



Myths and Modernity — Issue 129, 1 September 2019

The Northern Hemisphere's summer classical music festival season is nearly over. Apart from a few festivals ending today or in a few days' time, our **online festival listings** show only Slovenia's Festival Maribor, Romania's Enescu Festival and the UK's BBC Proms in September, plus a couple of piano competitions in Budapest and New York. Have we missed your September event? If so, please **add it to the listings**.

This newsletter focuses on some of the festival reviews we've received over the summer. Monika Rittershaus' photo above shows John Tomlinson as Tiresias, David Steffens as the Grand Priest, Katha Platz as Baby Oedipe and Brian Mulligan as Creon in Enescu's *Oedipe* at the 2019 Salzburg Summer Festival, which is where we begin :

Giuseppe Pennisi: The 2019 Summer Festival in Salzburg (20 July-31 August) has as its unifying theme the modernity of myths staged in ancient theatre. Hofmannsthal defined them as a magic mirror: myths from over two thousand years ago raise questions that we are trying to answer about human existence, war, sacrifice, murder, penalties, repentance and redemption.

Oedipe is George Enescu's only work for the theatre; he worked for over twenty years on a libretto by French poet Edmond Fleg. It is also the only musical work based on not just Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus* but also on less known ancient Greek poems about the birth of the protagonist scarred by inexorable fate. The opera has been relatively forgotten because it paints very articulately a picture of Oedipus' life path (and of

humanity) until the final catharsis and forgiveness. (Unlike in Sophocles' tragedies, Enescu's *Oedipe* regains his sight, humbling himself before God.) The work is founded on a premise far from Sophocles. In reply to this question by the Sphinx: 'who is more powerful and bigger than destiny?', Oedipus replies: 'man', by adjusting, however, his answer, saying that 'man is more powerful than destiny, but is not greater'. For Enescu, 'destiny' is God: he was a believer and practitioner of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The work is thus soaked in philosophy and religion.

In the score of *Oedipe*, on the one hand, there is the impact of French training on Enescu, a pupil of Gabriel Fauré, and mainly the influence of Darius Milhaud's choral works. There are also echoes of Richard Strauss, Karol Szymanowski and Romanian folk melodies, especially those like the *doina* and *cîntec lung*. All these ingredients melt together admirably in writing which is, at the same time, very personal and unique. Ingo Metzmacher's rendering of the score is superb, especially for the richness of tonal details, breadth of sound, attention to solo moments (for flute, and for the two horns), support to opera singers, and attention to the short dialogue at the end of the third act. To give more stereophonic effects, the flute is in one of the boxes carved into the rock of the *Felsenreitschule*, a small ensemble - one of the three harps, a flute, two horns - and part of the chorus are on a balcony on the left side of the hall, and the choir is frequently offstage. The listener is surrounded by music while the drama of *Oedipe* (as well as of humanity) is unfolding. Christopher Maltman excels among the protagonists; his voice ranges from airy, melodic, declamatory singing to *sprechgesang*.



Christopher Maltman in the title role of Enescu's *Oedipe* at the Salzburg Festival. Photo © 2019 Monika Rittershaus

John Tomlinson in the role of Tiresias and David Steffens in that of the High Priest are both vocally imposing. Amongst the women's voices, I would have preferred a sphinx (Eve-Maud Hubeaux) and a Jocasta (Anaïk Morel) with a lower register; Chiara Skerath was a perfect Antigone. All the principal singers displayed good diction (in the French language desired by Fleg and Enescu). The same cannot be said about the many secondary parts.

Staging, set, costumes and lighting have been entrusted to Achim Freyer, an eighty-five-year-old veteran of the German theatre and visual arts. In line with the festival's basic concept about the perennial meaning of myth, Freyer has designed an abstract and timeless staging in which the protagonist, a boxer, fights with characters who often emerge from the antlers carved into the rock.

Sometimes, Freyer loads the staging with too many symbols. Such a staging is, no doubt, controversial. On the evening of 17 August 2019, Freyer was greeted with ovations at the curtain calls, when he showed up with the rest of the cast. I was spellbound throughout the performance.

[READ MORE FROM SALZBURG ...](#)

James Sohre: The venerable San Francisco Opera should be justifiably proud of the overwhelming Dvořák production that currently inhabits its stage, a *Rusalka* monumental in its visual sweep, unerring in its musical excellence.

It is impossible to write about anything else until it is acknowledged that first and foremost, the performance was the occasion for the overwhelming title role debut by the luminous, incomparable Rachel Willis-Sørensen.

