commissioners and singers need to be more flexible, especially when it comes to using new technology. 'Even a classical composer like myself uses it, but although the skills are there, we're not integrating them enough with training. There are still a lot of singers who struggle to use mikes well, and we need to be less apologetic about using them in an opera house. Are you telling me that Verdi and Puccini wouldn't be interested in what modern amplification

could do? There is already discrete main flow miking which allows voices to be projected into space on stage, and everything is miked up if you take an acoustic opera outside. If opera companies invest in really good technical departments there's no reason why they can't tour a production to different locations or make it work in Wembley Arena. It's not hard from a technical point of view.'

Emily Hall is fortunate in that she has technical support on hand to help develop her creative ideas in the form of her husband, the contemporary opera sound designer David Sheppard. As a composer who tends to write smaller scale work for site specific venues, Hall is in many ways ahead of the curve. 'I don't write for orchestra or rely on the concert hall, but even so there is a sense that the old ways are no longer appropriate. Although I got things done in the first lockdown it wasn't a creative time for me, but I feel the current situation has forced new ideas on me which I'm excited about. I thrive on limitations as it gives me something to bounce off. I'm also used to being resourceful, working with smaller budgets and bringing in people I know and like working with.'

Hall's latest project, *Fossegrim* (a musical Norwegian water-sprite) is inspired by Ibsen's poem *Spillemaend* (Fiddlers) about a capricious Hardanger fiddle-playing troll who can be persuaded to teach mortals how to play, but at a price. She's working with writer Melanie Golding, director Frederic Wake-Walker and Sheppard to produce an audio experiential opera walk. Instead of going to a particular venue at a certain time, she says this immersive art form will mean people can listen to the music through headphones at a time, and in a location, of their choosing. 'It's a production that wears itself lightly – we take people outside and use nature as a backdrop. They can find a local lake, waterfall or fountain and inhabit the story so that they're physically part of the experience. There will be various dramatic beats so that the person feels things the same way they would in a theatre.'

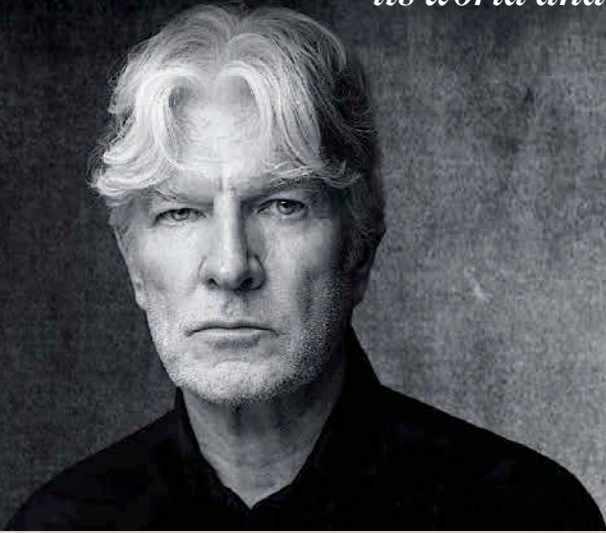
It's a similar idea to *Found and Lost*, Hall and Sheppard's opera installation at London's Corinthia Hotel where audiences walked through the hotel holding speakers playing recorded music. Furthermore, *Fossegrim* is a safe opera experience for pandemic times as there will be no need to travel and with no expensive sets and costumes the ticket prices will be lower.

Given the budget constraints likely to be in place for the foreseeable future, opera companies will need new technology to create a range of opera experiences that expand and broaden their audience base. And while there will always be demand for large-scale productions of popular repertoire, the times we're in have kick-started a powerful evolution of the artform. **ON**



SM GUNTER/CORBIS

‘Opera needs to invite barbarians like me with new ideas into its world and let them have a go’



Written in the stars

Susan Nickalls talks to former rock star **Tim Finn** who has just written his first opera, *Ihitai ‘Avei’a – Star Navigator*, to be premiered by New Zealand Opera this March

Along with new technologies, opera is also being reshaped by composers from other musical genres. New Zealander Tim Finn was a member of the rock bands Split Enz and Crowded House in the 1970s/1980s and *Ihitai ‘Avei’a – Star Navigator* is his first opera. The premiere of the concert performance for New Zealand Opera features songs by Finn alongside Célestine Hitiura Vaite’s Tahitian monologues. It eavesdrops on Tahitian priest and star navigator Tupaia (tenor Amitai Pati), and Captain James Cook (bass-baritone Paul Whelan) during their voyage from Tahiti to Batavia in 1769.

Finn fell into writing the opera by accident after telling his friend Carolyn Shard at Western Australia Opera about his visit to a replica of Cook’s ship, *Endeavour*, with his son 12 years ago. ‘Sitting in the great cavern at the stern of the boat, I imagined the psychological collision between Cook and Tupaia in this compressed space. The more I read about them the more I was drawn to how the two navigators couldn’t find their way into each other’s world. Tupaia felt superior to Cook while Cook felt threatened by Tupaia’s innate charisma and nobility. The crew thought Tupaia was arrogant because he wouldn’t eat the food, but who could blame him? The sauerkraut Cook pushed into the crew to prevent scurvy was filled with maggots.’

Never thinking for a minute that he was pitching an opera to Shard, Finn found that she was drawn to the idea and NZ Opera came on board shortly after. At that time Finn knew very little about the medium. As a songwriter who writes the tunes first, he found that being given a set characters and a narrative was a real

gift. ‘You’re not having to plumb your own life for a theme which is a liberation for a songwriter like me. The biggest challenge was how to get rid of the recitatives and still maintain the energy of a narrative through line. When Celestine came on board it felt like the opera was going to be something different, so we stripped out most of the recits.’

During the workshop process, *Ihitai ‘Avei’a – Star Navigator* became more like a Singspiel or semiopera with songs that pop in and out of the story. Finn enjoyed the experience so much he’s looking to write a comic opera next. He also found the opera world more open than pop culture but believes the art form would benefit by engaging with more people like him. ‘Opera needs to invite barbarians like me with new ideas into its world and let them have a go. It’s scary as the opera crowd doesn’t necessarily want to see new opera but many people are worried about its future. What seems to have happened is that there’s a corrupting influence whereby they keep on doing the same old operas – brilliant works of genius – in new and ever more expensive ways.’

The theme of Finn’s opera is, ‘who is going to lead us through this and where are we going?’ – a pertinent question, not for this story but the future of opera in these times.

Ihitai ‘Avei’a – Star Navigator receives its world premiere run on 19 & 20 March 2021 in Auckland.

www.nzopera.com

Above: Tim Finn and Célestine Hitiura Vaite journey across the cultural divide in their new opera

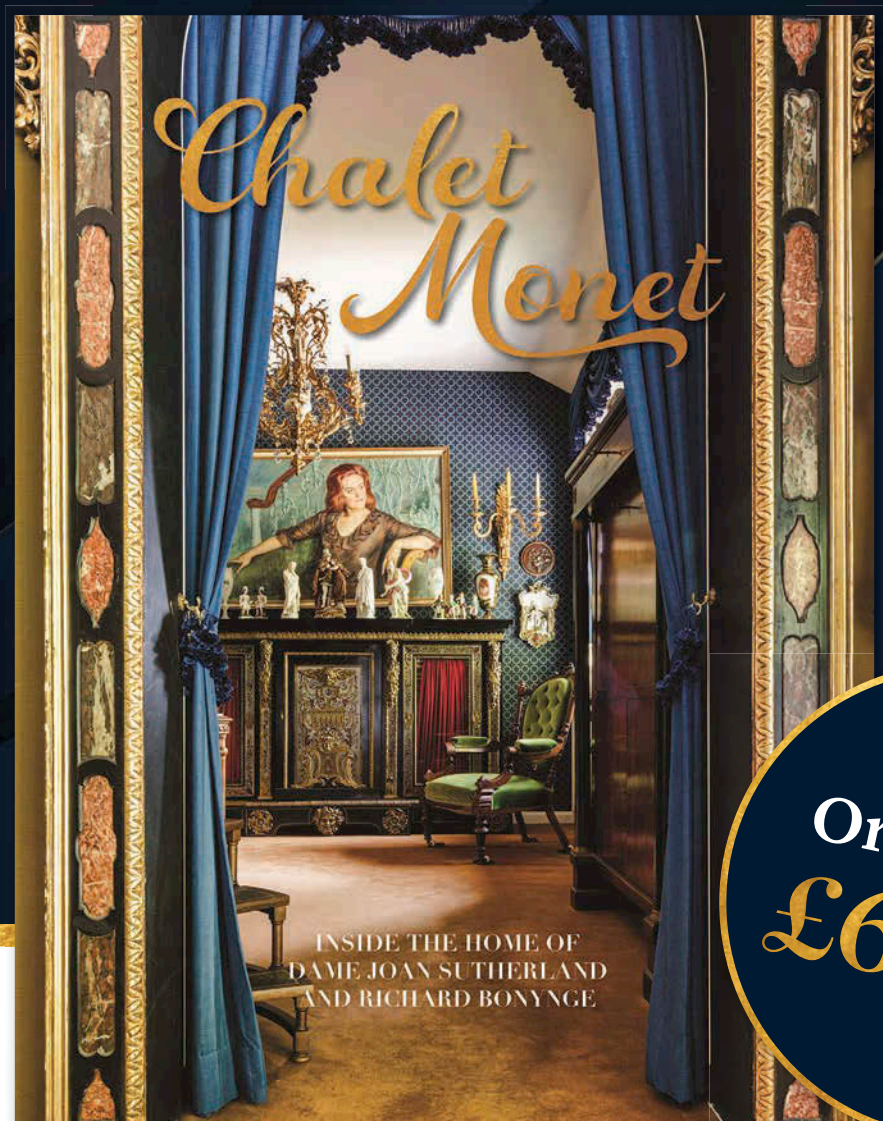
Below: A French Polynesian stamp depicting the encounter between the Tahitian priest Tupaia and Captain Cook



CHALET MONET

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and Richard Bonyng*

Author: Richard Bonyng. Foreword by Marilyn Horne. Photos: Dominique Bersier



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Travels from my *armchair*



Professor Anthony Ogus satisfies his operatic Wanderlust during lockdown by sharing his experiences of the rich variety of operas that are now available to stream from opera houses around the world

Being a glutton for live opera, I've never been a natural enthusiast for watching performances on screen – even in the cinema. I miss, of course, the atmosphere of a theatre and I resent being unable to control what I choose to see with my own eyes rather than through the lens of a camera. But, in the absence of live performances over the course of the past year, I have had no choice, and have been forced to develop an expertise in discovering opera through streaming while stuck at home.

The richness of what is available in terms of the range of works, reputation of performers and their geographical location is, indeed, remarkable. Many will be attracted by starrily cast relays from the major houses. One of the highlights of my streaming experiences has been the 200th anniversary performance of Rossini's *La gazza ladra* (The Thieving Magpie) from La Scala. With its odd mixture

of comedy, tragedy and fantasy, this work poses problems for performance and it has not achieved the popularity which is its due. Riccardo Chailly in the pit, with his sensitive, well-accentuated, delivery of the score showed what we had been missing. And Gabriele Salvatores' astute, entertaining production solved the staging problem by using an acrobat to represent the eponymous thieving magpie, swinging in different postures throughout. There were particularly strong vocal contributions from soprano Rosa Feola and bass Michele Pertusi.

Some will be more interested in pursuing performances by particular singers. I still harbour a grievance from the occasion when Anna Netrebko withdrew from a Covent Garden cast, so was determined to savour her attributes. Available is her first (2013) *Il Trovatore*, a performance from the Staatsoper Berlin which allowed me to understand what all the fuss was about: immaculate technique,

Above: An astute and entertaining *La gazza ladra* from La Scala



AMPHIBIUS



LAMBERTO



Top: Justifying all the fuss: Anna Netrebko in her first *Trovatore* with Plácido Domingo at the Staatstheater Berlin

Above: Dmitri Tcherniakov's compelling *Invisible City of Kitezh* at the Dutch National Opera

variety in volume and tone, and above all a feeling for the Verdian line. So also the Norwegian soprano Lise Davidsen, whom I missed seeing live when Covent Garden's *Fidelio* was cancelled last year. She displayed in her *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the 2018 Aix Festival a warm, creamy soprano, communicating the emotional core of Strauss' melodic line.

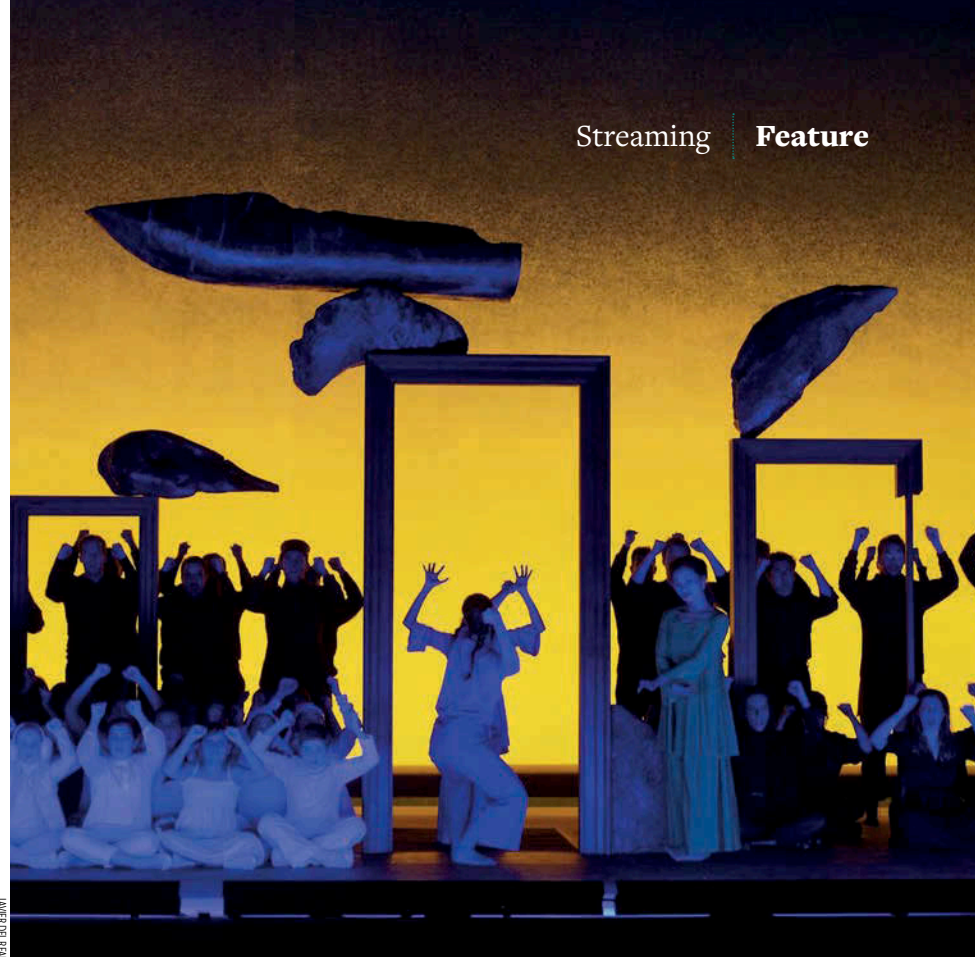
Others will prefer to fill gaps in their operatic experiences. Having only two Verdi operas left to see, I was eager to encounter these. Verdi's *Il Corsaro* from Parma (filmed in 2008) was disappointing. The

work itself is well below par, the main problem being Piave's libretto which is little more than a series of conventional dramatic episodes. And though one might expect quality of performance at Parma, home of the Festival Verdi, standards there were not high in this production. The grouping and movement in Lamberto Puggelli's staging were drearily platitudinous, with the soloists mainly limiting dramatic expression to arm gestures and facial anguish or ecstasy.

Happily, Verdi's *Aroldo*, given at the Teatro Municipale in the northern Italian town of Piacenza



JAN DE REIJDER



Above left: A vibrant production of *Der Schmied von Gent* from the Flanders Opera in Antwerp

Above: Beauty and restraint from director Peter Sellars in the Teatro Real's *Persephone*

was far more impressive. It is a revision of the composer's earlier *Stiffelio* which, because it focused on the adulterous affair of a pastor's wife, proved to be too controversial. Transposing the sinful liaison to a medieval setting did not, however, render it any more successful with 19th-century audiences. Yet the score contains some wonderful music and the powerful and moving, if unsubtle, Piacenza performance – to which soprano Adriana Damato was a notable contributor – makes the work's continuing neglect a mystery.

The neglect of Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh* is even less explicable. A late piece in the composer's output, it reveals a maturity of style and creativity. The plangency of typically Russian vocal melody is combined with exotic orchestral colours but also softened with much lyricism. This reflects the spiritual core of the opera, namely the pursuit of religious fulfilment through peace, love and oneness with nature. The 'Russian *Parsifal*', as it has been called, is admittedly difficult to stage: a fairytale involving the destruction of one city by barbaric hordes and the imaginary creation of another through the mutual love of a simple peasant girl and a prince too easily becomes kitsch. But in his 2012 production at the Dutch National Opera in Amsterdam, director and designer Dmitri Tcherniakov made it dramatically compelling by turning it into a political fable. Conductor Marc Albrecht excels in music of this kind and his sensitive playing brought out all the originality in the score. In a strong cast, Svetlana Ignatovich and Vladimir Vanev were outstanding.

