

"The musicians' pure and deft musicality was exploited to the full by Garry Walker's sparklingly detailed yet lissome and long-sighted conducting." - The Times



Garry Walker, conductor 2022-2023 Full Biography

Scottish-born Garry Walker is currently Music Director of Opera North and concluded his tenure as Chief Conductor of the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie in July. He has held positions as Permanent Guest Conductor of Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Principal Guest Conductor of Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Principal Conductor of Paragon Ensemble, and Artistic Director of Conducting at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. In the UK, Walker has worked with all of the BBC orchestras, Hallé, London Philharmonic, London Sinfonietta, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Philharmonia, City of Birmingham Symphony and National Youth Orchestra of Scotland.

In the 2022-2023 season, Garry Walker conducts Puccini's *Tosca* with Opera North as well as a double bill of Mozart's *Requiem* plus an untitled, upcoming new commission written with guest artists from South Africa for the company. Alongside his opera work, he returns to the Aalborg Symfoniorkester, as well as conducting concerts for the Orchestra of the Opera North, opening the season with an all-American program of composers ranging from George Gershwin to Aaron Copland, plus later concerts to feature Elgar's *Violin Concerto*, Beamish's *The Day Dawn*, and Nielsen's Symphony No. 2. Garry Walker makes his return to Scotland conducting the Aberdeen Sinfonietta in concert featuring soloist Alan Haggart, and appears in concert with the Leeds Conservatory in March.

Walker's collaborations with chamber orchestras have included the Britten Sinfonia, Manchester Camerata, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, English Chamber Orchestra and Academy of St Martin in the Fields. His regular appearances at the Edinburgh International Festival have included notable performances of Mahler's Symphony No. 2, Kurtag's *Stele*, and MacMillan's *The Quickening*, all with the RSNO.

Further afield, Garry Walker has worked with orchestras including the Aalborg Symfoniorkester, Gothenburg Symphony, Dortmund Philharmoniker, Orchestra dell'Opera Roma, Orchestre Philharmonique de Luxembourg, Musikkollegium Winterthur, Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin, and Orchestra della Toscana. He has often conducted the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony, Tasmanian Symphony and Auckland Philharmonia, and engagements in the US have included the Pacific and Utah Symphonies, and the Asheville Symphony Orchestra.

During his tenure as Chief Conductor, Walker's many wide-ranging performances with the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie encompassed programmes of Adès, Beethoven, Bartók, Britten, Berio, Brahms, Dvořák, Haydn, John Williams, Kodály, Mahler, Mozart, Prokofiev, among others. Together Walker and the orchestra made their Amsterdam Concertgebouw debut in 2018, resulting in an immediate reinvitation.

An experienced opera conductor, Walker conducted Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* for Garsington Opera in 2014, where he returned in 2018 for the critically acclaimed world premiere of David Sawer's *The Skating Rink*. At the Edinburgh International Festival, he led both Britten *Curlew River* and the world première of Stuart MacRae's opera, *The Assassin Tree*. At the recently opened Linbury Studio (Royal Opera House) he has revisited the McRae and conducted Poulenc's *La Voix Humaine*. Additional UK highlights include David McVicar's acclaimed new production of Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* and Raskatov's *A Dog's Heart* at the English National Opera, Cimarosa's *The Secret Marriage* at Scottish Opera, and for Opera North Britten's *Billy Budd*, a *Gianni Schicchi-The Rite of Spring* double-bill, Martinů's *The Greek Passion*, *Carmen* and *Rigoletto*. In Europe, he has most recently conducted *The Curlew River* for Lyon Opera, and a new production by Calixto Bieito of Toshio Hosokawa's *Hanjo* at the Ruhr Triennale.

Garry Walker has enjoyed collaborations with many internationally renowned soloists, including Maxim Vengerov, Sarah Chang, Jonas Kaufmann, Truls Mørk, Mischa Maisky, James Ehnes, David Geringas and Branford Marsalis.

His discography includes works by Havergal Brian and Matthew Taylor on Toccata Classics, Edward Harper on Delphian and Dvořák on Sony.

"With the excellent Chorus and Orchestra of Opera North on superb form under the company's principal conductor-designate, Garry Walker, a Scottish musician whose Billy Budd in Leeds a year or two back confirmed him as a talent for years to come, this Greek Passion transcended the obstacles of text and staging to provide a vivid, intense musical experience."

Musical America

"Conductor Garry Walker has the measure of the smallest details as well as the overall scope of the score."

The Stage (UK)

"Presiding conductor for the occasion was Garry Walker. Was this his finest hour? It certainly felt like it in the cracking pace at which he delivered Finlandia; sensationally thrilling yet having the breadth at the climax to let the SSO ring out that golden theme, one of Sibelius's most inspired."

The International Herald Tribune

"In this concert, Walker's first main-season event since his appointment as principal guest conductor of the RSNO, there was a palpable reciprocal pride and confidence between players and conductor. Anyone wondering whether he could bring a much-needed breath of fresh air into the RSNO's playing would have been left in no doubt by the end of this concert. Walker brought suppleness, variety and a definite sting to the music."

The Telegraph

"The highlight of the concert for this listener (and one of the highlights of the season, actually) was Walker's performance of "Scheherazade"... His affection came through in almost every bar. Walker painted vivid pictures but also told the story. It was a case of balancing the special effects of the orchestration with the pacing of the whole. He coaxed all the voluptuary shapes in the broad string melodies, made the dances nimble and crisp, and vaulted the tricky transitions in single bounds. He never pushed and made the cinematic climaxes the old-fashioned way, by earning them. This was all helped by a light touch (call it taste) and an attention to instrumental balances; we could hear everything." The Orange County Register

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GARRY WALKER Critical Acclaim

Verdi: Rigoletto | Opera North | January 2022

"As usual, the Opera North Chorus impressed, with terrific ensemble singing and tightly choreographed action, and the orchestra was relentlessly on top form under conductor Garry Walker."

Femi Wilcocks, Bachtrack



"Under Garry Walker the orchestral playing, always polished and pointed, really catches fire after the interval."

Ron Simpson, The Reviews Hub

Martinu: The Greek Passion | Opera North | September 2019
"Garry Walker conducts with a dark intensity that brings out both the score's violence and its extraordinary moments of ecstatic lyricism."

Tim Ashley, The Guardian

"Walker, in his first production since being named Opera North's music director designate, holds the potentially stark and sprawling score together

tautly, bringing out Martinu's trademark radiance."

John Allison, The Telegraph

"The orchestra, under the music director designate Garry Walker, play with a suppleness and generosity that makes the score soar."

Rebecca Franks, The Times

"Martinů's luminous, eclectic score is handsomely conducted by new Music Director Garry Walker."

Graham Rickson, The Arts Desk

"This is another excellent performance under the baton of Garry Walker."

Dawn Smallwood, The Reviews Hub

Sawer: The Skating Rink | Garsington Opera | July 2018

"Garry Walker and the Garsington Opera Orchestra deliver it all with panache."

Mark Valencia, WhatsOnStage

"Conductor Garry Walker and the Garsington Opera Orchestra kept everything coherent, purposeful and slick."

Charlotte Valori, Bachtrack

"Conducted by Garry Walker, the score is executed with aplomb."

Louise Lewis, British Theatre Guide

"Garry Walker's conducting is first rate."

Andrew Clements, The Guardian

Britten: Billy Budd | Opera North | December 2016

"...Opera North's equally superb orchestra, which delivered a brilliantly vivid, sharply etched account under conductor Garry Walker, full of surging drama and also moments of exquisite contemplation."

David Kettle, The Scotsman

"The orchestra, conducted by Garry Walker, could hardly have been more alert."

Martin Dreyer, Opera Magazine

"Garry Walker conducts with finesse, and the Opera North orchestra sustains tension with aplomb."

Kate Kellaway, The Observer

"Garry Walker's conducting [...] encourages some eloquent orchestral playing."

Rupert Christiansen, The Telegraph

"Garry Walker's razor-sharp Opera North players let rip, too. Goosebumps all round [...] The final word goes to Vere, whose musical liberation if not the words that go with it makes complete sense in Walker's postponement of the biggest climax to the last well-timed shattering chord."

David Nice, The Arts Desk

"Garry Walker's pacing and balance of this and every dramatic confrontation is impeccable. Walker and the Orchestra of Opera North makes Bizet's glorious musical score sounds as if the ink had barely dried."

Ilkley Reviews

"Walker painted vivid pictures but also told the story. It was a case of balancing the special effects of the orchestration with the pacing of the whole. He coaxed all the voluptuary shapes in the broad string melodies, made the dances nimble and crisp, and vaulted the tricky transitions in single bounds. He never pushed and made the cinematic climaxes the old-fashioned way, by earning them."

Orange County Register

"One of Britain's most promising young conductors."

The Independent

"Garry Walker's conducting is exemplary."

The Guardian

"Under Garry Walker's expert guidance, the orchestra drew a wide range of colours and textures from Sawer's score, giving as thrilling and committed performance as the singers on stage and making the piece really count."

Opera Today

"Garry Walker's cool-headed direction was thrilling."

The Times

"Walker is a dynamic conductor who didn't let the musical momentum flag all evening. He bookended the Prokofiev concerto with two early symphonies of Russian masters Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky, imbuing both with youthful vigor and freshness."

The Salt Lake Tribune

"The revelation of the evening's performance was Garry Walker: not only did he show theatrical antennae in his conducting of the Britten Sinfonia but he also allowed us to sense the dramatic volcano underlying MacRae's instrumental writing."

"Garry Walker was absolutely at the top of his form in an interpretation that projected the sheer beauty of the work."

The Herald

"[Garry Walker] has an already firm grip on [Vaughan Williams' Sea Symphony] outline and he obtained a performance of undoubtedly high quality."

Edinburgh Evening News

"The composers have conductor Garry Walker's safe pair of hands to thank."

The Scotsman

"With Garry Walker in storming form to direct his old band, they turned out a stonking concert that was electrifying to experience and a thrill to review."

The Herald

"In this concert, Walker's first main-season event since his appointment as principal guest conductor of the RSNO, there was a palpable reciprocal pride and confidence between players and conductor. Anyone wondering whether he could bring a much-needed breath of fresh air into the RSNO's playing would have been left in no doubt by the end of this concert. Walker brought suppleness, variety and a definite sting to the music."

The Telegraph

"[Garry] Walker has proved to be one of the most versatile conductors around."

Classical Music

'This was a fantastic performance, with the RPO in top form and Walker's interpretation allowing the music to come alive."

MusicWeb International

"He knows his scores, is refreshingly not afraid to occasionally introduce his own idiosyncratic ideas and – importantly – seems to have the respect of his players. They obviously enjoy their work and, consequently, are a joy to both hear and watch."

The Westmorland Gazette

"Presiding conductor for the occasion was Garry Walker. Was this his finest hour? It certainly felt like it in the cracking pace at which he delivered Finlandia; sensationally thrilling yet having the breadth at the climax to let the SSO ring out that golden theme, one of Sibelius's most inspired."

The International Herald Tribune



June 24, 2019

Opera North announces new musical leadership



We are delighted to announce two significant appointments to our artistic and musical leadership with immediate effect, marking an exciting renewal in Opera North's life and future.

Garry Walker becomes Music Director designate and will take up his post from the 2020/21 season in August 2020. As Music Director, Garry will head the musical leadership of Opera North and joins the artistic management alongside General Director, Richard Mantle, and Director of Planning, Christine Jane Chibnall.

Garry is currently Chief Conductor of the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie in Koblenz where he will retain some responsibilities until the 2021/2022 season and therefore there will be a period of transition between the two organisations. Once he is in post, he will conduct two opera productions and several symphonic concerts during each season and will become embedded in the life of the company at all levels and across the diversity of the Company's work.

Garry's recent work for Opera North has included an impressive and powerful *Billy Budd* and the double bill *Gianni Schicchi & The Rite of Spring*. He is due to open Opera North's upcoming mainstage season in September 2019, with a new production of Martinů's *The Greek Passion*.

As Principal Guest Conductor, Antony Hermus, who who made a revelatory conducting debut Opera North's production of *Tosca* in 2018, will build on this strong relationship, contributing to the artistic vision of the company and conducting one opera production each season as well as symphonic concerts, whilst retaining his current position as Principal Guest of the North Netherlands Orchestra and continuing burgeoning international career. Antony scheduled conduct The Marriage of Figaro in the 2019/20 season.

Richard Mantle, General Director, Opera North, said:

"I am delighted to welcome Garry Walker to Opera North as Music Director, following a two year recruitment process for this key artistic leadership role. He will be a great colleague and will bring clear, resilient and mindful leadership, driving and



inspiring high musical standards as well as being fully alive to our ethos and aspirations, as we move forward into a new chapter in the life of the Company.

"The addition to the team of Antony Hermus as Principal Guest Conductor is also an exciting prospect and creates a new structure which builds on the established musical and artistic strengths of Opera North. His positivity and dramatic flair will be an undoubted asset to the Company and we look forward to working more closely with him over the coming seasons.

"We have already had the privilege of working with these two musicians over recent years, who each bring valuable yet complementary strengths and experience to the Company. These appointments to our core team will further enhance our commitment to innovation and excellence into the future."

Garry Walker, Music Director designate, Opera North said:

"I'm hugely honoured to become Music Director of Opera North, and excited to maintain and advance the already enormously high artistic standards achieved. It is an organisation I have a twenty-year relationship with, and its warmth, inclusivity and genuine company ethos – something commented upon by so many visiting artists – is one of the key characteristics which has drawn me to Opera North over the years.