Her triumph was instant and total. The passionate, haunting rendition of 'The Song to the Moon' was the first of many unforgettable moments, imbued with mystery and creating many a frisson in reaction to jaw-dropping, controlled vocalism. As the piece surged and receded, rose and fell, this consummate artist placed us in the palm of her hand and never let go.



Rachel Willis-Sørensen in the title role of Dvořák's *Rusalka* at San Francisco Opera.
Photo © 2019 Cory Weaver

Once she served notice, she went on to powerful, urgently beautiful singing in her extended duet with the Prince, and she pled her case to Ježibaba to become human most persuasively. When she matures and becomes resigned to her fate, Rachel found unbearable pathos and heart wrenching decisions in the tragic Act Three. Her dramatic journey was superbly communicated, and her singing was effortlessly radiant and assured throughout. Moreover, she is possessed of an appealing physicality.



Rachel Willis-Sørensen in the title role of Dvořák's *Rusalka* with Brandon Jovanovich as the Prince at San Francisco Opera. Photo © 2019 Cory Weaver

Happily, every principle singer was up to her thrilling standard. Having not heard the excellent tenor Brandon Jovanovich for some years, I wondered if time and the heavy repertoire he has been consistently singing might have altered his prodigious gifts. I need not have worried. Mr Jovanovich still brandishes a meaty voice of ringing beauty, and he sounded vibrant and fresh from first to last. Brandon can still melt your heart with tortuously lovely phrases one minute, and then pin your ears back with searing, arching outbursts the next. And to boot, he is still boyishly handsome, not a bad attribute for a fairytale Prince.

[READ MORE FROM SAN FRANCISCO ...](#)

Anett Fodor: On 19 June Aleksandr Scriabin's *Prometheus: The Poem Of Fire* and Béla Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* were performed on the outdoor Summer Stage of the Miskolc National Theatre.

The infrequently performed *Prometheus* is a symphonic work for piano, orchestra, optional choir and *clavier à lumières* or 'Chromola'. This latter is a colour organ, which was invented by Preston Millar. As you can imagine, even in Scriabin's lifetime, this rarity seldom featured in performances of the piece.



Scriabin's *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* in Miskolc. Photo © 2019 János Vajda

Scriabin was a synaesthete and his synaesthesia and its associated colours influenced his work. To him, every harmonic note of his atonal scale appeared as a different colour. His colour-coded *Circle of Fifths* is another example of how this Russian Symbolist composer saw his subject matter. The pianist Dávid Báll and the excellent Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra cleverly combined the music with spectacular coloured lighting as their '*clavier à lumières*'. The whole became not only a wonderful musical experience, but a splendid sight, as well.



Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* in Miskolc. Photo © 2019 János Vajda

Béla Bartók's one-act opera *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* was performed by two world-renowned Hungarian artists; Andrea Rost (Judith) and András Palerdi (Bluebeard). Their performance enchanted the audience. The singers did not wear costumes and the set was a simple, giant backdrop of an ancient grey castle.

Their singing was really impressive, Béla Balázs' libretto was splendidly succinct and the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra's playing, truly excellent. The musical tension between the soloists was both exciting and palpable!

[READ MORE FROM THE BARTÓK PLUS OPERA FESTIVAL ...](#)

Patrick Maxwell: German orchestras are often some of the most popular to play at the Proms - with the Berlin Philharmonic treated as pop idols in the world of classical music - and their programmes are always pleasing as well. **The Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra achieved a rapturous reception** from the crowd when they performed twice late last month, and the Leipzig Gewandhaus who commanded the second half of this concert - BBC Proms, Royal Albert Hall, London UK, 23 August 2019 - kept up that reputation. The gargantuan Bruckner 8 awaited the Friday night crowd, and the mix of tantalising vitality, boisterous fanfares and a brilliant finale - it was for no small reason that Bruckner called it 'the most significant movement of my life'.