A single experience of an unfamiliar work may be insufficient to form a judgement of its worth, so you may welcome the opportunity for a second exposure

to it. Hence my desire to revisit Franz Schreker's *Schmied von Gent* (The Smith of Ghent), streamed from the Flanders Opera in Antwerp. A parable about a blacksmith's pact with the Devil, its meaning is ambiguous. Director Ersan Mondtag's efforts to give it political relevance by reference to the Belgian colonial experience were not as successful as those of Tcherniakov, but nevertheless he created an exciting vibrant show. The exotic costumes and lively stage movements in a revolving angular set complemented well the spiky phrases and acerbic harmonies of Schreker's expressionist score.

Suppose that the production of a performance which tickles your fancy is in the hands of someone whose previous work you detested, should you avoid it? I was very keen to see, for the first time, Stravinsky's music melodrama *Persephone*, but the credits of the Teatro Real's 2012 production in Madrid disclosed the name of director Peter Sellars, responsible for what I considered some disastrous maulings of Mozart. Ready for the worst, I was blown over by the beauty of his restrained, classical realisation of the piece.

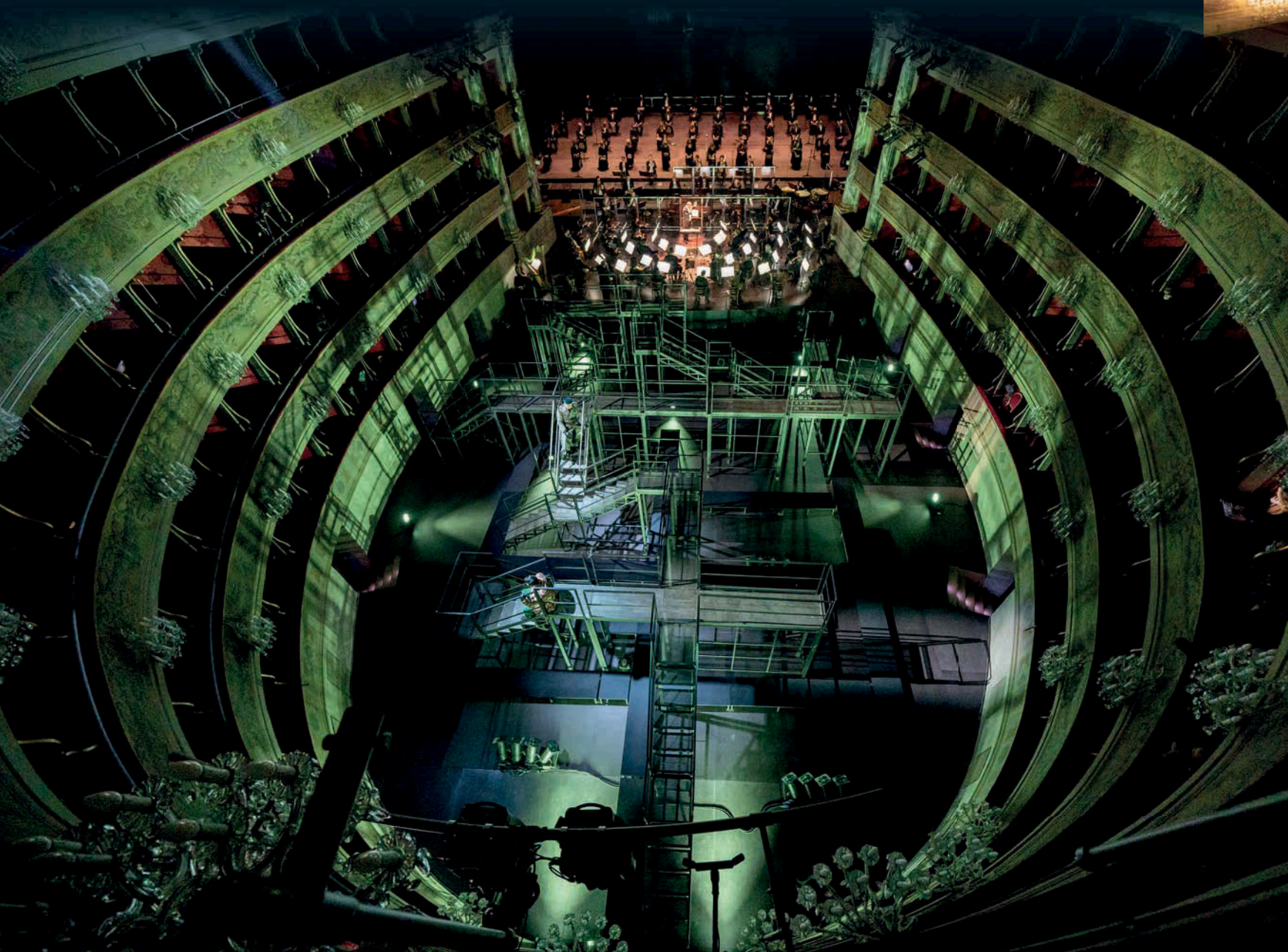
The same occurred when, with misgivings, I opened up Handel's *Deidamia* directed at the Dutch National Opera by David Alden, another of my *bêtes noires*. With the aid of Paul Steinberg's colourful sets and Constance Hoffman's eccentric costumes, this was a highly entertaining, stylised version of the Greek myth, never detracting from the brilliance of Handel's score. So, Messrs Sellars and Alden, with hand to my heart let me say that, with these streamings, all is forgiven. **ON**

A playlist with links to all the productions in this article is available at www.operanow.co.uk

FESTIVAL FOCUS

Donizetti Opera Festival 2020

Review by James Imam • Photography by Gianfranco Rota





Belisario: a compact concert performance from dispersed forces

The residents of Bergamo are known among Italians for their tireless work ethic, and Gaetano Donizetti, the city's most famous son, clearly inherited the trait. Brought up in a poor family with no tradition of music, Donizetti became one of the leading composers of his age. He also wrote more than 70 operas during his glittering career, which ended with his death in Bergamo in 1848, aged 51.

The Donizetti Opera Festival, Bergamo's annual festival dedicated to the composer's operas, is also hard working. When, last October, the Italian government shuttered theatres as a second wave of Covid ripped through Italy, the festival doggedly refused to cancel its scheduled programme.

After ploughing on with preparing productions and developing a new web platform to stream performances from an empty theatre, the festival presented its full sixth edition against all the odds.

No wonder the organisers were reluctant to throw in the towel: big landmarks had been billed, including the completion

of a major three-year renovation of the 18th-century Teatro Donizetti and festival debuts from big hitters such as Plácido Domingo and Javier Camerana (both of whom cancelled due to health concerns).

The edition was to herald a new start for Bergamo, the wealthy Lombard city situated 50km northwest of Milan, which became the epicentre of Italy's Covid crisis last spring. News footage of coffins being transported away from the city's mortuaries in army trucks, to be distributed to crematoria around the nation, became a defining image of the pandemic.

Furthermore, the event was a call to arms to an opera industry that is reeling following closures globally. In a press release issued before the start of the festival, Riccardo Frizza, music director, issued a rallying cry: 'Artists must promote culture, because it is at risk of dying,' he wrote.

For health requirements to be met, the auditorium was overhauled. Removing seats in the stalls created an enormous performance space for the singers, and the

physically distanced orchestra was placed on stage.

Productions were streamed via Donizetti WebTV (donizettitv.uscreen.io), a new streaming platform featuring a wealth of additional lively content including mini documentaries, revealing fly-on-the wall chats between cast members and a statue of Donizetti, and a talk show-style series which ran contemporaneously with the performances in which guests commented on the opera.

Journalists were invited to watch the performances live from boxes divided with plexiglass panels, allowing for a sneak preview of the newly-refurbished Teatro Donizetti. The €19m budget, jointly provided by public and private sources, has been used to restore the auditorium's swirling ceiling fresco, reline boxes in sumptuous red damask, and introduce wooden seating and parquet flooring according to acousticians Müller BBM's design. New spaces introduced backstage include new rehearsal rooms, dressing rooms, offices, catering spaces and a mobile pit.



*Michele Pertusi:
imposing as
Marino Faliero*



*Left: The protagonists of Farino Faliero: (l-r)
Michele Pertusi, Bogdan Baciu, Francesca Dotta and
Michele Angelini*

The live performances kicked off with **Belisario**, originally chosen as a vehicle for Plácido Domingo in the title role, which tells the story of the war hero Belisario's return to Constantinople, before Antonina, his wife, wrongfully accuses him of treason. The blazing, inky score, written immediately after *Lucia di Lammermoor*

in 1836, evokes imperial grandeur with brassy orchestration and crisp military rhythms. A poignant father-daughter duet and (novel for the time) the baritone lead role are two elements Verdi would later develop.

Frizza conducted the onstage orchestra and choir beyond with his backs to the

soloists, who were lined up in the stalls and sang from behind music stands. The conductor drew impressively compact, nuanced playing from these dispersed forces, alternating incendiary outbursts with lovingly crafted Bellinian melodies in the introduction, and unearthing bold detail to illuminate characters' inner worlds. In certain passages, Frizza summoned an atmosphere of Byzantine magnificence in coppery blocks of sound. The chorus gave rousing contributions as warriors, senators and guards.

Roberto Frontali replaced Domingo in the title role, and provided an engrossing account of Belisario's journey from world-weary wanderer to indomitable warrior. Carmela Remigio's stony Antonina lacked vocal power, but Celso Albelo impressed as a heroic Alamiro, the slave discovered to



Above left: Davide Maranchelli's delightful staging of *Le nozze in villa*

Above: Fabio Capitanucci has his cake as Trionfo...

Left: 'Love is in the air': new beginnings and happy endings at the Donizetti Festival



be Belisario's lost son. Annalisa Stroppa's Irene, daughter of Belisario, made a beautifully tender contribution to Act II's long father-daughter duet. Simon Lim's rounded bass made for a distinguished Giustiniano.

What a difference a city can make. Written a year earlier than *Belisario* for Paris's Théâtre-Italien, **Marino Faliero**, whose murky soundworlds are encased in sparkling orchestration and big set-numbers as favoured in the French capital, sounded as if it were from another planet. We are in 14th-century Venice, where Faliero, the Doge, is sentenced to death after his planned conspiracy against the Council of Forty is foiled. Meanwhile, Elena, Faliero's wife, confesses to a love affair with Fernando, the Doge's nephew.

The often imaginative directorial partnership of ricci/forte provided a dense scaffolding structure in the stalls, forming a maze of walkways and staircases through which characters prowled as if navigating Venice's narrow streets. Dancers in circus attire randomly writhed.

The atmospheric production was neither insightful nor engaging, but the music was top-drawer. Michele Angelini stepped in convincingly as Javier Camarena's replacement in the role of Fernando, surviving the fiendishly stratospheric writing by Donizetti for the star tenor of his day, Giovanni Battista Rubini (1784-1854). The growling Michele Pertusi's imposing Faliero was the perfect match for Francesca Dotta's intense Elena, and Bogdan Baciú was an ardent Israele, the Venetian Officer. Riccardo Frizza, armed

with two music stands placed opposite one another, swivelled to conduct the orchestra and chorus onstage and the soloists in the stall.

Le nozze in villa (1819) is less distinctive musically (much of it sounds like a pastiche of Rossini); but Davide Maranchelli's delightful staging, set as an outdoor wedding complete with giant inflatable swans, golf carts and lashings of slapstick, was a joy watch. Sabina would like to marry Claudio, but Don Petronio, her father, has promised her to the schoolmaster, Trifoglio.

Standout singers included the rich mezzo of Giaia Petrone (Sabina), Omar Montanari's spirited Don Petronio and Fabio Capitanucci's cavorting Trifoglio. Conductor Stefano Montanari drew fizz and panache from the bubbling score. Composers Elio and Rocco Tanica provided a kitsch new quintet to replace the opera's missing second act.

Hard work, creativity and command of the Donizetti idiom: these are the Donizetti Opera Festival's ingredients for success. **ON**

MOZART

Zaide

Review by James Imam • Photography by Yasuko Kageyama

Teatro dell'Opera,
Rome

MUSIC ★★★★★

STAGING ★★★★★

It's more than a year since Italy pulled down the shutters on theatres across the nation as the shadow of Covid descended. They were reopened in the summer, only to close again as a second wave of the virus ripped through Europe in the closing months of 2020. Programming up and down the peninsula went up in smoke. But Rome Opera's production of Mozart's *Zaide*, conducted by Daniele Gatti and directed by Graham Vick, slipped through the net – five out of six scheduled performances, at any rate.

Mozart penned 15 arias for his Singspiel *Zaide* before abandoning work in 1780 to write *Idomeneo*. The work was subsequently believed lost. Constanze,

Mozart's wife, eventually found the score. However, Johann Schachtner's monologue – which depicts Gomatz and Zaide's foiled attempts to escape Sultan Soliman, their Turkish captor, and subsequent death sentence – was never found.

In the 1970s, Italian writer Italo Calvino wrote a spoken part for a central narrator, who conjures the drama before our eyes, weaving together Mozart's arias. Calvino's conception, doused in orientalism, is delectably fanciful while also a fascinating postmodernist exploration of the process of dramatic creation.

The version was premiered at the Batignano Festival in 1976, in a production directed by Vick. When Vick's scheduled

production of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* for Rome was cancelled this autumn, the British director proposed *Zaide* in the Calvino edition instead. It was to be the theatre's inaugural production of the opera.

Vick knows how to create drama with limited means, and does not disappoint. Characters in 18th-century Turkish costumes populate a mainly bare stage featuring a yellow skip with a long rubbish chute rising several storeys – a metaphor for the drama being constructed before us. A mound of sand represents Calvino's 'desert at dawn', the chute the silk scarf with which Gomatz climbs to Zaide's room.



A constructive approach to limited resources:
Graham Vick's production of *Zaide*



Gatti drew airy expanses and a kaleidoscope of shifting colours to breathe life into the spartan staging. The work's *seria* elements are leavened by *buffo* episodes, and Gatti expertly blended these qualities, while also revving the engine for the stormier musical passages.

Chen Reiss (Zaide) was musical but vocally unsteady, her tuning awry in 'Ruhe sanft', the opera's most famous number. Davive Giangregorio was a solid Osmin, Markus Werba irrepressible as Allazim and Paul Nilon threatening as Soliman. Juan Francisco Gattell was a strapping Gomatz, but actor Remo Girone struggled to remember his lines as the narrator.

In his peroration, we hear of 'lapis lazuli and amethysts embedded in a sky-blue wall, [which] glitter in a tangle of arabesques'. The gems become unstuck, then incorporated in another mosaic in a mosque, a caravanserai, the palace of a Caliph and fortress in the desert. A fitting tribute to the dramatic art of reinterpretation, and a moving parting message from Rome Opera as Italy entered another phase of the Covid lockdown. **ON**

Above: Paul Nilon as Soliman
Top right: Markus Werba as Allazim and Juan Francisco Gatell as Gomatz
Right: Soprano Chen Reiss (right) with her men to the rescue



LEONCAVALLO

Pagliacci

The Opera Ensemble at
The Grange,
Hampshire

MUSIC ★★★★★

STAGING ★★★★★

Review by Colin Clarke • Photography by Matthew Williams-Ellis courtesy of Longborough Festival Opera

Necessity is the mother of invention, so the saying goes. So when the pandemic hit, musicians got creative; and audiences followed through wind, rain and (in this instance) mud. At a time when opera performances seem unlikely, The Grange (more familiar as a summer festival) presented a winter-time *Pagliacci* using only an instrumental group of piano (Berrak Dyer), two violins (Fenella Humphreys, Alexandra Lomeiko), viola (Lisa Bucknell) and cello (Sophie Gledhill) as orchestra, plus a small mixed chorus. As director Christopher Luscombe rightly pointed out, this made the instrumentalists ‘soloists in their own right’. And how well they coped!

The production was the work of a new company called The Opera Ensemble, originally performed in London in the autumn, before moving onto The Grange and then Longborough during ebbs in the UK’s lockdown.

Hearing *Pagliacci* separated from its eternal twin, Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana*, had the effect of deepening one’s respect for the piece itself, intensifying my admiration for Leoncavallo’s taut processes.

Stripping the stage down also helped to concentrate the mind. The instrumentalists were seated to one side, with a large wooden box in the centre serving as Canio’s dressing table. Commedia dell’arte period costume was eschewed for Covid-friendly modern dress. The dark walls contributed substantially to the oppressive atmosphere, underscored by Tim Mitchell’s lighting – a twilight that leads to a night of passion and tragedy, even if kisses themselves had to be delivered from across the stage.

