

Reports

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Reports

WEXFORD

For the 1983 Festival, Wexford tapped a new and potentially rewarding source, German Romantic opera, and came up with Marschner's *Hans Heiling* (29 Oct), a fine and typical example of the genre. The work also has great historical interest because of its influence on Wagner, who prepared Marschner's opera for performance at Würzburg while he was chorus master there in 1833, the year of *Hans Heiling's* hugely successful Berlin première, and later conducted it frequently in other German theatres. The score is a chain of splendid melodies, each one appropriately characterized, while Eduard Devrient's text shows penetrating insight into the psyche of the protagonist. Heiling, King of the Earth Spirits, loves a peasant girl, Anna, and renounces his throne in order to marry her. Anna, temporarily dazzled by her new suitor's obvious wealth, soon reverts to her former lover, Konrad, the village marksman; Heiling, prevented by his mother, Queen of the Earth Spirits, from killing the young couple, returns chastened to his subterranean kingdom.

Steven Pimlott staged the opera in a hospital psychiatric ward – the surrealist set was superbly designed by David Fielding – with the plot as a fantasy of Heiling's deranged mind. Though a number of clues were provided, this interpretation became fully apparent only at the end when, in a stunningly dramatic dénouement, Heiling collapsed into the tender arms of the Queen Mother, now revealed as a doctor in crisp white coat, syringe in hand to sedate the violent patient. The gaudily dressed peasants, who were celebrating the wedding of Anna and Konrad, shed their disguises in a forlorn heap which they determinedly circled, ignoring the docile, strait-jacketed Heiling.

Sergei Leiferkus, the Russian baritone who made such an impression at Wexford last year in Massenet's *Grisélidis*, found in Heiling a role exactly tailored to his prodigious vocal and dramatic talents. Scaling his performance to the tiny Theatre Royal, he nevertheless contrived to paint an overpowering portrait of a man trying vainly to escape his destiny through the power of love – pre-echoes of Vanderdecken's plight in *Der fliegende Holländer* are certainly not coincidental. Anna was warmly sung and acted with the right mixture of passion and naivety by Constance Cloward, a young American soprano whose voice opens up excitingly at the top. Her rich, golden tone was in effective contrast to the brighter, icier timbre of Malmfrid Sand, whose Queen/Doctor characterization was wholly convincing. Ingrid Steger made an excellent Gertrude (Anna's mother) while Eduardo Alvares provided stalwart support in the unrewarding tenor role of Konrad. Albert Rosen conducted, obtaining enthusiastic cooperation from the Wex-

ford Festival Chorus and from the RTE Orchestra.

La vedova scaltra, or *The Cunning Widow* as Wolf-Ferrari's adaptation of a Goldoni comedy becomes in Geoffrey Dunn's English translation, is musically lightweight, but a production so imaginatively staged and designed as that offered by Charles Hamilton and Tim Reed at Wexford makes fine festival fare. Against the colourful riot of a Venetian carnival, Rosaura – the widow of the title – chooses a new husband from four suitors of different nationalities. Naturally she prefers the Italian, who is a tenor to boot. Rosaura's song to spinet accompaniment, the one musical gem in a setting of frothy ensembles, was delightfully voiced by Jill Gomez, a merry widow indeed. Howard Haskin sang with ardent sincerity as the Italian; Grant Shelley made a witty and vocally elegant Frenchman; Neil Janssen was an appropriately solemn English Milord; and Tom McDonnell, a gloomy, aristocratic Spanish Don, completed the quartet of suitors. Two characters straight out of the *commedia dell'arte*, Arlecchino and Marionette (Rosaura's French maid), were vividly projected by Gordon Sandison and Rosemary Ashe. Yan Pascal Tortelier conducted with a quicksilver volatility, though ensemble was occasionally less than perfect.

Donizetti's *Linda di Chamounix* (28 Oct) was

updated from mid-18th to early 20th century by the producer Julian Hope and his designer Annena Stubbs, for no particularly valid or apparent reasons. At the later period, social conventions still prevented noblemen from marrying village girls, but surely by then those girls no longer went mad for unrequited love. In consequence the peripheral characters, Linda's parents (Jennifer Adams and Brian Kemp) and the Prefect (John O'Flynn), carried most conviction. Linda was efficiently sung by Lucia Aliberfi, but the edge to her keenly focussed voice was often painful at the top of its range, while the high-heeled shoes and thin summer dress in which she apparently walked to Paris and back destroyed all illusion. Similarly, Ugo Benelli as Carlo was inexplicably clad in a Hungarian Hussar uniform straight out of a Lehár operetta, though he sang with attractively open and generous tone. Anita Terzian, hardly a credible boy, gave Pierotto the benefit of her beautiful, dark-coloured mezzo and admirable phrasing. Gianni Socci, the wicked Marquis in shooting gear or full racing rig, turned in a stylish performance. The chorus was in fine voice while the RTE orchestra played well, though not as well as it can, for Gabriele Bellini.