Before that, the orchestra's organist Michael Schönheit performed some of J S Bach's most renowned organ pieces, all composed during his long period as Cantor at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig. The magnificent Fantasia in G minor was carried off with visceral aplomb, although the quizzical tempo that Schönheit assumed was often overly

brisk for the genius to be fully appreciated. The following transcription of the famous melody from Cantata No 147 is often played with a brisk tempo, and it was so here, with the lush tune not given full expression, and the Romantic organ and notorious acoustics in some ways not suited to this music. The Prelude in E flat major that followed showed this again, with such a strict tempo that any hint of expression at the end of phrases was ignored, with a wash of noise sweeping over the Royal Albert Hall. The tuneful 'Wachet auf' Prelude followed, a piece that seemed rather out of place in an August concert, given its symbolism of Christmas. The Prelude's accompanying Fugue followed, one of the most fulfilling of Bach's offerings for the instrument. Schönheit continued in his orotund fashion, having practised in the hall until 3am that morning. The programme offered music that showed off Bach at his genuistic best - but not the organist or indeed the organ itself.



Michael Schönheit in 2016

One could almost believe that Schönheit had been discreetly asked if he could get a move on through his pieces, given the length of the second half of the concert. The monumental piece is well-known to the orchestra - they are recording a cycle of Bruckner's symphonies - and the familiarity was evident in their flamboyant and dramatically assured performance. The 1890 revision was used, with Bruckner having chastised himself as an 'idiot' after the conductor Hermann Levi wrote that 'I haven't the courage to put it on'. The music, whilst often uplifting at certain points, is also full of foreboding moments of underlying darkness. Bruckner was constantly beset by the criticism from Eduard Hanslick and others, who formed the anti-Wagnerian school that took up one side in the War of the Romantics. In many ways, this later piece can be seen as a clear expression of his musical characteristics, and also a summation of his life's achievements.



Andris Nelsons. Photo © 2018 Marco Borggreve

The orchestra produced a moving performance that energetically gave of the best of German string playing, led superbly from the front by Sebastian Brueniger. The remarkable and sonorous third movement was carried off with grace and expressive beauty, before heading towards the finale that did not lose any of the earlier intensity. The timpani playing from Marek Stefula filled the whole hall in its orotund sounds, helping to mix the grandeur and deep-rooted troubled emotions that Bruckner portrays. Under the direction of Andris Nelsons, the orchestra played with panache and energy, which gave renewed vigour to the gigantic expression of one man's philosophy and turbulent feelings in a piece of such symphonic magnitude.

[READ MORE FROM THE BBC PROMS ...](#)

Roderic Dunnett: One can't help marvelling, year on year, at the imagination, the vitality and the unfailing perfection of the Three Choirs Festival. Staged this year at Gloucester, in 2020 at Worcester, and the next year at Hereford, centred on the three cathedrals, and gathering the most spectacular forces, it continues to produce, both in the dazzling nave concerts and in a host of neighbouring or outlying recitals, standards that are distinctive, wonderfully finessed, meticulously well-prepared and overall superb. Nowadays the Three Choirs has seemed at its highest peak, particularly since the unmatched Philharmonia Orchestra took on a regular formal residency at the Festival.

What is its aim? Ideally, as Adrian Partington, this year's Festival Artistic Director, argues, it is 'always to honour [our] great tradition, by presenting masterpieces of the choral-orchestral repertoire, whilst offering challenges by performing musical rarities and premieres'. Either way, it was a week packed with good things, music of the highest quality, and very sociable too. For chorus and orchestra events, embraced within a single week, it has no peers. Add a dense flow of excellent chamber music, afternoon and late night choirs, and solo recitals, many in a cathedral context, and there's no doubt the Three Choirs leads the field.



Adrian Partington, the 2019 Festival Artistic Director, conducts an immensely dynamic performance of Berlioz's dramatic work *La damnation de Faust*. Photo © 2019 Michael Whitefoot

In all key areas he has the backing of the administration, overseen by the festival's Chief Executive, Alexis Paterson: 'New music has been a passion of mine since I was a music student', she says: 'I think revivals are really important too. To bring back some terrific modern pieces should be one key aim: this year John Joubert, Gabriel Jackson, Judith Weir, Ian Venables.'

And some brand new, too, many of them commissioned. 'Especially exciting is our premiere of Bob Chilcott's *A Christmas Oratorio*, made possible thanks to a particularly generous donor, Dame Amelia Fawcett: the Festival's support from such individual donations is absolutely vital. However, by and large, we achieve an income of some 50% from Box Office takings - a pretty remarkable sum.

'It's exciting, in piecing together a programme, how a "theme" gradually emerges. You see not just random items, but a coherent festival evolve. Sometimes, by this juxtaposition, you hear stunning connections you'd otherwise miss.'

