



THE WAGNER SOCIETY

www.wagnersociety.org

President: Dame Gwyneth Jones one Kammersängerin

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Registered Charity No: 266383 Founded 1953

ILLUSTRATED TALK BY JONATHAN HASWELL, TELEVISION OPERA DIRECTOR

Thursday 9 February 2017 6.30 for 7.00 pm

FROM STAGE TO SCREEN: FILMING OPERA

at the German Historical Institute

17 Bloomsbury Square, London WC1A 2NJ Nearest Tube: Holborn
Tickets £15- students free on production of ID (includes light refreshments)

DIE MEISTERSINGER STUDY DAY

With Paul Dawson Bowling

Saturday 18 February 2017, 10.30 - 3.45

at St Boltoph's, Bishopsgate, London EC2M 3TC

Tickets £25/£5 students. Students free on production of ID (includes lunch)

DIE MEISTERSINGER DINNER

Friday 24 March 2017

Royal Over-Seas League, Over-Seas House, Park Place, St James' St, London, SW1A 1LR

Membership and tickets for all events are available on-line at www.wagnersociety.org and can be paid for using a credit or debit card or by PayPal. You can also register for the event and then send a cheque or bank transfer to the society. If you prefer not to use the website for payment, then please send your cheque to the society's treasurer at 15 Gibson Square London N1 0RD. Tickets are also available on the door. If none of the above methods of purchasing a ticket works for you, you can contact us by e-mail at ticketsecretary@wagnersociety.org.

thoroughly misrepresenting Kessler's contribution at Weimar. 'I find the scenario enchanting,' the librettist wrote, 'and Count Kessler with whom I discussed it is delighted with it.'

Matters would finally come to a head with a discussion between Hofmannsthal and Kessler about how the latter, who had agreed he would remain in the background, would be acknowledged. Kessler, perhaps unsurprisingly, was put out by Hofmannsthal's suggestion that the work be dedicated to him as 'hidden helper'. Eventually the libretto was dedicated to Kessler in acknowledgement of his 'collaboration' ('Mitarbeit'), but not until relations, never exactly on an even keel, had soured irreparably.

Reynolds's evidence regarding Kessler's involvement is compelling and most of what he concludes is difficult to argue against, even if one sometimes gets the sense that he tends to give the benefit of the doubt to his man ahead of Hofmannsthal. He is perhaps too quick, for example, to take Hofmannsthal's

admissions of his literary defects at face value, when one could easily argue that they're simply self-deprecating. But even if you find yourself, as I did, trying to resist the force of the evidence, it's impossible not to concede by the end.

This is not least because Reynolds is also quick to address doubts the reader might have, to raise questions about the nature of his findings and admit that issues of authorship are tricky. He admits too that many will still perceive Hofmannsthal's role, in fleshing out the bones Kessler provided, as being more important. It's Hofmannsthal's words, after all, that are so essential in the way we perceive the Marschallin, Ochs and the rest.

Ultimately, though, despite the sense of a historical wrong being righted, the book's conclusion is rather *triste*. Hofmannsthal comes out of it very badly, the whole episode being indicative of many of the faults that Kessler identified in him early on. But there's also a sense of Kessler wanting his cake and eating it,

renouncing any claim to credit and then being unhappy with not being credited. It's a story of grey areas and unspoken hurt, of distrust and disappointment, and of the insecurities of both men.

Creating 'Der Rosenkavalier' shows signs of a swift progression from doctoral thesis to book, and Reynolds arguably shows too much of his working in the first two 'acts': though often fascinating on its own terms, this might not be of interest to everyone. It's undoubtedly an important publication, though, especially for English readers (Kessler's involvement is more often

acknowledged, albeit grudgingly, in the German literature). What will be interesting to see is how those who write subsequent music histories, which already have enough difficulty in dealing with the role of librettists in the creation of operas, will incorporate the book's findings. But Reynolds makes a compelling case for Kessler's role being reintroduced to any new accounts of this ever-popular work, even if I'd imagine there'll be a certain reluctance when it comes to his 'hidden helper' status being upgraded to that of fully-fledged co-creator.

