

# MUSIC & VISION

classical music newsletter



Quirijn de Lang and Jeni Bern in  
Cole Porter's 'Kiss Me, Kate' at Opera North

Photo © 2015 Alastair Muir

## *Delirious Joy – Issue 93, 1 December 2015*

Mike Wheeler: 'Yes, opera singers *can* do Broadway without causing the rest of us acute embarrassment. The ghosts of some pretty dire past examples were thoroughly exorcised by Jo Davies' sparkling production of Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate* for Opera North, bringing the two worlds together with a conviction that simply oozed style, wit and pizzazz (Theatre Royal, Nottingham, UK, 21 November 2015).

'Part musical adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, part the backstage story of the company putting it on, the show centres on actor-manager Fred Graham and leading lady (and ex-wife) Lilli Vanessi, the archetypal bickering-couple-made-for-each-other who play Petruchio and Katherine. Fred has switched his attentions to Lois Lane, a cabaret singer making her stage debut as Bianca. Add in Lois's boyfriend Bill, playing Lucentio, who has run up a gambling debt in Fred's name, and the two gunmen who come to collect, and who find themselves caught up in the on-stage action, as Fred tries to use them to stop Lilli walking out on the show, and you have the recipe for one of the smartest, sassiest musicals in the Broadway canon.

'Quirijn de Lang was a slick operator as Fred and a swashbuckling Petruchio, while Jeni Bern's fire-breathing Katherine was matched by her brassiness as Lilli. Both of them revealed a genuinely moving vulnerability in their separate takes on 'So In Love' — Lilli in Act 1, Fred in the Act 2 reprise when it looks as though she really has walked out for good with her new admirer ...

'... With that experienced musical theatre conductor David Charles Abell keeping it all on the boil (using the new critical edition of the score he produced with Seann Alderking, which draws on re-discovered material from the first production), the Opera North orchestra played

like the greatest pit band on Broadway. The whole thing was one big-hearted, delirious joy. I just hope someone thought of filming it for DVD.' [Read more](#)

Mike also reviews Opera North's productions of Janáček's *Jenůfa* and Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. Also in Nottingham, he listens to a refreshingly wide-ranging recital by South Korean pianist Jenna Sung, and to Berlioz and Tchaikovsky from Lawrence Power, Ryan Wigglesworth and the Hallé Orchestra.

Down the road in Derby, Mike is impressed by Joo Yeon Sir and Irina Andrievsky's violin and piano recital, by Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* performed by Derby Bach Choir, with soloists Andrew Kennedy, Christopher Maltman and Leigh Woolf, and by Mosaic - eight trained and experienced singers from the UK's East Midlands.



Mosaic performing in 2014

Maria Nockin: 'Having first been seen at San Francisco Opera in 2012, Jun Kaneko's amusing production of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Emanuel Schikaneder's *The Magic Flute* (*Die Zauberflöte*) again graced the company's stage on 17 November 2015. Adorned with additions by veteran translators Ruth and Thomas Martin, San Francisco Opera General Director David Gockley's own updated, locally oriented translation guided the audience through the twists and turns of the story. For this totally digitized production, Kaneko even accompanied the overture with projections of advancing lines in puzzle-like abstract drawings that sometimes held the audience in thrall. With the assistance of Paul Pyant's lighting, Kaneko's scenery and costumes captured this opera's unique enchantment. These backgrounds were fascinating, almost to the point of distraction.

'Director Harry Silverstein, who has an eye for comedy, brought out the wonder and fantasy of the opera and he made this an easily understandable production that could be the perfect first opera for school-aged children. Mozart's last opera mixes great music with fantasy. Throughout the libretto's romantic tale of trials and their resolution, the music is uplifting even though the eighteenth century libretto is sometimes more than a little politically incorrect.' [Read more](#)



Paul Appleby as Tamino in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* at San Francisco Opera. Photo © 2015 Cory Weaver



Maria also reviews the HD cinema transmission of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* from New York.

James Sohre: 'If you were to take all of the sopranos in our collective memory who have conquered the Everest role of Norma, pooled together all of their strengths and none of their weaknesses, it would probably result in something close to Angela Meade's towering performance at Los Angeles Opera.

'Ms Meade surmounts the title role's every possible musical and technical challenge, gifting her superb vocalizing with clear diction and investing it with internalized dramatic fire. From the first time she opens her mouth, she serves notice that she not only has the heroic thrust necessary for Bellini's potent proclamations, but can also effortlessly spin a *pianissimo* filigree of accurately ornamented melodies that holds us spellbound on the edge of our seats.



Angela Meade. Photo © Dario Acosta

'I managed to miss Callas and Sutherland live in their much appreciated assumptions of the druid priestess, but quite frankly the former lacked inherent beauty of tone, and the latter the theatrical flair to completely fulfill the part. I did experience the magnificent vocal achievement by Montserrat Caballé at her considerable best, but of course Mme Caballé acts only with her voice, eschewing detailed, or even generalized physicalization of any role.