This consistent high quality could not have been more obvious than when Partington himself, who also completed the week with Beethoven's Ninth, in which not just the choral last movement but the adagio were a triumph of interpretation, pacing and dynamic, and who bore the brunt of the week's conducting, took the podium and exercised masterly control for an undeniably sensational performance of Berlioz's semi-opera (or following an earlier work, Eight Scenes from Faust, his 'légende héroïque'): that endlessly entertaining saga, *The Damnation of Faust*.

Partington, who with the support of an invaluable Gloucester team devised the music programme throughout this packed week, following tradition interspersed with fresh ideas a cluster of more familiar items: Verdi's Requiem, conducted to great applause by former Gloucester chorister - and later Music Director of English National Opera - Edward Gardner; the blistering Beethoven; Handel's bracing and rather grisly narrative *Israel in Egypt* - the story of the devastating plagues and the imprisoned Israelites' escape from Egypt to the Promised Land; and even Karl Jenkins' widely popular *The Armed Man*, which is commonplace nowadays among choral societies countrywide.



Edward Gardner, former Gloucester Cathedral boy chorister, conducts a nerve-racking performance of Verdi's Requiem, drawing fiery results from the chorus and orchestra alike. Photo © 2019 Michael Whitefoot

Possibly the real novelty was when Partington himself gave a taste of the unusual, on the last evening, prior to that largescale, sensational finale embracing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, with both the Philharmonia and the 170-strong chorus on exhilarating form. He programmed, in an unusual combination, one of Gustav Holst's least familiar works, *The Mystic Trumpeter*. The work, ignored by Holst in his last two decades, and only released by his estate over fifty years after the composer's death, is one that - being one of his earliest - is particularly intriguing: not least, because it betrays his fascination at that time with Wagner, having heard Mahler, no less, conduct *Götterdämmerung* at Covent Garden. Holst - then highly impressionable - was turning eighteen. The memory stuck. *The Mystic Trumpeter* is almost as little known as *The Planets* is celebrated. It dates from 1904, when the composer was thirty. It managed three performances, then faded from view; here, under Partington, it at last received its due.

[READ MORE FROM THE THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL ...](#)

Giuseppe Pennisi: Few people know, or remember, that the nineteen-year-old Gioacchino Rossini spent a few hours in jail in Bologna for 'indecent exposure'. What did he do? Messing up in one of the brothels in Via delle Oche (within walking distance of today's Teatro Comunale)? He seems to have been a regular customer of those enterprises. Not that time. He had composed the score of a *dramma giocoso per musica* by Gaetano Gasbarri - *L'equivoco Stravagante*, which had its debut on 26 October 1811 at the Teatro del Corso. The opera caused many irate reactions by the Archbishopric and the conformists: after only three performances, the Board of Censors banned it.



Davide Luciano and Teresa Iervolino in *L'equivoco Stravagante* at the Rossini Opera Festival.
Photo © 2019 Studio Amati Bacciardi

The libretto is full of double meanings, innuendo, and jokes with erotic-sexual overtones. More significantly, the plot focuses on a girl who, in order to avoid the marriage arranged against her will, and tie the knot instead with a handsome but penniless young man, is made to pretend to be a castrato - at this time that practice was still in use. All kinds of intrigues take place, even conscription to the army, until the happy end. The wordings and the situations that then raised eyebrows, would today be suitable for a performance of high schoolers in an educational institute operated by nuns.

This work had already ploughed through the venues of the Rossini Opera Festival (ROF) in 2002 and in 2008, but had left few traces, mostly because of unfortunate staging. This year's new production was entrusted to Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier, 'historical' directors of Cecilia Bartoli. I've previously reviewed their work in, for instance, productions of Handel's *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* and Bellini's *Norma* presented at the Salzburg Festival. The two directors asked the singers and other staff to start rehearsals on 25 June (for a debut planned for 13 August). The light opera became a gem of wit and fun, thanks to the contributions of all.

The idea is not to present a slightly scurrilous farce but a theatrical and musical piece that today would be called 'a comedy for adults'. It is to be hoped that the production will be seen in other Italian and foreign theaters as well as via a high quality DVD and on major television channels dedicated to music (including Sky Classica, ARTE and Mezzo). It shows how Gasbarri and Rossini's joint product precedes light, allusive bourgeois comedy by decades. Indeed, it really is a lot of fun.

The plot is set in a rich Bolognese farmer's mansion in the early nineteenth century. The action is fast, the sets and the costumes gorgeous, and the acting is perfect; several hilarious gags add spice to the libretto. Obviously many of the implicit references in the libretto become explicit.

