

OPERA TODAY

OPERA NEWS, COMMENTARY, AND REVIEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

HOME
COMMENTARY
FEATURED OPERAS
NEWS
REPERTOIRE
REVIEWS
ABOUT
CONTACT
LINKS

★ RECENTLY IN PERFORMANCES

FT Reviews La Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein
La Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein, Châtelet, Paris
By Francis Carlin Published: October 11 2004 03:00
| Last updated: October 11 2004 03:00 Were the Brits in the audience the only ones to get the allusion? Felicity Lott's Grand Duchess is...

Cecilia Bartoli at Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris
La réhabilitation pour Salieri Au TCE, Cecilia Bartoli se fait l'éblouissante avocate d'un musicien dont la postérité retiendra avant tout les soupçons d'empoisonnement sur la personne de Mozart : Antonio Salieri. Elle consacre l'intégralité d'un récital à celui que Gluck...

Le Monde Reviews Messiaen's "Saint François d'Assise"
La mise en apesanteur divine de "Saint François d'Assise", SDF de la foi LE MONDE | 08.10.04 | 15h02 A l'Opéra Bastille, les tableaux franciscains d'Olivier Messiaen par Stanislas Nordey. Avec cette nouvelle production du Saint-François d'Assise de Messiaen -...

"La Voix Humaine" at Vremena Goda Festival
Voznesenskaya - only too human by Neil McGowan
La Voix Humaine (concert performance) Vremena Goda Festival Vremena Goda Orchestra/Bulakhov 29 September 2004 Bringing down the curtain on the Vremena Goda Festival this year was the Festival's first-ever operatic offering -...

Moscow Times: Entering the Ring
George Loomis reports on Wagner opera, Russian-style. By George Loomis Published: October 8, 2004
Last spring the Metropolitan Opera gave three complete cycles of Richard Wagner's four-opera saga, "Der Ring des Nibelungen" (The Ring of the Nibelung). It was business...

FT Reviews Tamerlano
Tamerlano, Opéra de Lille By Francis Carlin
Published: October 6 2004 03:00 | Last updated: October 6 2004 03:00 There should be a golden rule for producers: don't make life difficult for yourself and the audience. In Lille's magnificently restored...

Le Figaro on Charpentier Festival
FESTIVAL Marc-Antoine Charpentier à Ambronay
Triomphe de la jeunesse Gérard Corneloup [30 septembre 2004] En cette année du bicentenaire de la mort de Marc-Antoine Charpentier, occasion unique de le sortir de l'ombre que lui fait encore Lully, le festival d'Ambronay...

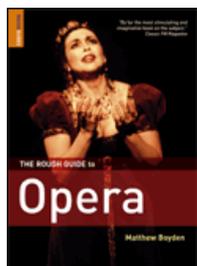
FROSCHE at Innsbruck
Die Frau ohne Schatten, Tiroler Landtheater, Innsbruck By Larry L Lash Published: September 29 2004 03:00 | Last updated: September 29 2004 03:00 It was a strange match: Richard Strauss's hugest, most difficult opera - with one of the largest...

Die Walküre at the Met
Die Walküre, Metropolitan Opera, New York By Martin Bernheimer Published: September 28 2004 03:00 | Last updated: September 28 2004 03:00 For the past couple of decades at the Metropolitan Opera, Die Walküre was the exclusive property of James Levine,...

Subscribe to
Opera Today
Receive articles and
news via RSS feeds or
email subscription.

[RSS](#) Feature Articles

twitter



Rough Guide to the
Opera 4

Ads by Google

[NJ's Premier Opera Co.](#)

Professional opera performances in Cranford, NJ.
www.pinedalyric.com

[Mozart's Idomeneo](#)

Full-size, Color Facsimile of Mozart's Autograph Manuscript
mozart.packhum.org

★ PERFORMANCES



15 Aug 2010

Tristan in Seattle

Seattle, the city of software and Starbucks, is also a summer site for serious Wagnerites.