Other events at Wexford ranged from morning programmes of semi-staged operatic scenes to afternoon concerts and midnight cabaret. Somewhat ironically, the most dramatic item was the final scene from Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, which ended a joint recital of English, French, Spanish and Russian songs given by Sergei Leiferkus and Jill Gomez. Singing in Russian and powerfully assisted by John O'Conor at the piano, they generated a tension rare even in the theatre.

ELIZABETH FORBES

CARDIFF

The first ever Welsh *Ring* got off to a generally good start when Göran Järvefelt's production of *The Rhinegold* opened at the New Theatre, Cardiff, on 21 October. Järvefelt had apparently chosen to place the opera in a 19th-century framework, but perhaps the chief merit of Carl Friedrich Oberle's sets and costumes was that they served well the timelessness of the myth by clearly isolating the different levels on which it unfolds. There were, it is true, some half-hearted attempts at realism, but the restrictions of a small stage and the need to tour no doubt militated against any ambitious visual conception. There was, for example, no suggestion of water for the Rhinemaidens (Marie-Claire O'Reirdan, Caroline Saxon and Marion McCullough) in scene 1, and the wooden platforms that served poorly as slithery rocks for Alberich (a forceful portrayal by Nicholas Folwell) made an equally unconvincing setting for some feeble tarnhelm magic later on; even Donner's hammerblow in scene 4 fell short of the *coup-de-théâtre* which the music leads us to expect.

Where Järvefelt's production scores over many

more sophisticated ones is in making both action and motivation absolutely clear, and in this it is aided by Andrew Porter's English translation. The producer has also understood that the myth's universality is not impaired by sharp characterization. Not only the two giants (a brutal Fafner from Roderick Earle and a tender, concerned Fasolt from John Tranter) but also the gods were carefully differentiated, with particularly vivid portrayals from Patricia Payne as Fricka, Anne Williams-King as Freia and Nigel Douglas as a lively Loge. If Wotan made a weaker impression it was not for any lack of fine singing by Philip Joll, but rather because he is seen more than ever in this production as the helpless observer of the momentous events he has set in motion but is powerless to control. In general the singing was of a very high standard and the orchestral playing under Richard Armstrong surpassed even that in the company's recent *Parzifal*. This is a *Rhinegold* in which the issues are clear, while most of the options remain open. It will be fascinating to see how they are taken up as the cycle proceeds.

MALCOLM BOYD

SWANSEA

Welsh audiences are sturdily slow to follow London fashions. Or disappointingly so, according to how you look at it. At the musically most successful and publicly best supported Swansea Festival for many years, the Brangwyn Hall was far from full to hear Klaus Tennstedt's Mahler Symphony no.6 with the LPO, or Günther Wand's fine account of Bruckner's Symphony no.5 with the admirably disciplined NDR SO of Hamburg. But it was packed to hear Tennstedt's *Also sprach Zarathustra* (partly attracted, no doubt, by Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto no.1 in the same programme, a disturbingly eccentric performance by Ivo Pogorelich), for Vladimir Ashkenazy's fiery 'Eroica' Symphony with a dedicated Philharmonia, and for the profoundly felt Elgar Symphony no.1 by Vernon Handley with the LPO. In the cheers with which this was greeted, history was repeating itself. It was in this hall and with the same symphony that Handley's career can be said to have taken several steps forward in the 1967 festival. Chamber music has usually had a small following at previous festivals, but there was a four-figure audience this year for the Amadeus Quartet.

David Harries's third canticle, *The Sleeping Lord*, was given its first performance in a recital arranged by the Guild for the Promotion of Welsh Music. It is quite the finest and most personally felt music to have come from his pen. His brief was to write for the forces used by Vaughan Williams in *On Wenlock Edge* (included in the same programme) and like V.W. he chose poetry about a countryside with which he could identify, in his case the verses of David

Jones and the landscapes of South Wales, the destruction of which by industrial despoilation is the cruelty at which the poetry protests. This protest Dr Harries captures imaginatively. The tenor line is carefully fashioned to project against the instrumental textures, which suggest the numerous natural allusions of the verses, the vocal music following their pattern of rhetorical questioning. Here, one feels, is a work committed to a cause, touching the conscience of the offender and the emotions of the offended, but essentially a musical experience, skilfully wrought and communicative. Much was owed to the devoted singing of Kenneth Bowen and the well-balanced playing of the Delmé Quartet and the pianist Allan Schiller.