"Opera is the ultimate team game, with so many individuals in so many differing disciplines coming together contribute to the overall success of performances. I look forward to putting the music and the storytelling at the centre of what we do, and I hope to bring my energy and love for the dramatic power of opera to audiences, both on and off the podium." Antony Hermus, Principal Conductor, Opera North, said:

"From my very first encounter with Opera North I felt such enormous energy, drive and commitment for our wonderful artform. As Richard Wagner said: "Music is the language of passion", and I look forward to sharing this common passion for music and opera with all our fantastic singers, musicians and indeed the whole Company, working together to inspire our audiences to the maximum!"

YORKSHIRE POST

August 22, 2019

Opera North's new Music Director designate talks about the upcoming season

By David Denton



Just over 20 years ago I was interviewing the young Edinburghborn cellist, Garry Walker, having become the 25-year-old winner of Ninth Leeds **Conductors** the Competition, his **Town** Hall performance receiving the unanimous selection of the jury

Next month sees his return to Leeds to open Opera North's new season of six coinciding with announcement that he will become the Music company's new Director designate, an appointment he takes up in next "When you win such a prestigious competition many doors open, and then it is up to you to decide which you want to go through," he related in his lunchbreak during rehearsals for Martinu's opera, The Greek Passion.

New world class film and television studio to open in Leeds He didn't have to wait long when a few months later he was offered, in place of the indisposed Daniele Gatti, an 11thhour London debut conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in the opening concert of their major season at the Barbican.

"I was fortunate, and the doors that I walked through included the Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and invitations from around the world conducting leading orchestras, though I have particularly enjoyed coming to Opera North which is something quite different, it's more like joining and being part of a family." "Preparing Martinu's almost totally unknown opera has certainly presented us with a special challenge, the story of refugees looking for a new homeland being particularly appropriate during the troubled years we now see in the Middle East."

Opening at the Leeds Grand Theatre on September 14, this new production is directed by Christopher Alden, with Nicky Spence as Manolios, the ill-fated leader of the exiles, and the renowned Polish soprano, Magdalena Molendowska, as Katerina, the local girl who falls in love with him.

Opera North's new season and the futility of war

Using a large orchestra, it was originally intended for London's Covent Garden in 1957, but was eventually premiered in Zurich in 1961 in a shortened version, Opera North making this a landmark presentation by returning to the 1957 score. An offer to conduct that one opera came from Opera North two years ago,



and before he began discussing the vacant position of Music Director. Presently the Principal Conductor of the Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie, he will continue in that role for the immediate future, his forward commitment with Opera North starting in 2020 when he will then conduct two operas over the following year. "Now the people in Koblenz are particularly delighted that I will be with such a highly regarded company, and working with their symphony orchestra in the concert hall has given me longterm ideas to shape Opera North's future orchestral series in Huddersfield and Dewsbury."

The autumn season at the Leeds Grand Theatre also sees the return of Tim Albery's much acclaimed staging of Handel's Giulio Cesare opening on September 28, heading up the cast, and making her company debut, the Lithuanian mezzo, Justina Gringyte is in the title role, with the counter-tenor, James Laing, as Tolome.

Celebrating 10 years of Leeds's Howard Assembly Room

Third in the season, and from October 12, sees the return of Phyllida Lloyd's

vibrant update of Puccini's La Boheme, showcasing a suitably young cast to recreate the impoverished bohemians. Moving on to January, Garry Walker is joined in Opera North's artistic line-up by Antony Hermus who will make his debut in Opera North's newly created role of Principal Guest Conductor. The with Dutchman. arriving experience in opera, will open on familiar ground with Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro (February Is it an opera or a musical? Kurt Weill's Street Scene probably comes somewhere between the two, the stifling heat in a New York street of tenement houses is about to go that much higher when Anna's secret comes to light. Opening on January 14, Giselle Allen, Robert Hayward, Alex Benfield and conductor, will reveal those James Holmes. clandestine A return of Alessandro Talevi's staging of Benjamin Britten's ghost story, The Turn of the Screw, with a cast headed by Nicholas Watts and Sarah Tynan completes the year, opening on February

All operas will tour to Nottingham, Salford and Newcastle.



December 1, 2016

Interview: Scots conductor Garry Walker on his production of Billy Budd for Opera North



Gay subtexts ain't what they used to be. In an age when even Trump seems OK with two men or two women getting hitched, looking back to a time when the love that dare not speak its name could only be suggested, never openly discussed, might seem – well, a bit old-fashioned. But that's probably being unfairly reductive about one of the masterpieces of 20th-century opera – Britten's nautical drama Billy Budd, which Leeds-based Opera North bring to

the Edinburgh Festival Theatre next week. It's one of two shows in their fournight run, sharing the stage with a double-bill of one-acters Il tabarro and Suor Angelica, two tales of similarly forbidden desire by Puccini. But there's no getting away from the fact that Billy Budd — based on a short novel by Herman Melville, of Moby-Dick fame — deals with suggestion, repression and intense emotion, all seething away on board the confined, all-male

environment of the HMS Indomitable at the end of the 18th century. At its heart are a trio of enigmatic characters: the malevolent dark, Master-at-Arms Claggart, who takes an unaccountable dislike to the young, beautiful, rather saintly Billy, with the erudite Captain Vere looking on but seemingly incapable of doing anything to prevent the developing tragedy. "A lot of Britten's essentially operas are about dysfunctional, claustrophobic situations, and outsiders who come into them,' explains Garry Walker, the production's conductor. "In Billy Budd, it's Claggart who's the outsider, on a boat full of men." And for Walker, the opera's enigmas are part of its appeal. "Melville doesn't seek to answer some of the mysteries that he creates. It's never clear why Claggart hates Billy so much there's a bit in the libretto that suggests that it may be Billy's goodness, or his beauty, or simply because he's different to Claggart." Or maybe – to get back to the idea of a gay subtext - because Claggart detests the desire he feels towards Billy. EM Forster, who put together the opera's libretto with Eric Crozier, was more straightforward on what it's all about, calling it a tragedy of "sexual discharge gone evil". With spoiler warnings, Walker continues: "It's not actually in the book, but one dramatic turn that Britten makes in the opera is the whole redemptive element. There's almost a Christian halo around it all, as though Vere is saved by Billy's death. What I find most comforting is the opera's message of trying to live one's life as positively as possible - if you continue to burn brightly, even in the darkness, at times some of that light might brighten other people's lives too."

Billy Budd is famously - and very unusually – an all-male opera: "So instead of a soprano against a bass, for example, you'll have a tenor against a baritone against a bass, all singing in the same kind of area. But Britten's very clever at differentiating, and with the singers we have in this production, you just kind of sit back and marvel." It's true that the production's central trio of singers – Roderick Williams in the title role, Alan Oke as Vere and Alastair Miles as Claggart – are some of the UK's most eminent vocal names, and they've understandably drawn adulation in the touring production's stop-offs so far. "I couldn't have asked for shipmates," says Walker, "and a show like this also really shows you the strength of having a chorus that's always together, works well together and have a real bond with each other - it's absolutely crucial." Walker himself, a former pupil of St Mary's Music School in Edinburgh, is increasingly in demand internationally, but keeps a foot firmly "I've just been Scottish soil. appointed principal conductor of the Rhine Philharmonic in Koblenz, and I'm also artistic director of conducting at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow. I'm delighted to be working in - it's Germany a real cultural powerhouse - but I do have a firm commitment to Scotland too. As a Scot, I want to be part of the scene here, and I like to feel I can make a difference with my role at the RCS." It's down to happy coincidence rather than any Caledonian arm-twisting that Walker is bringing Billy Budd north of the Border, but it's a production that looks set to both entertain and provoke – however overt or covert its subtexts.



January 14, 2016

Scot becomes first director of conducting at Royal Conservatoire By Phil Miller



The conductor Garry Walker has been appointed the artistic director of conducting at Scotland's leading talent school.

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) in Glasgow has announced that Walker will be the first musician to hold the position.

From Edinburgh, Walker studied cello with noted American cellist Ralph Kirshbaum and conducting at the Royal Northern College of Music.

He also attended masterclasses with the late French composer and conductor, Pierre Boulez.

He has been visiting professor of conducting at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland for two years.

Professor Jeffrey Sharkey, principal of Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, said: "We've long admired the quality of Garry's teaching and his conducting and are tremendously excited about how this closer association with the RCS will elevate our programme into being among the finest internationally."

Walker said: "I look forward to further developing the conducting programme at RCS and seeing the positive impact our students have in music both here in Scotland and internationally. It's very much our aim to create an international centre of excellence for conducting here in Scotland."

Walker has been involved with the conducting programme at RCS for a number of years as visiting lecturer.

He will also take up the position of chief the Staatsorchester conductor of Rheinische Philharmonie Koblenz from September 2017.

Walker was permanent guest conductor Roval Philharmonic Orchestra. principal guest conductor of Royal Scottish National Orchestra, principal conductor of Paragon Ensemble and now also works with the Red Note Ensemble.



musicalamerica

November 20, 2015

Scotsman Named Chief Conductor of Rheinische Philharmonie

By Nicholas Beard



Scottish conductor Garry Walker, former principal guest conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, current principal conductor of the contemporary Paragon Ensemble, has been appointed chief conductor of the State Orchestra Rheinische Philharmonie in Koblenz, which lays claim to a 350-year-old history. He starts in the 2017/18 season, succeeding Daniel Raiskin, in the post for 10 years.

Walker, 41, has appeared on numerous U.K. podiums, along with the Deutsche Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Orchestre Philharmonique de Luxembourg, Hannover's NDR Radiophilharmonie, and the Utah and Pacific symphonies in the U.S.

Among operas, he has conducted both standard and contemporary works at the Royal Opera House's Linbury Studio, English National Opera, and the Edinburgh Festival, among other U.K. venues.

"Garry Walker is our absolute favorite candidate," said Rheinische Philharmonie Intendant and search committee member Günter Müller-Rogalla, "not only because of his wonderful collaboration with members of the orchestra but also because Garry Walker very clearly believes that access to good music is as important as a good education or health system for the people in their city and its region."

New Zealand Herald

February 7, 2015

A journey to outer space

By William Dart



The first concert of Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra's NZ Herald Premier series is a little over a week away, promising a spectacular launch for the city's musical season. Orchestrally, we go from the zoom 'n' gleam of John Adams' Short Ride in a Fast Machine to an astrological trip around Gustav Holst's The Planets.

Between, there is the Auckland premiere of Ross Harris' 2008 Violin Concerto, featuring Russian violinist Ilya Gringolts. Both soloist and conductor are familiar to APO audiences.

The man with the baton is Scotsman Garry Walker. At first he jests that being in Auckland in February is a welcome escape from the European winter, but then reveals a deeper affection for our part of the world.

"The first time I arrived here, the border guard said, 'Welcome to New Zealand'," he enthuses. "That doesn't always happen in other countries and, from then on, I liked this place."

Walker has also forged connections with our music, having conducted the first performance of Ross Harris' Cello Concerto in 2012, released later on a Naxos CD. He is very happy to be tackling the Violin Concerto and pleased it will appear on the APO's third disc of Harris' music.

"There's never a problem with span in Ross' music. The overall integrity is immediate and this is hugely beneficial for listeners finding their way through the work."

Walker admires the way Harris "pits the orchestra against the soloist in the grand tradition of the best concertos. The soloist is not left on his own to dazzle us with virtuosity, but plays in dialogue with the other musicians."

Soloist Ilya Gringolts made the same point a few days earlier. The Russian was looking forward to "working with a living composer and going through the whole process of discovery that eventually gives birth to a piece of music".

Gringolts had warmed to the freeflowing nature of the writing. "It's been composed in a very organic way. It's sincere and you can feel a direct link between composer and audience. That's a difficult thing to establish and not every composer manages it."

On previous visits, Walker has conducted memorable Elgar (including the Violin Concerto with James Ehnes) and introduced many of us to the contemporary British composer, Thomas Ades. He is also keen on the music of John Adams. "He started as



part of the Minimalist movement but developed in different ways."

Walker has done a lot of the American's music, and his Short Ride should be a heart-stopping roller-coaster adventure. He vividly remembers his experiences with Adams' 9/11 tribute, *On The Transmigration of Souls.* "A frightening piece to conduct," is his first assessment. Then he muses on the score's terrifying climax - "the cataclysmic sound of the towers collapsing, with incredible metallic clang and clash, creating this awful feeling of bending and crashing down".

Doubtlessly, *The Planets* will work its expected magic Thursday week. "It's an extraordinary piece, even if its best

music is less often heard. Back in 1918, it came completely out of the left field. It was unlike anything else that had been written, certainly by Elgar or Vaughan Williams."

In 1926, Holst's fellow composer Joseph Holbrooke wrote that he hoped "*The Planets* will survive this unhealthy popularity". Walker sees "a real problem with writing a piece as unbelievably successful as *The Planets* because it can destroy your career".

Nevertheless, the legacy of Holst's music is inescapable. "When we think of John Williams and all those floating parallel triads that are so much part of science fiction movie scores, Holst came up with the idea first."



July 30, 2008

Five questions for Garry Walker

by Richard Bratby



One of Britain's brightest young conductors, Garry Walker played in the National Youth Orchestra Of Scotland; now he's conducting it on a UK tour.

