

# The Music & Vision

## classical music newsletter

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### *A Gift Horse – Issue 89, 1 August 2015*

'From the moment Donald Runnicles gave the downbeat at San Francisco Opera's *Les Troyens*, I knew I was in for a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

'Maestro Runnicles and his superb orchestra were aglow from the first bars of a definitive reading of this Berlioz masterpiece and they slowly and surely revealed a performance of cumulative, inexorable beauty. Heard closing night of the run, a cast of first tier singers, dancers, and instrumentalists just let 'er rip 'one last time', and the evening was, quite simply, on fire. Their commitment and passion were infectious.

'It is hard to over-praise the accomplishments in the pit (and in the wings, for that matter). For nearly five hours, the orchestra went from strength to strength whether it be in overpowering 'tutti' sections, fanciful moments decorated with filigree, ominous cadences, playful dances, or flawless solo work. (That horn! That clarinet!) The band just kept covering itself in glory.' - Jim Sohre visits San Francisco Opera [[read more](#)], where he also reports on Marco Tutino's *Two Women (La Ciociara)* :

'Mr Tutino collaborated on the Italian libretto with Fabio Ceresa, adapting the story from a script by Luca Rossi, and based on the novel *La Ciociara* by Albert Moravia. The two women of the title are the central character Cesira and her fourteen-year old daughter Rosetta. When World War II brings allied bombs and soldiers to Italy, the pair flee Rome, but not before a business colleague (the evil Giovanni) rapes Cesira during an air raid.'

'Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco*, the headline opera for this year's Buxton Festival, is an early work, from that period between *Nabucco* and *Rigoletto* (most of the 1840s) the composer called his 'galley years'. Elijah Moshinsky's production and Russell Craig's designs sit light to the period, but then Temistocle Solera's libretto is not exactly a model of historical accuracy, either — Joan falls in love with the French King, Carlo, and dies on the battlefield instead of at the stake.'



Ben Johnson as Carlo, Kate Ladner as Giovanna and members of the chorus in Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco* at the Buxton Festival. Photo © 2015 Jonathan Keenan

'The focus, instead, is on human drama rather than epic spectacle. The basic set is a box, set at an angle to the front of the stage and with highly polished walls, confining the action and providing for multiple reflections and shadows. When we first see Joan she is cowering in a corner, and the overture becomes a psychological portrait of a naïve country girl, in plain dress and sensible shoes, happily plaiting her hair one moment, tormented by her visions the next. Kate Ladner has the right note of steely heroism in her voice to convey a character both conflicted emotionally and fired up by her mission.

'Ben Johnson gives Carlo both regal dignity and human warmth. His upper notes occasionally lack heft but he more than compensates in a performance of great intelligence and subtlety. Devid Cecconi has the vocal weight for Giovanna's father, Giacomo, who betrays her to the English because he believes her to be possessed by demons. His remorse at the end is completely credible.'

Mike Wheeler has provided a very comprehensive series of reviews from Buxton 2015, also featuring Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Charpentier's *Louise*, Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, Tchaikovsky and Mozart from the English Chamber Orchestra, Mary Bevan and members of the English Concert, guitarist Maria Camahort and colleagues, the Schubert Ensemble, pianist Eudald Buch and Psappha, and song recitals by Soraya Mafi

/ Ian Tindale and Roderick Williams / Susie Allan :

'Elgar's *Sea Pictures* are inextricably linked to the mezzo-soprano or contralto voice but, as Roderick Williams reminded us, we are now used to hearing a work such as Schubert's *Winterreise* sung by women, so it should be no big deal if the gender switch also goes in the other direction. In fact, this was one of the most moving performances I've heard. His warm, clear baritone opened a whole new perspective on the motherly presence in 'Sea Slumber Song'. 'In Haven' had charm without turning maudlin, any hint of sententiousness in 'Sabbath Morning At Sea' was skilfully avoided, and the underlying restlessness in 'Where Corals Lie' was deftly hinted at, while there was a palpable sense of urgency in the concluding 'The Swimmer'. Allen brought her own distinction to the piano part, conjuring up the delicacy of 'In Haven', and bringing out the quotations from the opening song in No 3.'



Some of the activities of Psappha, Manchester's new music ensemble

### More Buxton Opera reviews ...

In addition to Buxton, Mike Wheeler has also been following the activities of Sinfonia Viva (performing in their new outdoor moveable venue) and the Derwent Singers.

