

Photos: The Royal Opera



The Music & Vision

classical music newsletter

And the Bridge is Love – Issue 87, 1 June 2015

ENSEMBLE – A SCINTILLATING EVENING

'If the visuals are intermittently deficient, the vocals are not. Exquisitely written for voices as for orchestra, *King Roger* calls for incredible subtlety, intensity and attractiveness from the singers. The Shepherd is required to produce a wealth of sensual vocal lines dotted with melismata, often in high tessitura, as he proclaims the liberation and licence of "mój Boże" — his deity (or is he, like the fair Dionysus in the *Bacchae*, the deity himself?): "I bring freedom to those in chains".

'Georgia Jarman's innocent, tame Roxana, in her quite extraordinary and unique vocal appeal, recalling the *Muezzin* songs and others of Szymanowski's wartime song cycles, is heart-searing as she twines round her achingly beautiful melody. Kwiecień's Roger himself must somehow convey in voice, as well as gesture, the transition from commanding potentate to vulnerable victim: a major emotional shift and a strangely modulated adjustment from would-be persecutor to virtual worshipper.'

The vocals were, without exception, impressive; if neither Pirgu as the Shepherd achieves the whining poignancy peculiar to Wiesław Ochman (the doyen of performers in this role), nor Kwiecień's Roger has the peculiar, uneasy tone so special to the late Andrzej Hiolski (1922-2000), one of the legendary Polish performers of the role, Jarman is a real find as Roxana, with her evocation of youth, her acute sense of not just isolation but desolation, and her aching desire to attach some meaning to her life.

Roderic Dunnett reports from Covent Garden ...

'... a new opera has been especially commissioned for the Expo, created by Italian composer Giorgio Battistelli, with the title CO^2 — the carbon dioxide chemical formula. The libretto is by Ian Burton, based on Nobel Peace Prize winner Al Gore's essay *An Inconvenient Truth*. This is a ninety-minute one act opera on global warming, with a prologue, nine scenes and an epilogue.

'The text is in English, even though in the Kyoto Treaty negotiations scene, a variety of other languages (from Arabic to Russian) are heard. The stage direction is by Robert Carsen, the sets by Paul Steinberg, costumes by Petra Reinhardt, lighting by Peter van Praet, videos by Finn Ross and choreography by Marco Berriel. Although the opera is short, there are nineteen principals (and of course a chorus directed by Bruno Casoni). Some of the singers are well known, such as baritone Anthony Michaels-Moore as the protagonist, Dr David Adamson, dramatic mezzo Jennifer Johnston as Gaia, the mother earth, and countertenor David Dong Qyu Lee, as the snake tempting Eve. Quite a few of the others are young singers from La Scala Academy.'



A scene from Giorgio Battistelli's new opera CO^2 at Teatro Alla Scala. Photo © 2015 Brescia/Amisano

Giuseppe Pennisi reports from La Scala and Expo Milano 2015. He also reports on the late Giorgio Strehler's production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* as it finally reaches Rome, on a 3D fairytale version of *The Magic Flute* in Bologna, on Myung-Whun Chung's return to Rome to conduct Beethoven and Mahler, on Austrian conductor Manfred Honeck's Mozart and Mahler, again in Rome, and on troubles in Florence as Maggio Musicale Fiorentino's *Fidelio* is performed under difficult conditions.

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Voices Choir

'The VoiceBox, Derby's powerhouse of all things vocal, notched up its tenth anniversary in 2011. But its resident girls' choir, Voices, has been going longer than that, and celebrated its first twenty years in style, joined by past members, and by other groups based at the premises — ChorAlchemy, a larger mixed-voice group, Sequenza, comprising former Voices members, and adult chamber choir Derby City Singers.

'The range of activity at The VoiceBox was reflected in the wide variety of repertoire on display — from Palestrina to Debussy, Vivaldi to Sondheim, Bellini to Bacharach — starting with an apt opening invocation in the shape of *Come, ye makers of song* by Canadian composer Ruth Watson Henderson, setting words largely from Purcell's royal birthday ode *Come ye sons of Art, away*. It was followed by Michael Neaum's version of *A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square*, somewhat over-arranged, but sensitively sung.'

Mike Wheeler reports on anniversaries in Derby, on Chopin and Mahler from Noriko Ogawa, the Warsaw Philharmonic and Jacek Kasprzyk, and on Handel, Haydn and Mozart from Derby Choral Union and the Heart of England Chamber Orchestra.

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Marcelo Álvarez sang both Turiddu and Canio and brought a warm Mediterranean sound to each. His acting has improved markedly from a few years ago, too. George Gagnidze, like Álvarez, sang two parts, and his Alfio was a dangerous man. Gagnidze has a stentorian voice that never quits, and at the end of the afternoon he sounded as though he could go on to sing another performance. Jane Bunnell was a matter-of-fact Mama Lucia who had little time for Santuzza's tale of woe. This opera always gives Met Chorus Master Donald Palumbo's ensemble a chance to shine with the Easter Hymn and they performed it as a harmonically impressive lyrical procession.'

Maria Nockin reports (via HD video link to her local cinema in Arizona) on a rather uneven *Cav* and *Pag* from New York's Metropolitan Opera.

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SPONSORED FEATURES – L'HEURE ROMANTIQUE

'This glowing representation of Israeli singer Varda Kotler is testament to the range of music she can convincingly sing. It is also much more than that, as the partnership and sensitivity shown by and between Kotler and pianist Israel Kastoriano will long stay in my memory. I congratulate both artists on this great disc.' — Geoff Pearce

Geoff Pearce's review of Varda Kotler and Israel Kastoriano's *L'Heure Romantique* on the Forlane label (*FOR 16878*) has recently received an *M&V* article sponsorship.