How does it feel to conduct an orchestra you used to play in?

It feels like a completely natural progression. It's not the first time I've conducted NYOS, but it's always nice to be back. It's hugely exciting, we have great fun, there's a terrific atmosphere

and I love being part of it and feeding off all that youthful creative energy.

Why play Shostakovich's Sixth Symphony instead of a betterknown work such as the Fifth?

Well, Shostakovich wrote 15 of the buggers, so it's nice to do something a bit different once in a while. I think it's a great symphony; some might say it's underrated. I conducted it a few years ago with the CBSO Youth Orchestra and found that it worked well with a young



orchestra. Shostakovich's style is very approachable and, unlike music by Mozart or Brahms, you can risk knocking a few corners off it.

Is a youth orchestra more difficult to conduct than an adult one?

Yes. With a professional orchestra, there are certain things you take for granted. With a youth orchestra, you have to instil certain things, such as rhythmic discipline, attention to detail and maintaining the tempo. As a conductor you have to remember not to flog them too hard.

How easy have you found it to build a career as a conductor?

I can only say that I'm very happy with what I've been doing. I've just been

working in Lyon and I'm working regularly now in Denmark and Amsterdam as well. I've been doing quite a bit of opera and, though that has its downside in that it keeps you away from home for a long time, I enjoy it.

Have you climbed any good mountains lately?

I was up in Glencoe about three weeks ago, and I finished climbing the Munros a couple of years back. It's hard to fit it all in when work is busy, but I'm still shooting up mountains whenever I can. Sat, Aug 2, Leeds Town Hall, The Headrow, Leeds, 7.30pm, £10 to £20, concs available. Tel: 0113 247 8336. www.nyos.co.uk



February 7, 2004

Climb every mountain By Tim Cornwell

It is at 3,000 feet, just below the summit of Beinn a'Chaorainn, that Garry Walker gives me what is known as a killer quote. As we walk between two cairns, the bright young man of Scottish conducting has just said that yes, he likes his music but, given the choice, he'd opt for mountains.

Unfortunately, I am unable to record earth-shattering comment for posterity. This is close to Garry Walker's 250th Munro, but it is my first, and the thin, cold rain, blowing horizontally in what a friend concisely describes as "ridge weather", has effectively ruled out the use of notebook or tape recorder. Water has driven up the loose sleeve of a ski glove - Garry's glove, actually - and soaked it. At the bottom of my nonwaterproof backpack, it is currently frying the connections of my mobile phone. As any Scottish hillwalker knows, this is merely the beginning of the squelching road home. drenching.

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He the shone at Edinburgh International Festival; he conducted Aly Bain and Phil Cunningham at the RSNO St Andrew's Day concerts. His agent is on the phone as we talk, fixing dates for Walker to conduct the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra; to work in Luxembourg; the United States.

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March 2007

10 Brightest New Stars for 2007

GARRY **WALKER** SCOTTISH CONDUCTOR



YOUNG STARTER: Walker began performing at six

BIG BREAKTHROUGH: Conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in Stravinsky's *Petrushka* at the Barbican, October 1999 WHY HE IS IMPORTANT: The first to pass a RNCM Junior Fellowship in conducting with distinction (1999), he's music director of the Liverpool Mozart Orchestra, conductor

of the Paragon Ensemble and principal guest conductor of the Royal Scottish

National Orchestra.

AGE: 32

Garry Walker is the epitome of calm. Performing on the cello in front of his large family as a six year-old was scary, he admits, but it didn't put him off a career in music. A couple of months after winning the Leeds conducting competition in 1999, he was asked to conduct the RPO in concert last minute because their conductor had fallen ill. 'Luckily it was too quick to be nerve racking, so I just got on with it,' he tells us. So what makes him so successful? 'My strong family unit helps – that's more important than music. But I work hard, and I believe in conductors being facilitators, not dictators. I just respond to the music as naturally as I can.' As for the future, his ambitions lie in Germany, Sibelius's Sixth Symphony, and hill walking. 'Otherwise,' he says, 'I just want to continue to mature musically, and to enjoy the journey of discovering music. But all in good time.'

WEB: www.ingpen.co.uk
RECOMMENDED RECORDING: Ed Harper's
Second Symphony with the Scottish
Chamber Orchestra, to be released by
Delphian in May 2007



THE SCOTSMAN

February 7, 2004

by Tim Cornwell



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November 17, 2004

A man with a mission

MICHAEL TUMELTY

GARRY Walker is pounding the beat. That is not a comment on the conducting style of the RSNO's young principal guest conductor who, at 30, commands the No 2 post in Scotland's biggest symphony orchestra. It's a reference to what he calls the "shoe-leather" side of his new job. In the past two months, Edinburgh-born Walker has made around 15 "house calls" to business societies, universities, colleges, music clubs and societies, friends' associations and support groups. If he could make more time, he'd go further. "God, I'd love to get into every school music class in Scotland."

What's he up to? Proselytising? Drumming up business? Trying to increase the audience for his orchestra? Sell tickets? Shouldn't conductors just conduct? Be seen (only from behind) and not heard? That isn't Walker's way. Walker is a talker, an unstoppable enthusiast for the music that is his passion as much as his job. He burns to communicate. He always has, since the day I met him, shortly after he won the Leeds Conducting Competition, when nobody knew him, he had little experience, no job, no influence, no outlet for his ideas and he wasn't even sure if he wanted to conduct in the first place. Now he is an established figure, with prestigious guest conducting engagements accruing, at home and abroad, posts as permanent guest conductor with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London, artistic director of the Paragon Ensemble and, critically, the RSNO job, perhaps the one where he can really start to develop plans that have been seething in his mind.

Last season, on the first official night of his new appointment, he spoke to his audience, promising them "something challenging in every programme", and inviting them to propose their own ideas and suggestions; not exactly common practice among conductors.

Everybody assumed that, by "something challenging", he meant contemporary music. To a degree, they were right. Walker clearly has a skill in that area, and, at the very start of the RSNO's current season, took the music of Sciarrino and Sally Beamish to Perth, turned to face his audience, quipped that the doors were locked, chatted a little about the pieces of music, used the orchestra to illustrate the sound worlds and broke rather a lot of ice with a naturally suspicious audience through his articulate and easy-going delivery. That, in part, is what he's up to: to establish contact with his audience, let them get to know him, build up patterns of trust — "that will take years" — and lead them into musical territory with which they are unfamiliar.

He's going to do it next week in the heartland of RSNO territory, the weekly winter season concerts in Glasgow and Edinburgh, with a programme entitled Four Seasons with a

Twist, featuring two repertoire classics: Copland's Appala-chian Spring and Richard Strauss's autumnal Four Last Songs, interlaced with The Seasons by John Cage (possibly the scariest name on the contemporary roster) and the Cantus Arcticus by the Finn, Rautavaara, who has incorporated a veritable aviary of real and imitative birdsong into his orchestral piece.

"Look, with the exception of the Rautavaara" – which, incidentally, sounds like Vaughan Williams if you extract the birdsong – "the most contemporary piece on the programme is probably the Strauss.

"I can assure any member of the audience that there is hardly a dissonant note in this programme. The Cage, a ballet score, is beautiful. It's not angular. It's not disjointed. I picked it as it goes hand-in-glove with Appalachian Spring. Gesturally, they're very similar, though the philosophy behind them is radically different.

"If I am going to be trusted on this issue of bringing contemporary music to people, I'm going to be reasonably conservative. I'm just encouraging people to come and hear something new to them, something with which they are unfamiliar."

That's the point he wants to hammer home. This is not Garry Walker laying down a manifesto about cutting-edge, squeaky-gate, avant-garde music. Symphony orchestras have become associated with a fairly narrow band of fraditional, orthodox repertoire which is endlessly recycled though myriad interpretations.

Walker is acutely aware of libraries of music out there, approachable music, which gathers dust because nobody wants to bite the bullet, and because managements are paranoid about the box office (which is a bit rich when you consider that the bullet-proof combination in last week's RSNO concerts, featuring chief conductor Alexander Lazarev in dynamite form with Mahler's colossal blockbuster Sixth Symphony, played to half-empty houses in both Glasgow and Edinburgh).

Walker wants to broaden the palette, which is why he is out there, tramping the streets, doing the rounds, telling people about it. "You don't go to the cinema to see the same film over and over again. You don't go to a library and take the same book out every time. You don't go to the same restaurant every day and eat exactly the same food. I want people to hear great works of music that are rarely performed; and there is absolutely no reason to keep them rarely performed."

So he'll talk about them a bit, "just a little; it must not be a lecture; just to give a few landmarks, a feeling for the direction and the sound of the music. Just come and hear something a bit different".

There'll be more later in the season from the man who wants to broaden horizons, including music by John Adams and the completely unknown Piano Concerto by American Lou Harrison.

"People will absolutely adore the Harrison concerto," says Walker. "If you like Brahms, you'll enjoy it. If you like film music, you'll enjoy it. If you like world music, you'll enjoy it. If you like jazz, you'll enjoy it.

It's one of the most approachable modern pieces I've ever come across, with a notous second movement entitled Stampede."

Despite the torrential enthusiasm, Walker is deadly serious in his purpose. He's determined to put his money where his mouth is. Liter-ally. He has started saying "no" to conducting invitations. He has become pretty well established now. Good quality conducting work is coming in further in advance, and in plentiful supply. So he is being more selective in order to create more space for the shoe-leather work that means so much to him, for building contacts, establishing trust and developing a community with his Scottish audience, in order to draw them towards less familiar musical terrain. "It's not glamorous work. I just want to get on with what I believe in, which is often thoroughly unspectacular. I don't think many conductors do it, if I'm honest, but it's what's important to me – energising people. Yes, it's long-term. Yes, it will take a long, long time.

But I'm just 30. There really is no hurry."



January 23, 2022

Femi Elufowoju's contemporary take on Rigoletto for Opera North

By Femi Wilcocks

Bright white neon strip-lighting of the sort found on shop fronts forms a huge frame for the libidinous Duke of Mantua's wild party as Opera North's new *Rigoletto* opens, and it is soon apparent that this marks the production's modern relevances. Soon afterwards, a gilded frame (sets by Rae Smith) descends behind the laughing, sneering courtiers, holding a painting of traditional marriage ceremony, signifying the old values being ignored. Director Femi Elufowoju Jr ensures that Verdi's opera, which originally opened in Austrian-controlled Venice in 1851 after problems with censors who thought it had too many subversive contemporary resonances, successful afterlife by doing more of the same. For a start, Rigoletto does not have a hump, an "anatomical anomaly" according to Elufowoju. His otherness comes from his belief that he will never be allowed to fully integrate into society, especially with the startlingly vicious aristocrats he is employed entertain. He specifically wanted to cast a black singer not only as Rigoletto, but also as Gilda and Monterone, making this a memorable landmark production. The inclusion of very modern references brings a disconcerting jokiness to the first scene, for example a bicycle delivery of pizzas is searched by the Duke's security, and a spitted roast hog is

wheeled in. The contrasts are enormous. In the same scene, Count Monterone, mocked bv Rigoletto powerlessness after his daughter has been molested by the Duke, delivers his curse. The Count is played by Sir Willard White as a Nigerian chieftain. His authoritative voice was heard again, this more stentorian. when reappeared as a spirit at the end of the final act. Russian tenor Roman Arndt emphasised the Duke's crowd-pleasing qualities particularly well, as well as his arrogance. His subtle interpretations were most evident in "La donna è mobile", which was well worth waiting for in Act 3. Eric Greene was stunning as Rigoletto, most convincing when he railed against the vile courtiers in Act 2: found his ragingly passionate "Cortigiani vil razza dannata" to be breathtaking, and he transitioned seemingly effortlessly into caring father and tragic victim of the curse.

American soprano Jasmine Habersham was superb as Gilda, firmly establishing her character as virginal and devoured by the cruel world. She delivered an absolutely exquisite "Caro nome" as she mused on the man she adores. This aria, very challenging even for experienced coloratura sopranos, was faultless. It was sung partly on the back of a stuffed zebra, with a toucan on a perch in view, and concluded with her



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April 8, 2022

The Orchestra of Opera North – Huddersfield Town Hall

By Ron Simpson



The final concert of the 2021-2022 Huddersfield Town Hall season offered a chance to focus on the changes in British music in the last 120-plus years. Beginning with Mark-Antony Turnage's Drowned Out, a response to novel Pincher William Golding's major contemporary Martin by a composer, we moved on before the interval to the 1940s and Benjamin Britten's Serenade for Tenor and Horn. Undoubtedly the great English composer before Britten was Edward Elgar and his *Enigma* Variations from 1899 concluded the evening, but not before Alexander Ling's Minute Masterpiece, a young composer providing a cinematic climax, almost as though Turnage had not existed.

It was good that conductor Garry Walker took us through *Drowned Out* – otherwise confusion would surely have set in! The first impression was the hugeness of the orchestra: triple



woodwind. five trumpets, two saxophones, six percussion.... And then the frequency with which he reverted to tutti passages. Turnage's piece is probably the most challenging to surface this vear. with its elaborate undercurrent of existing themes, its manic jazz-influenced episodes that had Walker dancing on the podium and its vivid depiction of water and drowning. As the final clarinet theme weaved its way through the closing stages, it was easy to share the impression of aloneness.