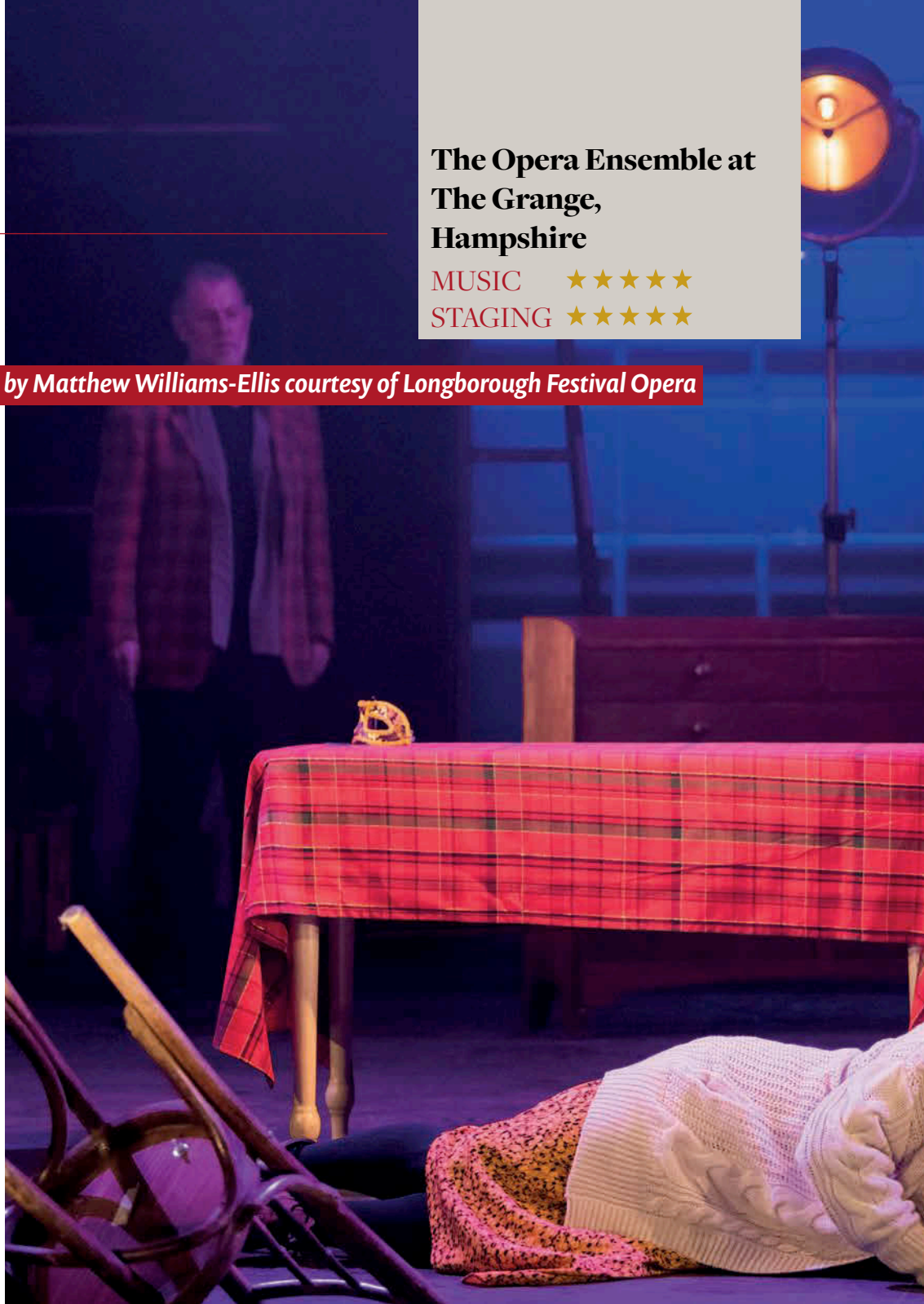
The opera plays with versions of reality, taking the conceit of a play-within-a-play and injecting it into raw, bloodthirsty *verismo*. This dichotomy between the real and the imagined was perhaps best reflected in Robert Hayward’s

authoritative performance of the Prologue, delivered in English (translated by Bill Bankes-Jones) before the rest of the opera was performed in its original Italian. Layers of truth and fiction became blurred in the tensions on stage and behind the scenes, with Nedda’s ‘Strodonno lassù’ a real cry for the freedom to be with her lover, Silvio.

The stand-out performance was Peter Auty’s Canio. His ‘Vesti la giubba’ was far more than a tenor’s big number, playing to the gallery; instead, it became a necessary outpouring as his character disintegrated

into madness, powerful both vocally and dramatically. Nedda was sung by the superb soprano Elin Pritchard: she offered a voice that shone and also made her character believably touching. There was palpable chemistry between her and her lover Silvio – a strong performance from Nicholas Lester. Aled Hall relished the opportunities of the role of Beppe.

All this was shaped beautifully by conductor John Andrews, who inspired his musicians to create and maintain immense tension via a real sense of the opera’s flow. A remarkable achievement. **ON**





Clockwise from above: 'La Commedia è finita!'; Peter Auty in a 'necessary outpouring of emotion' as Canio; Elin Pritchard, superb as Nedda; Nicholas Lester in a strong performance as Silvio; Robert Hayward delivering an authoritative Prologue

Theater Basel

MUSIC ★★★★★

STAGING ★★★★★

MESSIAEN

Saint François d'Assise

Review by James Imam • Photography by Ringo Höhn

An abandoned Carrefour supermarket is seen through a swirl of fog onstage. Flashing traffic lights are nestled between socially distanced audience members in the stalls, while birds hang lifelessly from electricity lines suspended on pylons. Merged with a series of platforms, stage and stalls become a single realm which is freely roamed by the singers. Few theatres at the end of October opted for anything other than threadbare productions. Basel, on the other hand,

offered an immersive, epically apocalyptic vision of Olivier Messiaen's *St François d'Assise*.

Clearly Benedikt von Peter, the new artistic director of Theater Basel, does not shy from a challenge. For his first production in charge, he scheduled himself as director and selected a graveyard work. *Saint François* – Messiaen's eight operatic tableaux about the friar from Assisi, who preaches to birds, hears the voice of god and receives Christ's stigmata in his own flesh – is musically awesome but dramatically

abstruse and inert. Moreover, the piece's sheer scale (it usually clocks in at over four hours and demands a cast in the hundreds) means it is not ideal for the Covid era.

But Basel ploughed on despite the pandemic, managing six performances before Switzerland's spiralling health crises meant the production had to be pulled.

For evidence of how Covid-inspired solutions can spell musical-dramatic opportunities, look no further. Oscar Strasnoy's reduced score condenses the orchestration and slightly prunes the



length. Placing the orchestra to one side of the stage allowed for a glimpse into Messiaen's musical workshop. Conductor Clemens Heil opted for precision over excess, resisting the temptation to bask in glittering bursts of light. The result was rock solid, razor sharp music-making which engaged throughout this musical marathon.

Von Peter's dark yet uplifting production, in which the embers of humanity glowed in a urban wasteland, also engaged. Missing letters from the supermarket's flickering sign spell out

're fou' (mad king). If King Lear becomes lucid following his madness, François, who is reimagined as a wretched down-and-out, achieves enlightenment in the delirium of his final hour. Eyes flickering and body convulsing, baritone Nathan Berg gave a towering dramatic depiction, turning this obscure role into something tragically relatable. His acting was so good that his gorgeously nutty baritone felt like a bonus.

Rolf Romei was a demented Leper, Soprano Álfheiður Erla Guðmundsdóttir hypnotic and otherworldly as the shabby

Angel. The six friars, here gleefully cavorting vagabonds, were excellent. The sound of the choir, whose members were hidden on platforms above the stage as the unseen God, descended as if from the ether. **ON**

Main picture left: Álfheiður Erla Guðmundsdóttir, hypnotic as the Angel; Clockwise from above: The orchestra on stage allows a glimpse of Messiaen's 'musical workshop'; Benedikt von Peter's production is a bold statement of intent in Basel; Nathan Berg in a towering performance as St Francois

The real deal

By Francis Muzzu

So, you thought the age of the great Verdi baritone was over? A new album from one of France's leading opera singers, Ludovic Tézier, will prove you wrong

A new album of opera arias sung by a baritone is a veritable *rara avis* these days; there has been a noticeable trend over the last few years for new solo recordings from sopranos, mezzos and tenors, but there it tends to stop unless one turns to lieder for lower voices. And even more remarkably, here is an album filled with arias by Verdi. Every generation of opera buffs moans about the good old days when things were better, voices were bigger and singers knew how to project. It is an understandable tendency, but ignores two glaring facts. Fashions change and the

last 60 years have seen an explosion of smaller and more agile voices: Conchita Supervia's nimble mezzo was viewed as a startling curiosity in the 1920s and '30s; now excellent Baroque and Rossini singers are plentiful in all vocal registers. And as young star Lise Davidsen limbers up to inherit the mantle from Nina Stemme in the dramatic soprano stakes, I don't think anyone need feel short-changed.

But when it comes to the Verdi baritone: 'Ah yes,' I hear myself saying, 'things aren't what they used to be.' And then I join the curmudgeonly ranks of the old fogies with 'I remember when I was a lad...' and start

reminiscing about singers long-retired, indeed departed, and some that I never even heard live but know only through their recordings. Thankfully French baritone Ludovic Tézier is here to prove me wrong. I have heard him sing live twice, once in Donizetti and once in Verdi, and can attest his voice is the real deal, with great power that can reach the furthest-flung reaches of any opera auditorium, and receive due approbation from a grateful audience.

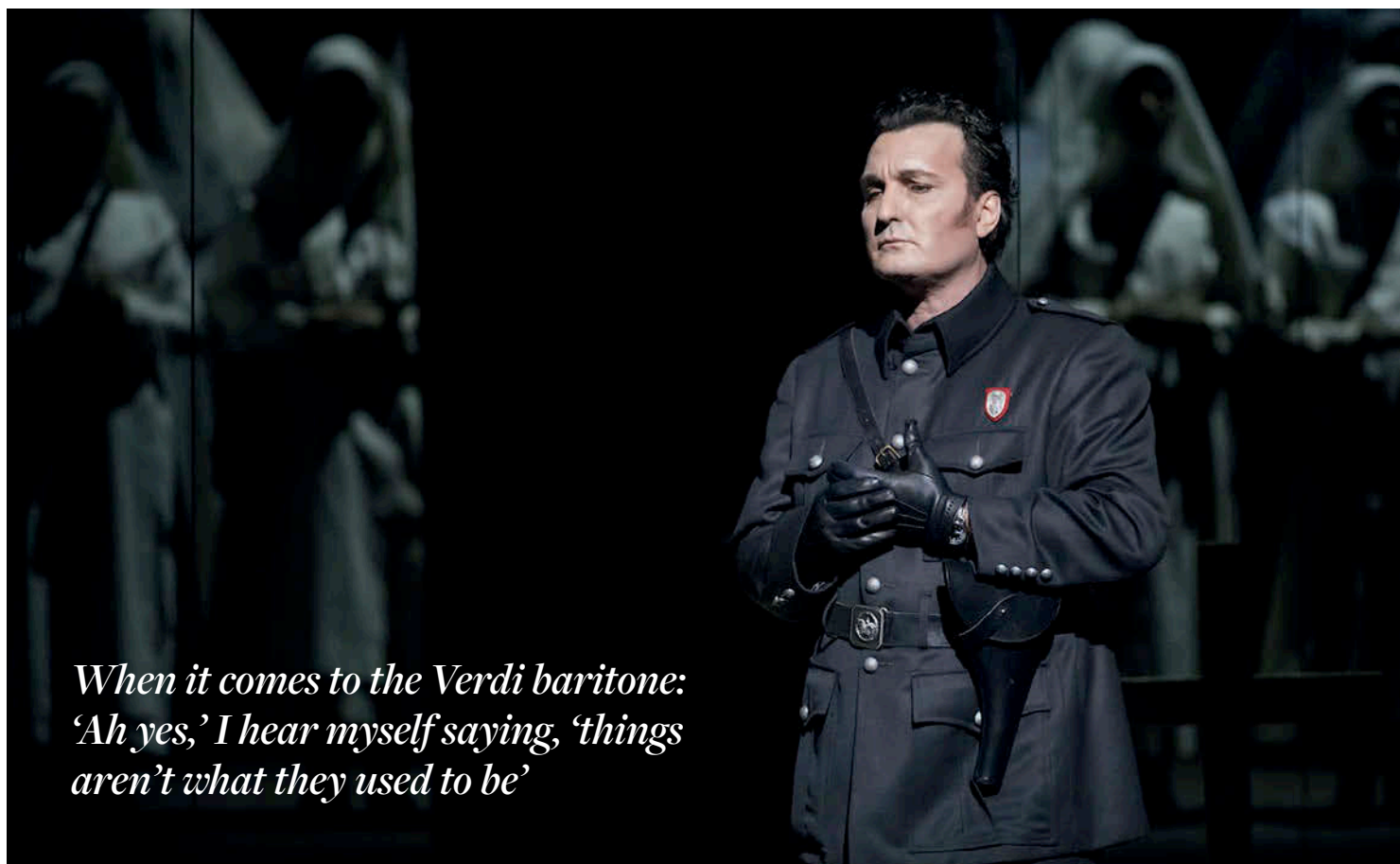
This album is generous and offers an excellent sample of Tézier's stage roles across Verdi's output, from Don Carlo in *Ernani* (1844) to Ford in *Falstaff* (1893), plus a role he has not yet performed, the even earlier *Nabucco* (1842). One of his major roles is missing, Simon Boccanegra, for lack of a suitable aria to include. Tézier's baritone has a noble quality, with a very dark tone to it, and immaculate breath control. He essays the excellent party trick of singing the opening phrases of Rodrigue's final aria from *Don Carlos* in one seamless breath and it is duly impressive. In fact, he shows off the skill twice as he later repeats the number in Italian and is just as adept. He carries his voice up through the *passaggio* with skill, even in the high placement of the aria from *Il Trovatore* that brings many a baritone to grief. He is engaged with the texts and in the album's accompanying essay makes the interesting point that Verdi himself was a baritone, and '... some parts are almost like clandestine autobiography. So he used the baritone voice to show us his own heart'.

So, in some ways this new release is quite overwhelming in its riches. It is a pleasure to hear a voluminous baritone pour his heart out. But this is also the problem; it erupts with great force and occasionally there is a slightly uneven burr on the voice (which I have also noticed both times I



Impressive: Ludovic Tézier

CHARLES DUPONT



When it comes to the Verdi baritone: 'Ah yes,' I hear myself saying, 'things aren't what they used to be'

BILL COOPER



have seen Tézier perform) as though he could do with pulling back a little. After fourteen tracks I felt rather shouted at. Tézier does shade his voice and relishes the recitative, but his fallback mode is forte. His Iago (*Otello*) sounds like appropriately psychotic, but his Germont (*La Traviata*) sounds as though he might give Alfredo

Above: As the Conte di Luna in Il Trovatore at Paris Opera

Left: As Don Carlo di Vargas in La forza del destino at the Royal Opera House, London

a good thrashing. He is not helped by his conductor, Frédéric Chaslin, who unleashes a torrential sound, and at times even manages to obliterate his soloist. The recording is very close: as Tézier starts his Rodrigue with 'C'est moi, Carlos!' something akin to a sniff is clearly audible.

Tézier cites his admiration for Ettore Bastianini (who sang professionally from 1952-65), but reserves his adoration for the late Piero Cappuccilli (who performed from 1957 to 1992), both lauded as Verdi baritones. Listening to Tézier I find more of the former singer in his vocal attributes; the darker tone, the more forceful interpretation. From Cappuccilli I do hear the length of phrase; what I do not get is his sense of shading. Cappuccilli's 'Eri tu' (*Un ballo in maschera*) conveys anguish: Tézier's displays fury. The older baritone's 'Il balen' (*Il Trovatore*) shows introspective passion as opposed to unbridled lust. Macbeth suits them both, and in his aria Tézier does balance the aggression of the

man with his sudden realisation that the game is up.

To go even further back to the early days of recorded sound, I think that Tézier is perhaps from the line that can be traced to the more animal bravura of Titta Ruffo than the comparative refinements of Mattia Battistini. An interesting and provocative album, well worth exploring. **ON**



Verdi

Ludovic Tézier, baritone

Orchestra del Teatro Comunale di Bologna

Frédéric Chaslin

Sony Classics



New releases

By Francis Muzzu



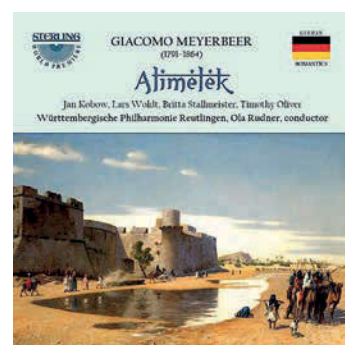
Medtner Songs
Soprano: Sofia Fomina
Chandos CHAN20171
★★★★



Das Rosenband
Soprano Inga Kalna
Skani LMIC/SKANI o8
★★★★



Il delirio della passione
Soprano:
Anna Lucia Richter
PentatonePTC 5186845
★★★★



Alimelek
Meyerbeer
Sterling CDO 1125
★★

CD/ Download

Three soprano albums vie for attention, so perhaps it is obtuse of me to start by discussing a pianist. But Alexander Karpeyev is not featured on the cover of *Medtner Songs*, whereas soprano Sofia Fomina is. I realise that fans will generally gravitate towards the singer – I doubt many people buy a Kaufmann or Netrebko release for whoever is tinkling the ivories – but it does seem particularly unfair to Karpeyev as these songs require as much of an input from the pianist as the vocalist. In fact, in many cases the accompaniments could stand alone as compositions without words. Russian composer Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951) is not greatly known but has a cult following among aficionados and is particularly appreciated for his output for keyboard; as demonstrated here his music is complex, contrapuntal and highly dramatic. It can all become a touch overwhelming, but the

programme is well-judged and simpler songs contribute oases of calm. Fomina, renowned as a coloratura who tackles roles like Zerbinetta and Gilda, reveals a soprano which is plush throughout its registers, well-balanced with an easy and bright top. She is very attentive to her words; I would have appreciated the Cyrillic texts being transliterated into Latin script so that I could follow them against the English as I have just one word of

Russian. But *nyet* (and that's it). It is manageable if you pay attention. There are three groups of Russian songs, one of German, and the texts are fabulous (as you would expect from poets such as Pushkin and Goethe). An unexpected delight.

