



## *Originality of Thought – Issue 90, 1 September 2015*

Roderic Dunnett writes in detail about the 2015 Hereford Three Choirs Festival: 'What holds one's ear and one's attention with [Torsten] Rasch is, time and again, the originality of the thought, the attention to structure, the ability to evolve really quite substantial textures out of just a singer and an accompanist, and the individuality of his approach to text. These are poems of deprivation, if not quite desolation: [Alun] Lewis's widow had lasted perhaps seventy years alone, following her husband's demise, before she met Rasch.'

'The first song, with its opening rising ninth, is chromatic in character ("Fine flame of silver birches flickers / Along the coal-tipped misty slopes / Of old Garth mountain who tonight / Lies grey as a sermon of patience ..."), and again, evoking a growing ominous feel of darkness, "Munition girls with yellow hands / Clicking bone needles over khaki scarves, Schoolboys' painful numerals in a book / A mother's chilblained fingers soft / Upon the bald head of a suckling child." Those epithets of Lewis — "in blackout rows the street", "hand-pressed human warmth", "a soap-scrubbed table" — put one in mind of Dylan Thomas. One can see why Rasch was immediately drawn to this poetry.' **Read more ...**



Torsten Rasch, who was in Hereford for his third Three Choirs Festival commission



Deborah Nansteel as Lucinda, Nathan Gunn as Inman and members of the chorus in Jennifer Higdon's *Cold Mountain* at Santa Fe Opera. Photo © 2015 Ken Howard

Jim Sohre: 'Long a champion of new works, the venerable Santa Fe Opera has scored a resounding success with the world premiere of *Cold Mountain*.

'Composer Jennifer Higdon and librettist Gene Scheer have transformed Charles Frazier's novel into a riveting, richly detailed lyric drama. For his part, Mr Scheer has penned a lean and mean framework that includes all of the important plot points and themes.

'Ms Higdon has responded with a restless score of pulsating confrontations, ever shifting musical moods, and almost unerring musical commentary and emotional support. Ms Higdon's vocal writing is informed by individualized characterizations. Her keen ear for natural conversational writing is reminiscent of the best of Britten or Sondheim, with its perfect capture of spoken cadence and accents.

'As Inman, Nathan Gunn's warm baritone encountered a bit of tightness very early on at the extreme top when he was asked to do high, loud declamation. Soon thereafter, the seasoned Mr Gunn settled in to his usual appealing, rich sound and easy lyrical top. Nathan's acting was natural and deeply internalized. This was just the star turn that was needed to anchor the performance.

'The widowed young mother Sara, whom Inman encounters alone and forlorn, was sung with a limpid soprano by Chelsea Basler in a moving performance of intensity and pathos. The runaway slave Lucinda gave a wonderful opportunity for Deborah Nansteel to deliver a chilling scene, with some stirring, steely singing.' **Read more ...**



Santa Fe Opera House. Photo © 2015 Peter Ogilvie

Maria Nockin: 'Santa Fe New Mexico is one of the world's most beautiful sites for opera. With the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east and the Jemez Range to the west, the state-of-the-art open-sided opera house shows the beauty of using traditional materials for contemporary design. The roof can collect approximately sixty thousand gallons of rainwater annually for the maintenance of the grounds. The theater seats slightly more than two thousand patrons and has standing room places for an additional hundred. Every position has an opera titles screen that allows the viewer to watch a translation in either English or Spanish.'

Maria writes about the other operas in Santa Fe's season — Verdi's *Rigoletto*, Donizetti's *La fille du régiment*, Mozart's *La Finta Giardiniera* and the best *Salome* she's seen in a decade: 'Because her voice has gotten considerably larger, Alex Penda, known for clear *coloratura* in *bel canto* roles, has begun to take on more dramatic parts. *Salome* requires the stamina of a Wagnerian soprano and the scintillating overtones of Penda's powerful voice soared gracefully over Robertson's huge orchestra.'

'This Judean princess was a troubled teen rather than a sex-starved adult and she did not drop veils or reveal her nakedness as she danced Seàn Curran's choreography. Instead, we see the murder of her father and her implied abuse by her stepfather. Her last scene was the finale the opera needed. It featured a great voice backed by the tapestry brought to fruition by Robertson's firm grasp of the score.' **Read more ...**



A scene from Wolfgang Rihm's *Die Eroberung von Mexico* at the Salzburg Summer Festival.  
Photo © 2015 Monika Rittershaus

Giuseppe Pennisi visits the Salzburg Summer Festival for a celebration of Pierre Boulez, and various operas including the first run of a new work by Wolfgang Rihm: '*Die Eroberung von Mexico* is a highly political work which fits well with the basic theme of the festival — the confrontation between different civilizations and genders. Based on a 1932 scenario by French author Antonin Artaud and interpolated with more recent poems by the Nobel Prize-winning Mexican poet Octavio Paz, the central subject is the relationship between two people from different cultures and genders. Stage direction (Peter Konwitschny), costumes and set (Johannes Leiacker) and video (Fettfilm) place the drama in an elegant Western style condominium (albeit near to a car junkyard) with a well-known Frida Kahlo painting on the wall. Cortez drives a red Ferrari.'