There are interesting musical aspects; for example, the 'first finale' seems a sketch of what, five years later, was the same number in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and some passages appear to anticipate *La Cenerentola*. More interesting than these philological elements is that, at the premiere on 13 August 2019, I experienced the audience laughing, applauding and being clearly merry during a musical comedy dating from over two centuries ago, and with a duration of about two and a half hours. There were many young people in the huge Vittrifrigio Arena, and they visibly enjoyed the performance. This is a good omen for both Rossini's lesser known repertoire, and above all, for the future of opera in general.

[READ MORE FROM THE ROSSINI OPERA FESTIVAL ...](#)

Mike Wheeler: Operatic rarities don't come much rarer than *Lucio Papirio Dittatore*, by Antonio Caldara (1671-1736) - Buxton Festival, Buxton Opera House, Buxton UK, 9 July 2019. This appears to have been its first staging for three hundred years, a challenge director Mark Burns seems to have found irresistible. It meant being able to approach this latest project by baroque ensemble La Serenissima with no pre-conceptions, no performance traditions to take account of. As is his usual way of working, the group's music director, violinist Adrian Chandler, also started with a clean slate, producing an edition of the score from scratch.



La Serenissima and the Buxton International Festival Chorus on stage for *Lucio Papirio Dittatore*.
Photo © 2019 Genevieve Girling

Plotwise, we were in typical *opera seria* territory. Roman dictator Lucio Papirio has returned to Rome to consult the auguries concerning a forthcoming battle, leaving the army in the hands of Quinto Fabio, son of his advisor, Marco Fabio, with strict orders not to engage the enemy until he returns. But the enemy provokes a battle, which Quinto wins. Lucio is stung by jealousy into sentencing Quinto to death for his disobedience, while everyone around him pleads for mercy on Quinto's behalf. Matters are further complicated by the fact that Lucio's daughter, Papiria - one of a number of invented characters - is married to Quinto. As Lucio struggles to find a way forward, there are echoes of another classical ruler in a fix, Idomeneo - Mozart's opera was Buxton's headline production last year.

The orchestra was placed to one side of the stage, with Adrian Chandler leading, and harpsichordist Giulia Nuti directing the recitatives. The restricted acting area this left for the singers actually paid off in terms of focusing the production's energy. Against a plain backdrop, Kitty Callister's design placed a free-standing double archway, a ceremonial chair and pillars. These were wrapped in cloth, Callister taking her cue from artists Christo Javacheff and Jeanne-Claude Denat, who did the same with everything from small objects to large public buildings. It was an apt visual metaphor for the characters' perceived restrictions to their freedom of action. Costumes were simple and emblematic.

Robert Murray humanised Lucio, with a mixture of resolution, bluster and inner conflict. Unusually, his aria at the end of Act I included interjections by other characters, emphasising the tensions between them.



Robert Murray as Lucio Papirio and Rowan Pierce as Papiria in *Lucio Papirio Dittatore* at the Buxton Festival. Photo © 2019 Genevieve Girling

The two counter-tenors were well contrasted vocally. The lighter-toned William Towers was a Marco almost as conflicted as Lucio himself. His Act III aria, in which he vents his grief and anger at the turn of events, was accompanied by Chandler in an obbligato of concerto-like virtuosity. The darker, almost contralto-like Owen Willets was suitably heroic and impetuous as Quinto, secure in runs in his Act I aria defending his actions to Lucio. For his pastoral-like aria at the start of Act III, he was joined by Louise Strickland, who stepped forward from the orchestra to play an expressive obbligato on a chalumeau, an early form of clarinet.



From left to right: Elizabeth Karani as Rutilia, Eleanor Dennis as Comminio, William Towers as Marco Fabio, Robert Murray as Lucio Papirio, Gareth Brynmor John as Servillio, Owen Willetts as Quinto Fabio and Rowan Pierce as Papiria in *Lucio Papirio Dittatore* at the Buxton Festival. Photo © 2019 Genevieve Girling

Rowan Pierce's Papiria showed a steely determination, heroically incisive in her big Act I aria. In Act III, as she and Quinto take what they expect to be their last farewell of each other, their duet was a moment of great tenderness. Elizabeth Karani was both sympathetic and wily as Papiria's friend Rutilia, in love with Eleanor Dennis' fiery officer Cominio. Gareth Brynmor John caught the ambivalence of Servilio, another of Lucio's functionaries, who eventually holds the key to resolving the situation - cue the final, typically sycophantic hymn of praise to Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI, for whose court the opera was written.

