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Andrew Clark

Andrew Clements

Richard Fairman

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Fiona Maddocks

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Roger Parker

Editorial Offices

36 Black Lion Lane


London W6 9BE


Telephone: 020 8563 8893

Fax: 020 8563 8635

email: editor@opera.co.uk

Website: www.opera.co.uk

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Subscriptions

Esco, Trinity House,

Sculpins Lane, Wethersfield,

Braintree CM7 4AY

Telephone: 01371 851804

Fax: 01371 851808

email: opera@escosubs.co.uk

Advertising

Jane Stoggles

Cabbell Publishing Ltd

Telephone: 020 3603 7940

email: jane@cabbell.co.uk

Front cover

Kristine Opolais

(see pp. 1228-34)

(photo: Tatyana Vlasova)

Opera

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Past Editors Harold Rosenthal
and Rodney Milnes*

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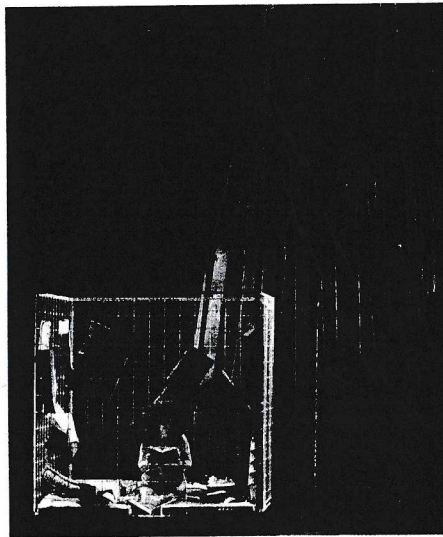
Ostrava

Situated near the Polish border, Ostrava has long been known for its heavy engineering industries and, more recently, its high rate of unemployment. But it boasts two universities, an academy of music, a full-strength symphony orchestra, two small playhouses, a puppet theatre—and the NATIONAL MORAVIAN-SILESIA THEATRE, founded in 1919 and covering the fields of opera, drama, operetta, musicals and ballet. For a programme of 15 new productions and 500 performances per year, Jiří Nekvasil, the Intendant, has to survive on €7.5m. And yet the company produces remarkable performances. Magic?

There was certainly a magical quality about Nekvasil's staging of *The Fiery Angel* at the 530-seat ANTONÍN-DVOŘÁK-THEATRE (May 19). Ranging across different times and styles, it depicted Cologne Cathedral as a surrealist construction, the fight between Ruprecht and Heinrich as a laser battle (similar to that between Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker), and the stake where Renata is burned as a high-tech spectacle. Faust and Mephistopheles appeared in tongue-in-cheek painted backdrops. Not only was this a feast for the eye, the ear was equally well satisfied. The partly covered pit arrangement meant that the voices were extremely well supported—almost too well, for Iordanka Derilova's Renata and Ulf Paulsen's Ruprecht were nearly overpowering. The orchestra under the superb Robert Jindra made the most of Prokofiev's ardent music.

This was part of a trilogy of operas by composers who at some point in their lives had a connection with Ostrava (the others were Hindemith's *Cardillac* and Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*). The city's composer associations are also evident in its affinity for Janáček, who was born at nearby Hukvaldy, and its ongoing fondness for the contemporary. The latest manifestation of this was the premiere of *Philoctetes* by Jan Klusák (May 21). It marked a belated rehabilitation for the 81-year-old Prague-born

■ Iordanka Derilova as Renata in 'The Fiery Angel' in Ostrava



composer, who disappeared from public view in 1968—when the Russians marched into Czechoslovakia—until after the Velvet Revolution of 1989. It is hardly surprising that Klusák should identify with Philoctetes, one of the Greek generals in the Trojan wars, who was bitten by a snake, fell ill and was abandoned on a lonely island.

The score, reminiscent of late Stravinsky and the Second Viennese School, is well crafted and sets the words of Sophocles with interesting colours. Nekvasil's staging, in Daniel Dvořák's clear-cut decor (representing an anatomy theatre), concentrated on essentials. Marko Ivanović conducted with energy, and the singing actors—Jakub Tolaš (Philoctetes), Jorge Garza (Odysseus) and Jana Hrochová (Neoptolemos)—were more than competent.

GERHARD PERSCHÉ

France

Lille

As its mainstream opera this year, OPERA DE LILLE revived Jean-François Sivadier's 2004 staging of *Madama Butterfly* for nine performances. It was a somewhat mannered production (seen on June 7) with stylized gestures, which were gradually discarded. The cast walked in through the auditorium in their everyday clothes and, though the women then put on vaguely Asiatic cloaks, Pinkerton and Sharpless retained their rather battered suits. There were no naval uniforms. Perhaps the most unusual touch was the suicide of Yamadori after he had been rejected. His body lay at the back of the stage until the end of the opera.