Inga Kalna has sung lyric coloratura roles for the last 20 years, more recently becoming best-known for her Baroque and Mozart work. Kalna is Latvian, and there are two

interesting twists to her new recording, *Das Rosenband*. One is that she treats us to songs in her native language; the other, that she essays Strauss lieder, which from her previous recordings I might have thought were a touch heavy for her. Wrong again! Like Fomina, Kalna's voice here provides surprising richness of tone and weight, plus a ravishing luminosity – her first phrases could almost be a mezzo, but she has a



A scene from *The Fiery Angel*,
filmed at Rome Opera



The Fiery Angel

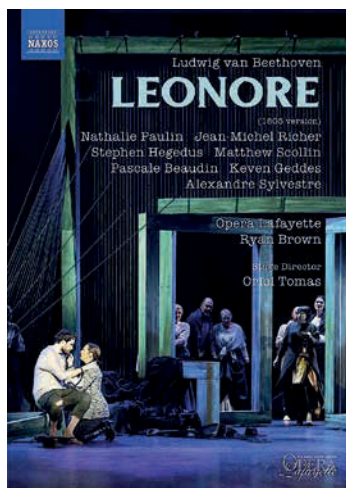
Prokofiev

Naxos 2.11063



wonderful spin at the top. The Latvian songs are by Jānis Mediņš and Alfrēds Kalniņš, two giants of that country's Romanticism, and they have a sweep that matches the Strauss well. Kalna performs with pianist Diana Ketler who takes her opportunities to shine as well as supporting her singer. So once again there is much enjoyment to be gained from a well-constructed recital. And I would like to compliment the cover: an attractive portrait of the singer at her glamorous best, engaging the viewer with a warm smile. It makes a pleasing change from the trend of dour performers staring us out as they slump.

The third soprano is Anna Lucia Richter, and her new album, *Il delirio della passion*, is a total contrast. She is singing Monteverdi and her musical style is far more specific to the moment. By which I mean that she invests every note with some significance – it would be impossible to play this album and not fully engage. As Richter points out, some of the



Leonore

Beethoven

Naxos 2.110674



music is very close to speech, and 'every comma and every point is deliberately there and important'. True, but she does emphasise this with incredible gusto and there is a thin line between maximising interpretation and going over the top. At times I just wanted to shout 'Sing out, Louise!' Richter's soprano is true and bright and when she does unleash it, as in the sacred aria

'Confitebor tibi Domine', it rings out pleasingly. The long 'Lamento' from the otherwise lost *L'Arianna* is profound and shows Richter's art at its best: detailed, luminous and heartfelt. The recording is very close, which adds to the intensity; you can hear director and lutenist Luca Pianca breathing as he plays. A curate's egg – at its best it is thrilling, and at its worst fussy: sometimes less is more. But Richter is a special interpreter and that tips the balance in her favour.

Next, a rarity from Meyerbeer, and one that is destined to remain so.

Alimelek is a short opera based on a story from *One Thousand and One Nights*; Meyerbeer set the first part of the story and his friend Weber set the second as *Abu Hassan*. *Alimelek* had already premiered and flopped in Stuttgart under a different title in 1813. This is a recording of the revised version, 1814, performed in Vienna, where it also crashed and burned. (*Abu Hassan* had already premiered in 1811 and proved a success.) This recording of *Alimelek* is live,

from Bad Urach in 2010, and is perfectly well-performed. But goodness, it is dull. Even the booklet admits that it provides no clue of the compositional riches to come. It's not all bad news: his failure spurred Meyerbeer to develop his craft in Italy, and finally Paris, where he hit the big time in 1831 with *Robert le Diable*.

DVD/ Blu-ray

Prokofiev's *The Fiery Angel* is better-known by reputation than by performance – its considerable demands ensure that it remains something of a curiosity, albeit one that is enjoying a renaissance at the moment. It requires large orchestral forces, a conductor who can hold everything together, an indefatigable soprano who can last the course and a director who can make sense of the drama. Plus its subject is more interesting than appealing – it is awash with religious and sexual obsession, hysteria, dark magic, madness, demonic possession, exorcism, and execution by burning at the stake courtesy of the Inquisition.

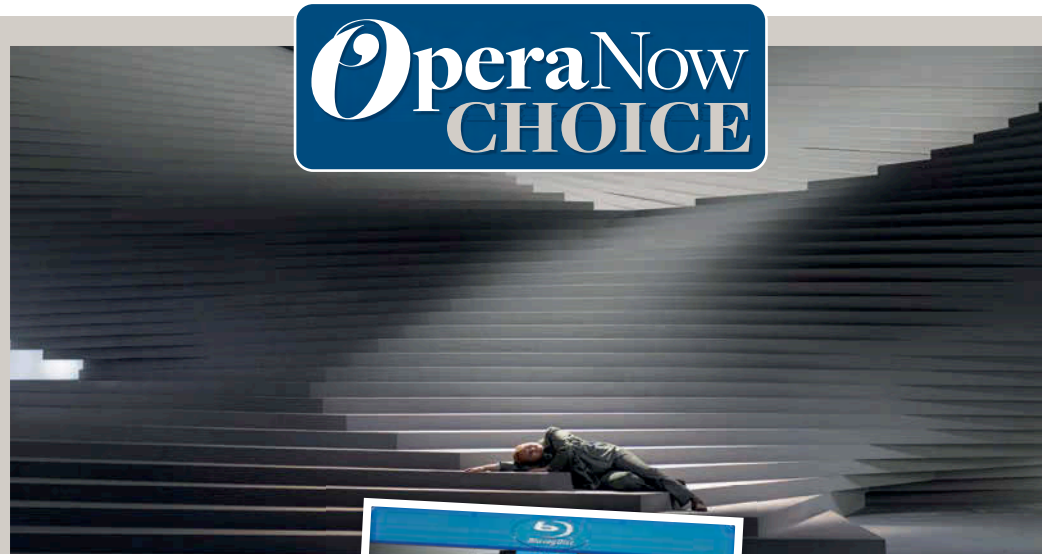


Jean-Michel Richer is moving as Florestan in Opera Lafayette's *Leonore*

In this performance, filmed in Rome, 2019, Emma Dante's production is half successful. She uses much Italian religious iconography to frame her direction – it opens in the Catacombs of the Capuchins in Palermo, each recess containing a demon. Her Renata doesn't burn but becomes a Madonna who stabs herself with one of her own daggers. It is theatrically effective, especially in its choreography, but ultimately the opera is robbed of its incredibly dark madness.

Act V is patchy anyway, and here it just fizzles out. Conductor Alejo Pérez marshals his orchestra with skill, though sometimes the wall of sound gets the better of the singers. Leigh Melrose is a solid Ruprecht, but the show belongs to Ewa Vesin's indefatigable Renata. She has the voluminous soprano to ensure she is heard, the voice never becomes squally even under immense pressure, and her acting is excellent.

A *Leonore* (*Fidelio* in Beethoven's original three act 1805 version) is interesting, not least as it contains a reconstruction by musicologist Will Crutchfield of the missing portions of Florestan's great soliloquy 'Gott! Welch Dunkel hier'. Otherwise the performance by Opera Lafayette is correct rather than thrilling. The prison looks very spruce and the acting is generic. The performance is well-judged to the scale of the small theatre, so don't expect decibels. Nathalie Paulin is a sincere Leonore, Jean-Michel Richer a moving Florestan. Ryan Brown conducts with precision and there is an air of seriousness about the whole event – appropriate but not exciting. **ON**



Fidelio

Beethoven

Unitel 803304

★★★★★

From the hideous cultural decimation that has resulted from the pandemic we have at least one blessing to be thankful for in this film of *Fidelio* in its 1806 version. Christoph Waltz's new production at the Theater an der Wien was long sold out when it was cancelled. Rather than give up and go home the decision was made to film a performance for posterity and it works perfectly in so many ways. Waltz is an actor who brings a strong cinematic quality to his direction, (abetted by Felix Breisach's assured videography): he originally was drawn to singing as a career but decided that his operatic voice was not up to scratch; he must thank Euterpe daily for her failure to bless him with vocal talents as he has acted his way to two Oscars, among other awards. This *Fidelio* is his third opera production and he reveals a firm hand. The first and most obvious success is the set, developed by Waltz in conjunction with the architects Barkow Leibinger,



a vast double helix that fills the stage top to bottom with steps, a Piranesian labyrinth that allows the singers multiple entrances and vantage points and reinforces Waltz's vision of the opera's constant striving for direction and escape. It is exquisitely lit by Henry Braham. Manfred Honeck's conducting is suitably swift, precise and masterly, and the Arnold Schoenberg Chor offers the best singing imaginable.

Waltz's direction of his singers is predictably adroit. He gets off to a great start with Mélissa Petit's Marzelline; she's not faffing around with an iron but nipping out for a crafty fag before being caught out by Benjamin Hulett's Jacquino. Christoph Fischesser's Rocco conveys his moral ambivalence, Gábor Bretz shows Don Pizarro's

lack of humanity. Even the costumes underline the point – all men are dressed equally, but Pizarro's suit is of a far superior cloth and cut. At the start of the opera we see Florestan being cast like rubbish down the steps, where he is ultimately found by Leonore. Eric Cutler's tenor has grown a lot but he retains the lyricism to make his Florestan human – a character that doesn't really get much stage time to establish personality. Nicole Chevalier's excellent Leonore also has a more lyrical voice than usual, but it rings loud and clear when needed and she manages that rare feat of looking resolute to us whilst sincere to her fellow characters (despite a hideous hairstyle worthy of Javier Bardem in *No Country for Old Men*). The moment of discovery and recognition is overwhelming, yet the couple remains stranded and distant. The end of the opera reinforces the point, with the whole cast milling aimlessly and lost amidst the endless steps, every person isolated albeit in crowd. A pessimistic and compelling image for our times, thankfully alleviated as a jubilant cast and orchestra finally gather on the set to cheer themselves.

A heavenly revelation

By Colin Clarke

A superb new recording of John Eccles' *Semele* sets the bar high for a rare English delight

John Eccles (1668-1735) became Master of the King's Music in 1700. His *Semele* dates from around 1706. As such it occupies the perceived operatic no-man's land between Purcell's death in 1695 and Handel's settling in England. This is the first fully professional recording of Eccles' *Semele* with historical forces.

The story is well-known: Jupiter, king of the gods and hardly a model husband to his wife Juno, is the subject of *Semele*'s affection. *Semele* herself is betrothed to Athamas, Prince of Boeotia, who in turn is the subject of *Semele*'s sister's affections, Ino. Through Juno's plotting, *Semele* convinces Jupiter to appear in his form as 'Mighty Thunderer' in a bid to attain immortality – a bid doomed to failure. We find that out of *Semele*'s ashes will rise Bacchus, the god of wine and decadence. So, all the mainstays of opera – lust, greed, vainglory and hubris – are all here.

This recording of John Eccles' *Semele* is nothing short of a revelation. It was recorded at London's St Jude-on-the-Hill ahead of a performance in the chapel of Trinity College, Cambridge with a cast that features some of the finest singers active today. Eccles' music, a fusion of Italian and English styles, offers a plethora of brief but inspired arias alongside duets and orchestral pieces (including a Symphony taken from Eccles' 1699 *Rinaldo and Armida*). It is often dramatic, an aspect underlined by a rich continuo in this performance including bass violin, bass viol and theorbo/guitar. Eccles writes with

an easy assurance, associating specific gestures with dramatic elements. Textures can also often be daringly thin in this remarkable work of great scope.

Part of the excellent documentation includes an essay by Helen Charlston ('Preparing Juno'). Charlston is impressive as Juno, her commanding 'Somnus, arise' and the jaunty duet with Somnus, 'Away let us haste' real highlights. Also excelling in this recording is *Semele* herself, Anna Dennis. The near-static 'O Sleep' is remarkable, Dennis' intervals so pure; her lovely 'If cheerful Hopes' – a meditation on opposite-facing emotions – is her finest moment, leading to a lovely duet with Jupiter (the excellent Richard Burkhard), 'If this be Love'.

William Wallace's agile, high tenor is remarkable as Athamas – try 'See, she blushingly turns her Eyes'; while Aoife Miskelly as Ino mines a deep seam of pathos in her lament 'Turn hopeless Lover', displaying a stunning purity of tone.

Bass Graeme Broadbent is a stentorian Chief Priest. At the other end of the spectrum is Christopher Foster in Cadmus's ever-so-gentle 'Leave me, loathsome Light'. With Bethany Horak-Hallett a deliciously light Cupid and Héloïse Bernard an emotionally powerful Iris, this is a cast without flaw.

The recording is beautifully presented (as we have come to expect from the Academy of Ancient Music's releases – such as Handel's *Brookes-Passion* or the Dussek *Messe solenne*). The instrumental

playing is characterised by a wide range of emotional projection: the Overture sets the stall, with each of the instrumental numbers individually, memorably, etched. The sheer virtuosity of the Symphony that opens act III is breathtaking, especially when captured in producers Alexander Van Ingen's and Dave Rowell's superbly present recording.

While not the first recording of *Semele* (Rooley, 2004, Florida State University Opera), this AAM release marks a significant new chapter in the performance history of Eccles' *Semele*. Performed to the very highest vocal, instrumental and scholarly standards, it is simply unmissable. **ON**



Eccles

Semele Soloists; Cambridge Handel Opera Company; Cambridge Early Music; Academy of Ancient Music / Julian Perkins (harpsichord)

ACADEMY OF ANCIENT MUSIC
AAMo12 (two discs: 121 mins)

A touch of Magic

By Colin Clarke

Salieri's *Armida* showcases the Italian composer at his inventive best. Christophe Rousset discusses his new recording of this enchanting *opera seria*

Christophe Rousset's odyssey into the stage works of Antonio Salieri began in 2005 with *La grotta di Trofonio* (1785), followed by *Les Danaïdes* (1784); *Les Horaces* (1786) and *Tarare* (1787). His new recording of *Armida* (1771) with Les Talens Lyriques brings us up to date on this journey.

Asked where his passion for Salieri originates, Rousset talks of how he likes to be a 'lawyer for disparate causes. I have always been interested in music around Mozart: Martín y Soler, Cimarosa and Salieri.' With *La grotta*, 'it was clear that

the piece deserved more attention. When I was asked in Paris to do the set of three French operas, I was struck by Salieri's wonderful invention.'

That invention is a core part of Salieri's art. There's a Janus-headed aspect to Salieri's music, at once paying homage to Gluck while looking forwards to the 19th century: the opening to the third act of *Armida* points to Beethoven. While admitting that it is tough to compare anyone to Mozart ('everybody loses'), certainly Mozart took so many ideas from Salieri: from *Grotta* in *Don Giovanni*, for example, 'In this sense, Salieri is an innovator'. Rousset decided to tackle *Armida* because he had already done a Salieri *dramma giocoso* (*Trofonio*) plus French *opéra*; but *opera seria* was missing.

Armida was a big success in its day. Salieri was about 20 when he wrote it. 'It is an important piece in Salieri's output, and I haven't been disappointed studying the piece and conducting it – really it is a masterpiece,' says Rousset.

There's lightness and drama in the score. 'The lightness is in the enchantment – in the first act, you have the nymphs' dances. You are somehow in Gluck's *Orfeo*; the same with Act II, when Armida and Rinaldo are still happily in love. When the drama comes, the heroic figuration is different – Salieri uses trombones, he uses coloratura in the voice in a very dramatic way (while Gluck was excluding coloratura completely in the reform operas). What strikes me is the relative brevity of the arias, in contrast to the *opera seria* of the time. The form is fluid.'

Christophe Rousset: 'Armida is an important piece in Salieri's output, and I haven't been disappointed'

Armida was a huge success as far afield as Copenhagen, (1773) and St Petersburg (1774). 'Salieri was surprised himself – he didn't expect that much success. Its newness in Vienna was significant. Traetta, Gluck and Cimarosa were all around Vienna, but except for later in Traetta, one doesn't find this new sense of compact drama.'

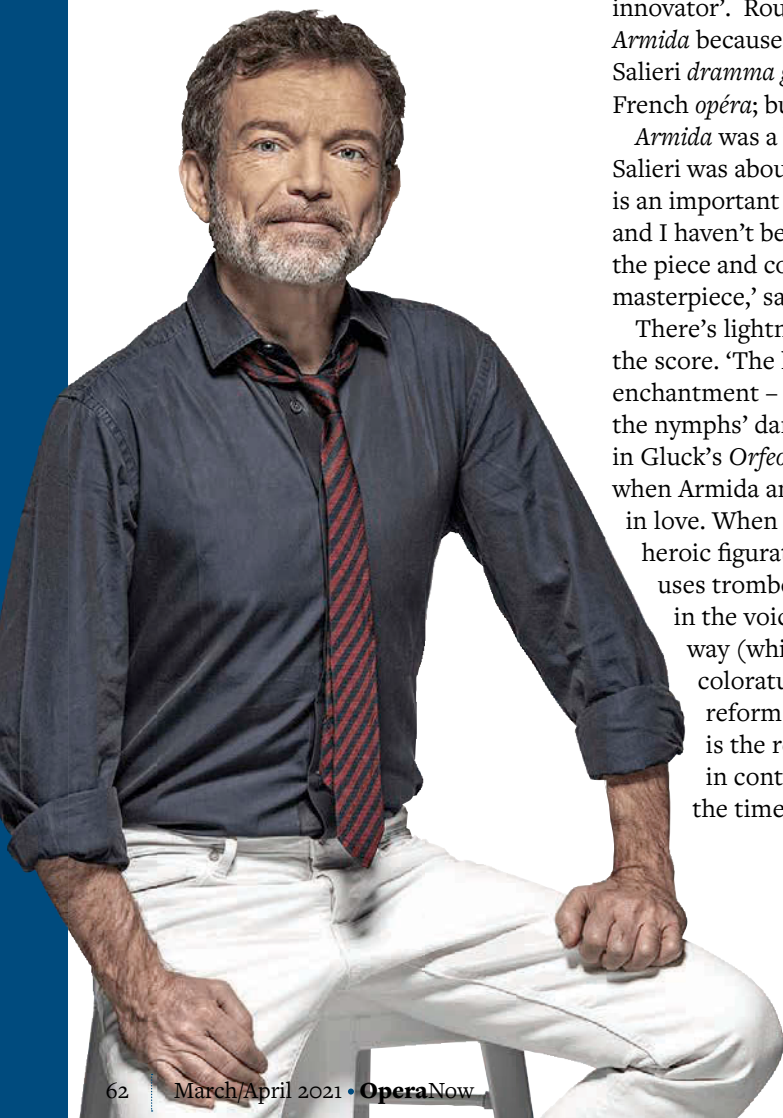
The Overture is effectively programme music. 'It describes the scene, the arrival of Ubaldo on a desert island, the animals, Ubaldo running. Salieri drops us immediately into an intense drama.' Salieri's profound mix of French tragedy-laden lyricism and Italianate melody is compelling. His use of the chorus, too, is revelatory. 'He doesn't use the chorus at all in the second act, which is focused on Armida and Rinaldo, while the first and third acts are grander, with more effects and magic. This intensifies the drama.'