Roderic Dunnett is also out and about in the UK, currently at the Three Choirs Festival in Hereford, but also sampling the fare at some of England's out-of-town summer opera venues - Garsington Opera at Wormsley (Britten's *Death in Venice*), Nevill Holt Opera (Bizet's *Carmen*) and Winslow Hall Opera (Verdi's *La traviata*) :

'Winslow Hall Opera is the freshest company to join the roster of country house operatic venues, and its profile is growing fast.

'In fact, Sir Christopher Wren's rural mansion is now on the edge of a thriving small town in Buckinghamshire, where you are as likely to encounter a street market as much as a flock of sheep — let alone fully fledged opera.

'The house, which has the honour of being the only such outside the capital designed by Wren, is a superbly imposing piece of architecture, whose frontage looks not unlike his larger undertaking at Chelsea Hospital. It was bought a few years back by another Christopher, Christopher Gilmour, and his Australian-born wife Mardi. The interior involves a good deal of work, but the exterior is as splendid as when Wren (1632-1723; he passed his ninetieth birthday) completed it at the very end of the seventeenth century.'

'The helm is now taken by Christopher's brother, Oliver Gilmour, a seasoned professional conductor who early on was soaking up the appearances of the great conductors — Karajan and Bernstein included — as a student in Vienna. He cites Giulini and Carlos Kleiber among his idols. Later appointments followed, but one of the most important for him was the opera house at Rousse (Ruse) in northern Bulgaria — long hailed as a centre of East European musical and vocal excellence.





Elena Xanthoudakis as Violetta in *La traviata* at Winslow Hall Opera, as reviewed by Roderic Dunnett

'Elena Xanthoudakis' Violetta came across as a memorably strong character: she is clad by the designers, Deirdre Clancy and Sam Steer, in vivid mottled costumes full of period flavour (as are several members of the chorus). That she is not just a party creature, but a character of deep feeling and suppressed passion, is clear from the next Act, where she confronts rather than is worsted by Hayes' Germont senior and her outpouring "Thus hope is dead", a kind of mirror image of the big tune with cello and double bass responding as if in contrary motion, is followed by the acquiescent "Tell your pure and lovely daughter" ("Ah, dite alla giovane").

'Quentin Hayes focused on the task in hand of persuading Violetta to forswear Alfredo; but vocally he has, and has always had, a fine rich tone, one that is assured, commanding and pays dividends to an audience. His famous aria "Di Provenza" ("from Provence"), where he reminds Alfredo of where his true life lies, in the distant South, was nobly delivered; their parting "Addio"s were touching.'

'The Aix-en-Provence International Festival of Lyric Art (this is the official denomination) is almost seventy years old. It is no longer a "mostly Mozart festival" as originally conceived but essentially a manifestation of co-productions which are given world premieres (or first European performances) before tours in the forthcoming "seasons". Thus, listeners can feel the general tendencies in the sector.

'*Svadba* ("The Marriage") by Serbian composer Ana Sokolović was, in my view, the festival surprise. It is coproduced with the opera houses of Angers, Nantes, Luxemburg, Ljubljana and Sarajevo but I think it will also tour to many other theatres. It is a low cost and very effective piece of musical theatre.



A scene from *Svadba* by Ana Sokolović at Aix-en-Provence, featuring the cast of six singers — Florie Valiquette, Liesbeth Devos, Jennifer Davis, Pauline Sikirdji, Andrea Ludwig and Mireille Lebel. Photo courtesy of the Aix-en-Provence International Festival of Lyric Art

'Performed "a cappella", ie without orchestra, it requires only six young voices (three sopranos and three mezzos) in a single very simple set (by Samal Black) and stage direction (Ted Huffman and Zack Winokur) quite sensitive to the acting.' - Giuseppe Pennisi, who also reports on Siena's Chigiana International Festival and on Puccini operas — *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot* — in Rome.

Malcolm Miller attends a study day and concert in London in German composer Helmut Lachenmann's eightieth birthday year.

**Browse our latest concert and opera reviews ...**

## DVD REVIEW — AN ANCIENT CHARACTER — 'SEMIRAMIDE'



'In some respects a conclusive work, *Semiramide* contains, like all masterpieces, traditional elements alongside innovative ones. Rossini accentuated the role of the orchestra, compared to his previous serious operas: the Sinfonia, the longest, most elaborate he ever wrote, immediately suggests that he endeavored to give the instrumental part a more important role than was usual. At the same time, the *bel canto* dimension is probably more developed than in any other previous Rossinian serious opera.