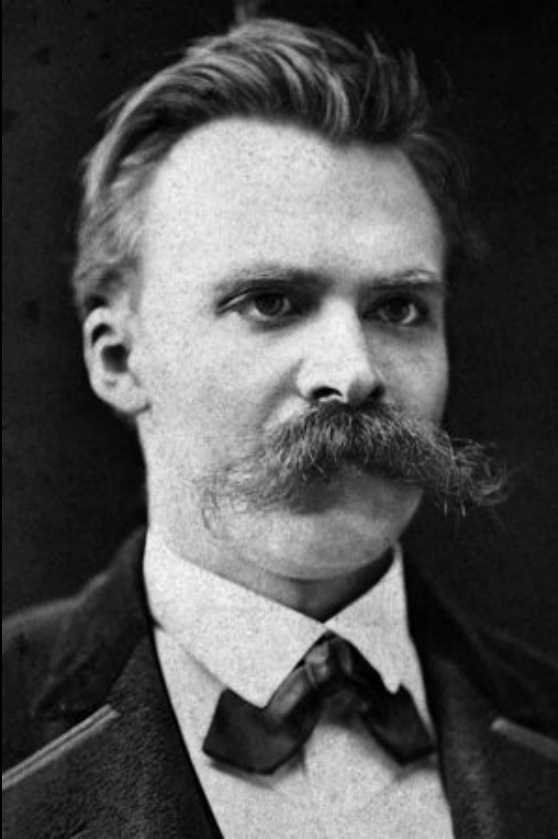
Giuseppe also drops in to Pesaro for some semi-serious Rossini: 'The semi-serious opera is a genre which had a certain success in Italy and France in the years after the French revolution and around 1840, when it was overtaken by melodrama in Italy and *opera lyrique*. Like in *opera à sauvetage*, after a rather dramatic plot, intertwined with moments of comic relief, there is a happy ending when the villains are punished and the good people rewarded. I saw the first cycle (10-12 August) in this order: *La Gazza Ladra*, *La Gazzetta* and *L'Inganno Felice*.' **More ...**



One father (Aristone - James Harrison) and two daughters (Aoife O'Sullivan, Anna Starushkevych) - but what to do with them? Salieri's *La Grotta di Trofonio* at Bampton Classical Opera. Photo © 2015 Jeremy Gray

Roderic Dunnett writes about two Salieri operas performed this summer in the UK — New Chamber Opera's *La Locandiera* and *La Grotta di Trofonio* at Bampton Classical Opera: 'This high-quality production shone from the very outset: the moves during the overture were apt and amusing, not gratuitous or distracting. The girls' duet — the impish Dori, a sparkling-eyed performance from Bampton regular Aoife O'Sullivan (who has enlivened Mozart, Gluck, Bertoni and Grétry) and the bookish Ofelia — Anna Starushkevych, winner of the first Bampton Young Singers' Competition, and of the 2012 London Handel Singing Competition — due not least to Salieri's close pairing and beautiful interweaving of the voices, sounded already like what Mozart turns out in *Così*. The closeness of the two operas — not least as the two pairs of lovers, by stages, change character, just as in Mozart the "soldiers" woo each other's innamorata — is noticeable throughout *Trofonio*. When the father, Aristone (the affable James Harrison) joins in, it is as if we encounter Fiordiligi, Dorabella and Don Alfonso three or four years before their time.'

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Friedrich Nietzsche - photograph by F Hartmann in approximately 1875

Daniel Sampaio marks some interesting anniversaries: 'Among the topics Nietzsche's name may evoke, a trinity of remarkable, oft-cited ones quickly emerges, composed of Nazism, religion, and imposing moustaches. The last one is naturally due to the mighty specimen of facial hair that adorned his upper lip, and the second is a subject on which he wrote extensively, but the connection between Nietzsche and proto-Nazism often comes from a superficial interpretation of the concept of the *Übermensch*, the superhuman (or superman, in some translations). In a more legitimate way, Wagner too is linked to Nazism, in particular due to a certain anti-Semitism, and the fact that he wrote essays explaining the origins of "our" dislike of Jews doesn't help him at all — the original version of "Judaism in Music", published in 1850, is a good example. Nietzsche was roughly thirty years younger than Wagner, but not only did the two forge a friendship, the composer was an object of admiration for the philosopher. They shared an interest in Greek tragedy — in fact, Nietzsche's first book was a controversial work in which he deemed

it the highest form of art, the one that truly formed a complete creation, and thus the one that most accurately depicted what it meant to be a human being. Wagner, too, considered that the end of the Greek tragedy marked the decline of all Western art. Under the Roman Empire, art was produced in order to please God, and the Church would persecute those who created anything which might be viewed as immoral.' **Read more ...**

## OBITUARIES

We mark the passing of Natalia Strelle, Dan Iordăchescu, George Cleve, Vardo Rumessen, Helen Kemp, Roger Smalley, John Scott, Serge Collot, Gerd Natschinski, Michael Rayner, Anatoly Kremer, Václav Snítil, Alan Curtis, Wolfgang Gönnerwein, Mario Sereni, Paul Freeman and long-standing *M&V* contributor Howard Smith. (We hope to publish a feature about Howard shortly.)