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HALIDA DINOVA BRINGS HER LISZT TO NEW ZEALAND



Halida Dinova in concert

'While touring in New Zealand during the 2015 southern autumn, pianist Halida Dinova faced a diversity of music lovers — from a small town rural audience, regular city concertgoers, musical cognoscenti in Wellington, advanced music school students, Christchurch piano graduates recovered from destruction of several music venues in the devastating 2011 earthquake, attentive wide-eyed Montessori schoolchildren and members of the Auckland Jewish Community ...

'In picturesque Greytown, a small, prosperous Victorian country town, one-hundred-and-five appreciative music lovers attended Ms Dinova's first NZ (2015) recital, held in a private purpose-built concerts home ...

'In Wellington; the NZ capital, base for the NZSO, Orchestra Wellington, NZ Opera, and the New Zealand String Quartet, the second home concert attracted professional musicians.

'University music students were fortunate in her demonstration lectures; at Wellington Victoria University her topic was 'Pedalling — Russian style' and at Canterbury (Christchurch) University School of Music, she held a composition workshop.'

Howard Smith tells the story of this recent visit ...

CD REVIEWS — AND THE BRIDGE IS LOVE



Howard Smith: 'Here's a musical gift deserving of a resounding hurrah. The English Chamber Orchestra (ECO), founded in 1960, is unsurpassed in string music.

'And now the ECO is back in a gorgeous new release from Naxos — a generous selection of Britain's fine, much loved, orchestral string music. A treasury of Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Delius, Ireland, Walton and others.

'In 2014 cellist Julian Lloyd Webber described his devastation at being forced to stop performing because a slipped disc in his neck had reduced the power in his right arm.

'Here, as conductor and having announced the end of his distinguished playing career, Lloyd Webber said he was still reflecting on "a sudden and distressing life-changing situation".' (*And the Bridge is Love — English Music for Strings*, Naxos 8.573250)

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Smith also listens to Piers Adams' group Red Priest's 'Handel in the Wind' (Red Priest Recordings *RP012*) and Tomáš Klement's *Contemplation of Life* (Eito *E0003*).

Gerald Fenech: 'This magnificent re-issue of Nielsen's piano music is providential in more ways than one. Firstly, it gives the chance for those who missed the original 1975 issue to acquire John McCabe's probing interpretations. Secondly, one is invited afresh to approach these seldom heard works, and make a new appraisal of this masterful piano repertoire.' (SOMM Recordings *SOMMCD 0146-2*)

Fenech is also impressed by John Kitchen at the Ulster Hall organ (Delphian *DCD34132*), by Emmanuelle Bertrand and Pascal Amoyel's Chopin (harmonia mundi *HMC 902199*) and by Hoffmann and Witt symphonies played by the Kölner Akademie conducted by Michael Alexander Willens (cpo *777 208-2*).

Andrew Schartmann, struggling with Daniel Lentz's *In the Sea of Ionia* (Cold Blue Music CB0042), asks 'Is the obvious pastiche element part of some profound artistic statement?'

Geoff Pearce recommends the emotional power of Moisey Weinberg's Fifth and Tenth Symphonies (Melodya MEL CD 10 02281) and the hypnotic choral music of William Averitt's *The Deepness of the Blue* (MSR Classics MS 1509).

Browse our latest CD reviews ...

If you enjoy listening to the sound samples in our CD reviews, you might already know that you can usually hear an extra sample on the 'CD information page' which is linked from the bottom of each review. An alternative way to reach these CD information pages is via our **New Releases** section, where you can also listen to samples from CDs which haven't yet been reviewed.

CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — REPLACING RATTLE

At a secret meeting, the members of the Berlin Philharmonic fail to agree on a replacement for Simon Rattle. The English Symphony Orchestra permanently renames its Composer-in-Association Chair in memory of John McCabe. Italian soprano Desirée Rancatore will receive the 2015 Pavarotti d'Oro prize in October 2015.

Robert Anderson's collected opera reviews have been published as *Opera Nights and Nightmares*. Makrokosmos Project, a new festival in Oregon, USA, celebrates George Crumb's 85th birthday.

Virginia Firnberg and Wavyline will run innovative *Music Techniques for Arts Practitioners* workshops in London in June and July 2015, applying music techniques and disciplines to the work of artists and writers.

We mark the passing of Steven Gerber, Ton Hartsuiker, Alexander Kok, Paul Walter Myers, Mervyn Burch, Jack Body and Ma Shui-long.



Desirée Rancatore
Photo © Outumuro/Fidelio Artist

News in detail ...

Performance listings

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NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE

We're building an archive of our monthly classical music newsletters. They've been published in this PDF format since September 2013, and you can download and read any of them from **this page**, but, in the previous plain text format, the newsletters go back much further.

ASK ALICE — CALLUM SMART'S GLAZUNOV

Alice McVeigh: 'Every now and then — maybe once a decade — you hear a teenager with that mysterious gift — the *real X-factor* — and you feel that little thrill up your spine, and you realise, suddenly, shockingly, that you've just accompanied a musician who's going to be famous.



Callum Smart. Photo © Patrick Allen

'This happened to me last Saturday, at the Langley School for Boys

Performing Arts Centre, while I was leading the Bromley Symphony cellos. And the violin soloist I'm talking about is called Callum Smart. A lot of British string players will recall that — then aged just thirteen — he won the strings final at BBC Young Musician of the Year 2010 ... On the basis of what we heard last Saturday, had he been content to wait until he was all of fifteen, no one could have beaten him for the overall title.

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More episodes of 'Ask Alice' ...

Ask Alice your classical music-related questions ...

This newsletter, edited by Keith Bramich, is a monthly taster for Basil Ramsey's high quality and colourful online classical music magazine, published every day since January 1999.

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