'That brings me back to the conquering heroine at hand. Angela Meade has a sizable, glorious, warm, even, throbbing, responsive soprano of uncommon beauty. She understands how to communicate a well-rounded character with fine variety of color and appropriate weight to each phrase. She spins out aching, arching lines that are meticulously shaped to Bellini's exacting specifications. She is highly engaged in the drama and limns her dialogue with an urgent, inevitable passion.' [Read more](#)

Giuseppe Pennisi: 'Dionysus and his followers (including Pentheus' own mother) are expelled from the Kingdom, but the devilish self-proclaimed God returns disguised as a traveler and attracts Pentheus to go with him to the garden of pleasure. In a wild orgy, Pentheus is killed, dismembered and even eaten by Dionysus' crowd. This isn't light stuff for a gala, especially because the central part is a confrontation between Pentheus and Dionysus.



Veronica Simeoni as Agave in Hans Werner Henze's *The Bassarids* at Teatro dell'Opera di Roma. Photo © 2015 Yasuko Kageyama

'As a matter of fact, rather than an opera, *The Bassarids* is a scenic symphony (like Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust*). Conventional operatic forms (arias, duets and ensembles) are embedded in a four movement symphony. The first movement is a sonata where the characters and their groups are defined; the second is a scherzo with a sequence of dances; the third is a slow movement, and the fourth a long theme which grows into the final passacaglia. The score contains all the main elements of twentieth century innovation (including a twelve note row system) on a wide post-Wagnerian platform ...

'... An international vocal cast was on stage, all of a high standard: Ladislav Elgr (Dionysus), Russell Braun (Pentheus), Mark S Doss (Cadmus), Erin Caves ( Tiresias), Andrew Schroeder (Captain of the Royal Guard), Veronica Simeoni (Agave), Sara Hershkowitz (Autonoe) and Sara Fulgoni (Beroe). The long duet between Ladislav Elgr (a tenor with a high tessitura) and baritone Russell Braun was especially effective. Veronica Simeoni, in the rather unpleasant part of a mother devouring her own son, was excellent.'



Also in Rome, Giuseppe samples the Vatican's Festival Internazionale di Musica e Arte Sacra, listens to Antonio Pappano's *Beethoven and the Contemporaries* cycle and samples the Rome ballet scene - Adam's *Giselle* and Delibes' *Coppélia*.

Out of town, Giuseppe reports on various other productions - Mozart's *Idomeneo* from Venice, Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* from Jesi, Richard Strauss' *Elektra* from Bologna, and Berg's *Wozzeck* at La Scala in Milan.

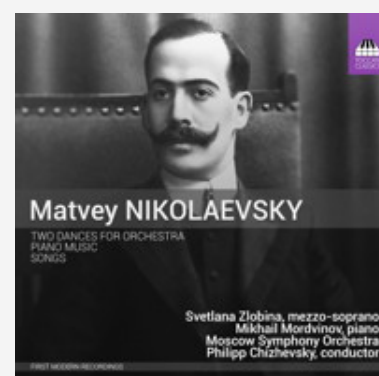


Michael Volle as Wozzeck and extras in Berg's *Wozzeck* at La Scala Milan. Photo © 2015 Brescia and Amisano

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## CD REVIEWS — DELIGHTFULLY MELODIC

Gerald Fenech: 'Matvey Nikolaevsky was born in Moscow on 28 June 1882, and, like his brother Fyodor, who later became a celebrated military bandmaster, inherited his love of music from his father Josif. When Matvey was two, his mother Maria died, and his father got married again, this time to a certain Sofia Mikhailovna. Aged ten, he entered the Moscow Conservatoire, where he was specially instructed in piano playing. In 1902, Nikolaevsky completed his studies as a virtuoso pianist, but continued at the Conservatoire, studying composition.'



'.. immensely enjoyable stuff ...'

'While still a student he started trying his hand at composition, and by 1931 his voice as a composer was achieving recognition, after spending the 1920s teaching and performing. It was also during this decade that the Russian people were

bowled over by the emergence of the foxtrot, Charleston and the tango, and popular music was everywhere. It seemed that Russia had almost become another Europe or America, and Nikolaevsky, now a seasoned composer and performer, was in the middle of it. The composer soon took to light music, and his pieces began to be widely performed.' (Toccatà Classics TOCC 0324)

Gerald also listens to Terry Eder playing Bartók piano music (MSR Classics MS 1410), to music by Francesco Barsanti (Glossa GCD C80020), and to Soile Isokoski singing Chausson, Berlioz and Duparc (Ondine ODE 1261-2).



'... Michala Petri is a champion of this instrument.'

Geoff Pearce: 'The first work is by Thomas Koppel, who came from a well-known Danish family. His sister is well-known to Australian audiences as a leading soprano with Australian Opera during the 1970s and 80s. Thomas, whilst trained in classical music, was a force in rock music before returning to classical during the last fifteen years of his life. This piece, *Moonchild's Dream*, written during the last year of his life, 'focuses on the hopes and dreams of a little girl living in the south harbour district of Copenhagen, one of the city's poorest neighbourhoods'. As the most readily accessible of the works on this disc, I think it will be enjoyed by all ...