The Fires of London made a warmly welcomed first appearance at the festival. They included the first complete performance of *Birthday Music for John*, appropriate in this context because of the previous association with Wales of the dedicatee, John Carewe, who spent several years as conductor of the BBC Welsh Orchestra ('symphony' had not then been added to its title). It is a taut, agreeable three-movement piece for cello, flute and viola. Mr Carewe was there to direct *Image, Reflection, Shadow*, the textural subtleties of which achieved greater clarity in the wider spread of St Mary's Church than they did in the closer confines of Bath's Guildhall earlier in the year, and a lively performance of the always delightful *Le jongleur de Notre Dame*, to which a major contribution was that of the children's band from the West Glamorgan Youth Orchestra.

KENNETH LOVELAND

had been commissioned by Musica Viva. Two other string quartets which gave Sydney recitals at the same time were the Petra from Tasmania and the Ambrosian from Brisbane.

Meanwhile the Australian Opera winter season was drawing to a vernal close. The long-heralded *Die Walküre* was received coolly, not for the singing, which was generally commendable from such voices as Rita Hunter (Brünnhilde) and Bruce Martin (Wotan), but for the production by Andrew Sinclair and the scenery, which has been described as 'unprepossessing' and 'miscalculated'. More successful was *Der Rosenkavalier*, with Marilyn Richardson and later Etela Piha as the Marschallin and Noel Mangin as Ochs, conducted by David Kram. Also well received were *Don Giovanni* in which Hakan Hagegard, then John Pringle, sang Giovanni, and *La fanciulla del West*, conducted by Carlo Felice Cillario.

A fascinating operatic experience came when Krzysztof Penderecki conducted concert extracts from his opera *Paradise Lost* (in which Milton makes an appearance), a sombre work of low tessitura with a static plot, in some ways (like *Pilgrim's Progress* by Vaughan Williams) more sermon than theatre. Penderecki directed this work and his abrasive Symphony no.1 in Sydney with the Sydney SO and Philharmonia Choir, while in Melbourne he conducted his *Te Deum* and the Violin Concerto (with John Harding as soloist).

Some fine pianists were on tour, including the 1981 Van Cliburn winner André-Michel Schub from the USA and the 1981 Sydney International Competition winner Chia Chouy from Canada, now based in Germany. 'House Full' signs met the King's College Cambridge Choir conducted by Stephen Cleobury and some other excellent Musica Viva imports such as the Borodin Trio, the Orford Quartet from Canada and the Aulos Ensemble of Baroque specialists from New York. The Czech-born conductor Zdenek Macal galvanized Australian orchestras into fine performances with such soloists as the organist Gillian Weir.

New Australian music included a minor rash of piano concertos by Eric Gross, Edwin Carr and Peter Sculthorpe; and a choral work, *Visions* by George Dreyfus, was given its première by the Melbourne University Choral Society. The Seymour Group in Sydney is about to present a triple bill of new Australian operas – *Christina's World* by Ross Edwards, *The Owl* by Nigel Butterley and *Sin* by Martin Friedel and Jack Hibberd. To prepare the ground for overseas touring, the University of New South Wales Ensemble, one of the best chamber music groups, has been renamed Australia Ensemble.

FRED R. BLANKS

AUSTRALIA

For a structure hailed as a new world wonder and the building of the century, ten years of existence is merely the beginning of infancy. But the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Sydney Opera House were held in a major key, promoting on one hand a series of worthy concerts and on the other fanning the flame of a smouldering controversy, summarized by the title of an attractive new book by Ava Hubble, *More than an Opera House*. The building has five main halls, the largest being the 2700-seat concert hall on which the opera lobby, having to content itself with the 1550-seat opera theatre, casts envious eyes. The latter would like a rebuilding of the concert hall to make it suitable for opera, for which it is now used only in the concert-less summer. The idea is financially extravagant and managerially impractical and would involve closing the hall, heavily booked for years ahead, frequently filled and internationally lauded, for a couple of years. Yet every now and again the suggestion is propounded.

In the official tenth anniversary concert the soloist with the Sydney SO under the young Italian-born American conductor Guido Ajmone-Marsan was Dame Janet Baker, who sang Elgar's *Sea Pictures* and Mozart arias with all her beau-

ty of voice and finesse of technique. She also presented two recitals accompanied by Geoffrey Parsons, who was celebrating an anniversary of his own – 25 years on the concert stage. Other opera house anniversary concerts featured the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields and local groups such as the Australian CO (currently led by Carl Pini) and the Sydney String Quartet.