The contrast with Britten's Serenade could not have been greater, the orchestra pared down to strings which played beautifully, but unobtrusively, in of Richard support Watkins Nicholas Watts. There are eight movements to the piece, the first delivered in magnificent style by Watkins, his smooth, pure-toned playing setting the mood for the rest of the piece. Watts similarly sculpted the lines

elegantly, notably in the Tennyson setting, *Blow*, *bugles*, *blow*, and gained a haunted, possessed tone in the Lyke Wake Dirge. Watkins' horn sounding from behind the stage completed a fine performance.

What can one sav about the *Enigma* Variations? Walker favoured a slow, lingering approach to the more reclusive variations, countered by the contrasted brass-and-percussionheavy passages where he gave his forces their head. It's interesting to think how seldom we hear these variations in the concert hall and a major impression was how much attention all the individual sections of the orchestra get. Standing out in the all-round excellence were the bassoons and clarinets. Nimrod began in muted tones, but gradually worked its way to a dramatic conclusion, as did the Finale, in its excitingly taut expression of – could it be? – the mysterious theme behind it all.

throwing a handful of golden glitter into the air, signs of her happy naivety. The abduction scene was not just innovatory but disturbing, due to the fact that all those doing the deed wore the same evil clown mask clamped over their heads. Habersham blended well with Greene, and was suitably tragic in Act 3, though I was not too sure about the insulated snowsuit she changed into before she was stabbed. Callum Thorpe's bass voice conveyed plenty of edginess in his role as the murderer Sparafucile, and he peeled an apple with his gleaming knife way which prompted recollection that this opera has been produced in a Mafia context. The set here depicts an out-of-town district of Mantua which is part of a dystopian version of a modern city, with scruffy tents, dismal lighting and an abandoned the neon lighting Here, redeployed to flash for a spectacular storm sequence. Maddalena, Sparafucile's sister, here played by Russian mezzo Alyona Abramova, was played as a slinky sex worker who seduces the Duke, who is slumming it to extremes. He was obviously not fazed by a brothel in a tent, which made his aria about the fickleness of women very poignant. Abramova's rich, nuanced singing convinced me that she is soon destined for much bigger roles.

As usual, the Opera North Chorus impressed. with terrific ensemble singing and tightly choreographed action, and the orchestra was relentlessly on top form under conductor Garry Walker. What worked for Verdi and his librettist Piave, and with the play on which it is based, Victor Hugo's Le Roi s'amuse, can still work today. This *Riaoletto* is innovatory. provocative... and very connected to the modern world.

THEREVIEWSHUB

January 23, 2022

Opera North: Rigoletto - Leeds Grand Theatre

By Ron Simpson

The Winter season at Opera North began on a sombre note with the opening performance of *Rigoletto* dedicated to the memory of Rafael Rojas, the Mexican tenor who died this week at the early age of 59. He regularly returned to Opera North over a 20-year period and had been scheduled Jose in this play Don season's Carmen. Anyone looking for a reason for his enormous popularity in Leeds needs only to watch him singing Nessun dorma in a shopping mall on Facebook or YouTube riveting!

As for Rigoletto it is colourful and imaginative, with a director who has a concept rather than just ideas and an international cast with outstanding performances and no weak with company's As the recent Carmen, Opera North takes the opportunity provided by a well-known and well-loved favourite to re-work the plot. The difference is that Femi Elufowoju Jr has a thought-through interpretation. Rigoletto is not a hunchbaked jester, but a fit upright black man – and that is why he is an outsider. It fits well, although, without the deformity and the cap and bells, his "difference" doesn't register as strongly as it might in the opening act.

Elufowoju's direction is bold and decisive, but, until the riveting later stages, prone to a failure to let well alone. Visual gags, guaranteed to raise a titter (Giovanna patrolling with a gun, the lift lights coming on in the Duke's palace), cut across the ends of serious

arias. The white-clad figures, dressed as footmen or pages and seemingly on loan from Mozart, are a fiddly nuisance and there is too much aimless hopping and leaping. But there is no doubt that finally Elufowoju's *Rigoletto* hits where it hurts: that off-stage *La donna e mobile* chills as it should – the Duke is alive, who is in the sack? We know, but we hold our breath as Rigoletto finds out.

In Act 1 the human relationships don't always come into sharp focus, but there are great moments among the swirl of sometimes confusing action. Monterone is a small part, but Verdi wrote, "The whole theme lies in (Monterone's) curse." You don't doubt that in Sir Willard White's magnificent delivery – and Elufowoju's production rightly foregrounds the curse, even in the closing seconds of the opera. Also in Act 1 Caro nome, if a touch over-theatrical in presentation, gives the first indication American soprano Jasmine Habersham's artistry.

the interval the personal relationships come into focus, Act 2 with hair-raising Si ending a vendetta from Habersham and Eric Greene before Act 3 exerts its car-crash appeal, the trio with accompanying thunder and lightning pinning you back in your seats. If you ever doubt Verdi's dramatic genius, latch on to the closing stages of Rigoletto – melodramatic, but brilliantly done.

Jasmine Habersham's soaring lyricism – plus her ability to cut across the orchestra in the mighty Act 3 trio –



makes a huge impression and, as Gilda, she overcomes some unfortunate costume choices. Roman Arndt is agile, both vocally and physically, as the Duke, but doesn't quite convince as the evil seducer. Eric Greene's dignified and beautifully articulated Rigoletto takes time to register the character's extremes of emotion, but by the end this is a powerfully moving portrayal.

The murderous siblings are secure in the hands of Callum Thorpe, all nonchalant menace as Sparafucile, and Alyona Abramova, suitably seductive as Maddalena. A strong supporting cast distinguishes especially well between the

naughty boys at the Duke's court, Themba Mvula's Marullo making a particular impact.

Rae Smith's designs perfectly reflect Elufowoju's concept in their contrasts, imagination and occasional unnecessary silliness. Her box design for sets works admirably and the climactic power of Act 3 owes not a little to her terrific town dump creation, Maddalena making good her assignation with the Duke in the back seat of a wrecked car. <u>Under Garry Walker the orchestral playing</u>, always polished and pointed, really catches fire after the interval.



October 2, 2021

Opera North's Carmen, Leeds Grand Theatre

By Geoffrey Mogridge

Opera North's emotional return to its home theatre after an absence of twenty months released the warmest of responses from a capacity audience evidently in the mood for a celebration. The visionary £18.5M Music Works Project, Garry Walker's long awaited debut as music director, the postponed production of Carmen. All have finally come to fruition.

So there is nothing new about a director putting his or her stamp on the world's best known opera. Edward Dick's production for Opera North goes further: the cigarette factory and Bull Ring in sun drenched Seville have been cancelled and there isn't a toreador in sight. In this production, Phillip Rhodes's powerful Escamillo is not a bullfighter, but a rodeo rider and country music singer.

The crimson velvet curtains open to reveal a seedy night club, probably in the United States mid-west. A giant neon sign proclaims the word "GIRLS". The punters are mainly soldiers from a nearby garrison who pay up to ogle Carmen as the playboy bunny girl 'La Carmencita'. Crystal E Williams' Carmen descends to the stage in a flurry of ostrich feathers to sing her sultry

Habanera. Traditionalists are unlikely to enthuse about a production of Carmen that so brazenly changes the identities and back stories of principal characters. does Dick carefully control simmering tensions and allows them to erupt at key moments. Carmen's cocaine smuggling associates humiliate the sweet natured and heavily pregnant Micaela - a performance of infinite colour from soprano Camilla Titinger. Carmen's tragic demise at the brutish hands of Erin Caves' dangerously unhinged Don Jose uncomfortable viewing but compelling listening. Both Williams and Caves find their best form in this heart rending denouement.

Garry Walker's pacing and balance of this and every dramatic confrontation is impeccable. Walker and the Orchestra of Opera North makes Bizet's glorious musical score sounds as if the ink had barely dried. The pristine freshness of winds and strings in the lovely En'tracte to Act 3 exemplifies this composer's genius for creating myriad colours with economy of means. The animated Opera North Chorus lights up the big ensembles so beautifully choreographed by Lea Anderson.

The Guardian

September 16, 2019

The Greek Passion review – Martinů's fierce opera brings home refugee crisis

By Tim Ashley

There are two great themes like trickles Bohuslav Martin<u>ů</u> wrote blood," of The Greek Passion, "the heritage of Christian virtues man's and his humanity." obligations to Based Kazantzakis's on Nikos Recrucified, Martinů's fierce last opera, given its first new UK production in nearly 20 years by Opera North, is set in a remote Greek village under Turkish rule, where the cast of a Passion play, increasingly absorbed in their roles, take sides with a group of refugees against authoritarian prejudice both religious and secular, with consequences that eventually prove fatal.

Hearing it in the 21st century is to be reminded that its indictment of a society catastrophically divided between compassion and smug self-interest has become more resonant than ever. The close intersection between religion and politics, however, makes it a difficult prospect for directors, and Christopher modern-dress Alden's staging occasionally errs on the side of ritual stylisation rather than angry immediacy. Raked banks of seats suggest both the mountain where the asylum seekers attempt to establish a home, and a classical theatre where this Greek tragedy slowly unfolds. The refugees carry their lives with them almost literally, in the form of life-size effigies. For the final confrontation with authority, Christ-like Manolios and his disciples arrive already dressed to enact a Passion which is going to play itself out in actuality. The ending, however, is anticlimactic and unduly protracted, some of which is ultimately Martinů's responsibility.

Musically, it's extremely fine, and dominated by an exceptional central performance from Spence, who sounds glorious and admirably captures both the conviction of the religious leader and the deeply troubled man beneath.

Among his followers are Magdalena Molendowska's tender Katerina, Paul Nilon's endearing Yannakos, and Jeffrey Lloyd-Roberts, brutal yet empathetic, as the work's Judas figure, Panait. John Savournin's Fotis, the refugees' zealous, passionate priest, sharply contrasts with Stephen Gadd's hypocritical Grigoris, the villagers' religious leader. The choral singing thrilling, and Garry Walker conducts with a dark intensity that brings out both the score's violence and its extraordinary moments of ecstatic lyricism.

TELEGRAPH

March 5, 2019

Rite stuff with froth on top

By Philip Andrews

It seems an unlikely double bill: Stravinsky's earthy, ground-breaking ballet which sparked a riot when first performed in Paris in 1913, and Puccini's comic opera which, though written five years later, seems to belong to a vanished age. Yet the combination works well: a meaty first course followed by a light dessert. The Rite is 40 minutes of driving, rhythmic, ceaseless movement, starting with the year's rebirth and ending with the ritual death of a young girl to propitiate the pagan gods. Stravinsky's music moves from the tenderly wistful to the violently shocking, and is here energetically and imaginatively interpreted by the Haitian choreographer Jeanguy Saintus. And it is performed with precision by eight dancers from the multinational,

Yorkshire-based Phoenix Dance Theatre. The staging is simple predominantly white costumes against a plain black backdrop, the performers bloodied hands. Stravinsky's mesmerising score is interpreted with equal energy and sensitivity by the orchestra of Opera North under Garry Walker. If the performers were not exhausted at the end, the audience certainly were, so it was a relief to wind down with a bit of musical froth. Gianni Schacchi is a conman who tricks a grasping family out of an inheritance from a rich uncle. The plot is corny but the score is pleasantly undemanding and Christopher Alden's entertaining production for Opera North keeps the laughter flowing.

Mkley Gazette

February 19, 2019

Opera North's production of The Rite of Spring and Gianni Schicchi

By Jim Jack

This unique double bill is a product of the first ever collaboration between internationally acclaimed Leeds- based companies Opera North and Phoenix Dance Theatre. Stravinsky's seminal score for The Rite of Spring has memorably raised the roof of Leeds Town Hall on a number of occasions. The ballet for which it was commissioned has never been staged in the city until now.

Jonathan McPhee's reduced orchestration for around sixty musicians inevitably scales down the explosive impact of a concert hall performance. However, the individual voicings of the Orchestra of Opera North, conducted by Garry Walker, are bathed in the Grand Theatre's beautifully clear acoustic.

Haitian-born choreographer Jeanguy Saintus replaces the traditional sacrificial storyline of a young girl dancing herself to death with themes of Haitian folklore. Bold downward lighting illuminates the grace and athleticism of the eight Phoenix dancers which, combined with the effect of Yann Sebra's costumes, creates stage pictures that are utterly compelling.

A revival of Opera North's 2015 production of Puccini's delightfully madcap Gianni Schicchi makes for a scintillating contrast. It is set in Florence where the scene for comic mayhem is the sick room of wealthy Buoso Donati.

A gathering of grasping relatives are impatiently waiting for the old man to kick the bucket. The relatives summon Gianni Schicchi to impersonate Donati and dictate a will that leaves all wealth and property to them. But the wily Schicchi has the last laugh by dictating a fraudulent will that bequeathes everything to himself.

Richard Burkhard is a rich-toned and slightly menacing Schicchi, Tereza Gevorgyan is his goth-like daughter Lauretta whose interpretation of O Mio Babbino Caro (Oh My Beloved Daddy) blends sarcasm with tenderness.

Rinuccio, Lauretta's love interest, is the liquid-voiced Mexican tenor Diego Silva, and Leah-Marion Jones his formidable aunt Zita.

Conductor Garry Walker ensures the whole confectionery zips along at a cracking pace. The Orchestra of Opera North find every expressive nuance in Puccini's feverishly busy score.