**Read more ...**



Natalia Strelle died suddenly on 30 August 2015 from severe head and neck injuries, aged only thirty-eight

## CD REVIEWS — ESSENTIAL ACQUISITION

Stephen Francis Vasta: 'I've not heard Alan Gilbert's Philharmonic performances of Nielsen, though a Philadelphia rendition of *The Four Temperaments* in 2007 suggested his affinity for the style. He organizes these scores with a clarity that supports and spotlights the soloists. A wide range of orchestral colours shows through the clean, detailed textures, which suggest an appropriate Scandinavian "reserve". A slightly faster pace for the Violin Concerto's *Rondo* might better have suited the waltzlike second theme; otherwise, tempos sound natural and effective. The orchestra responds with enthusiasm and precision — note the alert brass interjections, for example, in the Clarinet Concerto ... With sound that is both brilliant and deep, even in plain frontal stereo, this becomes an essential acquisition, and not just for Nielsen collectors.' (Dacapo Records 6.220556)



'... an essential acquisition, and not just for Nielsen collectors.'



'... lucid, expressive variety.'

The late Howard Smith writes: 'Here is a cleverly selected programme of 15 eighteenth century lied: three each by Haydn (1732-1809) and Mozart (1756-1791) and nine from Beethoven (1770-1827). All songs are performed by Mark Padmore, accompanied on the fortepiano by Kristian Bezuidenhout.'

'The breadth of theme, emotion and musical expression is quite extraordinary.'

'Mark Padmore is enthusiastically received by the Press: eg the *Irish Times* commented: "The London tenor could make a telephone directory interesting." Bezuidenhout reveals bright, rare, co-equivalent artistry and rare empathy. At fleeting intervals in *An die ferne geliebte*, the dated fortepiano action is more than usually in evidence. However this release will be a true acquisition. Go for it.' (harmonia mundi usa *HMU 907611*)

Howard is also impressed by Korngold's *The Adventures of Robin Hood* film music on Naxos (8.573669).



Howard Smith died suddenly on 4 August 2015 leaving over eighty unpublished CD reviews. His family has kindly given us permission to continue publishing Howard's material.

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.

Gerald Fenech: 'Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805) has always been considered as one of Italy's foremost composers of chamber music during the classical era, but from 1768 onwards Boccherini's musical activities flourished in Spain, where he died aged sixty-two. The *Sei Terzettini* recorded on this disc were written in 1793, twenty-five years after the composer arrived in his adopted country, and the works took about a year to complete. Strangely enough, some of his first compositions on Spanish soil had been written for the combination of violin, viola and cello, but a quarter of a century had to pass before Boccherini returned to this genre ... This is exquisite stuff from beginning to end, in exemplary sound and classy presentation that shouldn't be missed.' (Glossa GCD 920313)



'... exquisite stuff from beginning to end ...'

Gerald also listens to piano music by Carl Loewe and chamber music by Robert Kahn (both on Toccata Classics), to Messiaen vocal music (OUR Recordings) and to Penderecki's *Magnificat* and *Kadisz* on Naxos.



'... excellent performances ...'

Geoff Pearce: 'The selection recorded here, written in the early to mid 1920s, is much influenced by Tansman's time in Paris, and by the music of his mentor Maurice Ravel, but there is much more to Tansman than this, with influences of his native Poland, and in particular the spirit of Chopin, but also some of the exotic mysticism of Szymanowski and even Scriabin.'

'Many of these works are miniatures, lasting around a minute, but what a variety of mood, colour and texture. Tansman excels in this type of writing, and is another composer, I firmly believe, who will become more and more popular — Zelibor's excellent

performances and Toccata's exemplary work will ensure that.' (Toccata Classics TOCC 0170)

Geoff also listens to piano music by Schubert and Voříšek on Heritage, and to piano music by Adolf Jensen on Toccata Classics.

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## ASK ALICE — ON US PRESIDENTS, BASSOONS AND MINI-MUNCHKINS

Alice McVeigh: 'Like most cellists, I love the bassoon. I love its grainy texture, which complements the cello's smoothness perfectly. I love it in the baroque, chuntering away in Bach cantatas. I love it in Beethoven, underpinning the horns. I love it in the romantic repertoire, swiping the theme from the clarinets and handing it on to the oboe. And I love it in Stravinsky, Prokofiev ... the bassoon is so much more than most people realise ...'

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Alice McVeigh. Cartoon © 2015 Pat Achilles

## FUTURE PERFORMANCES

Our September listings include Festival Maribor, the George Enescu International Festival, the opening of the Chelsea Symphony's tenth anniversary season, Beethoven, Strauss and Nielsen from St Luke's Chamber Ensemble, Douglas Humpherys playing piano sonatas by Haydn, Mozart, Ravel and Henri Dutilleux, Warren Mailley-Smith's complete Chopin cycle, Debussy, Copland, Bach and Rameau from the City of London Sinfonia, and the Elgar Chorale's Puccini workshop in Worcester UK. **Read more ...**

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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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