The latter ensemble was the centrepiece of a challenging venture by Musica Viva, a three-day weekend of rehearsal, discussion and formal performances of string quartets by Australian composers, who were mostly present to take the flak. They included Nigel Butterley and Edwin Carr (Sydney), Richard Meale and Peter Brideoake (Adelaide) and George Tibbets (Melbourne), whose Quartet no.3, a witty satire on the Classics, was the hit of the weekend. Some of these works

GENEVA

For the first time since the dress rehearsal in Paris, on 28 April 1902, *Pelléas et Mélisande* is being given uncut. The 15 bars that Debussy was forced to omit before the première hardly

come as a shock to a modern audience. They are in Act 3 scene iv, where Golaud uses Yniold to spy on Pelléas and Mélisande. Beginning at half the speed of the surrounding bars, Golaud asks

Yniold if they are near the bed; Yniold, a *tempo*, replies that he cannot see the bed. The performance of this version at the Grand Théâtre in Geneva is part of the city's celebration of the 100th birthday of Ernest Ansermet, who in 1969 noticed the forgotten passage in the 1902 piano reduction (Edition Froment) and would have conducted the complete version that year had he not fallen ill. These bars are to be included in the new critical edition (Costallat and Durand).

The most successful aspects of the Geneva production are concentrated in the scene between Golaud and Yniold, where Tom Krause begins his gradual and convincing transformation from a warm, kind and lonely character to a passionately jealous, possessive lover whose guilt nearly drives him to distraction. Krause's clear diction, his wide range of vocal qualities and his remarkable acting allow him to translate the subtleties of text and music persuasively. Elidan Arzoni as Yniold is old but with his perfectly pitched

voice projects the words loudly and clearly enough for the audience to understand them (as rarely happens).

Dramatic considerations play an important role in François Rochaix's production. The singers always enunciate the text clearly, if not always with the best pronunciation. The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande under Jésus Lopez-Cobos carefully underlines the voices and subtly remains in the background; one might only wish for more nuance in tempo and dynamics. The changes of set lend a narrative and realistic quality: from a forest of real trees in the first scene to the elevation of the castle and terrace which permits Golaud and Pelléas to penetrate the underground vaults in Act 3, Jean-Claude Maret's sets are effective, even if the atmosphere they create recalls late 18th-century idealism more than late 19th-century symbolism.

The other main characters lack the depth and mystery necessary for a symbolist work. The

American Faith Esham as Mélisande plays the coquette throughout; her voice is sweet, but her French poor, her acting unconvincing. As Pelléas, Jerome Pruett sings capably but might as well be courting the conductor rather than Mélisande for his eyes rarely leave the man with the baton. The love scenes are disappointing: the castle window in Act 3 is too low and the singers virtually ignore the implied yearning gestures; both too dependent on the conductor, they rarely look at one another and in their last scene, rarely even approach each other – Mélisande is crouched on the fountain steps while Pelléas darts back and forth across the stage. The casting of Jules Bastin was curious, for he appears more a bon vivant than someone gravely ill, was unable to project Arkel's wisdom and prophetic nature, and failed to maintain the vocal intensity needed in the final scene. Yet Krause's performance and the sensitivity of the orchestra ensured dramatic coherence and distinction.

JANN PASLER

Competitions, Courses

Wind Instrument Workshop and Interpreters' Competition, Ville d'Avray, 17–26 Feb: discussion and teaching of new techniques; competition open to workshop participants; first prize of 10,000 francs and Prix Selmer (instrument of a value up to 10,000 francs); entries by 1 Feb. Details from Atelier Musique de Ville d'Avray, 10 rue de Marnes, 92410 Ville d'Avray, France.

International Arnold Schoenberg Piano Competition, Rotterdam, 9–13 April: participants must have all Schoenberg's solo piano works in their repertoires; no age limit; prizes totalling 6000 Hfl; entries by 31 Jan. Details from Foundation Gaudeamus Centre of Contemporary Music, Swammerdamstraat 38, 1091 RV Amsterdam, Netherlands.

International Gaudeamus Competition for Interpreters of Contemporary Music, Rotterdam, 9–14 April: for instrumentalists, solo singers and ensembles who must submit a programme of at least six works (60 minutes' duration or more) composed after 1940, of which at least two date from 1970 or later and two are by Dutch composers; prizes totalling 8250 Hfl; entries by 31 Jan. Details from Foundation Gaudeamus Centre of Contemporary Music, Swammerdamstraat 38, 1091 RV Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Wolverhampton Art Gallery Chamber Music Composition Competition, May: work of at least 15 minutes' duration for three string instruments, two strings and one woodwind, or two string instruments and piano; entries by 1 Feb. Details from Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Lichfield Street, Wolverhampton WV1 1DU.