Rite of Spring and Gianni Schicchi continue at Leeds Grand Theatre on February 23, February 28 and March 2.

The Herald

April 29, 2019

RCS Symphony Orchestra/WalkerCity Halls, Glasgow, four stars

By Keith Bruce

With a further Scottish performance of Rachmaninov's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini and a Brahms symphony after the interval, conductor Garry Walker's programme with the orchestra from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland was startlingly similar to the one played in the same hall by the BBC SSO only ten days previously. It began in very different style, however, with Sally Beamish's A Cage of Doves, her dedication to mentor Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and evocation of the Orcadian environment and history where she studied with the older composer.

"Evocative" is the right word for this music, which begins arrestingly on the low strings and brass with muted timpani rolls and deploys the lowest notes on tuba and contrabassoon elsewhere, pitted against sparkling suggestions of shafts of sunlight. As throughout seemed apparent concert, Walker had surely been working with these young musicians on the discipline of quiet playing, and the precision they brought to the final page fade on this piece was notable for that. Pianist Daniel Hart also has a very fine touch on the keyboard, and this

performance of the Paganini variations was entirely without the sort of bombast that Rachmaninov often inspires in soloists. Walker paid close attention to his soloist's pacing of the work in a reading that was notable for its approach to the slower, quieter passages and brought out details of the orchestration – in the horns for example - that had been less apparent in recent performance by our professional orchestras. It was the gentle musicality of the young Cuban soloist, however, that made this a very singular rendition of the work.

There were some rough edges in the orchestra's performance of Brahms' Second Symphony, but they were outweighed by the strengths of the ensemble playing in the strings, particularly the cellos, whose precise pizzicato accompaniment to the bright and lively playing of the winds in the third movement made that section a particular highlight. Once again, it was in the moments of quietness, as before the main theme kicks in on the cellos at the start of the work, that the young players showed particularly impressive control.



June 25, 2017

Opera North sails in to the Aldeburgh Festival with a buoyant revival of *Billy Budd*

By Mark Valencia

Where were the microphones? Don't tell me no one spotted the audiophile possibilities in this flawless, fabulous account of Britten's nautical opera? In that case it will have to live on as an "I was there" evening.

Opera North's production of *Billy* Budd opened last autumn to enthusiastic reviews, including one by me, but this concert version is in another league. Most of the original cast members have returned for these Aldeburgh Festival performances, with the addition of Conal Coad as Dansker and company stalwart Dean Robinson as Mr Flint, but in shedding Orpha Phelan's cramped staging the show has blossomed into one of those dramatised concerts that Opera North does so well. And it's epic.

The first gain is in the soundscape, with featured soloists, male chorus and six outstanding 'powder monkeys' (one of whom, James Slingsby, returns to his former Cabin Boy duties) disposed around the orchestra in real-life SACD. With the Maltings acoustic once more aglow thanks to the dismantling of A Midsummer Night's Dream's problematic faux-proscenium arch, the aural spectacle was overwhelming. Indeed, at the opera's great climaxes famous wood-and-brick building could barely contain it.

Then there was the palpable growth in confidence from conductor Garry Walker as he marshalled his forces. His reading of Britten's score has matured since last year's opening night, to the extent that I count this one of the most muscular accounts of it that I've heard. Walker's workout had the gruelling energy of sinews stretching and bones pumping as the Opera North Orchestra supplied a tireless display of physicality. The abortive attack on a French frigate, one of *Billy Budd*'s great set-pieces, was exhausting exhilarating and experience.

Third, rarely can a concert performance have been as expertly lit as this one. The players may have been dressed in variants on platform attire (white tie and tails for the officers, black shirts and trousers for the sailors) but they were illuminated by Mike Lock with sense sensibility and a superb understanding of the score. It added enormously to a semi-staging by the production's original assistant director, Matthew Eberhardt, that was as sharply drilled as any naval battalion.

The joker in the pack – no, joker is definitely the wrong word – was the addition of Brindley Sherratt's matchless Claggart to the company. The great British bass, still currently on Baron Ochs duty for WNO, revisited the



role with which he scorched

Glyndebourne's earth in its revival production and delivered a performance of staggering presence and baleful intent. Herman Melville's master-at-arms is a creation of pure evil, more a brother than a cousin to *Otello*'s Iago, and Sherratt's interpretation of it was a masterclass in malignity and power. Along with Stuart Skelton's Peter Grimes it counts among the great opera performances of 2017.

For the rest it's as you were, and that is no bad thing. The excellent Oliver Johnston returned as the tragic Novice, as did Peter Savidge as a deeply humane Mr Redburn. (The First Lieutenant's parting glance towards Alan Oke's anguished, magnificent Captain Vere was an indelible moment, haunting in its compassion.) And Roderick Williams remained a memorable Billy, his demeanour of sculpted innocence at one with his energised vocal performance.

To end as we began, there ought to be a way of preserving this *Billy Budd* in its present state, but I guess Opera North has missed that particular boat. The next best thing? Well, the company has a vacancy for a new music director, and the orchestra openly revelled in Garry Walker's conducting...



December 1, 2016

Opera review: Billy Budd

By David Kettle

With designer Leslie Travers's shabbychic set, all curling floorboards and distressed paintwork, director Orpha Phelan's fine production of Britten's great nautical tragedy for Opera North placed us firmly inside the mind and regretful memories of the aloof Captain Vere. Which felt only right, given Alan Oke's quietly commanding performance in the role, the still point around which everything orbited – detached at times, yes, but also tracing a brilliantly believable arc from duty to despair to redemption.

There were equally fine performances from Roderick Williams in wonderfully rich voice as a surprisingly sturdy, thoroughly likeable Billy, and Alastair Miles, gratifyingly balanced as the sinister Claggart, deeply unsettling in his manipulations of the young and vulnerable, but far from a panto villain in his struggles with his own deep

damage. Indeed, Phelan's honest. intelligent production achieves a fine sense of balance with Britten and librettist EM Forster's homoerotic subtext, never concealing it, but never overplaying it either – instead leaving it to fester under the surface, and to inform both the opera's warm, seafaring camaraderie and its darker moments. Two elements really stood out: first, North's chorus, Opera superb wonderfully roof-raising in the opera's aborted battle scene but equally eloquent in its ominous opening; and second, Opera North's equally superb orchestra, which delivered a brilliantly vivid, sharply etched account under conductor Garry Walker, full of surging drama and also moments of exquisite contemplation. This is a glorious, thoughtful production, as strong on technical accomplishment as it is on insight.

The New Zealand Herald

May 28, 2016

APO, Auckland Town Hall

By William Dart

It was a concert of hardcore favourites, to be sure, featuring Tchaikovsky, Chopin and Prokofiev, with its two Russian takes on *Romeo and Juliet* neatly coinciding with this year's Shakespeare celebrations.

Yet, in Garry Walker, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra had just the conductor to lift what could have been a predictable programme into something of an altogether higher order.

The evening set off strongly with Tchaikovsky's popular overture-fantasy; its dark opening chorale was crisply ominous, its syncopated strife theme evoking a palpable sense of emotional and physical conflict.

Best of all, the theme of the young lovers never failed to soar, appropriately so for a concert titled The Greatest Love.

Two years ago, Alexander Gavrylyuk played Rachmaninov with the APO; tonight, the Ukrainian pianist's account of Chopin's F minor Concerto was so incandescent that the work's numerous compositional awkwardnesses simply vanished in his wake.

Walker offered him challenges, bringing out unexpected tensions in the opening pages, but Gavrylyuk countered with the purest balm, drawing the players into his glittering dream world, until they were released in Chopin's infectiously dancing finale.

The soloist's encore was the first of Schumann's Kinderszenen pieces, ideal in its simplicity and poetry.

After interval, a suite from Prokofiev's 1935 ballet returned us to the Bard's doomed young lovers.

There were crowd-pleasing choices, such as the opening Montagues and Capulets, but less familiar pieces, including the gleaming musical box of Aubade and an encounter with Juliet's gruff, garrulous nurse, brilliantly showcased an ingenious composer and an assured orchestra.

New Zealand Herald

February 21, 2015

Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Auckland Town Hall

By William Dart

The Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra welcomed us to this year's New Zealand Herald Premier series on Thursday night with an adrenalin-spiked aperitif. Conductor Garry Walker was a fearless driver for a four-minute zoom through John Adams' Short Ride in a Fast Machine.

Orchestrally, it was a brilliant workout, as colours shimmered and shifted around Eric Renick's deadpan, metronomic woodblock.

The centrepiece of the evening, Ross Harris' Violin Concerto, was courageous programming; an appreciated gesture to our country's composing community, rewarded with a near full house.

This is not an easy work. In the first minute, one was tempted to bend forward to catch Ilya Gringolts' whispered solo fragments, before they were caught up in engaging dialogue with the APO woodwind.

With the entry of the strings, there was a sense of liberation, as the Russian effortlessly set his expansive lines aloft.

There is a tenacity to Harris' musical arguments here that is typical of the composer; conductor, orchestra and soloist positively relished the very symphonic thrust of this writing. There was no lessening of tension in the faster sections, either, marked by unfailingly

idiomatic writing and an almost Stravinskian sense of propulsion.

After 20 minutes, a journey had been taken and resolution achieved, as Gringolts gave us his final exquisitely whispered gestures.

The cheering news is that, as well as being enjoyed by thousands throughout the country thanks to Radio New Zealand Concert's broadcast, this performance will eventually be available on CD.

After interval, tackling The Planets, Walker was just the man to show us how startling this score must have been when it appeared almost a century ago.

Holst's opening portrait of Mars brought us adrenalin once more, by the bucket, in great surging crescendos.

Before Jupiter's hearty, sing-a-long tune, we tasted enchantment in the serenity of the second movement, catching Venus, as the Bringer of Peace, its heavenly tranquillity only slightly lessened by intonation murmurs in the strings.

After the bristling scherzo of Uranus, there was more magic, mystery and mysticism in Neptune, with the women of Viva Voce displaying all the vocal allure one might expect of astrological sirens.

The Telegraph

June 26, 2014

The Cunning Little Vixen, Garsington Opera, review: 'teeming with life'

This new production of Janacek's masterpiece expertly captures the composer's unsettling heartache and brims with fine performances

By John Allison

Janacek's unsettling heartache in the opening of The Cunning Little Vixen is seldom captured as well as under Garry Walker's baton at Garsington Opera, and almost never evoked so profoundly as in Daniel Slater's new production. As the orchestral prelude unfolds, we see lost souls sitting in the bar of a Moravian country inn, where the Forester and a flame-haired woman are eyeing each other up warily.

She soon turns out to be the Vixen herself. simple transformation accomplished when she dons her fox-fur collared coat, but equally she represents the unseen character of Terynka, who is never far from the erotic longings of the village men. More than in most productions. Tervnka's fascination haunts the air, a reminder of the composer's unrequited feelings for his muse Kamila Stösslová while writing this pantheistic masterpiece, premiered in 1924.

An opera that explores man's relationship with nature while celebrating the natural order, however amoral its example, this bucolic piece has an edgy side that leaves some productions unsure of whether to lean towards The Texas Chainsaw Massacre

or Percy the Park Keeper. Slater and his designer, Robert Innes Hopkins, strike an ideal balance. The shabby pub is decorated with leafy wallpaper that brings nature inside, complementing the way in which the Opera Pavilion at Wormsley allows evening light to stream onto the set.

Portraying animals on stage is always tricky, and Slater and Hopkins find an elegant solution in the way they blur the natural and human worlds. Though the costumes have plenty of animal-like detail (with codpieces that are as much optimistic as animalistic), this is less a case creatures of the anthropomorphised than the humans' animal instincts being dramatized. This is indeed faithful to the score, in which onomatopoeic sounds and village bands mix, and both aspects are vividly conveyed in the brimming orchestral playing.

Claire Booth gives an outstanding performance in the title role, singing with brilliant focus acting with a physicality that makes her equally a femme fatale and a force of nature. Victoria Simmonds plays a sincere Fox. The Forester acquires dignity in Grant Doyle's warmly sung performance, and

Timothy Robinson's plangent tenor brings out the sadness of the Schoolmaster touchingly. Henry Waddington's bellicose Priest also stands out in a large cast. From the knitting, moral-guardian hens to the free-spirited dancers (Maxime Braham is the choreographer), this is a stage teeming with life.

THE STAGE

June 23, 2014

The Cunning Little Vixen

By George Hall

New to Garsington's repertory is Janacek's moving opera drawing parallels between the lives of humans and those of forest animals, as well as the interaction between them; it seems a natural choice for a venue set in the midst of a country estate and surrounded by beautiful woods.

And so it proves in Daniel Slater's thoughtful staging. Presenting animals on stage can be perilous, but with the help of Robert Innes Hopkins' canny costuming there is a concentration here on what humans and animals have in common. The set manages to suggest both the village inn, where the menfolk relieve their boredom by drinking, and the forest itself.

The human story of the villagers perfectly exemplified by Timothy
Robinson's touching Schoolmaster,
Henry Waddington's worldly Priest,
Joshua Bloom's bumptious poacher
Harasta and, especially, Grant Doyle's
expertly sung and superbly acted
Forester - comes into sharp focus in the
foreground.

Yet the central animal performances - Claire Booth's complete realisation of

the Vixen, Victoria Simmonds' knowing yet initially shy Fox, and Bragi Jonsson's harrumphing Badger - are visualised with style and conviction.