Best known for its regular *Ring* cycle, the Seattle Opera presents other Wagner operas in the off years. The high quality of this summer's performance of *Tristan und Isolde* is a tribute to the company's seriousness of purpose. While perhaps not quite a match for its legendary 1998 *Tristan*, in which Jane Eaglen and Ben Heppner debuted in the title roles, it nonetheless presents as strong a cast as one is likely to encounter anywhere today.

Clifton Forbis is that rarest of singers: a genuine dramatic *Heldentenor* whose clarion top rests on a dark baritone base. If his voice seems a bit less supple than in his impressive 2005 Geneva performance (available on DVD), it is now more solidly grounded. On August 4, despite lingering indisposition, he displayed hardly a single moment of technical insecurity. While somewhat restrained in Act I, perhaps by design, he trumpeted the Act III high notes with apparent ease—as if, in the Birgit Nilsson tradition, he could sing it all over again. (The performance was shorn of the Act II “Tag und Nacht” segment, a standard Seattle cut, but Act III was performed complete—more than many Tristans sing.) Throughout there were moments of genuine musical and dramatic insight. While those with a historical perspective might quibble, calling here and there for clearer diction, subtler phrasing, gentler pianos, warmer timbre, or deeper psychological insight—who today sings a finer Tristan?

Annalena Persson

Richard Wagner: Tristan und Isolde

Isolde: Annalena Persson;
Tristan: Clifton Forbis;
Brangäne: Margaret Jane Wray;
King Marke: Stephen Milling;
Kurwenal: Greer Grimsley;
Melot: Jason Collins;
Shepherd/Sailor: Simeon Esper;
Steersman: Barry Johnson.
Conductor: Asher Fisch. Stage Director: Peter Kazaras. Set and Costume Designer: Robert Israel. Lighting Designer: Duane Schuler.

Above: Annalena Persson as Isolde and Clifton Forbis as Tristan

All photos by Rozarii Lynch courtesy of Seattle Opera

[Printer Version](#)

[Send to a Friend](#)

Opera Today Store

[Walter Felsenstein Edition](#)
Various Artists, F...
New \$115.97
Best \$115.83

[Opera Exclusive](#)
Verdi, Guleghina, ...
New \$46.47
Best \$43.98

[Maria Callas - Complete Studio Recordings](#)
Giacomo Puccini, V...

[Want to See Wagner Opera](#) But Can't Find Your Favourite? We Can Help. Check Our Pages Now.
www.BachTrack.com

[Like Libretto](#) Looking for Like Libretto? Find exactly what you want today.
Yahoo.com

FT Reviews La Rondine

La Rondine, New York City Opera By Martin Bernheimer Published: September 27 2004 03:00 | Last updated: September 27 2004 03:00 La Rondine certainly isn't Puccini's easiest or most successful opera. Completed in 1917, it flutters - sometimes elegantly, sometimes...

Andrew Patner Reviews Don Giovanni at the Lyric Opera

Don Giovanni, Lyric Opera, Chicago By Andrew Patner Published: September 21 2004 03:00 | Last updated: September 21 2004 03:00 A half century ago, a trio of twentysomething operaphiles offered Chicago what they dubbed a "calling card" production of Mozart's...

Faust in Hong Kong

Faust, Hong Kong Cultural Centre By Ken Smith Published: September 20 2004 13:25 | Last updated: September 20 2004 13:25 Hong Kong's opera lovers, lacking a full-time opera house and gaining a standing company only in the past year, have...

FT Reviews The Greek Passion

The Greek Passion, Royal Opera House, London By Andrew Clark Published: September 17 2004 03:00 | Last updated: September 17 2004 03:00 All human life is here: prayer and pageant, self-sacrifice and self-righteousness, humour and hypocrisy, feast and famine. Opera...