Will Caldara eventually join, say, Handel or Rameau on their baroque opera pedestals? This production argued his case forcefully.

[READ MORE FROM THE BUXTON FESTIVAL ...](#)

Giuseppe Pennisi: The Chigiana International Festival and Summer Academy is one the longest and most interesting music festivals in Italy and most likely in Europe. This year it runs from 6 July to 31 August and it includes some sixty concerts; several are free. It has a title and a unifying theme: *Out of Nature*, meaning both the nature of sound and the sound of nature. It includes debuts of new compositions, Italian premieres and great repertory music.

The festival is now at its fifth edition. It is the brainchild of the Italian composer and music organizer Nicola Sani - [read 'Highlights of a Composer', 9 February 2019](#) - who has also been, amongst other things, music director of Teatro dell'Opera di Roma and superintendent of Teatro Comunale di Bologna. As reported previously in *Music & Vision*, the festival is based on two different earlier experiences: the Chigiana Academy of Music, which started in 1938, and the Chigiana Week, which started after World War II. Both were initiatives by a private sponsor, Count Chigi-Saracini, who had previously organized a contemporary music festival in 1928 with world premieres of works by Prokofiev, Walton, Casella, Ravel, Webern, Hindemith and De Falla. Among his collaborators, Count Chigi-Saracini had important composers such as Ottorino Respighi.



Lilya Zilberstein playing Tchaikovsky with Fabio Luisi and the Orchestra of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino at the Chigiana International Festival. Photo © 2019 Roberto Testi

Academy of Music masterclass participants are selected via a worldwide competition, and have the best international musicians as their instructors such as, this year, among others, conductor Daniele Gatti, pianist Lilya Zilberstein, composers Salvatore Sciarrino and Kassel Jaeger, cellist Ernst Reijseger and tenor William Matteuzzi. The participants come from fifty-two different countries. Necessarily, the masterclasses focus on the classics. The Academy concerts take place in the magnificent Palazzo Chigi-Saracini, as

well as in two charming theatres and other venues - churches and squares.

Sani's brilliant as well as simple idea has been to merge the Academy courses and concerts with the Chigiana Week into a single festival of international standard. The Siena Music Academy has always been a gateway to fame.

This summer, *Out of Nature* is an extraordinary laboratory of productions ranging from the Baroque period to contemporary music. The concerts feature great performers with exclusive events by David Krakauer, Manu Delagu, Mari Kamura, Gene Coleman and Bruno Lefort. There are eight resident ensembles. Several concerts are broadcast live on the Italian national radio channels and, in addition, from 6 July until 31 August 2019, a web radio channel, *Chigianarte*, is broadcasting the most interesting contemporary works with a special focus on the soundscape as interpreted by today's composers. A section of the festival is devoted to Iannis Xenakis, a composer especially attentive to both the nature of sound and the sound of nature; twenty of his masterpieces will be performed. A fully staged opera is also included in the festival: *Il barbiere di Siviglia* by Giovanni Paisiello - a real exploration of the nature of human beings.

I was in Siena for the 6 July 2019 inaugural concert - the long-awaited return to Siena, after sixteen years, of the Orchestra of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, conducted by Fabio Luisi with, as soloist, the world famous Russian pianist Lilya Zilberstein, one of the pillars of the Chigiana Academy masterclasses.

The concert included Tchaikovsky's Concerto No 1 for Piano and Orchestra in B flat minor and Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No 6 in F major, *Pastoral*. They both deal with the sound of nature and with the nature of sound.

[READ MORE FROM THE CHIGIANA INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL ...](#)

Roderic Dunnett: Longborough Festival Opera, with its spreading English views across the Vale of Evesham, has earned widespread accolades for its magnificently conducted (by Anthony Negus), intelligently staged productions of Richard Wagner, which have achieved for it, not without reason, the title 'the Cotswold Bayreuth'.

Tristan und Isolde and *Tannhäuser* have both recently drawn Longborough critical and audience plaudits. Such vast acclaim is fully justified. Its trademark has been a series of *Ring* cycles, which since their inception in 1998 have merited not just local and national but beyond that, arguably worldwide attention. At Longborough things are always on the move. It launched the present 2019 season with an already hailed new staging of *Das Rheingold*, initiating a wholly fresh cycle which will grow to a culmination with a full-blown *Ring* in 2023.