Bromsgrove Festival Young Musicians' Platform, 6–7 May: open to singers, pianists, string and wind players and chamber ensembles whose home address is in the area covered by the West Midlands Arts Council or who are full-time music students in the area; age limit 17–25; entries by 1 Feb. Details from Miss J.E. Messenger, 18 Ragley Crescent, Broom Park, Bromsgrove, Worcs B60 2BD.

Toulon Festival International Competition, 18–25 May: for oboists; age limit 18–30; prizes totalling 30,000 francs; entries by 1 March. Details from the Secretariat du Concours International de Festival de Musique de Toulon, Palais de la Bourse, avenue Jean Moulin, 83000 Toulon, France.

International Musica Antiqua Competition, Bruges, 28 July–11 Aug: for singers, early instrument soloists, lutenists and ensembles; age limit 30 for soloists, average age 33 for ensemble members; prizes totalling 400,000 BF; entries by 1 May. Details from the Festival van Vlaanderen, C. Mansionstraat 30, B-8000 Bruges, Belgium.

International Gaudeamus Music Week, Bourges, 1–9 Sept: previously unperformed compositions may be entered for symphony orchestra, choir, chamber ensembles of three specified types, with scoring of composer's choice, and electro-acoustic works; age limit 35; Gaudeamus Prize of 4000 Hfl; entries by 31 Jan. Details from Foundation Gaudeamus Centre of Contemporary Music, Swammerdamstraat 38, 1091 RV Amsterdam, Netherlands.

1st International Mirjam Helin Singing Competition, Helsinki, 14–22 Aug: age limit 30 for women, 32 for men; prizes totalling 280,000 Finnmarks; entries by 31 March. Details from the International Mirjam Helin Singing Competition, Finnish Cultural Foundation, Bulevardi 5 A 13, 00121 Helsinki 12, Finland.

2nd Mario Zanfi Piano Competition (Liszt), Parma, 20–30 Sept: age limit 16–32; prizes totalling 20,000,000 lire; entries by 30 April. Details from Segretaria del Concorso Liszt – Premio Zanfi, Conservatorio di Musica 'A. Boito', via del Conservatorio 27, 43100 Parma, Italy.

Ian Fleming Charitable Trust Music Education Awards: towards the costs of special projects and for the provision of instruments; for singers (age limit 30), instrumentalists and conductors (age limit 26); awards totalling £16,000; entries by 13 Feb. Details from the Correspondent for Music Education Awards, Ian Fleming Charitable Trust, 16 Ogle Street, London W1P 7LG.

Making Musical Instruments, West Dean College, 12–21 April: for participants with a wide range of ability; tutors include Robert Kerr, Brian Tunnicliffe, Gordon Jones and John Watkins. Details from Sue Overman, West Dean College, West Dean, Chichester, West Sussex PO18 0Q2.

7th Annual Piatigorsky Seminar, USC, Los Angeles, 9–16 June: master classes, seminars, discussions, recitals; faculty to include Pierre Fournier, Nathaniel Rosen and Paul Tortelier; applications for master classes by 1 Feb. Details from Prof. Eleonore Schoenfeld, School of Music, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089-1141, USA.

Computer Music Session for Composers, IRCAM, Paris, 18 June–27 July: six-week free course for composers who want to be able to use computers. Details from IRCAM, 31 rue Saint Merri, 75004 Paris.

Millfield Summer School for Wind Players, 23–7 July, 30 July–3 Aug: individual tuition and preparation for final concert by wind band. Details from John Davies, Millfield Village of Education, Street, Somerset.

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9th Aterforum Festival, Ferrara, 9–17 June: non-competitive festival for young conductors, instrumentalists (including players of non-Western instruments), singers, ensembles and composers, who are invited to apply to attend; special attention will be given to those who include the works of D. Scarlatti and Berg in their repertoires; entries by 10 Jan. Details from Aterforum, Associazione Teatri Emilia Romagna, Via Giardini 466/G, 41100 Modena, Italy.

Hong Kong Arts Festival, 22 Jan–21 Feb: Hong Kong PO (Schwarz, Tippett), Pittsburgh SO (Previn, Tippett), Israel CO (Kraemer), Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra; Fairey Engineering Band; Atrium Musicum de Madrid, Tokyo String Quartet, Beaux Arts Trio; Civil, Uchida. Details from Hong Kong Tourist Association, 125 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5EA.

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