'The present Belgian production features the Vlaamse (Flemish) Opera Orchestra, Antwerp, with veteran conductor and musicologist Alberto Zedda.' - Howard Smith investigates this release on Dynamic (33674). **More ...**



Geoff Pearce: 'This music is dedicated to and inspired by Axel Borup-Jørgensen (1924-2012), one of the most important Danish composers of the twentieth century, who taught and influenced so many composers from the region. The music is performed by Michala Petri on recorders, with the Lapland Chamber Orchestra and conductor Clemens Schuldt. The soloist's connection with the composer was that he regarded her as family — a second daughter. Borup-Jørgensen's daughter Elisabet Selin was Michala Petri's only private student.' (OUR Recordings 6.220613, review also featuring *Gert Mortensen - The Percussion Universe of Axel Borup-Jørgensen*, OUR Recordings 6.220608)



'... very descriptive, atmospheric music ...'



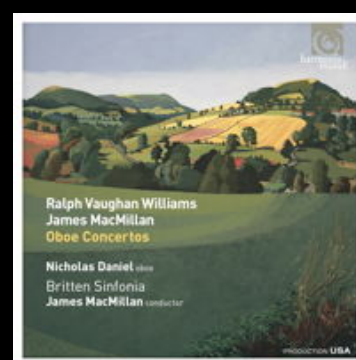
'Sound and presentation are top notch.'

Gerald Fenech: 'Born in August 1950, Andrei Golovin is one of the most interesting composers of contemporary Russia. He studied composition and orchestration at the Moscow State Conservatoire and graduated in 1976. He received his post-graduate degree three years later. Since 1975 he has taught composition at the Gnessin State Musical School, and since 1989 he has been a professor in composition and instrumentation at the Gnessin Academy of Music. Golovin has also been a jury member in a number of music competitions, the most prestigious being the 2005 Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra International Composing Competition.'

'This CD incorporates three of Golovin's most intriguing works: Symphonies Nos 1 and 4 and the "Canzone" for Cello and String Orchestra. Of all genres, the composer has a strong leaning towards symphonic and chamber music, so this issue gives the listener an adequate picture of Golovin's style and harmonic language.' (Toccat Classics TOCC 0264)

Howard Smith: 'Few countries have been as uncomfortable with their folk traditions as England. On the contrary, European and American nations embrace their indigenous "song" and dance as part of a distinctive musical psyche, frequently celebrated.'

'Radical British composers often wrote in an anti-pastoral, folk-based style typical of the English National School. English composer Elisabeth Lutyens (dubbed "Twelve Tone Lizzie") famously dismissed music such as that of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, Arnold Bax, John Ireland and George Butterworth as "Cowpat music — folky-wolky modal melodies on the cor anglais".'



'... superb performances ideally recorded.'



'... music of surpassing excellence.'

Howard is also impressed by two compilations on Geoffrey Simon's Cala Records label from the London Sound - *Cool Brass* (CACD0122) and *Hot Brass* (CACD0123), and finds that 'MSR's combination of Poulenc wind music is unlike any other.' (Iowa Ensemble, *Francis Poulenc: Complete Music for Winds and Piano*, MSR Classics MS 1540)

Keith Bramich: 'American guitarist David Tanenbaum, who plays on all the works on this CD, gives clear, poised and committed performances ... this extraordinary recording from San Francisco provides an intriguing view of a relatively unknown side of Gubaidulina's output.' (*Sofia Gubaidulina: Complete Guitar Works*, Naxos 8.573379)

## Browse our latest CD reviews ...

Due to the large volume of concert and opera reviews published last month, we've published fewer CD reviews than usual, but we hope to make up for this in August.

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 recent CDs which haven't yet been reviewed.