Longborough, which had the initiative to present the UK's only complete *Ring* cycle in 2013 (the bicentenary of the composer's birth), has from the outset diversified into other repertoire: Mozart, Strauss, Verdi and Janáček - *Katya Kabanova* and *Jenůfa*, both recently; *The Cunning Little Vixen* will feature in 2020. Donizetti has appeared in the mix: *Anna Bolena* figured this year, *Don Pasquale* in 2015, and the lighter *The Elixir of Love* is tacked onto the 2020 season.

What was initially less well-known, but is now supported by knowing audiences as a popular high quality element each season, is Longborough's commitment, due to the

initiative of its founding couple Martin and Lizzie Graham, to furnishing enlightened, enabling opportunities for younger singers. Ten operas for young artists - invariably imaginatively produced and very competently - will have matured by 2020, including Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, staged memorably in 2008 and again in 2018. Their Handel has generally been first rate: *Rinaldo*, *Xerxes* (wonderful) and *Alcina* were mounted in three consecutive seasons (2014-16). This youthful enterprise has become not just an add-on, but with its obvious high standards a vital and uplifting feature of Longborough's summer season. The *Vixen* next year will in fact be a Young Artists production: quite a challenge to pull off, but pure enchantment when it succeeds.

This year it was Francesco Cavalli (1602-76) - thirty-five years younger than Monteverdi, possibly his pupil, and stylistically akin. How much one took to Mathilde Lopéz's pretty wacky staging of *La Calisto* depended on one's tolerance of Lopéz's in-your-face innovation, one's desire for a traditional mythical staging (as many of Handel's *Semele* are), one's distaste for the gratuitous, one's dislike of supermarket trolleys, and one's consequent doubts about having shelled out for a ticket. It was pretty over the top, incorporating much visual bric-a-brac that took it to the edge of pointlessness. Not surprisingly, opinions on this slightly twerpish approach were pretty conflicting. Lopéz in fact founded and leads a somewhat *avant-garde* company in Cardiff, August 012, which may to a degree have influenced her 'innovative' production here. She teaches at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.



Endymion (Brian McAlea) trapped by Pan and his henchmen, still clutching his balloon sheep.
Photo © 2019 Matthew Williams-Ellis

Yet despite these production annoyances, I loved it. There is, after all, a good deal of tongue-in-cheek in *La Calisto*. With the help of his aide-de-camp Mercury (bass), Jupiter (baritone) disguises himself as his daughter Diana - the goddess of abstention and the

renunciation of sex: her acolytes prefer to remain virgins - and descends to earth, expressly to have his usual way with a scrumptious nymph, Calisto. Conveniently, his disguised role is depicted by a quite separate figure, 'Diana' (a mezzo). Teenage Calisto in turn - irony of ironies - falls in love with the goddess of her dreams, and seeks 'bouquets of kisses'. The idea of a woman, or girl, falling for another woman is a bit of a *Leitmotif* in certain Baroque operas, but the irony and explanation here is that, despite 'her' mezzo, Diana is in fact the cross-dressing Jupiter.

[READ MORE FROM LONGBOROUGH FESTIVAL OPERA ...](#)

Giuseppe Pennisi: The Ravenna Festival has reached its thirtieth anniversary. It is now the most important Italian festival of performing arts - mainly music but also drama and ballet. It is a top European festival too. Every year the festival has a theme. In this 2019 edition, the theme is from a verse by Dante, who lived the last part of his life and died in Ravenna: to sail 'on the high and open sea'. It is an invitation to hope for a better future. The 2019 Festival has a Mediterranean focus, especially on Greece.



The Muti/Pollini concert in the De André auditorium. Photo © 2019 Silvia Lelli

The Festival has two parts. The Summer Festival (5 June-16 July) takes place in Ravenna and neighbouring towns and involves more than two hundred different performances of symphonic music, chamber music, religious music, contemporary music, live electronics, drama, ballet and other categories of performing arts. During a three day stay in Ravenna, a reviewer can provide only a sample of the vast and diversified program. There is also an Autumn Festival from 1 to 10 November, an opera trilogy. This year, it is devoted to women from bel canto to the anti-chamber of verismo: *Norma*, *Aida* and *Carmen*. They have the same stage direction and production design. One can see

and hear the three operas over a span of three days, but it is essential to book early. Ravenna is a medium size town; in addition to the Festival, it has an interesting opera and winter concert season.