The story of *Armida* itself has been massively popular, with Jommelli and Sacchini around Salieri's time, later Rossini and Dvořák, and even later Judith Weir. 'It is because *Armida* is a sorceress, someone beyond the human. In Salieri, it is the human side that is on display. By the end of the opera, Armida's magic has stopped working – she has no power and falls into despair. This story is basically a banal love story that ends badly, and probably that's what appealed. That aspect still speaks – everyone likes love stories.'

What's next for Rousset? 'I'd love to do a Singspiel by Salieri, but we have a project on *Cublai gran kan de' Tartati*, written for Vienna, which was never performed at the time' (for political reasons – it was critical of Russia). More revelations, doubtless... **ON**



Salieri's *Armida* is available on the Aparté label. AP244



Books round-up

by Benjamin Ivry

Poulenc: A Biography

by Roger Nichols

Yale University Press, 352 pages

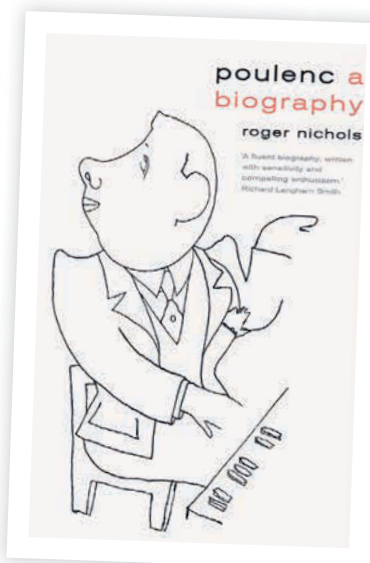
The Frenchman Francis Poulenc, for all his popularity, is still surprisingly misunderstood by writers who fall back on common clichés about his output. In June 2020 the *Literary Review* oddly opined that Poulenc ‘doesn’t rank as one of the “great” composers, and perhaps didn’t even aspire to’.

Yet the composer who wrote *Dialogues of the Carmelites* and *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* was assuredly a great operatic composer, and in *Poulenc: A Biography*, the veteran musicologist Roger Nichols expertly details how music drama was an essential part of his life and achievement, almost from birth.

As a small child, Poulenc was introduced to the world of opera by his Uncle Marcel, known as ‘Papoum’, an intimate of the celebrated French tenor Edmond Clément. By age 10, he was thoroughly familiar with *Carmen*, *La Bohème* and *Manon*.

At age 12, Poulenc feverishly jotted in his diary a review of a performance of *Tosca* which he had attended, including the vocal quality of the principals and comprimarios, but also offering views on matters such as costume design. Even before his voice broke, he dreamed of writing, and singing in, opera.

So in 1923, when Diaghilev commissioned him to compose recitatives for Gounod’s opéra comique *La Colombe* (1860), Poulenc was well



prepared for the challenge. In a punctilious, almost fretful, style, Nichols presents the full background information needed to understand just how Poulenc became passionate about opera.

Conducting Opera: Where Theater Meets Music

by Joseph Rescigno

University of North Texas Press, 336 pages

Sometimes being thrilled by opera is akin to a dynastic inheritance. The US conductor Joseph Rescigno is the scion of a musical family which included his uncle Nicola Rescigno, co-founder of the Lyric Opera of Chicago and Dallas Opera. Record collectors will remember the elder Rescigno having conducted Maria Callas’s US debut in *Norma*, as well as her performances of *Madama Butterfly*, *Medea* and *Il Pirata*.

In his guidebook *Conducting Opera*, Joseph Rescigno does not brag excessively about

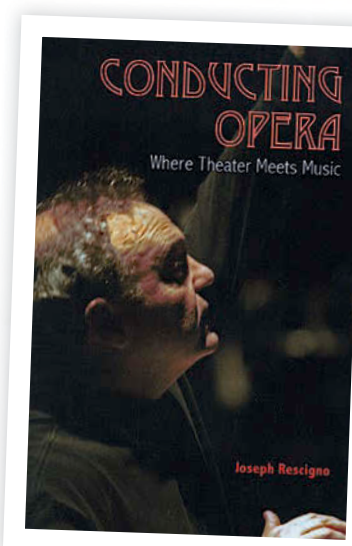
his roots, despite having a distant relative and homonym who played horn in Arturo Toscanini’s NBC Symphony Orchestra. Yet he does cite a bowing trick for strings in *Don Giovanni* that Gustav Mahler taught Bruno Walter, who in turn passed along the secret directly to Rescigno’s uncle, who bequeathed it to him.

Elsewhere, Rescigno offers pragmatic observations on how to approach operatic scores, based on decades of performances at the Florentine Opera Company in Milwaukee and La Musica Lirica festival in Novafeltria, Italy.

Rescigno’s observations are informative for fans who merely listen to operas as well as those who try to perform them. One example is his opposition to time-saving cuts in scores, which he claims results in losing ‘our collective memory of some wonderful music with little to show for our axe-wielding’.

Rescigno confides that when he studies an unfamiliar opera, he begins by scrutinising a

piano-vocal score to ascertain musical structure. He determines what should be the loudest moment of each opera, which is not always the emotional high point. In *Carmen*, the ‘emotional and dynamic climaxes’ coincide with the death of the title character, but in Richard Strauss’s *Elektra*, the end of the Elektra-Klytämnestra duet sets punters’ ears ringing, while the histrionic high point is Elektra’s recognition of her brother Orest.



Nicola Rescigno and Maria Callas at the Dallas Opera, 1957

Rescigno takes comic operas seriously, and suggests that singers be discouraged from too much clowning in the *Barber of Seville*; nor should Musettas in *La Bohème* be permitted to make a meal of her Act II aria by slowing down the tempo. In the latter opera, basses singing the role of Colline must also be guided to not decelerate their Act IV aria until they sound 'like King Philip' in Verdi's *Don Carlo*.

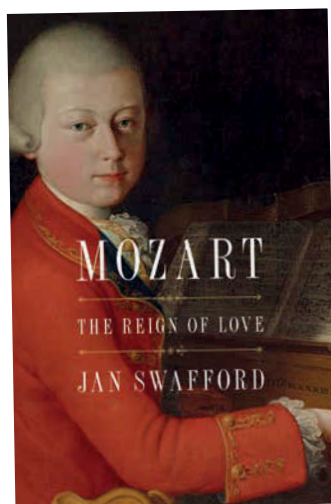
For pointed, experienced and plainspoken advice about opera, this is one of the most sagacious books to have been published in recent years, worthy of the Rescigno family tradition.

Mozart: The Reign of Love

by Jan Swafford

Faber & Faber, 832 pages

As a child prodigy, Mozart was indoctrinated with operatic culture by his musical family. Yet in Salzburg, his birthplace, few operas were performed, and only when the Mozarts moved to Vienna in 1762 was Wolfgang exposed to a society where the royal family included an archduke who conducted a Gluck opera from the harpsichord.



Samuel Barber's *Vanessa* at the Glyndebourne Festival

In the American composer and musicologist Jan Swafford's empathetic new *Mozart: The Reign of Love*, we are informed that Leopold Mozart was no opera composer, so to familiarise his son with the basic requirements, he relied on Giovanni Manzuoli, a male soprano rival of the castrato Farinelli.

As Swafford puts it, 'Manzuoli was woven into Wolfgang's early experience of opera' and this formative influence, redolent of the swashbuckling days of superstar castrati, echoed through Mozart's later stage works.

Mozart was regularly asked, as a child, to improvise arias which he might sing at the harpsichord, after which he might play with a cat or ride a stick horse, demonstrating an essentially ludic approach to opera from the start.

One of Swafford's gifts as a musical biographer is to write prose that evokes the impression that a composer's music makes upon listeners. Fond of Mozart's letters,

including the scatological ones, Swafford quotes them at length. For example, when recounting an early tour of Italy, Leopold and Wolfgang attend a performance of Hasse's *Demetrio* in Mantua. The young Mozart faults the soprano who didn't 'open her mouth and just whined everything out very softly ... The seconda Dona looks like a grenadier'.

Although Swafford buoyantly praises Mozart as 'the sanest, most gregarious, least self-flagellating' of opera composers, he concludes that the tragedy of his early demise, preventing him from writing a planned opera inspired by Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, 'makes you weep to think of it'.

Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music (Second Edition)

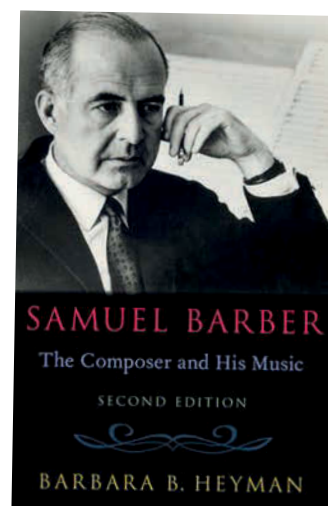
by Barbara Heyman

Oxford University Press, 648 pages

American composer Samuel Barber (1910-1981),

remembered for the operas *Vanessa* and the recently revalued *Antony and Cleopatra*, imbibed opera as part of a blissful childhood, according to the expanded second edition of Barbara Heyman's sympathetic biography. Nephew of the star contralto Louise Homer, a mainstay of the Metropolitan Opera, Barber also benefited from professional advice from Homer's husband Sidney, a composer of art songs.

Later a trained baritone himself, Barber's operatic ambitions, like those of



Poulenc or indeed Mozart, were manifested precociously. By age 10 he had written one act of his first opera, *The Rose Tree*, set to a libretto by his family's Irish housemaid about a Met Opera tenor who falls in love with a local damsel in a small American town. When the inspiration of the housemaid flagged, no further acts of the opera were written.

Throughout his early life, his aunt's voice and artistry represented an ongoing example of the communicative powers of opera. As Barber would recall in the 1970s, Homer's voice 'sounded like no other ... the rich low voice combined with brilliant high notes that Verdi would have liked and is so rare today'.

The first Metropolitan Opera performance he attended as a boy was of Verdi's *Aida*, featuring his aunt as Amneris, with Enrico Caruso, clearly providing a lifelong inspiration that would illuminate his writing for later divas such as Leontyne Price, with whom he had a close professional association.

If his later years were marked by grief, in part due to a soured intimate relationship with another opera composer, Gian Carlo Menotti, at least Barber's youthful time of first acquaintanceship with the lyrical stage was paradisiacal.

Beethoven: A Life by Jan Caeyers, translated by Brent Annable

University of California Press,
680 pages

Beethoven's mighty rescue opera *Fidelio* was accompanied by unfinished projects such as *The Vestal Flame* and a never-realised plan to set Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Yet as *Beethoven: A Life*, a judicious biography by the Belgian conductor Jan Caeyers suggests, opera was part of Ludwig's mental landscape until his Vienna funeral, when his pallbearers were, inappositely enough, Italian opera singers who at the time far preferred the works of Rossini.

Yet as a boy of 10, Beethoven had been trained by the prolific opera composer Gottlob Neefe, conductor and director of Italian opera productions in Bonn. Among the youngster's duties were rehearsing with singers, which required sight-reading full opera scores at the keyboard, and playing continuo in opera productions.

Neefe was court organist for Archduke Maximilian Francis of Austria, who, Caeyers informs us, 'curated an extensive and carefully catalogued library of opera

scores'. Small wonder that Maximilian Francis spotted the abilities of Neefe's pupil and allowed the teenaged Beethoven to take a leave of absence to study with Mozart in Vienna, which apparently never actually occurred.

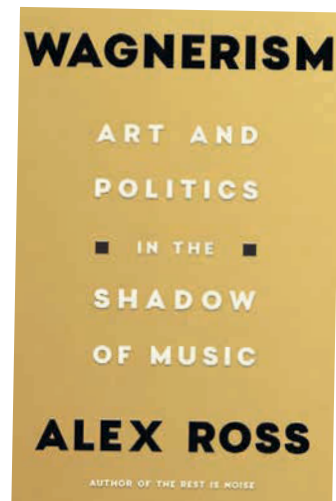
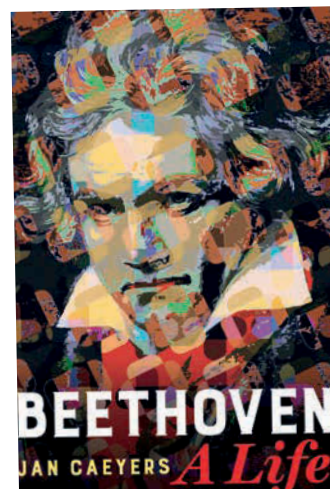
One can only speculate how early contact with Mozart might have further developed Beethoven's operatic ambitions, although by itself, *Fidelio* is an endlessly rewarding operatic legacy, despite its status as a solitary masterpiece.

Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music by Alex Ross

Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
784 pages

Like Beethoven, Wagner too was operatically precocious with an apparently inborn grasp of the art form, as *Wagnerism*, a wide-ranging survey of the worldwide impact of the Master of Bayreuth's legacy, reminds us.

The US music critic Alex Ross details how at age nine, Wagner saw Carl Maria von Weber conduct his new opera *Der Freischütz*. This early revelation set the groundwork for an article written two



Wagnerian muse:
Wilhelmine Schroeder-
Devrient (1804–1860)



decades later for a French periodical, in which Wagner introduced Parisian readers to *Der Freischütz*.

The condescension dripping from Wagner's article might imply that for some operagoers, childhood exposure to supreme performances establishes standards that only inspire intolerance later, when they prove to be unmatchable.

Another instance occurred in 1829, when the teenaged Wagner saw a performance by the dramatic soprano Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient, the 'vocal idol of Wagner's youth,' as Ross terms her. Schröder-Devrient's combination of theatrics and music in opera, Wagner later noted in his memoirs, had a matchless impact on him. An 'almost demonic fire' was set alight by the 'profoundly human and ecstatic performance of this incomparable artist'.

As if in reaction to these early heights, in his later

article about *Freischütz* Wagner disdainfully claimed that Parisians could not understand the true meaning of Weber's opera because they are ignorant of Germany's forests and uniquely profound emotions.

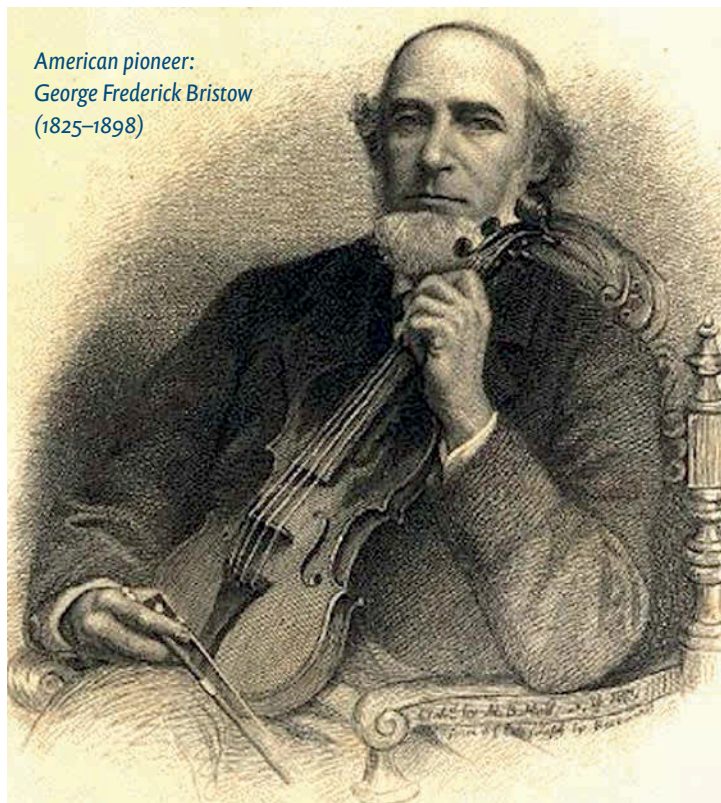
Small wonder that when still a teenager, Wagner began to work on an opera, *Die Hochzeit* (*The Wedding*), which remained uncompleted.

George Frederick Bristow by Katherine Preston University of Illinois Press, 208 pages

George Frederick Bristow, who composed the opera *Rip van Winkle* (1855), described as the first grand opera written by an American on an American subject, was introduced to the art form as a performer.

A lucid study by Katherine Preston, an opera historian, describes how as a 13-year-old theatre violinist in

American pioneer:
George Frederick Bristow
(1825–1898)



Manhattan dives, Bristow was unexpectedly moved in 1839 by having to play an orchestral version of an excerpt from a contemporary opera, which had premiered only four years earlier in Paris. It was 'Suoni la tromba', the duet for baritone and bass, from Bellini's *I Puritani*.