Slater also binds the two worlds cleverly together, with the aid of entrancing work by two dancers in particular: doubling the main characters in Maxine Braham's sensitive choreography, Chiara Vinci dances the Vixen, beautifully offset by Jamie Higgins, who dances the Forester.

As well as a plethora of smaller roles, there's also excellent group work from the pupils of Old Palace School and Trinity Boys Choir as the minor denizens of the animal kingdom.

Presiding musically over the show is conductor Garry Walker, who shows a profound understanding of the colours and textures of Janacek's idiosyncratic writing, and draws exceptional playing from the Garsington Opera Orchestra. It's an undoubted success for the festival, and a production that will surely win many new admirers for this life-enhancing piece.





February 17, 2014 Walker fits the bill as ASO conducts search

By Graham Strahle

Times are changing for the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.

It is essentially rudderless while it looks for a new chief conductor to replace Arvo Volmer, with whom it enjoyed a stable and happily productive 10 years. Under its newly installed chief executive, Vincent Ciccarello, the orchestra continues towards getting this task wrapped up as quickly as it can, unlike the agonising five years that elapsed before Volmer was appointed in 2004.

For the moment, it has its eyes on Garry Walker, erstwhile permanent guest conductor of London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and principal guest conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

Two years ago, this lanky Scot fronted the ASO in a vivacious performance of Dvorak's New World Symphony that impressed more for its balletic grace than its sense of architecture. A Russian ballet score might reveal his talents more fully, one felt.

So a program of Tchaikovsky and other Russian romantics looked just the part for his return appearance in the ASO's first main concert of this year.

On the podium, Walker looks for all the world like a ballet dancer. Large, sweeping gestures of both arms give a sense of airiness and openness to his conducting of beat.

Hesitancy struck the orchestra at first, when Walker seemed to take ages to arrive on stage for Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet fantasy overture. Growing restlessness among the audience and nervously exchanged smiles between the players seemed to conspire towards a tentative start.

By midway though, this work's minor key turbulence was well and truly ignited. Walker is impressive in the way he can suddenly hoist up the energy and impart electricity to rhythm.

Ultimately, however, it was a more graceful than passionate performance: Juliet's love theme toward the end needed to rise up more gloriously to really touch the heartstrings.

Due to his sheer force of musicianship, the evening belonged mostly to Alexander Gavrylyuk, soloist in Rachmaninov's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini. He is a beguiling pianist, able to find the simplest musical truth behind even the most staggeringly virtuosic torrent of notes.

His Rachmaninov, astutely concise rather than grandiloquent, and remarkable in its range of contrast between variations, gleamed with clarity.

This gala concert saw the ASO in fine shape, its reflexes well honed and tuning sweetly accurate.

In Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade it hit the button in both regards, particularly thanks to fine solo contributions from guest concertmaster Elizabeth Layton and clarinettist Dean Newcomb.



New Zealand Herald

May 31, 2013

Philharmonia's stairway to heaven

By William Dart

The pathway to James Ehnes' superlative Elgar Violin Concerto was a beguiling one. Under the unswerving baton of Scottish conductor Garry Walker, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra opened with more recent English fare - Thomas Ades' 2006 *Three Studies from Couperin*.

Ades' music can be wild and impulsive but he treads gently here, ruminating on 18th-century harpsichord pieces with a smaller but no less potent orchestra.

After the concert, Walker described the work in terms of reflections in a broken mirror, and the players had caught its enchanting elusiveness well.

The first movement created the illusion of phased sound with syncopations, elastic ornamentation and mysterious marimba. The second decoyed us with rhythmic ploys, and the third allowed the strings, under guest concertmaster Wilma Smith, to catch the poignant harmonies of Couperin's "soul in pain". A lively performance of early Beethoven always makes one wish he had written

always makes one wish he had written more before the Eroica changed the symphonic template forever. Walker's First Symphony did this. The *Allegro con brio* had glorious light and shade, the lilting *Andantino cantabile con moto* was all Beethoven asked for, while the last two movements were boisterous with hints of menace.

From the very beginning of Elgar's Violin Concerto, there was symphonic engagement. Walker took the orchestra in massive strides, not overlooking Elgar's more delicate roadside blooms. James Ehnes has a restrained style but the Canadian searched out the music in every note, even during tortuous passagework.

Elgar's friend and violinist W.H. Reed commented on the constant rise and fall of this music, and the restless fluctuations in the *Andante* led to a heart-stopping shift to G flat major. It was here that Ehnes was able to break forth with Elgar's brand of heavenly lark song.

The surge of the final *Allegro con molto* culminated in the cadenza, with its celebrated strummed orchestral strings. Ehnes, energy undimmed, offered mercurial virtuosity as well as a short unaccompanied Lento which, with its yearning sobs and sighs, caught the very soul of this score.

REGISTER

January 11, 2013

Pacific Symphony shimmers in 'Scheherazade'

By Timothy Mangan

The Pacific Symphony's programming of its classical orchestral series this season has been oddly and stiflingly unadventurous. With the exception of what turned out to be an ill-starred evening of cabaret, the orchestra has ventured out of the greatest hits of the 19th century (in either direction) with seeming trepidation, the newest piece on offer being the Suite from "Der Rosenkavalier" (1910)by Richard Strauss. It's not about to become more daring anytime soon, either, with concerts of Mozart and Puccini in the offing.

Here's where you, dear reader, think that I'm calling for the orchestra to perform a blistering slate of avant-garde and contemporary classical music that you, dear reader, don't like. But really, all I'd like to see is the orchestra taking a broader view of the repertory, one that embraces more than just certified masterpieces written by Europeans two centuries ago. Classical music is more interesting than this.

The orchestra's latest program, heard Thursday night in Segerstrom Concert Hall and scheduled for repeat tonight, played it safe again, pairing Beethoven's Violin Concerto with Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade." A couple of less-thanmarquee names were headlining the proceedings, guest conductor Garry

Walker (virtually unknown here; his program bio listed not a single U.S. orchestra among the groups he has conducted) and guest violinist James Ehnes.

Now here's where you, dear reader, think that I'm going to give the performance a negative review that you, reader, will disagree with, dismissing me as an elitist. Wrong again. One of the beauties of having guest performers on the program is that they tend to pack their luggage with pieces that show them in the best light, pieces that they know well and sound good in, ergo pieces that will get them invited back. Walker and Ehnes did this. The highlight of the concert for this listener (and one of the highlights of the season, actually) was Walker's performance of "Scheherazade." The Scottish conductor, permanent guest conductor of the Royal Philharmonic and principal guest conductor of the Royal Scottish Orchestra, obviously has a thing for it. His affection came through in almost every bar.

"Scheherazade" relates the story of "The Thousand and One Nights." There is a solo violin theme for the princess Scheherazade (who spins the tales), a theme for the ominous Sultan (who wants her put to death), and adventures on Sinbad's ship, at the Festival in

Bagdad, of Prince Kalendar, etc. The piece is famous for its fascination with the Orient as well as for its orchestration, which is dazzling and exotic.

Walker painted vivid pictures but also told the story. It was a case of balancing the special effects of the orchestration with the pacing of the whole. He coaxed all the voluptuary shapes in the broad string melodies, made the dances nimble and crisp, and vaulted the tricky transitions in single bounds. He never pushed and made the cinematic climaxes the old-fashioned way, by earning them. This was all helped by a light touch (call it taste) and an attention to instrumental balances; we could hear everything.

The orchestra appeared to catch Walker's fire, or at any rate played with warmth and exuberance, and the many solos were handled with exceptional generosity and style, in particular those by concertmaster Raymond Kobler and clarinetist Benjamin Lulich.

Ehnes, 35, a much-recorded Canadian virtuoso on the international circuit, gave a satisfying but careful performance of the Beethoven concerto. His technique is all but perfect, and he played with an exquisite polish and golden tone throughout his range and no matter what he was doing.

He captured the ornamental quality of the solo in the first movement with grace, the rapt beauty of the slow movement with patient purity and the playfulness of the finale well enough. You couldn't fault him. But it was all a little subdued and lacking a little in personal temperament. His performance sounded as if he was hitting all the marks rather than forgetting them and throwing himself into it. Walker and the orchestra supported him handsomely and delicately, paying special attention to dynamics.

New Zealand Herald

May 5, 2012

Concert review: Into The Light, Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra

By William Dart

Ross Harris' programme note for his new Cello Concerto is barely 50 laconic words, yet its central image of ascending from darkness into light provided the title for Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra's *Into the Light* concert.

The gloom of the opening bars, as cellist Li-Wei Qin takes flight from the growl of double basses and bass drum, was almost tangible.

Bursts of florid writing, effortlessly handled by the soloist, provoked orchestral commentary; a tightly-knit quartet with cor anglais, harp and horn had melodic tinting that betrayed Harris' interest in klezmer music.

From the start, one sensed that conductor Garry Walker was enjoying the symphonic argument, marshalling the musicians like a stage director, especially as the work gained momentum, moving to its final destination.

Harris' writing tests orchestra and soloist. Both were superb, especially Qin, dispensing jaunty passagework while, behind him, the APO offered memories of bygone marches.

As the work developed, there were more extrovert moments. One, in (mostly) triple time, strode boldly but was soon countered by a more elegiac strain, showcasing Qin's immaculate playing.

The good news for those who missed both the concert and Radio New Zealand Concert's broadcast, is that this performance has been recorded.

On either side of the concerto, Walker showed the musical tenacity that we have come to expect.

The first movement of Haydn's Symphony No44 revealed a composer who understood the nuances of court life and the rustic goings-on of the village. If the Adagio was slightly compromised by thin violins, then the Finale was a real 18th century hoedown.

After interval, there was a sense of deliberation in Brahms' First Symphony. Particularly memorable were a burst of almost Wagnerian splendour early in the second movement and some carefully considered colourings in the third.

New Zealand Herald

April 21, 2012

Concert review: Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Auckland Town Hall

By William Dart

For a moment, it seemed that the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra was starting its Enigma Variations concert with an encore.

As it turned out, the opening string quartet, exquisitely rendered by spotlit section principals, was the music that inspired Benjamin Britten's Variations on a theme of Frank Bridge.

Conductor Garry Walker entered and explained all with a nice line in Scottish wit before leading all the strings through an energetic exploration of the Britten.

Even if the composer's sometimes stark and exposed string writing tested the first violins, meticulous articulation and phrasing sustained the performance right through to a tenaciously argued Fugue.

Each variation was allotted its individual character, as drawn by a 23-year old composer brimming over with the sheer exhilaration of a seemingly limitless imagination.

And, as any audience member would agree, nothing can replace the pleasure, in the Aria Italiana, of seeing violins and violas strumming away like a Neapolitan mandolin orchestra.

<u>In Walker's hands, the opening Allegro</u> <u>aperto of Mozart's A major Violin</u> Concerto, had the brio of an overture to an imaginary opera buffa.

Soloist Barnabas Kelemen brought a crowd-pleasing showmanship to a concerto that does not always encourage such an approach. The Hungarian even added a touch of the gypsy to Mozart's more rollicking moments.

By the Finale, the Turkish marches that give the concerto its nickname could not have been more infectious had they been delivered by a carnival street band.

Two generous encores contrasted a spitfire Paganini Caprice and a soulful Bach Sarabande.

After the interval, Walker consolidated last year's memorable Elgar First with a stirring Enigma Variations.

Again detail was all, apparent from the first few phrases of the work; and Walker was not afraid to investigate the full emotional scope of a score groundbreaking in its time.

As we progressed through Elgar's "portraits", there was a new, manic thrill in the bustling busyness of the Fourth Variation.

The celebrated Nimrod was the expansive song that it should be, followed with the endearing and delicate flutter of Dorabella.



The Guardian

November 22, 2011

Pass the Spoon – review

Tramway, Glasgow By Kate Molleson



Pass the Spoon is a daft and instantly lovable collaboration between cartoonist David Shrigley, composer David Fennessy and director Nicholas Bone. The posters promised a "sort-of opera" about cookery; what transpired was a zany, warm-hearted sort-of pantomime held together by some extremely good music and expert comic delivery. Action happens around the set of a daytime TV cookery show, where hosts June Spoon (Pauline Knowles) and Philip Fork (Stewart Cairns) prepare an ill-fated dinner for the fearsome giant puppet, Mr Granules. Other characters include Potato, Carrot and Turnip (glaikit lumps of stuffed lycra), a Tory butcher with a god complex (Peter Van Hulle), a suave Latino banana (Martin McCormick) and a manic-depressive egg (Gavin Mitchell). That this is Shrigley's first foray into anything long-form might have shown around the edges of the narrative had it not been for Bone's shrewd pacing. But the blithely left-field dialogue is priceless — a bonkers Pythonesque send-up of any number of vacuous stereotypes — and Shrigley's designs turn the classic indie look of his line drawings into supersized 3D.

The acting in this Magnetic North production was a spot-on satirical blend of hammed-up and winceably familiar mannerisms, especially from the two hosts. The score, every bit as sharp-witted as the text, is an irreverent mishmash of leitmotifs, muzak, Broadway, romantic overdrive, acerbic dissonance and contemporary operatic paradigms, all deftly sewn together into colourful accompaniment and catchy set pieces. Red Note Ensemble — in chef costumes — gamely provided the 11-piece band on stage, conductor Garry Walker kept things moving with clarity and verve. Technically the genre is probably more "sort-of melodrama", with long stretches of speech over music, and apart from Van Hulle the voices were more music theatre than operatic. But frankly, that's irrelevant: whatever the label, this is easily worth a revival.