FT Reviews Tobias and the Angel

Tobias and the Angel, English Touring Opera, St John's Church, London By David Murray Published: September 16 2004 03:00 | Last updated: September 16 2004 03:00 The composer Jonathan Dove may have called his Tobias, now touring cathedrals and churches,...

FT Reviews LA Opera's Ariadne auf Naxos

Ariadne auf Naxos Music Center, Los Angeles By Allan Ulrich Published: September 15 2004 03:00 | Last updated: September 15 2004 03:00 William Friedkin's mounting of the Strauss-von Hoffmannsthal comedy handsomely and wittily confirms the general director Plácido Domingo's belief...

Le Figaro Reviews Pelléas et Mélisande at Palais Garnier

Debussy tout feu tout glace La critique de Jacques Doucelin [15 septembre 2004] Une salle qui tousse à gorge déployée en été, hors de toute épidémie de grippe, au mieux manque d'attention, au pire s'ennuie. Voilà le résultat du transfert...

FT: Ariadne auf Naxos, Welsh National Opera, Cardiff

Ariadne auf Naxos, Welsh National Opera, Cardiff By Richard Fairman Published: September 14 2004 03:00 | Last updated: September 14 2004 03:00 The Prologue to Ariadne auf Naxos is all about the backstage shenanigans before a performance - a bit...

NYT: Anne Midgette Reviews Katya Kabanova CRITIC'S PICK | ANNE MIDGETTE A Star to Shed Light on Janacek's Bleak Operatic Landscape OPINIONS may differ as to what constitutes a highlight at the Metropolitan Opera these days, but few disagreed last season about Karita Mattila's performance as...

WSJ: The Comeback Composer

The Comeback Composer Opera World Taps Handel To Woo New Audiences; Cleopatra in Gold Lamé By HEIDI WALESON The last time Michael Goodman had season tickets to the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, Gerald Ford was president and pet...

FT: Martin Bernheimer reviews Daphne



as Isolde

Much anticipation surrounded the American debut of **Annalena Persson**. The young Swedish soprano sang the role of Isolde to acclaim at the Welsh National Opera in 2006, where Seattle

impresario Speight Jenkins signed her up. (The local press hints that she is slated as Seattle's 2013 Brünnhilde as well.) Young, blonde, comely and, by Wagnerian standards, slim, Persson looks the part. Her silvery voice has edge and brilliance that can project, despite some lack of warmth and heft, through a Wagnerian orchestra. At times she is a thrilling interpreter, particularly at moments of anger and excitement, such as the Act I Narration and Curse—especially where the orchestration is light. But the role of Isolde overstretches her vocal resources. On sustained (particularly rising) tones in the upper middle part of the voice, the voice weakens and the vibrato widens dangerously. The "Liebestod," almost entirely comprised of such passages sung against full orchestra, was thus anti-climactic.

The secondary roles were all taken by Seattle favorites, to great effect. **Stephen Milling** nearly stole the show with a moving König Marke. His rich bass effortlessly filled the hall, and his German diction was exemplary. **Margaret Jane Wray** is gaining attention these days, consistently singing major roles at the Met. To judge from her Brangäne here, the spreading fame is well-deserved. Hers is a soprano approach to this Zwischenfach role, slightly steely at the top, but clearly projected and delivered, with plenty of volume. **Greer Grimsley**, Seattle's resident Wotan, made a more convincing Kurwenal for being understated and elegant wherever possible. Jason Collins plays a forceful Melot, Simeon Esper a sweet Shepherd/Sailor, and Barry Johnson a fine Steersman.



Clifton Forbis as Tristan

Seattle's Principal Guest Conductor **Asher Fisch** is not one to pepper this score with excessive accelerandos, overweight accents, or bloated brass. He strives instead for a consistent mood of classical restraint, brilliantly achieved through smooth line, subtle detail, smooth blend, and transparent textures. (Connoisseurs might note also the innovative use of open strings and Wagner's specified *Holtrompete* in Act III.) The orchestra, once past some botched entrances in the prelude, played splendidly.