François Piolino's neatly sung Goro appeared on stage before the lights went down and seemed to control all the characters, but the production sprang to life only with the sudden appearance of the huge figure of Ramaz Chikviladze's Bonze. His rich, powerful voice sealed Butterfly's fate, abandoned by her family, and he left spectacularly, brushing Pinkerton to the floor as if he were a mere fly. The other major dramatic effect came when Sharpless asked Butterfly to consider the possibility that Pinkerton might never return. Serena Farnocchia, a rather mature Cio-Cio-San, visibly grew in stature, commanding the stage. Her suicide became inevitable at that moment. She sang with a glorious open tone, conveying all of Butterfly's suffering. Victoria Yarovaya captured Suzuki's loyalty with the warmth of her voice while Armando Noguera was an equally loyal Sharpless, his well-focused baritone able to dominate the orchestra. Merūnas Vitulskis revealed a powerful tenor rather lacking in lyricism as Pinkerton. Dramatically Sivadier made him into a rather insignificant figure, over-fond of his half bottle of whisky.

Antonino Fogliani's conducting captured all the glory and aching beauty of the music, but the Orchestre National de Lille took a little time to find its true form, settling to give a stylish, powerful account of the score. It was good to have the Humming Chorus on stage, whence it could be properly heard. GRAEME FEGGETTER

Toulouse

Just think of all the places Calixto Bieito might have taken *Turandot*. The Catalan director is hardly shy of a bit of gore; surely his production of Puccini's most sexually violent opera—first staged in Nuremberg last year, seen here at Toulouse's THEATRE DU CAPITOLE—was bound to get messy. But it didn't. There were no toilets (remember Bieito's *Un ballo in maschera*?), no forced urine-drinking (his *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*), not even any oral sex (take your pick of Bieito stagings). There was bondage and whipping, vomiting and beating, but nothing was excessive and nothing was out of keeping with the explicit cruelty of the piece. And, crucially, nothing distracted from Bieito's examination of Turandot's vindictive power tactics or Calaf's dangerously blinkered political idealism. This production was disturbing, yes, but for reasons more interesting than straight-up scandal.

Puccini composed *Turandot* (or most of it) immediately after the creation of communist parties in Italy and China. His depiction of persecuted masses under ancient imperial rule applies to 20th- and 21st-century authoritarianism, which is where Bieito takes us (June 30). Striking sets from Rebecca Ringst and unfussy costumes from Ingo Krügl suggest today's communist China, one of the most unequal societies on earth.

Opera, 10/2015

Překlad: Lenka Schreiberová

Czech Republic

Ostrava

Ostrava, umístěná v blízkosti hranic s Polskem, byla dlouho známá především těžkým průmyslem, postupně také vysokou mírou nezaměstnanosti. Ale pyšní se dvěma univerzitami, hudební akademií, symfonickým orchestrem, dvěma menšími divadly, loutkovým divadlem – a Národním divadlem moravskoslezským, založeným v roce 1919, které produkuje žánr opery, činohry, operety, muzikálu i baletu. Pro repertoár čítající 15 premiér a 500 představení za rok musí ředitel Jiří Nekvasil vystačit se 7,5m. eur. A přesto zde vznikají pozoruhodné inscenace. Že by kouzlo?

Zcela jistě měl kouzelnou kvalitu Nekvasilova inscenace Ohnivého anděla v květnu 2015 v Divadle Antonína Dvořáka, kam se vejde 530 diváků. Rozprostřená mezi různými časovými epochami a styly zobrazila kolínskou katedrálu jako surrealistickou konstrukci, souboj mezi Ruprechtem a Heinrichem pomocí laserů (podobně jako souboj mezi Darth Vaderem a Lukem Skywalkerem) a „technologicky“ upálení Renaty na hranici. Faust a Mefistofeles se objevují v nadnesené malované dekoraci. Nejen, že to byla pastva pro oči, spokojené bylo také ucho. Částečně zakryté orchestřiště umožnilo hlasům dobře vyniknout, některým skoro až příliš dobře – hlasy Iordanky Derilovy (Renata) a Ulfa Paulsena (Ruprecht) byly téměř nesnesitelné. Orchester pod vedením skvělého Roberta Jindry vytěžil v Prokofjevovy žhavé hudby maximum.

Byla to součást trilogie oper skladatelů, kteří měli někdy během svého života spojení s Ostravou (další součástí byl Hindemithův Cardillac a Stravinského Život prostopášíka). Odkaz města k různým skladatelům je patrný také v pozitivním vztahu k Janáčkoví, který se narodil v nedalekých Hukvaldech, a také ve stále se rozvíjející náklonnosti k současné hudbě. Poslední ukázkou toho byl premiéra Filoktéta Jana Klusáka (21. května). Přinesla opožděnou rehabilitaci pro 81 letého v Praze narozeného skladatele, který zmizel z veřejného života v roce 1968 – když Rusové přišli do Československa – až do sametové revoluce v roce 1989. Těžko bude překvapivá identifikace Klusáka s Filoktétem, jedním z řeckých generálů v Trójských válkách, který byl uštknut hadem, onemocněl a byl ponechán na opuštěném ostrově.

Hudba odkazuje k pozdním dílům Stravinského a druhé vídeňské škole, je dobře vytvořena a překládá Sofoklův text v zajímavých odstínech. Nekvasilova režie se v jasně řezané scéně Daniela Dvořáka (reprezentující anatomické divadlo) soustředí na základní téma. Marko Ivanović dirigoval energicky a zpívající herci – Jakub Tolaš (Filoktétes), Jorge Garza (Odysseus) a Jana Hrochová (Neoptolemos) – byli více než schopní.

Gerhard Persché