October 21, 2011

Pianist Kozhukhin, conductor Walker join Utah Symphony in energetic all-Russian program

By Catherine Reese Newton



Every year, the Utah Symphony designates an up-and-coming guest performer as the Evelyn Rosenblatt Artist. This season's honoree, 25-year-old Russian pianist Denis Kozhukhin, proved to be another shrewd pick.

Kozhukhin's dazzling performance of Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 1 with the orchestra on Friday showed that he isn't just another hotshot with lightning-fast fingers, but a savvy musician worth keeping an eye on. He paired phenomenal speed with crystal clarity and graceful phrasing. Thirtysomething Scottish conductor Garry Walker and the orchestra did a splendid job matching Kozhukhin's dynamism in this exuberant concerto, which charges

forward without pause and culminates in an exhilarating burst of musical adrenaline.

Walker is making a belated Utah Symphony debut this weekend; his scheduled appearance in 2010 was scuttled by the Eyjafjallajökull volcano eruption. Better late than never. Walker is a dynamic conductor who didn't let the musical momentum flag all evening. He bookended the Prokofiev concerto with two early symphonies of Russian masters Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky, imbuing both with youthful vigor and freshness.

In Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 2 (nicknamed "Little Russian" for its prominent use of Ukrainian folk

melodies), bold colors in the first and last movements was complemented by a light touch in the middle movements. Expressive solos by Bruce Gifford (horn) and Leon Chodos (bassoon) were among the individual highlights.

The concert-opener, Stravinsky's Symphony No. 1, is best described as

"Stravinsky before he was Stravinsky." Aside from a few brief flashes of Stravinskian color in the woodwinds, this is a work Tchaikovsky might have written, if Tchaikovsky had had a sense of humor. Walker and the orchestra gave a vibrant reading of this sweepingly romantic work.

The Herald

May 16, 2011

Red Note Ensemble, Tolbooth, Stirling

By Keith Bruce

Whether or not it split the available audience, the short tour by Scottish contemporary music group Red Note, which ended in Stirling on Saturday night, made for some interesting points of comparison with US superstars Kronos.

John Harris and Robert Irvine's ensemble was also clearly aware of the necessary theatricality of the repertoire in their programme, with only the tape and quintet composition Differences by Luciano Berio really concerned with purely musical exploration.

That performance element was largely in the hands (often quite literally) of soprano Angela Tunstall in Salvatore Sciarrino's Infinito Nero. It required her to dramatise the visions of 17th-century mystic Maria Maddalena de Pazzi with articulations that are explicitly unintelligible. Trios of winds and strings and percussive piano, drum and bells provide a compelling

soundtrack similarly on the outer edge of what is usually understood as music in a what was a mesmerising monodrama.

The programme opened with Sciarrino's treatment of four baroque works by Carlo Gesualdo, arranged for nonet and also using the female voice as a dramatic top note. Much more superficially accessible, La Voci Sottovetro is clearly designed to illustrate the earlier composer's influence but important seemed a purely technical exercise, rather the warmest of tributes.

Carolyn Sparey's commission for these concerts, Out of the Ashes, was no less theatrical, its four movements a story of the interaction of a Chopin Nocturne with the Second World War experience of Polish pianist Wladyskaw Szpilman, saved from the camps by a music-loving German officer. Here, in the hands of Tunstall, Red Note and conductor Garry Walker, was a wonderfully original approach to the telling of a story through music.



The New Zealand Herald

April 2, 2011

Concert Review: Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra at Auckland Town Hall

By William Dart

Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra's *Great Classics* concerts have always played favourites and did so again with Thursday's coupling of Dvorak's Cello Concerto and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*.

Yet what is there to dispute when one sees a well-filled Town Hall and the audience's evident enjoyment of the music?

Choice of repertoire aside, what singled this occasion out were Lithuanian cellist David Geringas in tandem with livewire young Scottish conductor Garry Walker. Walker may not have been giving us the more contemporary music for which he is known in Britain, but he invested the Dvorak Concerto with all manner of telling inflections, right from the tinge of melancholy launching the first movement.

Geringas proved himself a giant on his instrument, his striding introduction, truly *quasi improvisando*, in no way compromising the poetry that would come minutes later, *molto sostenuto*, against silvery woodwind.

It was Geringas' scrupulous lyricism that made the central *Adagio* so memorable and, although the Finale had no shortage of folksy thrust, both conductor and soloist made the most of those dawn-clear passages in which one might almost hear premonitions of Copland.

While most soloists bring out Bach at encore time, Geringas surprised with an extract from Book, a virtuoso solo by Latvian composer Peteris Vasks, which the cellist dedicated to the people of Christchurch. Borrowing an image from Leonard Cohen, God was alive and magic afoot in this hushed wonder of rustling sonorities. The cellist's unworldly vocalising, chillingly effective, had patrons craning to see just where the singing was coming from.

The storm of applause from an audience which had come to hear familiar fare, made one wonder whether the APO might have found 10 minutes for a more adventurous filling between its two romantic titans.

After interval, <u>Walker ensured</u> that *Scheherazade* was delivered in full technicolour. With Dimitri Atanassov's violin as storyteller, we were tossed on the waves, safe in Sinbad's Ship, thrilled to the song of a passionate princess and might have imagined Stravinsky's Petrushka flitting around the fringes of the last movement's brilliant *Baghdad Festival*.





March 22, 2011

Concert review: Scottish Chamber Orchestra

By Ken Walton

Scottish Chamber Orchestra City Halls, Glasgow ***

astonishing different It's how performances shed different light on the same piece. When the SCO, under Garry Walker, premiered Giorgio Battistelli's Fair is Foul, Foul is Fair at the 2009 Edinburgh Festival, it came over as something considerably less than the some of its parts. In the ideal acoustics of the City Halls, however, these parts had significantly greater dynamic presence.

But even under Walker's incisive lead, there was still a detectable undernourishment in musical material that offsets Battistelli's genuine flashes of inspiration (his orchestral colourings were razor sharp here) with an over reliance on endless scales and other ready-made motivic formula. The first movement of Edward Harper's unfinished Third Symphony — pieced together from

sketches by fellow Edinburgh composer Lyell Cresswell and called Pastoral – struck no such imbalance.

It is surprisingly traditional in its language — a relaxed Scottish pastoralism emotively bound by Harper's autumnal setting of Burns' Ye Banks and Braes, sung soulfully by Susan Bickley. The SCO captured beautifully the subtle virtuosity of the delicately-detailed orchestral score.

The folk references offered a striking poignancy in a programme dominated by folk-inspired music. Bickley also appeared in Berio's alluring, hi-definition Folk Songs and Walker elicited a robust finesse in Britten's suite A Time There Was, and the thrill-packed Bartok Rumanian Dance

MUSICAL AMERICA . COM

November 24, 2010

Man-dog as Opera Fodder

By Keith Clarke

LONDON — What with all the blood, the hacked-off testicles and the x-rated dialog, it would probably not rank as the best choice for anyone looking to entertain their maiden aunt on a Saturday night out in London's West End. But Alexander Raskatov's "A Dog's Heart," which got its UK premiere in the London Coliseum on November 20, certainly hit the spot with a capacity audience.

Based on Mikhal Bulgarov's novel, with libretto by Cesare Mazzonis, "Heart of a Dog," could easily have been sunk by the political undertow, the struggle of the proletariat, the harsh hand of officialdom, etc, but it is to director Simon McBurney's credit that the politicking is given its due without taking over the show. What we get instead is a piece of wacky, in-your-face music theater that constantly surprises and amuses — in the first act, at least.

The story is of the unorthodox surgeon Professor Filipp Filippovich, who is known for innovative operations that rejuvenate the sexual capacities of his Moscow patients. An emaciated dog, Sharik, becomes his most experimental patient, when he transplants testicles and pituitary gland of a newly The deceased human. result, everyone's eventual grief, is that Sharik is not only rejuvenated but humanized. He becomes a man. Sharikov, though still with his canine base instincts, is elected to take charge of ridding the city of its stray cats, and in time becomes a threat to the doctor's existence. The doc puts him under the scalpel again, and it's back to the dog's life for Sharik.

All this is portrayed with energy and vision by theater company Complicite in co-production between **English** National Opera and De Nederlandse Opera. The Dutch company commissioned it, and the decision to link up with Complicite was an inspired one. Simon McBurney puts together a bespoke company for each of his productions (this is his first venture into opera) and his choice here could not be bettered.

While he is still in canine form, Sharik is represented dramatically by a cleverly conceived puppet, and vocally by "a pleasant voice" and "an unpleasant voice." The latter is in the form of yelps through a megaphone (Elena Vassilieva clearly having fun) while the pleasant voice is very pleasant indeed – the fine, rounded countertenor of Andrew Watts. In McBurney's vision, the "voice" of Sharik is very much part of the action, so Watts has to pace around with the dog, even managing at one point to sing while lying face-up on a carpet having his tummy tickled.

The idea of a puppet dog did not evoke optimistic anticipation, following Anthony Minghella's "Madam

Butterfly," which used the same company, Blind Summit Theatre Company, to create the puppet child. But where the "Butterfly" puppeteers were all too intrusive, here Sharik was given life in an altogether subtler way, and the puppeteers (Robin Beer, Finn Caldwell, Josie Daxter and Mark Down) were much more easy to accept as part of the action.

When he becomes man, it is in the form of Peter Hoare, to whose vocal and dramatic demands is added the instruction to leap on to a table front of stage, stark naked, to give a preintermission vision of how the dog-turned-man is likely to mean trouble when the curtain rises again.

In truth the second act fought hard to maintain the momentum, but this was no discredit to Complicite's efforts, more a structural problem with the work, which would be a sure-fire winner as a 90-minute single act but tends to drag as a 135-minute evening filler.

Working brilliantly to keep our attention despite the longueurs were Steven Page as the Professor and Leigh Melrose as his assistant. Bormenthal. Alasdair Elliott as the petty official Shvonder, and Nancy Allen Lundy, magnificent as the excitable maid Zina. McBurney's demands mirror acrobatic the nature of much vertiginous Raskatov's vocal writing, soaring off into the stratosphere at any moment. Both Nancy Allen Lundy and Sophie Desmars as the Secretary were immensely impressive here, coping with what could be called extreme singing with tremendous dexterity.

Also strong, in a large and well rehearsed cast, were Andrew Watts, Hardy Woodcock, Frances McCafferty, David Newman, Ella Kirkpatrick, Michael Burke, Graeme Danby, Matthew Hargreaves, Michael Selby, Claire Pendleton, Deborah Davison and Jane Read.

Raskatov's music is witty and engaging, and offers an entertaining game of spotthe-composer (Schnittke is a front runner, but there is quite a queue). His determination to spell out almost every phrase syllable by syllable gets rather tiresome after a while, but the low brassheavy orchestration is highly charged and the work got a cracking performance under conductor Garry Walker.

McBurney's regular Complicite collaborator Michael Levine was in charge of some captivating designs, well lit by Paul Anderson, and there was some brilliant projection design by Finn Ross. Costume designs were in the capable hands of Christina Cunningham and in a fast moving production Toby Sedgwick took charge of movement.

The production has just seven performances in total, showing on November 24, 26, 30 and December 2 and 4.

Boulezian

November 21, 2010

Alexander Raskatov: A Dog's Heart, English National Opera, 20 November 2010

United Kingdom premiere The Coliseum (sung in English)



Professor Filipp Filippovich Preobrazhensky – Steven Page Peter Amoldovich Bormenthal – Leigh Melrose Sharikov – Peter Hoare Sharik the dog (unpleasant voice) – Elena Vassileva

Sharik the dog (pleasant voice) — Andrew Watts Darya Petrovna — Elena Vassileva Zina — Nancy Allen Lundy Shvonder — Alasdair Elliott Vyasemskaya — Andrew Watts First Patient — Peter Hoare Second Patient – Frances McCafferty
Provocateur – David Newman
Proletarians – Ella Kirkpatrick, Andrew
Watts, Alasdair Elliott, Michael Burke
Fyodor/Newspaper Seller/Big Boss –
Graeme Danby
Secretary – Sophie Desmars
Investigator – Matthew Hargreaves
Drunkards – Michael Selby, Christopher
Speight
Old Women – Deborah Davison, Jane
Reed

Puppeteers – Robin Beer, Finn Caldwell,
Josie Dexter, Mark Down
Simon McBurney (director,
choreographer)
Michael Levine and Luis Carvalho (set
designs)
Christina Cunningham (costumes)
Paul Anderson (lighting)
Toby Sedgwick (movement)
Finn Ross (projections)
Blind Summit Theatre: Mark Down and
Nick Barnes (director of puppetry)

Chorus of the English National Opera (chorus master: Martin Merry) Orchestra of the English National Opera Garry Walker (conductor)



Three cheers – at the very least – for the English National Opera! 'The current climate' is a dreary, defeatist phrase, generally an excuse for enemies of all that it is to be human to diminish our humanity further; nevertheless, it seems to inform so much of what we do and even hope for at the moment, that to have a new opera by an un-starry Russian composer, of whom most of the audience most likely will never have heard, performed at the Coliseum is worth a cheer or two in itself. (The current practice of many companies and orchestras in parochially commissioning works only from British artists is unworthy of organisations that would claim a place upon the world stage.) A couple more cheers – again, at least – must granted the be show's resounding theatrical success. For more than anything else this is a triumph for Simon McBurney and Complicite. After a number of false starts in its current mission to import values from the nonoperatic theatre, however one wishes to term it. ENO, in collaboration with the co-producing Holland Festival, really hits the target this time.