HUGO SHIRLEY

Halka/Haiti—18°48'05"N 72°23'01"W

By C.T. Jasper and Joanna Malinowska, ed. Magdalena Moskalewicz. *Inventory Press/Zachęta*. 216pp. \$35. ISBN: 978-1941753071

This multi-layered book repeatedly invokes the spirit of *Fitzcarraldo*. But where Werner Herzog's film—inspired by the building of the Teatro Amazonas and efforts to get Caruso to come and sing there—might best be described as surreal fiction that feels like a documentary, *Halka/Haiti* is really a documentary masquerading as far-fetched fiction. Unlike its celluloid godfather, this project tells the story of a performance that did take place, when on 7 February 2015 Moniuszko's *Halka* was performed in the Haitian village of Cazale, not just *en plein air* but on a dusty street. Originally set in the Polish highlands, here the opera was seen in a mountainous region of the Caribbean island—the sort of place that inspired the Haitian proverb 'Dèyè mòn gen mòn', meaning 'behind mountains there are more mountains'. Though a one-off performance, it was filmed and documented for the Polish Pavilion of the 56th Venice Biennale (this book is an offshoot of that project) and, if not as quixotic as the story of *Fitzcarraldo*, it nevertheless represents quite an exotic encounter between the Old and New Worlds.

Why *Halka*? Poland's national opera is of considerable totemic significance, and in addition to its enduring popularity at home it has taken on the role of cultural ambassador before. The late soprano turned director Maria Foltyn promoted *Halka* abroad with missionary zeal. Beginning with a production in Havana in 1971, she took the work as far afield as Ankara, Novosibirsk and Toronto; but in the Latin American context of this recent Haitian performance, the local productions she organized not just in Havana but also subsequently in Mexico City and Curitiba are worth noting. *Halka*'s popularity during the years of Poland's socialist republic has made it slightly suspect in the minds of younger musicians and audiences, and the uncritical admiration it inspired means that a certain reaction against it endures to this day, with some still not taking Moniuszko very seriously.

Halka was first heard (in concert) in Vilnius in January 1848, at the start of a year of revolutions. Its plot may seem typically 19th-century 'Opheliac' and not very Polish, but it is also anti-feudal—perhaps another reason for the opera's



■ Moniuszko's 'Halka' being performed in the Haitian village of Cazale

popularity under socialism. One aspect of this book is a valuable exploration of the work and its background—not least the libretto by Włodzimierz Wolski, a Warsaw poet of radical social views—and it considers whether Moniuszko was actually advocating revolution, or merely better behaviour for the landed upper classes. Unlike Auber's celebrated *La Muette de Portici*, with which it shares many similarities, *Halka* doesn't end with the spark of revolution; it ends in conciliation.

Why Haiti? Tracing their roots to Napoleonic times, a small community of Polish Haitians endures to this day, but the recent rediscovery of a deep Polish-Haitian affinity has caused some soul-searching. Poland's history—while not free of anti-Semitism—has always seemed uncomplicated by the issues of racism prevalent elsewhere in Europe. Blackness and slavery were, so to speak, foreign concepts in a country whose invaders—of which there were many—were always white, a country that was also one of the few in Europe never to own overseas colonies. Yet as this study shows, Poles were themselves not only victims of imperialist oppression but also agents, albeit in a minor way, in the history of colonialism. The connecting link in all of this was Napoleon.

In 1802-3, over 5,000 Polish soldiers went to fight in the then colony of Saint-Domingue, taking sides with the French in the war of independence for what became the Republic of Haiti. After the third and final partition of Poland in 1795, Poles had been left with little option other than to volunteer to fight for Bonaparte, who represented their only hope—one ultimately dashed—of gaining support against Poland's occupiers, Prussia, Austria and Russia. In Haiti, many fell in battle, but many others deserted and sided with the black revolutionaries when they realized they were fighting for the shared ideals of freedom and ownership of their land. The success of the Haitian uprising, compared with continuing repression back home, must have been sobering to the surviving Poles, who were given citizenship and protected by the Constitution of Haiti when it was promulgated on 20 May 1805.

Descendants of these Polish soldiers still live—now fully assimilated and scarcely more light-skinned than their neighbours—in Cazale, and it was really for them that this *Halka* was staged. The square in front of the village's Catholic church is named for Pope John Paul II, and the church itself houses a copy of one of Poland's most sacred images, the painting of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa. Cazale was also the centre for resistance against the dictatorship of Duvalier ('Papa Doc')—hence the 1969 massacre there. There is plenty of history in this book.

But there is plenty about opera, too. Consisting of essays, interviews, stills from the film and many fascinating photographs—including of the performance, which rather incongruously show the cast in traditional Polish costumes against a scruffy Caribbean backdrop—*Halka/Haiti* tells how this project united the singers, conductor and directorial team from Poznań with locally sourced dancers and an orchestra from nearby Port-au-Prince. It is the ultimately heartwarming story of a remarkable endeavour.