## BILL NEWMAN (1932-2015)



From right to left: the late Bill Newman, in happier times, with his hand on the shoulder of an unidentified blond lady, oboist Stella Dickinson, cellist Dinah Beamish, and the late Brian Wightman (front left, former principal bassoon with English National Opera), celebrating in a pub in Highgate, North London, after the Capital Oboe Quintet's concert on 4 February 2001 as part of Graham Williams' Music Past and Present series. Photo © 2001 Keith Bramich



*Bill certainly was a character, a support for music and performances of integrity. I will not forget meeting him and the validation and critique that he gave to me when launching my CD 'Love's Lore' - Stella Dickinson*

*A real character and a critic with a view was Bill, which is what we need. May he rest in peace. - Rob Cowan*

Born on 26 October 1932 in Maidstone, Kent, Bill Newman worked for EMI, CBS and Boosey & Hawkes. At various times his jobs involved classical music marketing, record promotion, record producing, music criticism and gardening. He was amazingly knowledgeable about classical music, and very generous to us at *Music & Vision*, writing for us continuously from 2000 until last year, in spite of his personal battle with various illnesses, including Crohn's disease. He gave advice to dozens of young performers. Bill passed away (with his headphones firmly on) in the Royal Free Hospital in London on 16 June 2015, aged eighty-two. **More ...**



Bill Newman with a small part of his huge and legendary collection of recordings. Photo © 2000 Keith Bramich

## CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — PRESTEIGNE FESTIVAL

This year's Presteigne Festival of Music and the Arts in the UK's Welsh Border Marches runs from 27 August until 1 September 2015. Centred on St Andrew's Church, Presteigne, but also visiting many other venues on both sides of the English/Welsh border, the festival includes a visit from Nova Music Opera, bringing thought-provoking performances of Charlotte Bray's *Entanglement* (with a libretto by Amy Rosenthal) and Thomas Hyde's *That Man Stephen Ward*. Both operas feature misunderstood individuals caught up in the grubby London glamour of the 1950s and 60s, and they've been co-commissioned by Nova Music and the Presteigne and Cheltenham Festivals.

The Festival also welcomes the Choir of Royal Holloway and director Rupert Gough, who make four appearances with repertoire including works by Rautavaara, Gabriel Jackson, James MacMillan, Tarik O'Regan and Toby Young.

The festival's resident composer will be Matthew Taylor, who brings *Pastorals*, a commissioned work for violin and string orchestra, and will have various pieces performed by the Navarra Quartet, the Festival Orchestra, Fenella Humphreys, Tom Poster and the piano duo Joseph Tong and Waka Hasegawa.





Musicians walking in Presteigne (Powys, Wales) at festival time. Photo © 2005 Keith Bramich

The winners of the 2015 Tchaikovsky Competition have been announced. We mark the passing of Ivan Moravec, Jon Vickers, Edward Greenfield, Denis Vigay and Bill Newman. **Read more ...**

### ASK ALICE — THE BUSINESS OF MEMORY, WITH STEVEN ISSERLIS

'I am occasionally asked about how to avoid memory lapses in concerts — a subject that is particularly pertinent to me as I embark on a series of Bach suite performances, for the first time in many years. I am thinking of using the music for at least some of the suites, just in order to remove a part of the stress that one inevitably feels when playing these great masterpieces — especially in this case, when I'm returning to them after so long. (It's a bit awkward with the suites, since one has to have a page-turner — since there must really be no break between the movements; but I'm hoping that having company on the stage will be quite comforting!)

'But when one does play from memory, how can one avoid lapses? It's a question that has resounded with musicians since the time of Liszt, who seems to have set the trend which others followed immediately. Clara Schumann, for instance, was tortured by memory fears. And I don't think there is an answer to the question; these lapses will occur — everyone has them, even musicians with phenomenal memories. Presuming that one knows the music well enough, they are really purely psychological; one's mind seizes up in fear — usually the fear of the lapse itself becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.' - Steven Isserlis

Read Alice McVeigh's comments on Steven's writing, her very positive review of Rossini's *William Tell* at Covent Garden, her discussion about whether or not classical music is good for the heart, and her well-meaning attempt to sneak classical music into her review of the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Death of a Salesman*.

**Read more ...**

**More episodes of 'Ask Alice' ...**

**Ask Alice your classical music-related questions ...**

## SUMMER FESTIVALS IN AUGUST

Our listings include Festival Pablo Casals and the Annecy Classic Festival in France, Östergötland Music Days in Sweden, the PARMA Music Festival on the New Hampshire Seacoast, USA, the Ohrid Summer Festival in Macedonia, the Dubrovnik Festival in Croatia, the Helsinki Festival in Finland, and in the UK, the Edinburgh and Presteigne Festivals, plus James Brawn playing three Beethoven sonatas at the BPSE Regent Hall Summer Festival. **Read more ...**

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