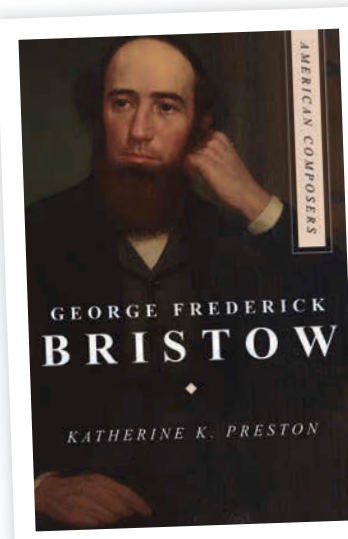
In the original opera, the duet expresses patriotic fervour, with the singers willing to face death for their country's freedom. Even an

instrumental transcription galvanised young Bristow, who later recalled that it inspired him to transcend the drudgery of playing in tatty amusement halls for paltry fees.

He would write that the music from the duo sparked a 'somewhat sudden change, a conversion to the belief that there was something good and beautiful in music'. The melody was 'so different from anything he had heard before, so striking' that he thought there was a 'fire in it which would stir up anybody'.

From this moment, Bristow felt liberated from a tyrannical father who pressured him to work as a 'poor wretch... compelled to scrape, scrape, scrape, until he was able to take his place in a minor theatre as second violin'.

Instead, the genius of Bellini provided an early form of liberation through opera – which all of the musicians celebrated in this array of new books experienced in one form or another. **ON**



Books round-up

by Benjamin Ivry

The Oxford Handbook of the Operatic Canon
edited by Cormac Newark
& William Weber
Oxford University Press

Anyone who enjoys opera will have wondered at some point about 'the canon': under economic pressures, opera houses are usually limited to a narrow presentation of what is available in the centuries-old treasure trove of operatic creation.

So this astutely researched and organised study, edited by the Head of Research at London's Guildhall School of Music & Drama together with an emeritus history professor from California, is especially welcome. Their co-written preface, communicating a certain degree of urgency, complains that due to today's box office exigencies, even a once popular hit like Verdi's *Rigoletto* no longer represents sure-fire ticket sales – at least according to Kasper Holten, Covent Garden's former director of opera.

In a thought-provoking chapter, Holten opines that

over the past decade, not just *Rigoletto*, but also *Così fan tutte*, another frequently programmed choice in the past, has faded considerably of late, leaving the only operas generally guaranteed to attract punters internationally as 'Traviata, Tosca, Bohème, Carmen, Butterfly, Figaro,' and 'possibly *The Magic Flute*'.

Audience tastes vary in different countries, and in addition to the narrow list of dead certs, there are also star vehicles in which star singers convince audiences to sample unfamiliar material. In an historical essay, Hilary Poriss celebrates the 19th-century French mezzo-soprano Pauline Viardot, who revived rarities, notably Gluck's *Orphée*, to display her talents. This precedent of unearthing long-neglected classics of the repertoire has been followed by more recent divas, from Montserrat Caballé and Joan Sutherland to Cecilia Bartoli and even Mirella Freni.

In another chapter, the veteran critic John Rockwell cautions that quality is not always a guarantee of frequent performance, as cognoscenti who consider *Wozzeck* to be artistically superior to *Turandot* might argue.

Yet, Rockwell asserts, in a partial contradiction of Holten's observations, that periodic revivals of Baroque and other operas have brought forgotten scores to public attention, including less renowned efforts by Verdi, Handel, Rossini and Mozart, whose *Idomeneo* and *La clemenza di Tito* are heard more often than in the past. Richard Strauss' *Arabella*, *Intermezzo*, and *Capriccio*, while not omnipresent

internationally, no longer go unperformed.

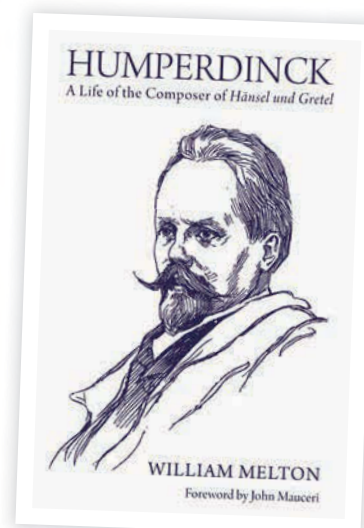
So there are reasons for hope, despite the challenges, for opera lovers who aspire to enjoy a varied and fulfilling diet of masterpieces.

Humperdinck
by William Melton
Toccata Press

Opera composers who are one-hit wonders undergo career trials that are rarely understood. So it is good to have the first thorough biography in English of Engelbert Humperdinck (1854–1921), composer of *Hansel and Gretel* (1893).

William Melton is a horn player and author of a much-praised study on the Wagner tuba (*Edition Ebenos*). He has produced an endearing portrait of a man whose name was considered risible even to contemporaries. One colleague, Hans Pfitzner, referred to him as *Himbeertunk* (raspberry sauce), a reference to Humperdinck's sweet-toned orchestrations. Siegfried Wagner, son of Richard, nicknamed him *Hümpchen* (little jug).

An unprepossessing presence, Humperdinck was also an undiplomatic critic. In 1875 he slated a new opera, *Golo*, by his employer, conservatory director Bernhard Scholz, resulting in an abrupt lack of teaching assignment. When verismo became fashionable, Humperdinck looked elsewhere for operatic inspiration. In November 1892, he visited Berlin to attend the world premiere of Felix Weingartner's opera *Genesis*.

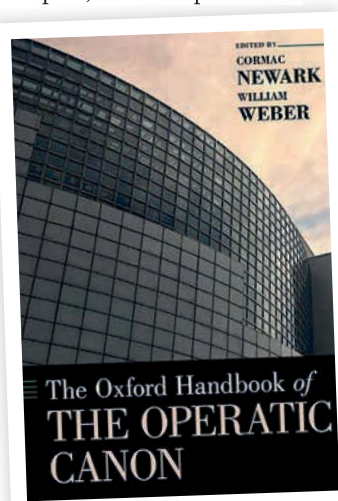


He wrote to a friend that its failure 'awakened in me a feeling of quiet dread; I would not give you two cents for *Hansel and Gretel*'s chances and am only finishing it because it is so near completion. The public now wants powerful action à la *Cavalleria*.'

Even those who admired the final score had doubts: Mahler, carped to his student Bruno Walter that while 'masterfully done', Humperdinck's creation was 'not really fairy-tale like'.

Beyond *Hansel*, Melton asserts that Humperdinck's comic opera *The Forced Marriage* (*Die Heirat wider Willen*; 1902) has 'potential to be the most worthwhile rediscovery'. His sometimes-revived *Königskinder*, although possessing strong qualities, is less satisfying a Wagnerian fairy tale than *Hansel*, partly due to its libretto. It was waspishly dismissed by Alma Mahler who accused Humperdinck of making 'operas out of Wagner's fingernail parings' to produce music that provokes a 'disgust for mankind'.

Enticingly, shortly before his death, Humperdinck announced plans for an opera inspired by the early Renaissance painter Fra Angelico, never to be realised. Melton's book is a worthy tribute to a still-underestimated composer of opera. **ON**



Going the distance

By Andrew Green

Douglas Boyd, artistic director of Garsington Opera, assures audiences that there will be a festival this summer – even if it means adapting quickly in response to whatever course the pandemic takes

Despite the gloom of a British winter, made heavier by the uncertainty about the nation's ultimate route to post-virus normality, Douglas Boyd fizzles with optimism regarding Garsington 2021. 'Unless we're forbidden by government to perform, we'll stage a full season,' declares the company's artistic director. 'Through the pandemic we've developed a nimbleness and inventiveness which can adapt to whatever situation we find ourselves in. The sense of gloom at the start of the year was understandable, but hopefully it's the darkness before the dawn.'

From the start of the crisis, says Boyd, the Garsington team have been thinking on their feet, concentrating on the art of the possible rather than sighing about the impossible. A major guiding principle has been to keep in close communication with the company's faithful supporters and musicians both professional and amateur – including the large body of young people within Garsington's ever-expanding orbit – through a variety of means.

'Everything went online last spring,' Boyd recalls. 'For example, our music and movement #MondayMotivation livestream catered for an audience of all ages – many schools used it. There were online masterclasses, part of our commitment to maintaining

the morale of young singers. And our wonderful media operation created *Our Haven* — a YouTube film featuring members of the Garsington Opera Youth Company. They sang music from John Barber's new opera *The Selfish Giant* and talked movingly about the experience of going through lockdown.'

Boyd praises the substantial and continuing financial contribution from Garsington's faithful operagoers across the last year. 'They've been amazing. People regularly told us to keep the ticket money from cancelled 2020 performances and there have been many donations as well. We've been able to create a large support fund to benefit the artists and technical staff on whom we depend.'

Preparations for 2021 have been geared towards ensuring everyone who attends performances at Wormsley '...will enjoy an amazing time *whatever* the constraints,' says Boyd. The company has the experience of staging *Fidelio* last autumn with all due social distancing throughout the venue and its surrounds.

For the tenth anniversary of the company's relocation to Wormsley this year, Boyd wanted to '...make a splash and be really ambitious. There's our first ever complete *Rosenkavalier*, featuring our world-renowned resident orchestra, the Philharmonia. The clincher for doing this was Miah Persson being available to sing Marschallin, following her ravishing *Capriccio* in 2018. We've seen the model sets for from Gary McCann and they're absolutely stunning.'

More much-needed charm and wit comes in the shape of a new production of Rossini's *Le Comte Ory*, with Jack Swanson in the title role. 'It's an opera that has to come across as truly hilarious or it falls flat,' says Boyd. 'As it happened, our director of artistic administration Laura Canning had seen English National Opera's production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe* and was seduced by the energy and comedic talent injected into it by director Cal McCrystal – so we're delighted to have secured his services for *Ory*.'

This year's revival is a second outing for the hit 2016 production of *Eugene Onegin*, although Boyd stresses the production will be significantly 'refreshed' rather than simply replicated. 'You never want a production to come across as a museum piece.' This time around Jonathan McGovern sings Onegin and Natalia Tanasii

Below: Boyd conducts the Garsington Opera Youth Company



Douglas Boyd:
*'We're concentrating on the
 art of the possible rather than
 sighing about the impossible'*

JEAN-PIERRE MILLOT

is Tatyana. Meanwhile, Garsington's tradition of seeking out operatic rarities continues with Handel's *Amadigi*, featuring Sonja Runje in the title role. Boyd is convinced the work is an underrated masterpiece: 'It was a big success in Handel's day yet has rarely been performed since. I really believe it contains some of his greatest music.'

The season is rounded off with the world premiere of John Barber's children's opera *The Selfish Giant* (a co-commission with Opera North), adapted from the Oscar Wilde tale by librettist Jessica Duchén. Rehearsals for Garsington's youth company (ages 9 to 25) have been progressing online through autumn and winter, with the hope of a smooth transition to normal rehearsals in the spring. Here, as throughout the season, the Garsington operation has compiled a detailed list of options for how to handle rehearsals in order to meet Covid rules at any one moment. Likewise, extensive plans have been hatched to ensure any necessary social distancing can be accommodated onstage and in the pit.

The same eye for distancing will apply as far the Garsington audience is concerned. Boyd points out that the in-built ability of the auditorium to be exposed to the open air will be of major benefit. 'As far as picnicking is concerned, we're lucky that we can offer the wide-open spaces of the Wormsley estate.'



We're ready, if necessary, to put in more marquees and toilets. Everything necessary will be done.

Meanwhile, in spite of the inherent uncertainties of the year ahead, ticket sales are going incredibly well. 'On the phone people are saying how making a booking represents light at the end of their tunnel. That's what a day at Garsington can mean at a time like this.' **ON**

Above: The show goes on, whatever the constraints: Boyd in action at Garsington's Covid-compliant performance of Fidelio last summer

Diaries at the ready for the Summer of '21...

With or without social distancing, the summer season promises to present a packed programme of opera, both live and online. Opening nights for productions were confirmed at the time of going to press, but in a world full of changes, dates for the full production run should be checked with the company.

Buxton International Festival Buxton, Derbyshire

Nestled in the heart of the Peak District, the historic spa town of Buxton hosts an annual summer arts festival of opera, concerts and literary events. Over the past 40 years, the festival has gained a reputation for staging rarely performed operas and, more recently, for commissioning new works; it won the Achievement in Opera Award at the 2019 UK Theatre Awards for the world premiere of the pasticcio *Georgiana*.

At the time of going to press with this issue of *Opera Now*, Buxton's plans for its 2021 Festival were still under discussion. The latest updates will be posted on operanow.co.uk. Meanwhile, to whet your appetite, Buxton is publishing a series of behind-the-scenes interviews with

Frank Matcham's splendid
opera house is the centrepiece of
Buxton's summer extravaganza





Setting the scene: by the lake at the Wormsley Estate, home of Garsington Opera

creative teams involved in this summer's festival on its YouTube channel, including discussions about set and costume design. buxtonfestival.co.uk

Garsington Opera Wormsley Park, Buckinghamshire

This summer Garsington celebrates 10 years at the Wormsley Estate in the Chiltern Hills, its home since 2011 following its move from the Oxfordshire manor house of the company's founder, Leonard Ingrams. The 2021 season is set to bring live opera back at full throttle, with three of its four productions new this year. In the meantime, audiences can enjoy Garsington's online broadcasts, including *Fidelio in Concert* led by Katherine Broderick as Leonore and Toby Spence as

Florestan (available until 22 April); the *Music for the Eyes* documentary series exploring connections between opera, visual arts and literature; and four Insight Talks discussing this season's operas (12 April-4 May).

Opening Nights

Wednesday 2 June: Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*. Miah Persson leads the cast as the Marschallin, with Hanna Hipp as Octavian and Soraya Mafi as Sophie. Making Garsington debuts are Derrick Ballard as Baron Ochs and Jordan de Souza conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra. Bruno Ravella directs this co-production with Irish National Opera.

Thursday 3 June: Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. Michael Boyd's 2016 production returns with Jonathan McGovern making his debut in the title role. Natalia Tanasii is Tatyana and Sam Furness sings Lensky. Douglas Boyd conducts.

Saturday 19 June: Handel's *Amadigi*. Handel's 'magic opera' is presented in a new production by director/designer Netia Jones. Sonja Runje makes her debut as Amadigi alongside a cast featuring Rhian Lois, Anna Devin and Tim Mead. Christian Curnyn conducts The English Concert.

Friday 2 July: Rossini's *Le comte Ory*. The cast is led by Jack Swanson as the mischievous cross-dressing Count Ory and Andrea Carroll as his secret lover Adèle. This new production is directed by Cal McCrystal, and Valentina Peleggi is in the pit at Garsington for the first time. garsingtonopera.org

Glyndebourne Festival Glynde, West Sussex

Since its inaugural edition in 1934, the Glyndebourne Festival has continued to lead the way for English country house opera. The 1,200-seater opera house boasts excellent acoustics and unbroken sightlines from almost any seat, while the extensive gardens for picnicking and three on-site restaurants are all part of the immersive experience of a day out at a country house opera. A highlight of the 2021 season



Glyndebourne's *Magic Flute* is back on the menu this summer

promises to be Glyndebourne's first ever production of Verdi's *Luisa Miller*, directed by Christof Loy. Current online offerings include a free broadcast of Peter Hall's production of Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, available on YouTube.

Opening Nights

Thursday 20 May: Janáček's *Kát'a Kabanová*. Kateřina Kněžíková stars in the title role with Aigul Akhmetshina as Varvara and Nicky Spence as Tichon. Damiano Michieletto directs this new production and Robin Ticciati conducts the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Saturday 22 May: Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. Barbe & Doucet's stylish production, big on culinary humour, is revived for the 2021 season. Paul Appleby sings Tamino, with Johannes Kammler as Papageno and Siobhan Staggs as Pamina. Galina Benevich takes us into the stratosphere as Queen of the Night, while Solomon Howard provides the bass notes as Sarastro. Constantin Trinks conducts.

Sunday 13 June: Rossini's *Il turco in Italia*. Rodion Pogosssov leads the cast as Don Geronio, accompanied by Elena Tsallagova as Fiorilla, Andrea Mastroni as Selim and Michele Angelini as Narciso. This new production of Rossini's curiously reflective comedy is directed by Mariame Clément and conducted by Giancarlo Andretta. ➤

Sunday 4 July: Mozart's *Così fan tutte*.

The two sisters are played by Ida Falk Winland (Fiordiligi) and Stephanie Lauricella (Dorabella), and their fiancés by Huw Montague Rendall (Guglielmo) and Alexey Neklyudov (Ferrando). Hera Hyesang Park, this month's *Opera Now* cover star, sings Despina. Nicholas Hytner directs and Italian conductor Riccardo Minasi makes his house debut.

Sunday 18 July: Verdi's *Luisa Miller*.

Christof Loy directs Glyndebourne's first ever production of Verdi's tragic opera. The cast includes Mané Galoyan as Luisa, Vladislav Sulimsky as Miller and Evgeny Stavinsky as Count Walter. Enrique Mazzola conducts.

Thursday 5 August: Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Simon O'Neill sings Tristan alongside Miina-Liisa Väreä as Isolde, Karen Cargill as Brangäne and Shenyang as Kurwenal. Robin Ticciati conducts this revival of Nikolaus Lehnhoff's critically acclaimed production.