JOHN ALLISON

Opera, January 2017

COMING EVENTS

Great Britain

Royal Opera, Covent Garden. The 2016-17 season continues with *Der Rosenkavalier*. With Renée Fleming/Rachel Willis-Sørensen, Sophie Bevan, Alice Coote/Anna Stéphany, Helene Schneiderman, Miranda Keys, Giorgio Berrugi, Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacke, Jochen Schmeckenbecher, Matthew Rose, c. Andris Nelsons, p. Robert Carsen, d. Paul Steinberg and Brigitte Reiffenstuel. January 8m, 11, 14, 17, 24

Written on Skin (Benjamin). With Barbara Hannigan/Georgia Jarman, Victoria Simmonds, Iestyn Davies, Mark Padmore, Christopher Purves, c. George Benjamin, p. Katie Mitchell, d. Vicki Mortimer. January 13, 18, 23, 27, 30

La traviata. With Joyce El-Khoury, Elizabeth Sikora, Angela Simkin, Sergey Romanovsky/Liparit Avetisyan, David Junghoon Kim, Artur Ruciński, Yuriy Yurchuk, David Shipley, Jeremy White, c. Daniele Rustioni, p. Richard Eyre, d. Bob Crowley. January 16, 19, 25, 28m, February 1

Il trovatore. With Lianna Haroutounian, Anita Rachvelishvili, Francesca Chiejina, Gregory Kunde, Samuel Sakker, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Alexander Tsymbalyuk, c. Richard Farnes, p. David Bösch, d. Patrick Bannwart and Meentje Nielsen. January 26, 28, 31, February 3, 6, 9

www.roh.org.uk

English National Opera has no staged performances during January.

Opera North's 2016-17 season continues at the GRAND THEATRE, LEEDS with *The Snow Maiden* (np). With Aoife Miskelly, Elin Pritchard, Yvonne Howard, Claire Pascoe, Heather Lowe, Bonaventura Bottone, Joseph Shovelton, Phillip Rhodes, Dean Robinson, James Creswell, c. Leo McFall, p. John Fulljames, d. Giles Cadle and Christina Cunningham. January 21, 28, February 3, 17, 24

www.operanorth.co.uk

Throughout this section the sign ** indicates a premiere and the sign * a work new to the locality. The letter a indicates a morning performance, m a matinee and e an evening performance. Conductor, producer and designer are shown as c., p., d. An oblique stroke between names indicates different performers alternating in one role.

Opera, January 2017

Scottish Opera's 2016-17 season continues with *Le nozze di Figaro*. With Eleanor Dennis, Lucy Hall, Kelly Mathieson, Hanna Hipp, Marie McLaughlin, Paul Curievici, Samuel Dale Johnson, Ben McAtter, Graeme Broadbent, Donald Maxwell, c. Timothy Burke, p. Thomas Allen, d. Simon Higlett

The Trial (Glass). With Emma Kerr, Hazel McBain, Daniel Norman, Elgan Llŷr Thomas, Nicholas Lester, Paul Carey Jones, Michael Druett, Gwion Thomas, c. Derek Clark, p. Michael McCarthy, d. Simon Banham (For dates and venues see 'Opera calendar home')

www.scottishopera.org.uk

Welsh National Opera's 2016-17 season continues at the WALES MILLENIUM CENTRE, CARDIFF with *La Bohème*. With Marina Costa-Jackson, Lauren Fagan, Dominick Chenes, Gary Griffiths, Gareth Brynmor John, Jihoon Kim, c. Manlio Benzi, p. Annabel Arden, rev. Caroline Chaney, d. Stephen Brimston Lewis. January 28

www.wno.org.uk

Around the world

Salzburg. The 2017 SALZBURG FESTIVAL programme has been announced with first nights as follows: *Orfeo* (semi-staged), c. John Eliot Gardiner, p. Elsa Rooke/John Eliot Gardiner (July 26); *La clemenza di Tito* (np), c. Teodor Currentzis, p. Peter Sellars (July 27); *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (semi-staged), c. John Eliot Gardiner, p. Elsa Rooke/John Eliot Gardiner (July 28); *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (semi-staged), c. John Eliot Gardiner, p. Elsa Rooke/John Eliot Gardiner (July 29); *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (np), with Nina Stemme, c. Mariss Jansons, p. Andreas Kriegenburg (August 2); *Aida* (np), with Anna Netrebko, c. Riccardo Muti, p. Shirin Neshat (August 6); *Wozzeck* (np), with Matthias Goerne, c. Vladimir Jurowski, p. William Kentridge (August 8); *I due Foscari* (concert performance), with Plácido Domingo, Joseph Calleja, c. Michele Mariotti (August 11); *Ariodante*, with Cecilia Bartoli, c. Diego Fasolis, p. Christof Loy (August 16); *Lear* (np), with Gerald Finley, c. Franz Welser-Möst, p. Simon Stone; *Lucrezia Borgia* (concert performance), with Krassimira Stoyanova, Juan Diego Flórez, c. Marco Armiliato (August 27)

www.salzburgerfestspiele.at