'... This disc contains remarkable playing by the soloist and orchestra, and the music is quite interesting and varied. I enjoyed it all, but I think the first piece, *Moonchild's Dream*, will appeal to most people. It is great to see so much new music being written and recorded for recorder and orchestra, and Michala Petri is a champion of this instrument.' (OUR Recordings 6.220609)

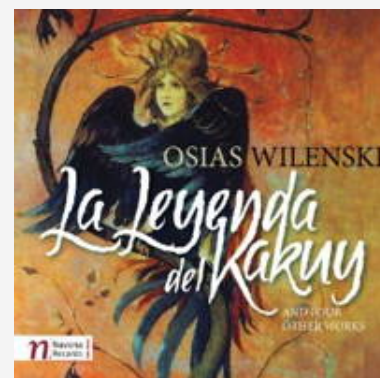
Geoff also listens to Schumann and Strauss from Hélène Grimaud, David Zinman and the Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin (Erato 0825646138302).

We continue to publish CD reviews by the late Howard Smith, who discovered the feral wildness of Osias Wilenski: 'Wilenski's list of accomplishments includes songs, chamber works, three string quartets, an extensive piano repertoire and four operas.

'Lauded for his compositional style, Wilenski's unique works range from narrative symphonic poems and operatic spin-offs to instrumental miniatures. *La Leyenda del Kakuy* is Wilenski's telling of the Argentine legend of the Kakuy and represents the centerpiece of Navona's brightly expressive 2012 album.' (Navona Records NV5882)

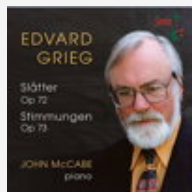
Howard also listened to Hafabra Music's *Light Music Vol 3*. (Hafabra Music CD 88971-2)

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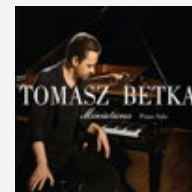


'Lauded for his compositional style, Wilenski's unique works range from narrative symphonic poems and operatic spin-offs to instrumental miniatures.'

## CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS



SOMM Recordings reissues John McCabe's recordings of Grieg's *Slåtter* and *Stimmungen*, based on carefully restored tapes.



Polish composer, pianist and music producer Tomasz Betka has released a new solo piano album, *Miniatures*.



*Red Music*, Continuo Records' latest release, features music by Schoenberg and Andrea Portera.



Cedille Records' *Soviet Experience* series has been re-released as a box set, featuring all the Shostakovich string quartets.

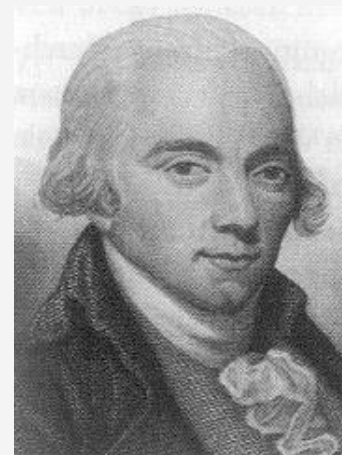
Garsington Opera has commissioned a 'people's opera' from Roxanna Panufnik.

We mark the passing of Luc Bondy, Robert Craft and David Stock. [Read more ...](#)

## ASK ALICE — MUZIO CLEMENTI AND THE BRITISH MUSIC SCENE

Janine: Missed your column last week. Are you OK?

Alice McVeigh: 'I was in a state of unusual humility, in Lucca, Tuscany, Italy, at a musicological conference, *Muzio Clementi and the British Music Scene*. This was on Clementi, and a load of very intelligent bozos, some from Yale, some from Boston University, some from Oxford and one — this is the pertinent part — my husband, were giving papers on all aspects of Clementi-in-London (and I bet you didn't know, as I didn't, that Clementi once said, "I was once a poor young Italian, but now I am a rich old Englishman!"



Muzio Clementi (1752-1832)

'Part of this, I now know, was down to his music — and part to his piano-building business, of which Clementi — whose piano sonatas I used to cheerfully murder as a child — was an expert. No mean businessman either. Quite sad to think that he made £42,000 — worth millions in the late 1700s/early 1800s — while Mozart died pretty poverty-stricken ...' [Read more](#)

Alice also muses on the string quartet, after reading David Waterman's article in *The Guardian*.

[More episodes of 'Ask Alice' ...](#)

[Ask Alice your classical music-related questions ...](#)



## FUTURE PERFORMANCES

Our December listings include an Advent music festival in Baden-Baden, the *Utrecht Te Deum* and Bach cantatas in Prague, *Parsifal* in Buenos Aires, *Die Fledermaus*, *The Nutcracker* and *Raimonda* in Riga, *Rusalka* in Shiga, Japan, and Wagner, Barber and Mahler, plus performances of Beethoven's *Choral* Symphony from the Seoul Philharmonic in South Korea.



The Seoul Philharmonic with conductor Myung-Whun Chung

There are Christmas music performances in the USA, including Rheinberger's *The Star of Bethlehem* and John Rutter's *Gloria* in New York, and in the 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.

The editorial and advertising copy deadlines for our January newsletter are both Monday 28 December 2015. [Details here.](#)

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