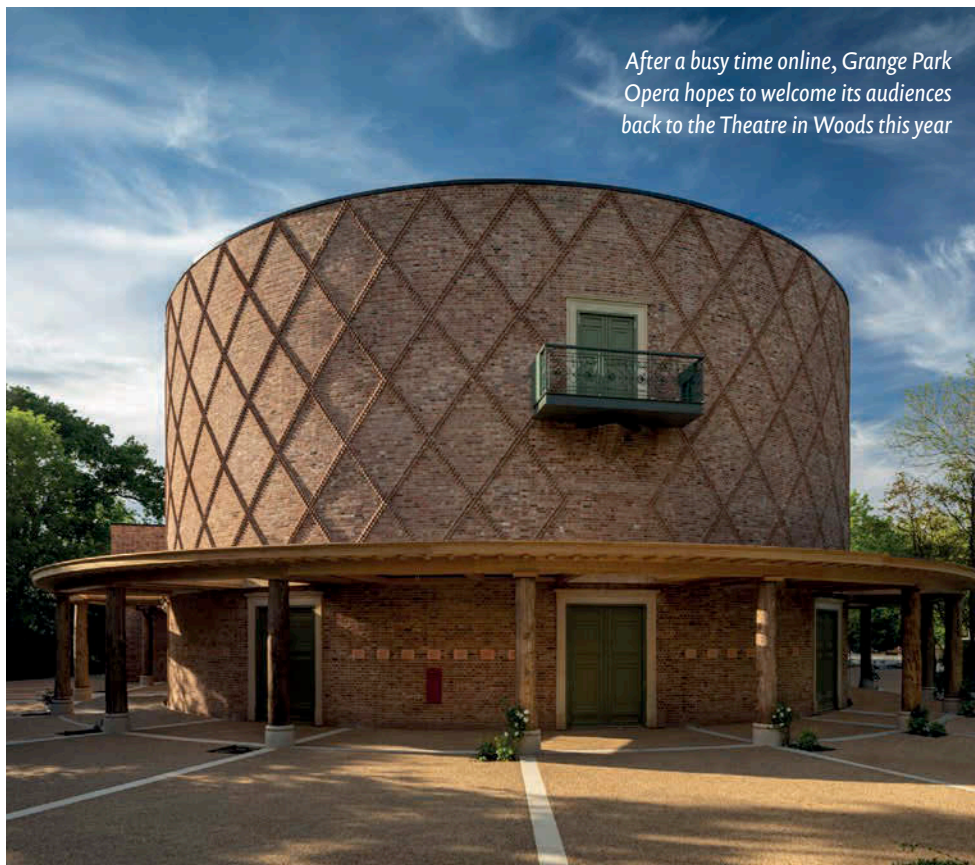
glyndebourne.com

Grange Park Opera
West Horsley Place, Surrey

Founded in 1998 by Wasfi Kani OBE, Grange Park Opera relocated to the 350-acre West Horsley estate in 2017. There, Kani and her team built the intimate five-storey Theatre in the Woods, and the new Piccolo Theatre was inaugurated in 2019. Notable in the upcoming summer season is the world premiere of Anthony Bolton's *The Life & Death of Alexander Litvinenko*, telling the real-life story of the former FSB officer through a series of flashbacks, flash-forwards and historic film footage. Meanwhile, Grange Park Opera has been unstinting in keep us entertained through lockdown: Britten's *Owen Wingrave* and a host of recitals and talks are still available to watch online from Grange Park's 2020 Interim Season.

Opening Nights

Thursday 10 June: Verdi's *Falstaff*. Bryn Terfel stars in the title role in Stephen Medcalf's production. Natalya Romaniw is Alice Ford, Sara Fulgoni is Mistress Quickly and Janis Kelly is Meg Page. Gianluca Marciano conducts.



After a busy time online, Grange Park Opera hopes to welcome its audiences back to the Theatre in Woods this year

RICHARD LEVINSOHN

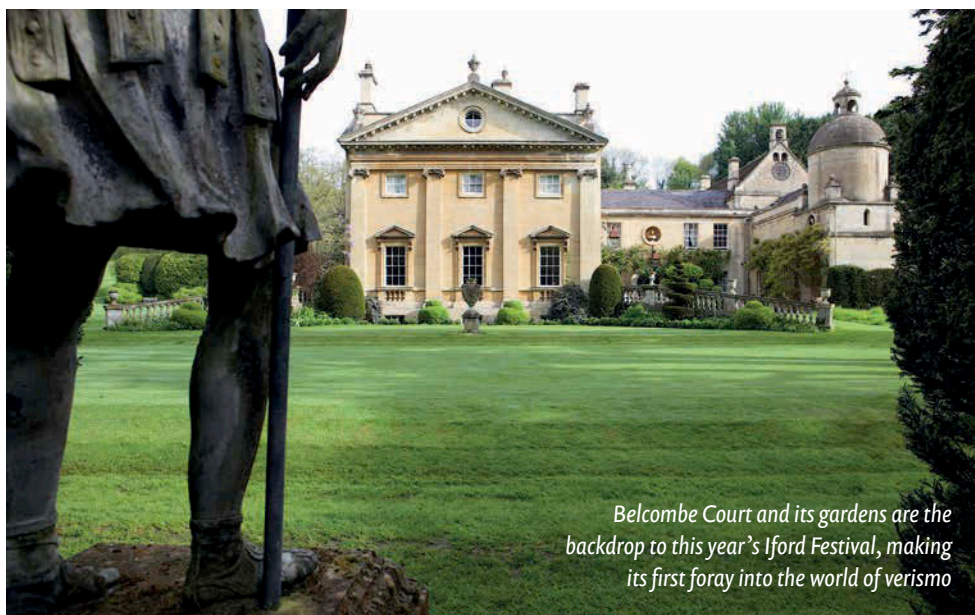
Saturday 12 June: Puccini's *La Bohème*.

Luis Chapa sings Rodolfo opposite Ailish Tynan as Mimì. William Dazeley is Marcello and Hye-Youn Lee is Musetta. Stephen Medcalf directs and Stephen Barlow conducts.

Korsakov's hidden gems. The cast includes Clive Bayley as Ivan the Terrible, Evelina Dobracheva as Princess Olga, Liubov Sokolova as Vlashevna and Carl Tanner as Tucha. Mikhail Tatarnikov is conductor.

Saturday 19 June: Rimsky-Korsakov's *Ivan the Terrible*. David Pountney directs a new production of one of Rimsky-

Thursday 15 July: Anthony Bolton's *The Life & Death of Alexander Litvinenko*. Grange Park premieres this new opera by composer Anthony Bolton and librettist



Belcombe Court and its gardens are the backdrop to this year's Iford Festival, making its first foray into the world of verismo



The gods are all set to be back in business in Longborough's Ring cycle, continuing with a concert staging of *Die Walküre*

Kit Hesketh-Harvey. Adrian Dwyer is Alexander Litvinenko, Rebecca Bottone his wife Marina, and Stephan Loges sings Boris Berezovsky. Stephen Medcalf directs and Stephen Barlow conducts.
grangeparkopera.co.uk

Iford Opera Belcombe Court, Wiltshire

Iford Opera returns in the late summer to Belcome Court, its temporary home since 2019. Main performances take place in the glorious grounds of this Grade I-listed Georgian house near Bath, set in 60 acres of formal gardens, parkland and woodland. The venue for this year's exciting series of events is a spectacular outdoor saddlespan structure, beginning with an evening Prom – details to be announced

The opera company is known as a springboard for young and emerging talent and runs a New Generation Artists programme, alongside numerous education and outreach projects. Its new general director is Mike Volpe, one of the driving forces behind the success of London's Opera Holland Park, who will be setting out plans to transform the company into a leading cultural force in the South West of England.

Opening Nights

Sunday 22 August: Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. Fun for all the family as Peter, his grandfather, the hunters, the villainous

wolf and a whole menagerie of animals are brought to life by Iford's artistic director Oliver Gooch and the Orpheus Sinfonia.

Saturday 28 August: Mascagni's 'MezzoCav' / Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*.

Iford's short, intense version of *Cavalleria rusticana* serves the opera up in bleeding chunks, including the famous Intermezzo along with soprano Susan Bullock leading the cast and chorus in the *Easter Hymn*. *Pagliacci* is produced in partnership with Opera Ensemble and directed by Christopher Luscombe. The production, which toured venues at the end of 2020, includes a high-powered cast led by Elin Pritchard and Peter Auty. (See *Opera Now*'s review on page 52.)

Ifordarts.org.uk

Longborough Festival Opera Longborough, Gloucestershire

Following its three complete stagings of the *Ring* cycle in 2013, given to critical acclaim, Longborough embarked upon its second cycle in 2019, due to culminate in 2024. This summer sees *Die Walküre* performed in Longborough's neoclassical theatre. The three other festival productions will take place in a new venue, the 'Big Top', an indoor/outdoor space with seating flexibility that allows for a larger socially distanced audience than the theatre. For insights into this year's programme and discussions with the artists, try Longborough's podcast series.

Opening Nights

Tuesday 1 June: Wagner's *Die Walküre*.

Amy Lane directs this new concert production, which allows for additional musicians on stage alongside the cast. Peter Wedd is Siegmund and Sarah Marie Kramer makes her Longborough debut as Sieglinde. Also making a house debut is Paul Carey Jones as Wotan. Madeleine Shaw returns as Fricka. Anthony Negus conducts.

Wednesday 23 June: Mozart's *Così fan tutte*.

Director Sam Brown joins Lesley Anne Sammons conducting the Barefoot Band in her own re-orchestration of Mozart's witty opera. Anna Patalong sings Fiordiligi alongside Idunnu Münch as Dorabella. Marcus Farnsworth is Guglielmo and William Morgan is Ferrando.

Tuesday 13 July: Monteverdi's *The Return of Ulysses*.

Longborough's artistic director Polly Graham makes her festival debut directing Monteverdi's compassionate drama. Tom Randle heads the cast as Ulysses and Lucia Cervoni is Penelope. Robert Howarth conducts early music specialists La Serenissima.

Thursday 29 July: Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*.

Directed by Olivia Fuchs and conducted by Justin Brown, this new production will showcase Longborough's Emerging Artists and the Longborough Youth Chorus. Julieth Lozano plays Vixen Sharp-Ears and Kieran Rayner is Forester.

lfo.org.uk

Nevill Holt Opera Nevill Holt Hall, Leicestershire

With the inauguration of its 400-seater opera house in 2018 – which won the RIBA Sterling Prize People's Vote in 2019 – Nevill Holt is firmly established in the top ranks of summer country house opera festivals. Not only can you expect to enjoy excellent performances, but the gardens are worth a visit in themselves: designed by Rupert Golby, they house a sculpture collection that includes works by Antony Gormley, Allen Jones and Nic Fiddian-Green. Nevill Holt has lined up two scenarios for its 2021 festival. Should full social distancing still be required, events will take place in a new outside venue with a bespoke stage and a mix of covered and uncovered seating. If social distancing has been minimised, the festival will return to its theatre.

Opening Nights

Wednesday 9 June: Verdi's *La Traviata*. Susana Gaspar stars as Violetta opposite Michel de Souza as Germont. Christopher Luscombe directs and Nicholas Chalmers, Nevill Holt's artistic director, conducts.

Thursday 24 June: Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The cast includes Seán Boylan

as Don Giovanni, Aoife Miskelly as Donna Elvira, Nicholas Crawley as Leporello and Joshua Owen Mills as Don Ottavio. The director is Jack Furness.

nevilleholtopera.co.uk

The Grange Festival Northington Grange, Hampshire

Countertenor Michael Chance became artistic director of The Grange Festival in 2017 and has since restored the landscaping of the magnificent Grange Park estate, offering stunning views across quintessential Hampshire countryside. The 2020 summer season has been rescheduled for 2021, and, in the spirit of The Grange's multi-disciplinary programming, presents Shakespeare's *King Lear* performed by singers rather than actors. The cast is a roll call of British operatic stars. Also billed for this summer is the musical *My Fair Lady*.

Opening Nights

Friday 11 June: Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Samantha Clarke, prize winner at the 2019 Grange International Singing Competition, performs Tytania and Alexander Chance makes his stage

debut as Oberon. Chris Darmanin is Puck and Jonathan Lemalu returns to sing Bottom. Paul Curran directs and Anthony Kraus conducts.

Saturday 12 June: Rossini's *La Cenerentola*. Sicilian mezzo Josè Maria Lo Monaco stars as Angelina opposite Nico Darmanin as the Prince, Don Ramiro. Christian Senn is Dandini and Luciano di Pasquale is Don Magnifico. The production is staged by Stephen Barlow with David Parry conducting.

Sunday 27 June: Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. Elin Pritchard returns to The Grange as Manon alongside Samuel Sakker as Des Grieux, Nicholas Lester as Lescaut and Stephen Richardson as Geronte. This is a new production by Stephen Lawless, conducted by Francesco Cilluffo.

Wednesday 14 July: Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Keith Warner curates this unique project with set designs by Ashley Martin-Davis and original incidental music by Nigel Osborne. John Tomlinson plays Lear, Thomas Allen is Gloucester and Peter Coleman Wright is Kent. Susan Bullock takes the role of Goneril, with Emma Bell as Regan and Louise Alder as Cordelia.

thegrangefestival.co.uk



Nevill Holt has plenty of choice when it comes to flexible performance spaces

Right: Style and exuberance are back on display at
The Grange in Hampshire

Below: John Tomlinson turns the spotlight on his
acting skills as Shakespeare's King Lear



West Green House Opera Hartley Wintney, Hampshire

Near the pretty Hampshire village of Hartley Wintney lies West Green House, a handsome early 18th-century mansion, once owned by the powerful business magnate Victor Sassoon. A few years before his death in 1961, Sassoon handed the estate over to the National Trust. Alistair McAlpine, adviser to Margaret Thatcher, acquired the lease in the 1970s and undertook an extensive restoration project with 'starchitect' Terry Quinlan. In 1993, the Australian gardener and writer Marylyn Abbott (who once worked for Sydney Opera House), bought the lease and created a magnificent garden – worth the journey in itself. Abbott has launched an eclectic summer opera season that takes place in a quirky auditorium in the garden known as The Green Theatre. Second time lucky: this summer's festival revives the 2020 programme that was cancelled for all the obvious reasons.

Opening Nights

23 July: Howard Goodall's *Invictus: A Passion* (choral). The choir of Winchester College and soloists from The Sixteen join forces for a new commission from one of Britain's leading composers, inspired by William Ernest Henley's classic poem exploring themes of fortitude and self-control.

24 July: Puccini's *La Rondine*. Paris in the 1900s forms the backdrop to one of Puccini's most romantic scores. Katie Bray stars as the flighty Magda toying with Robyn Lyn Evans's attentive young Ruggero. Richard Studer directs and designs.

30 July Lerner and Loewe's *Gigi* (in concert). We're back in Paris where everyone's favourite tart with a heart goes

in search of love and romance. 'Ah Yes, I Remember It Well...'

31 July: Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. West Green House has assembled a strong cast led by the Onegin of Nicholas Lester with Tatyana sung by Jenny Stafford and Lensky by Tom Elwin. Johnny Ramster directs. **ON** www.westgreenhouseopera.co.uk



Marylyn Abbott's magnificent gardens are big draw at West Green House

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- Expert analysis & opinion
- Practical advice & resources

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Spotlight

Cautious optimism

Listings are in alphabetical order by city within each country heading.

Any sudden turnaround in the fortunes of opera companies struggling under Covid is unlikely. As vaccines take their effect while coronavirus variants try to dodge the bullet, opera venues are proceeding with utmost caution in opening up to live audiences. Where performances are taking place, theatres are adapting to the constraints of social distancing and creating environments to ensure that everyone involved on stage and in the audience stays safe. Streaming and operas made for film are keeping audiences engaged at home.

Managements are reassessing their position as government guidelines are updated. The information in this Guide was correct at the time of going to press in February 2021.

Please check opera house websites in order to confirm whether performances are going ahead. Updates and season information will also be posted on operanow.co.uk

UK

CARDIFF

WELSH NATIONAL OPERA
www.wno.org.uk

Covid restrictions have forced WNO to cancel its national tour this spring, but the company is hoping to resume productions in autumn 2021. Meanwhile, a range of performances are available to view on WNO's digital channels, including online events involving WNO's choir and orchestra and work specially commissioned for streaming.

Welsh National Opera's
Creating Changes Series
is available to stream



GLASGOW

SCOTTISH OPERA
www.scottishopera.org.uk

Scottish Opera is offering a number of productions available for streaming online, including a Covid-compliant staging of *Hansel and Gretel* and a concert performance of *Così fan tutte*. Visit the website for details.

LEEDS

OPERA NORTH
www.operanorth.co.uk

Opera North's production of *Parsifal*, scheduled for spring 2021, has been postponed to a future year. Instead, the company will present a specially devised evening of music from Wagner's *Ring*, using Jonathan Dove's orchestrations and conducted by Richard Farnes. Past performances are available to stream online via the company's website.

LONDON

ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA
www.eno.org.uk

Please visit the ENO website for the latest details of planned live performances and online broadcasts. ENO members can access exclusive live events and conversations on ENO TV.

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE
www.roh.org.uk

Live performances have been suspended until further notice. Visit the ROH website for details of online screenings and radio and television broadcasts.

UK FESTIVALS LISTINGS

Turn to pages 70-75 of this issue for details of this summer's events around Britain

EUROPE

AUSTRIA

VIENNA

VIENNA STATE OPERA
www.wiener-staatsoper.at

Covid Restrictions continue until 28 February, after which performances may return to the State Opera House, following Austrian government advice. Meanwhile, productions from Vienna State Opera's archives are available to be streamed for free. Visit the website for details.

MAR 2021

La Traviata | Verdi
Manon | Massenet
Rigoletto | Verdi

APR 2021

Parsifal | Wagner
Turandot | Puccini
Il barbiere di Siviglia | Rossini
Die Walküre | Wagner
Faust | Gounod
Die Zauberflöte | Mozart
Les contes d'Hoffmann | Offenbach
L'incoronazione di Poppea | Monteverdi

JUN 2021

Macbeth | Verdi
Lohengrin | Wagner

BELGIUM

ANTWERP/GHENT

FLANDERS OPERA
www.operaballet.be

The adaptation of *Tristan und Isolde* by Annelies van Parys has been cancelled. A new full staging of Wagner's *Tristan* will be scheduled in a later season. Please visit the Flanders Opera website for the latest updates on live and streamed performances.