On 5 June 2019, the opening concert featured two international stars - conductor Riccardo Muti and pianist Maurizio Pollini - and a well-known young orchestra, the Orchestra Giovanile Cherubini, created by Riccardo Muti in 2004 and often invited to the Salzburg Summer Festival. Every year, the orchestra renews almost a third of its members to keep its overall average profile young. The concert took place in the De André auditorium, a venue for an audience of three thousand. It was sold out.

The program was quite eclectic. The first part encompassed two piano concertos by Mozart - K 449 in D major and K 466 in D minor. The second part included Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's overture *Meerestille und glückliche Fahrt* (travelling happily on a quiet sea, usually known in English-speaking countries as the 'Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage' overture), and Ravel's *Boléro*. Mendelssohn's 'serene reflection of untroubled waters' is the signature of the Festival and contrasts sharply with Ravel's tense and agitated *Boléro*. Similarly, in the first part, the D minor Mozart concerto is more tense and elaborate than the previous work in D major, even though they both focus on the delicate balance the composer is seeking between tradition and innovation. In the two piano concertos, innovation means that the soloist at the piano would not merely develop a dialogue with the orchestra but would become gently part of the ensemble.

[READ MORE FROM THE RAVENNA FESTIVAL ...](#)

CONCERT REVIEWS — ALL REEDS BLAZING

Although this newsletter's primary focus is on summer music festivals, we've also published several recent concert reviews, most recently by Mike Wheeler, Giuseppe Pennisi and Patrick Maxwell, which can be explored online.

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CD REVIEWS — ABSOLUTELY EXHILARATING

We regularly publish CD reviews, most recently by Gerald Fenech, Geoff Pearce and Ona Jarmalavičiūtė, and these can all be explored online. Our CD reviews are all illustrated with sound samples, usually chosen by the author of each review. If you enjoy listening to these, you can often hear an extra sample on the 'CD information page' 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 find information about recent CDs, including those which haven't yet been reviewed, and follow the review cycle process for a particular CD.

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[NEW RELEASES](#)

PROFILES AND GENERAL ARTICLES — ONLY THE SCREEN

Don't miss Ona Jarmalavičiūtė's conversation with Belgian singer and conductor Tom Tore Denys in our Profile section, or Endre Anaru's article about listening to all the Beethoven symphonies at once.

[INTERVIEWS, PROFILES AND TRIBUTES](#)

[GENERAL ARTICLES](#)

NEWS — STEIM'S FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

STEIM, the Netherlands' STudio for Electro-Instrumental Music, was founded on 27 February 1969 by a group of Dutch composers - Misha Mengelberg, Louis Andriessen, Peter Schat, Dick Raaymakers, Jan van Vlijmen, Reinbert de Leeuw and Konrad Boehmer. A foundation, financially supported by the Dutch ministry of Culture, STEIM developed into an internationally-celebrated lab for music and sound, thanks to the efforts, over the years, of a series of enigmatic directors, artistic directors, visiting artists, interns and a dedicated creative and administrative team. It invites international artists in residence from different musical and artistic styles and scenes. In addition to offering support in theoretical and practical development of contemporary musical instruments, STEIM also hosts in-house concerts, exhibitions and workshops. The work in progress of supported artists is presented in open studio events.



Swiss composer Daniel Schorno in Amsterdam's Muziekgebouw. Photo © 2019 Keith Bramich

STEIM is celebrating its 50th anniversary with a festival, *STEIM 50 YEARS*, which will take place 13-16 September 2019 at various venues in Amsterdam.

Nine of the foundation's former artistic directors - Atau Tanaka, Daniel Schorno, Jan St Werner, Joel Ryan, Mazen Kerbaj, Nic Collins, Rebekah Wilson, Tina Blaine and DJ Sniff - will come together for the first time to perform in a birthday concert for STEIM from 7pm until late on Sunday 15 September 2019 in the Kleine Zaal at the Muziekgebouw, as part of *The Rest is Noise* series.

The concert is billed as 'a celebration of STEIM's extraordinarily creative history and future', and as 'an intimate, informal non-stop performance of solos, duets, trios and more'. Short bios of the nine performers, below, give a strong sense of the variety on offer at this event.

Amongst other recent news, Plácido Domingo has been accused of sexual harrassment, and Canadian composer Bekah Simms has won the 2019 Barlow Prize.

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This newsletter is a monthly taster for our high quality and colourful online classical music magazine, published every day since January 1999. Founded by the late Basil Ramsey and current editor Keith Bramich.

The editorial and advertising copy deadlines for our October 2019 newsletter are both Wednesday 25 September 2019. **Contact us here.**

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