

Opera

£6.50 July 2019

Opera

**Simon Keenlyside in conversation
Lyndon Terracini—wizardry in Oz
The Radford sisters rediscovered**



July 2019

an opera that works as well in vaudevillian terms as it does as a parable of human enlightenment. It diverted the audience with harmless hints of music-hall tradition, industrial-age machinery, libraries of learning, all of which found a more compelling rationale in Allen's new programme essay (taking in #MeToo and *The Handmaid's Tale*) than in Simon Higlett's cavernous steam-and-brass set. Never mind: the performance, sung in Kit Hesketh-Harvey's zippy English adaptation, skipped along and should be worth another revival down the line.

The new cast was altogether classier than in 2012. It announced a heart-stealing Pamina in Gemma Summerfield, plumbing the depths of 'Ach, ich fühl's' with her clean, personable soprano and artless phrasing. It had a superb Speaker in Dingle Yandell, whose stage presence, vocal command and sheer dignity set the imagination racing about all the other (bigger) parts you'd love to hear him sing. It boasted a real communicator in Richard Burkhard's Papageno, never over-egging the humour. It also profiled a sexy trio of Ladies in Jeni Bern, Bethan Langford and Sioned Gwen Davies. Peter Gijbetsen was the handsome Tamino, James Creswell the stately Sarastro and Julia Sitkovetsky a reliable Queen of the Night—but the show was very nearly stolen by Sofia Troncoso's Papagena. A bouquet, too, to Adrian Thompson's ageless Monostatos.

For its audience-pleasing consistency, this *Flute* could not be faulted, but it needed Ringborg in the pit to elevate it above the crowd.

ANDREW CLARK

Pelléas et Mélisande

Opera on the Move at the Playground Theatre, London, May 8

La Tragédie de Carmen, first seen in 1981, was revived at Wilton's Music Hall 18 months ago for the Royal Opera's Jette Parker Young Artists. This *Pelléas et Mélisande*, presented by Opera on the Move, was another operatic condensation by Peter Brook and Marius Constant, dating from 1992. Though it spanned only 90 minutes, with no interval, it felt astonishingly complete. The most conspicuous changes came at either end of the opera: it opened with Geneviève's reading of Golaud's letter and then flashed back to the scene of Golaud and Mélisande in the forest; in the final scene, there was no mention of Mélisande's baby and the opera ended with what is usually Arkel's penultimate pronouncement. Rather than giving us a (false?) glimmer of hope, it left us pondering the sadness of everything.

Designed by Phett Waivv, Gareth Matthey's production was placed in an abstracted legendary setting. Mélisande, here dark-haired, wore a slinky black Brünnhilde-like costume, while the other inhabitants of Allemonde were clad in flimsy white silk robes. Their make-up was colourful and stylized, though not obtrusively so. The only physical decor was two grand pianos, one on each side of the stage area, played with grace and lucidity by the music director, Juliette Sabbah, and Alastair Chilvers. Video projections on the rear wall of the theatre (and at times on the singers) evoked physical locations and sexual encounters—whether real or imagined—between Mélisande and Golaud and then Mélisande and Pelléas. The firm, crisp projection that the French soprano Emilie Cavallo brought to Mélisande's lines was part of an unusually assertive view of the role. When she told Golaud 'Je ne suis pas heureuse ici', it was more mockingly defiant than self-pitying. She was well matched with the Pelléas of Ben Thapa, who sang in a strong, dark tenor and exemplified the production's physicality, at times careering around the stage. As his half-brother, clearly closer to his age than in most productions, Benjamin Schilperoort

simmered and suffered with contained intensity, his bass-baritone lean and resonant. Arkel can sound sanctimonious, but Christopher Foster made him affectionate and compassionate; rather than intoning, he brought conversational eloquence to his lines. Helen Stanley made a distinguished, velvety, subtly imperious Geneviève, while a second French singer, the mezzo Naomi Couquet, justified the inclusion of Yniold's encounter with the sheep—perhaps the only 'non-essential' scene in the adaptation—with her sparky characterization and tone that was vibrantly boyish, not childishly white.

YEHUDA SHAPIRO



■ (above) Ben Thapa and Emilie Cavallo as Pelléas and Mélisande for *Opera on the Move*; (below) Filipe Manu and Hongni Wu as Hippolyt and Phaedra at the Linbury

Phaedra

Royal Opera at the Linbury Theatre, Covent Garden, May 15

The Jette Parker Young Artists Programme at the Royal Opera House has an admirable record of supporting international young talent and kick-starting their careers by embedding them in the company for two years. All five singers, the conductor and the director in this new production of Hans Werner Henze's penultimate opera are part of the programme, while the 23 instrumentalists of the Southbank Sinfonia are also recent graduate musicians, so imbuing the entire operation with a distinctly youthful feel. Add to this millennial mix a plot of forbidden and unrequited love, seduction, jealousy, self-loathing, murder, revenge and suicide, and you should have the recipe for a hormone-fuelled spectacle of high-octane action from start to finish.

Hippolyt (Filipe Manu) was dressed as a stylized boy from da hood, Aphrodite (Jacquelyn Stucker) as a dead ringer for Ariana Grande; Phaedra (Hongni Wu) in slinky evening dress would have graced any society cocktail party. But the drama



Opera, July 2019

897