BRUSSELS

LA MONNAIE/DE MUNT
www.lamonnaie.be

February saw a specially devised programme of free streamed recitals and performances which will continue if Covid restrictions are still in place.

MAR-APR 2021

WORLD PREMIERE
Bastarda I & II | Donizetti

APR-MAY 2021

NEW PRODUCTION
Henry VIII | Saint-Saëns

JUN-JUL 2021

Parsifal | Wagner

CZECH REPUBLIC

PRAGUE

NATIONAL THEATRE
www.narodni-divadlo.cz

Nabucco | Verdi
La bohème | Puccini
The Cunning Little Vixen | Janáček

Fidelio | Beethoven
State Operahouse

NEW PRODUCTION
Tristan und Isolde | Wagner
WORLD PREMIERE
The White Death | Miroslav
Love for Three Oranges | Prokofiev

NEW PRODUCTION
Kát'a Kabanová | Janáček

NEW PRODUCTION
Rigoletto | Verdi
Madama Butterfly | Puccini

Turandot | Puccini
The Bartered Bride | Smetana

Aida | Verdi
Der ferne Klang | Schreker
Dalibor | Smetana
Hänsel und Gretel | Humperdinck

NEW PRODUCTION
Le Grand Macabre | Ligeti

FRANCE

PARIS

PARIS OPERA
www.operadeparis.fr

The Palais Garnier is closed due to Covid-19 by government order. Performances are at the Opéra de Bastille, unless stated otherwise.

MAR-APR 2021
NEW PRODUCTION
Faust | Gounod

directed by Tobias Kratzer
MAY-JUN 2021
Tosca | Puccini

NEW PRODUCTION
La Dame de Pique | Tchaikovsky
directed by Dmitri Tcherniakov
WORLD PREMIERE
Le Soulier de Satin | Dalbavie

GERMANY

BERLIN

KOMISCHE OPER BERLIN
www.komische-oper-berlin.de

MAR-APR 2021
NEW PRODUCTION
Die Fledermaus | Strauss J
MAR-JUL 2021
NEW PRODUCTION

Les Boréades | Rameau

APR-JUN 2021

Il barbiere di Siviglia | Rossini
Jim Knopf und Lukas der Lokomotivführer | Kats-Chernin

MAY-JUL 2021

NEW PRODUCTION

Oedipe | Enescu

JUN 2021

NEW PRODUCTION

Orpheus in der Unterwelt | Offenbach

BERLIN STATE OPERA

www.staatsoper-berlin.de

All performances at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden

MAR 2021

Der Rosenkavalier | Strauss

MAR-APR 2021

NEW PRODUCTION

Le nozze di Figaro | Mozart

Parsifal | Wagner

APR 2021

NEW PRODUCTION

Thomas | Haas, Georg

APR-MAY 2021

La bohème | Puccini

MAY 2021

La Traviata | Verdi

Salome | Strauss

Wozzeck | Berg

MAY-JUN 2021

Der Freischütz | Weber

JUN-JUL 2021

NEW PRODUCTION

La fanciulla del West | Puccini

DEUTSCHE OPER

www.deutscheoperberlin.de

Please visit the Deutsche Oper website for the latest details.

GREECE

ATHENS

GREEK NATIONAL OPERA

www.nationalopera.gr

GNO TV, the company's new web TV platform providing a high-quality viewing and listening experience, has been launched. John Fulljames' production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* is the first production, staged in Athens and available to view online

HUNGARY

BUDAPEST

HUNGARIAN STATE OPERA

www.opera.hu

MAR 2021

Dead Man Walking | Heggie

FEB-MAR 2021

L'oca del Cairo | Mozart

Madama Butterfly | Puccini

MAR 2021

Bánk bán | Erkel

Werther | Massenet

MAR-MAY 2021

NEW PRODUCTION

Les contes d'Hoffmann | Offenbach

APR 2021

Pagliacci | Leoncavallo

Cavalleria rusticana | Mascagni

Parsifal | Wagner

Messa di Gloria | Mascagni

Falstaff | Verdi

NEW PRODUCTION

Notre Dame de Paris | Schmidt

APR-MAY 2021

NEW PRODUCTION

La fille du régiment | Donizetti

Dialogues des Carmélites | Poulenc

The Fairy Queen | Purcell

MAY 2021

Les Huguenots | Meyerbeer

NEW PRODUCTION

Pelléas et Mélisande | Debussy



La Bohème at the Berlin State Opera



Socially distanced rehearsals for La Clemenza di Tito in Geneva

NEW PRODUCTION
Andrea Chénier | Giordano
WORLD PREMIERE
Figaro3 | Various
JUN 2021
Carmen | Bizet

ITALY

MILAN

TEATRO ALLA SCALA
www.teatroallascala.org
 Please visit the La Scala website for the latest details.

ROME

TEATRO DELL'OPERA
www.operaroma.it
 Please visit the Teatro Dell'Opera website for the latest details.

VENICE

TEATRO LA FENICE
www.teatrolafenice.it
 La Fenice is streaming opera productions and concerts online. Visit the website for details.

NETHERLANDS

AMSTERDAM

DUTCH NATIONAL OPERA
operaballet.nl
MAR 2021
Oedipus Rex | Stravinsky
From 'Antigone' | Moussa
Upload | Van der Aa
APR-MAY 2021
Die lustige Witwe | Lehár
MAY 2021

Anna Bolena | Donizetti
JUN 2021
La Damnation de Faust | Berlioz

NORWAY

OSLO

NORWEGIAN NATIONAL OPERA
www.operaen.no

The season is suspended until further notice though digital content will be available.

SPAIN

BARCELONA

GRAN TEATRE DEL LICEU
www.liceubarcelona.cat

MAR-APR 2021
Otello | Verdi
MAY 2021
NEW PRODUCTION
Tannhäuser | Wagner
JUN-JUL 2021
La bohème | Puccini
JUL 2021
Lucia di Lammermoor | Donizetti
My Fair Lady | Loewe

MADRID

TEATRO REAL
www.teatro-real.com
MAR 2021
NEW PRODUCTION
Norma | Bellini
APR-MAY 2021
NEW PRODUCTION
Peter Grimes | Britten

MAY-JUN 2021
WORLD PREMIERE
Tránsito | Torres
JUN 2021
NEW PRODUCTION
Viva la Mamma | Donizetti
Orlando Furioso | Vivaldi
JUL 2021
Tosca | Puccini

RUSSIA

MOSCOW

HELIKON-OPERA
www.helikon.ru
MAR-JUL 2021
NEW PRODUCTION
La Traviata | Verdi
JAN-JUN 2021
Carmen | Bizet
MAR 2021
Nabucco | Verdi
APR 2021
NEW PRODUCTION
La Voix humaine | Poulenc
Dialogues des Carmélites | Poulenc
Falstaff | Verdi
Mozart and Salieri | Rimsky-Korsakov
MAY 2021
La finta giardiniera | Mozart
NEW PRODUCTION
Pique Dame | Tchaikovsky
Il barbiere di Siviglia | Rossini
JUN 2021
Tsarina | Tikhmanov
NEW PRODUCTION
Il trovatore | Verdi

SWEDEN

GOTHENBURG

GOTHENBURG OPERA
en.opera.se
MAR 2021
Norma | Bellini
MAY-JUN 2021
Don Giovanni | Mozart

MALMÖ

MALMÖ OPERA
www.malmoopera.se
MAR-APR 2021
NEW PRODUCTION
Så som i himmelen | Kempe
WORLD PREMIERE
Dead or Alive | Rydman
MAR-APR 2021
NEW PRODUCTION
Vec Makropulos | Janáček
WORLD PREMIERE
Circus Days and Nights | Glass

STOCKHOLM

ROYAL SWEDISH OPERA
www.operan.se
MAR-JUN 2021
La Traviata | Verdi
MAR-MAY 2021
Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg | Wagner
APR-JUN 2021
Il barbiere di Siviglia | Rossini

SWITZERLAND

GENEVA

GENEVA OPERA
www.geneveopera.ch
MAR-APR 2021
Parsifal | Wagner
MAY 2021
Dido and Aeneas | Purcell
JUN-JUL 2021
NEW PRODUCTION
La traviata | Verdi

ZÜRICH

ZÜRICH OPERA
www.opernhaus.ch
 Thanks to a brand new, specially developed performance model, Zurich hopes to deliver the rest of its 2020/21 season as planned. With this model, large ensembles, such as orchestra and choir, will

be transmitted live to the opera house for each performance from an external orchestra rehearsal hall, maintaining first-class acoustic quality and without time delay.

MAR-APR 2021

NEW PRODUCTION

Amerika | Haubenstock-Ramati

Don Pasquale | Donizetti

Werther | Massenet

APR-MAY 2021

NEW PRODUCTION

Les contes d'Hoffmann |

Offenbach

Eugene Onegin | Tchaikovsky

La donna del lago | Rossini

MAY 2021

NEW PRODUCTION

Viva la Mamma | Donizetti

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt

Mahagonny | Weill

MAY-JUN 2021

NEW PRODUCTION

Capriccio | Strauss R

JUN 2021

Madama Butterfly | Puccini

JUN-JUL 2021

NEW PRODUCTION

Lucia di Lammermoor | Donizetti

Don Carlo | Verdi

Idomeneo | Mozart

NORTH AMERICA

USA

BOSTON

BOSTON LYRIC OPERA

www.blo.org

Productions of *Madama Butterfly* and *Champion* have been moved to the 2021/22 Season, and *Hansel and Gretel* is postponed to a future date. Meanwhile, BLO has launched a new streaming service, **operabox.tv**

CHICAGO

CHICAGO LYRIC OPERA

www.lyricopera.org

The Lyric Opera's 2020/21 season is cancelled. Instead, the company is offering a virtual series of performances, including a concert hosted by Lawrence Brownlee.

NEW YORK

METROPOLITAN OPERA

www.metopera.org

The Metropolitan Opera has cancelled its 2020/21 season. It will continue to stream free content featuring full productions of opera from its archive.

LOS ANGELES

LOS ANGELES OPERA

www.laopera.org

LA opera is streaming recitals, lectures and behind-the-scenes videos on its *On Now* portal in place of its 2020/21 season.

PHILADELPHIA

OPERA PHILADELPHIA

www.operaphila.org

Opera Philadelphia's new TV channel was launched in October, hosting its *O2o Festival* and a series of streamed performances for the 2020/21 season. The company hopes to stage *Tosca* in spring 2021.

APR-MAY 2021

Tosca | Puccini

Academy of Music

SAN FRANCISCO

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA

www.sfoopera.com

SFO intends to resume business with its spring 2021 season programme. Meanwhile, the company's *Opera* is *On* virtual hub offers streamed performances, playlists, educational resources and blog posts.

APR-MAY 2021

The Barber of Seville | Rossini

Der Zwerg | Zemlinsky

WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA

www.kennedy-center.org

All performances to 25 April 2021 have been cancelled, along with much of the late spring and early summer touring programmes. The company is instead streaming concerts, performances and special events on its Digital Stage+.

ASIA PACIFIC

AUSTRALIA

SYDNEY

OPERA AUSTRALIA

www.opera.org.au

Live opera returns to the Sydney Opera House in 2021, while archive productions and related content is available to stream via the company's on-demand TV channel, OA | TV.

MAR 2021

Tosca | Puccini

MAR 2021

Bluebeard's Castle | Bartók

CHINA

BEIJING

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

www.chncpa.org

Please visit the NCPA website for the latest details.

JAPAN

TOKYO

NEW NATIONAL THEATRE TOKYO

www.nntt.jac.go.jp

MAR 2021

Die Walküre | Wagner

APR 2021

NEW PRODUCTION

Le Rossignol | Stravinsky

NEW PRODUCTION

Iolanta | Tchaikovsky

Lucia di Lammermoor | Donizetti

MAY 2021

Don Carlo | Verdi

JUL 2021

NEW PRODUCTION

Carmen | Bizet

Answers to the January/February 2021 issue Opera Now Quiz

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Leontyne Price (Met Opera Jamboree Fundraiser at the Ritz Theatre, 1953 – she sang 'Summertime'). | 11 <i>Sizilianische Vesper</i> , 1843 |
| 2 Amelia (<i>Amelia goes to the ball</i> – Menotti) | 12 <i>Covid fan tutte</i> , libretto by Minna Lindgren |
| 3 Amelia (<i>Un ballo in maschera</i> – Verdi) | 13 <i>La Gioconda</i> , Ponchielli (Act III) |
| 4 Susanna and the Elders – (<i>Susanna</i> by Handel; <i>Susannah</i> by Floyd) | 14 Zdenka in <i>Arabella</i> (R Strauss) |
| 5 The Duke of Mantua (<i>Rigoletto</i>) | 15 Seven (<i>Bluebeard's Castle</i> , Bartók) |
| 6 <i>Il barbiere di Siviglia</i> , Rossini, 1816 | 16 Rossini ('Tournedos Rossini') |
| Marcellina and Bartolo | 17 A Duchess (<i>Die Herzogin von Chicago</i> , Kálmán; <i>La Grande-Duchesse de</i> |
| Basilio and Don Curzio | <i>Gérolstein</i> , Offenbach; <i>La Duchesse de</i> |
| 7 <i>Othello</i> | <i>Krakenthorp</i> from <i>La fille du régiment</i> , Donizetti) |
| 8 The Omniscient Mussel (<i>Die ägyptische Helena</i> , by R Strauss) | 18 <i>Die Dollarprinzessin</i> , Leo Fall |
| 9 Baba the Turk (<i>The Rake's Progress</i> , Stravinsky). 'As I was saying' is her aria; and rum baba. | 19 Stupenda = Joan Sutherland / Superba = Monsterrat Caballé / Prudentissima = Mirella Freni |
| 10 Peter Josef von Lindpaintner: <i>Die</i> | 20 Henze, <i>The English Cat</i> |
| | 21 Marian Anderson (<i>Un ballo in maschera</i> , in 1955) |

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The Opera Now

Quiz

Do you know your Puccini from your Ponchelli? Test your wits in another round of fiendish and intriguing questions from the *Opera Now* editorial team...

- 1 Which opera is about Vickie Lynn Hogan, although her name was changed when her mother remarried and then she changed it again herself as an adult?
- 2 Which opera's overture quotes the national anthem of the UK?
Which opera quotes the national anthem of the United States?
In which opera does a character sing 'God Save the King'?
- 3 I can be both fiery and exterminating – what am I?
- 4 I am Анна Юрьевна Нетребко and I made my Met debut in *Война и мир* although I had already sung there in a guest production of *Руслан и Людмила*. Who am I?
- 5 Which 1979 classic rock album was turned into an opera in 2017? The very thought might leave you comfortably numb, but if you think 'we don't need no education' that might explain why you don't know the answer.
- 6 A comic opera for one – you might like it with the lights on for aesthetic reasons
- 7 Take 1 oz gin, 1 oz French vermouth, 1 oz crème de menthe - stir with ice, strain and serve. Which legendary tenor is this cocktail named after?
- 8 Who directed the *Jahrhundertring* (Centenary Ring) at Bayreuth?
- 9 Who painted the ceiling of the Palais Garnier in 1964?
- 10 Who sings that her mother had a handmaid called Barbara, 'in love and beautiful'?
- 11 A boom in which industry led to the construction of which opera house in Manaus?
- 12 Who made her name when she replaced Callas in *La Sonnambula* at the 1957 Edinburgh Festival?
- 13 Your ticket says 'gradinata non numerate' and you are clutching a small candle in one hand and, if you have any sense, a cushion in the other: where are you?
- 14 I am Ana de Mendoza de la Cerda y de Silva Cifuentes, Duchess of Pastrana, 2nd Princess of Mélito, 2nd Duchess of Francavilla and 3rd Countess of Aliano. But you know me by a different title unless your knowledge is patchy. What is it?
- 15 Who died onstage at the Met on 4 March 1960 while singing in *La forza del destino*?
- 16 How well do you know Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*?
 - What is the name of the Marschallin's hairdresser?
 - What is Octavian's full name and what is his nickname?
 - What name does Octavian use when he is dressed as a maid?
- 17 Weber started composing *Die drei Pintos* in the 1820s but became sidetracked. Which composer completed the opera for its premiere in Leipzig, 1888?
- 18 In the premiere production of which opera were roller skates used to simulate ice skates?
- 19 In the last complete opera season (2018/19), which opera had the most performances worldwide?
- 20 For an opera singer it's a climb up the ladder to the top of their profession – they are the bee's knees if they get booked to sing this night, an ambrosial experience. Which night, where and why?



Answers will be published online at www.operanow.co.uk and in the May/June issue of *Opera Now*. For answers to our January/February *Opera Now* Quiz, turn to page 79.

BLACK MASTERPIECE

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Giacomo Puccini

MADAMA BUTTERFLY

On GNO TV

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Ermonela Jaho
in the title role

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Conductor: **Lukas Karytinis** • Director, sets, costumes: **Hugo de Ana**
Video projection designer: **Sergio Metalli - Ideogamma SRL** • Lighting designer: **Valerio Alfieri**
Chorus master: **Agathangelos Georgakatos** | Suzuki: **Chrysanthi Spitadi**
B. F. Pinkerton: **Gianluca Terranova** • Sharpless: **Dionysios Sourbis**
With the **Orchestra, Chorus and Soloists** of the **Greek National Opera**



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