Stage director **Peter Kazaras** conceives Acts II and III as Tristan and Isolde's final hallucination. That is, the potion is indeed the death potion Isolde ordered, and from then on we share the images that pass through the lovers' minds in the moments before they expire. The inspiration is Ambrose Bierce's famous short story, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge."

New \$160.98
Best \$102.33



Icon
Mario Sereni, Tito...
New \$26.98
Best \$15.87



Rossini
Rossini, Corbelli,...

Privacy Information

Daphne New York City Opera By Martin Bernheimer
 Published: September 10 2004 03:00 | Last updated: September 10 2004 03:00 It took 66 years for Richard Strauss's Daphne to reach a stage in New York. We must be grateful for belated...

OPERA TODAY ARCHIVES »

This concept offers many potential insights into text and score. It promises to link the opera's two central concepts, love and death, in a unique way, underscores Tristan and Isolde's uncanny separation from all that goes on around them, with everything important taking place within their minds, and highlights the opera's uniquely distorted sense of time.



Annalena Persson as Isolde and Margaret Jane Wray as Brangäne

Ultimately the production fails to fully engage this demanding concept, though the stage direction, set design, and costumes (the latter two being the work of **Robert Israel**) display numerous virtues. On the positive side, a semi-transparent curtain draws the viewer gently into the dream world of each act, as if falling asleep (in the best possible sense!). The gloomy semi-abstract unit set, with a window at the back into reality, is visually neutral but acoustically resonant—a virtue too often neglected these days. The blocking of Act II, in which Tristan and Isolde slowly follow one another across a dark stage, like Orpheus and Eurydice, evokes their ghostly state between worlds. Similarly consistent with the concept, Kurwenal is never killed but simply recedes from Tristan's consciousness. Tristan and Isolde's costumes shift from mortal red to half-red, and finally to pure transfigured white, as if the blood is slowly draining from them. The extensive use of computer-aided lighting effects, a Seattle innovation with this production, is evocative. Tristan sings his first lines in Act II while apparently fully encased in a large slab of solid stone—a striking effect in itself, but also one that highlights that Isolde is summoning him only in her mind. (It would be even more effective if maintained for more than a few lines.) Other *coups de théâtre* include a glittering shower for the potion, and a giant, glowing holographic candle for the Act II light.

Yet much else is a jumble, undermining the production's core concept. Semi-realistic elements—large wrapped paintings, a tree, furniture, and the little model ship (mandatory, it seems, in contemporary Tristan productions)—coexist uneasily with abstract ones, such as laser-like red cords and a “stage within a stage” curtain behind which characters intermittently disappeared. This is hallucinatory, perhaps, but incoherent. The blocking at the end of Act I, and throughout Act II, tells us less than it might about the subjective experience of passing from day into night: It is not clear, for example, why the “dying” Tristan and Isolde are separated at the start of Act II, then again reunited. Nor does the costuming and compartment of secondary characters clearly delineate their status from the subjective perspective of the dying couple: One would expect a more fundamental change in how they are perceived after the Tristan and Isolde imbibe poison. In the end, too much of the production is static, even blandly realistic, in a classic stand-and-sing manner.

In the intermissions and on line, one encounters considerable criticism of this production for being too radical. I believe it is, on balance, too conservative. Readers of [my recent commentary on the Stuttgart *Ring*](#) know I can be critical of the excesses of Wagnerian *Regietheater*. Yet this production of *Tristan* might profitably have been more radical and rigorously intellectual—more *konsequent*, a German critic might well have said. The production is insightful as it stands, but a future revival might give Kazaras a second chance to realize its promising central idea more starkly.

Andrew Moravcsik

★ SEND TO A FRIEND

Send a link to this article to a friend with an optional message.

Friend's Email Address: (required)

Your Email Address: (required)

Message (optional):