A fuller synopsis can be found briefly, A elsewhere, but Dog's Heartreworks Mikhail Bulgakov's satire. Cesare Mazzonis's libretto is here translated by Martin Pickard. The opera opens with a stray dog - the superb puppet work inspired by Alberto Giacometti (click here for the sculpture in question) - mistreated by men, apparently rescued and promised a dog's paradise by a distinguished scientist, Professor Filipp Filippovich The Preobrazhensky. parallelism between the new workers' state and the condition revealingly animal's is maintained and deepened throughout, likewise the repellent superior pretensions of Preobrazhensky – the



name will be familiar to students of Bolshevism and Stalinism – both as scientist and as human. Eventually, the professor sees his chance for true scientific glory. Having fed up the dog, whom he has named Sharik, transplants human testicles and a pituitary gland, to create a 'new man', Sharikov. Sharikov's antics leave him, the professor notes, at the most rudimentary evolutionary level, yet that is hardly Sharikov's fault; indeed he garners hope from association with proletarian organisations, further horrifying his creator. The professor disowns him and conducts a second operation. The creature is once again a 'mere' dog. I could not help wondering about a potential English play on words:

is the dog man another representation of our desire to create a god man?

What marks A Dog's Heart out from many collaborations is that it was collaborative from the beginning, a joint project involving composer, librettist, and Complicite. This tells; I suspected it must have been so before I discovered that it was. A true sense of theatre is present from the very outset, the opera opening without warning. Pacing is keen throughout and the stage direction puts most to shame. The puppetry, previously mentioned, is wonderful – this includes a cat, whom Sharikov cannot help but chase - but so are mechanics such as scene changing, so often something hapless to endure in the opera house. Sets from Michael Levine and his assistant. Luis Carvalho, are exemplary: never fussy, but evocative both of period and of their stage in the drama. The grandeur of the professor's rooms by the proletarian envied house committee, but our scientist has friends in high places - provides an apt link with an older Moscow, whilst Finn Ross's NEP-style projections make clear what has changed. The silhouetted – in part – operation was very well handled, bringing subsequent gore into greater relief.



This is, to my knowledge, the only opera whose first act closes with the injunction, 'Suck my cock!' Why, in the supertitles, coyly write 'c*unt' thus, when everyone could hear the word, and why suppose, especially in such a context, that the sensibilities of Daily Mail readers should be considered? The 'profane language' is not, in that bizarre circumlocution, 'gratuitous', but integral to the plot, above all to the dog-man's characterisation. Where it somewhat irritate in Ligeti's Le grand macabre - though there is, of course, Dadaist (un-)reason for it there too – it would be several suburbanisms too far for anyone to object in the present case.



Music, it must be said, takes second billing, though that is not a unique phenomenon: Gérard Mortier's parting shot at the Opéra national de Paris, Am Anfang, billed Anselm Kiefer's installation before Jörg Widmann's score, and Widmann is a more famed composer than Alexander Raskatov. And yet, though I flatter myself that I can be called a musician, I did not mind, which must say something about the sum of the parts. It was far from easy to discern where one 'contribution' began and another stopped. For instance, doubling of parts seemed to have a point beyond economy. This is not *Lulu*; there is none of Berg's carefully-crafted parallelism and symmetry. But the taking on of different roles said something about appearance from anonymity, disappearance into the proletarian crowd, and Warhol-like moments in the limelight.



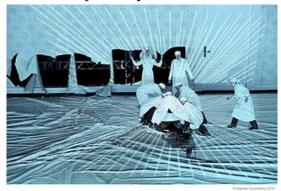
I cannot imagine wishing to hear to Raskatov's score outside the theatre and whilst I should definitely be tempted by a subsequent dramatic project, I should find it difficult to evince enthusiasm for hearing his music in the concert hall. Nevertheless, it works in the theatre. (People say that of Verdi, but that apparent success has always eluded me.) It is recognisably 'Russian'- sounding, closer perhaps to Schnittke than anyone else, though there may be other influences of whose work I am simply unaware. Often somewhat cartoonish, it occupies its (relatively) subordinate role cheerfully and has its individualistic moments, for instance in the use of bass guitar. earlier Russian Connections to composers are manifest too. This is not Prokofiev (certainly not Prokofiev at his operatic best. for instance The Gambler or The Fiery Angel), but it is a good deal more entertaining than most Shostakovich - or Schnittke, for that matter. I cannot say that I could hear

much or any influence from late Stravinsky or Webern, music to whose qualities David Nice, in his helpful programme note, suggested that Raskatov aspired. (Incidentally not incidentally. actually. but importantly - the programme features, McBurney's contributions included, were of an unusually high standard.) Thinning of textures on certain occasions aside, it was difficult to discern any kinship with the iron discipline of those serialist masters. But Raskatov's closed forms, whilst obvious, exert their own dramatic impetus in tandem with the events on stage, even if the vocal writing - melismata, scalic passages, and so on – swiftly becomes predictable. Α passcaglia signals darkening of mood, likewise the odd Mussorgskian choral moment: again, perhaps, predictable, yet again, perhaps, 'effective': a word I recall my A-level music teacher counselling against using, but here undeniably 'effective'.



Garry Walker's command of the score sounded exemplary. The sweeping dramatic drive he imparted made me keen to hear him back at the Coliseum very soon. He certainly knew how to bring the best out of the excellent ENO Orchestra — who deserved a good number of cheers of their own. The musicians played their hearts out — perhaps an unfortunate metaphor in the context of the present work — so much as to make one tempted truly to believe in Raskatov's score. Steven Page

presented a convincing dramatic portrayal of Preobrazhensky's dilemma: no hint of caricature here, though the vibrato may have proved a little much



for some tastes. Peter Hoare did likewise, albeit in very different manner, for Sharikov, repelling and provoking sympathy. Other noteworthy performances included the aburdist coloratura part of Zina the maid (Nancy Allen Lundy) and the grotesque cameo of Frances McCafferty's elderly Second Patient. How could anyone refuse? How could anyone not? The dog as dog has two voices: unpleasant, the distorted, loud-speaker-hailing soprano Elena Vassileva (also impressive as the professor's housekeeper, Darya Petrovna), and pleasant, the fine counter-tenor, Andrew Watts. There was certainly no finer musicianship on stage than that of Watts, whose plangent tones inspired the most genuine sympathy of all without sentimentalising.

The theatre seemed full and the audience responded enthusiastically. I saw two composers - Raskatov aside so I suspect there will have been more. So no, this was not a musical event to rank with the recentpremiere Goehr's Promised Alexander End-English Touring Opera's initiative rightly described by Michael Tanner in *The Spectator* as 'astoundingly heroic' - but as a musico-theatrical event, it scored very highly. Unlike, say, the recent Rufus Norris Don dismal Giovanni, which, had 'theatre people' come to see it, might well have put them off opera for life, this might just have intrigued some of them to explore musical drama further. Our political and financial masters would understand this, let alone agree, but that is something to which one cannot affix a price.



September 13, 2010

Caird Hall audience witnesses 'people's prom'

The words of Lesley Garrett's fabulous Caird Hall performance on Saturday night of the Rogers and Hammerstein evergreen, Some Enchanted Evening, did not quite do the event justice.

By Gary Fraser

They might be perfect in the context of South Pacific, but for the BBC Proms celebrations more suitable adjectives could be used.

Excellent, memorable, outstanding... you could struggle to find a description for such a night.

Quite simply, it was a triumph, an evening of beautiful music, outstanding solo contributions, first-class choral singing. There was a wonderful feelgood ambience about the hall and as informal an orchestral concert as you could hope for.

No pomp and circumstance here, it was the people's prom and they contributed with a packed hall willing to join in the spirit of the occasion, with the marvellous BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, under Garry Walker's superb direction, ready, willing and able to tick every box of a concert-goer's need.

It was hard to pick a winner. If anything, Dundee came out on top as hosting the event was an enormous coup — Glasgow's loss was very much our gain. The Dundee Proms Chorus should take a lion's share of the plaudits. Only formed a few weeks ago, their performance defied any sense of a fledgling ensemble, showing the well-knit balance reserved for established choirs.

Admittedly, their opening Anvil Chorus from Il Trovatore was slightly nervous, but there was ultimate redemption in a fabulous Rhythm Of Life. Bearing in mind some involved were experiencing their first public performance, and live on TV, this was a first-class demonstration of choral singing, with enormous credit going to trainer Anna Flannagan. With three stellar soloists, it is hard to know where to start.

Paul Galbraith (guitar) demonstrated not only an unusual playing style but also outstanding technique. The second movement of Rodrigo's Concerto d'Aranjuez was sublime, but he bettered that with a performance of a solo work by Tarrega that would be extremely hard to beat.

Nicola Benedetti needs little introduction to Dundee audiences and her performance of the third movement of the Bruch violin concerto was full of her customary panache and flair.

Pure and perfect

However, like Galbraith, she kept the best for her second contribution — the pure and perfect pianissimo that is Massenet's Meditation from Thais. It takes something special to upstage these two excellent performers, and that is exactly what soprano Lesley Garrett is. She had the audience in the palm of her hand from the very start.

Three operatic arias were delivered with performances oozing personality and



projection. In her second-half contribution she excelled herself in the brilliant I Want To Be A Prima Donna. To say her performance was dynamite is a huge understatement.

The BBC Scottish in all this were by no means bit players, giving staunch backing to choir and soloists and exhibiting their talents in numerous orchestral numbers, with the Local

Heroes medley contrasting well with more standard fare like the William Tell Overture and Also Sprach Zarathustra, which opened the concert.

With live link-ups to the Albert Hall and exuberant audience participation in You'll Never Walk Alone and Auld Lang Syne, this was an evening to savour and will long be remembered as one of best ever at the Caird Hall.



June 14, 2010

BBC SSO, City Halls, Glasgow By Michael Tumelty

I have no idea what it sounded like live on Radio 3, and listening to music on the radio can be a somewhat reduced aural experience; but sitting there yesterday in the balcony of the City Hall, with the BBC SSO at full tilt, mega-volume, firing on all cylinders and delivering the music with no prisoners taken, full-on and totally in your face, I confess I was transfixed, pinned to my seat by what I think might have been one of the most exciting concerts I have attended in 30 years.

From start to end; from a blazing account of Sibelius's Finlandia, to a pounding, head-banging, foot-stomping performance of Bartok's Miraculous Mandarin Suite, this was the BBC SSO doing what it does best: marking its 75th birthday, its contribution to Radio 3's day of back-to-back live concerts around the UK, and its own current and very special firing power with a set of incendiary performances that at least some of us there in the busy house will never forget.

Presiding conductor for the occasion was Garry Walker. Was this his finest hour? It certainly felt like it in the cracking pace at which he delivered Finlandia; sensationally thrilling yet having the breadth at the climax to let the SSO ring out that golden theme, one of Sibelius's most inspired. In the middle, before the SSO terminally bruised us with that incredible Bartok, Ilya Gringolts played a ravishing, totally seductive version of Korngold's beautiful Violin Concerto, a work creeping ever nearer the mainstream repertoire; while Sally Beamish's enthralling composition, A Cage of Doves, had a Sibelian intensity about it.

What music: what a concert: what a band.

Star rating: *****



The Mestmorland Gazette

March 16, 2010

Concert review: Northern Sinfonia @ lakes leisure Kendal

By Brian Paynes

Northern Sinfonia's association with the Lakeland Sinfonia Concert Society has been long and always synonymous with musicianly excellence; its recent visit was no exception.

The programme was delightful – Sibelius's Suite Pelléas et Mélisande, Schumann's Cello Concerto and Mozart's Jupiter Symphony.

Apart from its first movement the Sibelius proved to be unfamiliar yet utterly charming; to the not-so-familiar Concerto Guy Johnson brought musicianship, beautiful tone, virtuosity, intimacy and a total collaboration with his colleagues; Mozart...can there be another symphony, anywhere, of such genius?

The performances were memorable – out of the topmost drawer, with assiduous, professional attention to detail.

The calibre of the players, naturally, ensures this but the conductor also has a part to play. Garry Walker (young and balletic, not currently a household name, but watch this space) was in control, welding his forces with authority and artistry.

He knows his scores, is refreshingly not afraid to occasionally introduce his own idiosyncratic ideas and — importantly — seems to have the respect of his players. They obviously enjoy their work and, consequently, are a joy to both hear and watch.



*The*Guardian

July 19, 2008

by Tim Ashley

ASMF/Walker/de Niese Barbican, London

Danielle de Niese is very much the face of this year's Mostly Mozart festival, adorning programmes and posters to such an extent that you might think the whole event was structured round her. In fact, her activities were confined to a couple of extended slots in a single Academy of St Martin in the Fields concert conducted by Garry Walker, which proved remarkable and maddening by turns.

De Niese became a star in 2005. when she appeared as Cleopatra in Handel's Giulio Cesare at Glyndebourne, though her subsequent appearances tended to reveal limitations rather than strengths. Her Poppea, at Glyndebourne this summer, traded on her pin-up image, but was uninterestingly sung. At the Barbican, she reverted to Handel. with arias from Semele and Rinaldo, as well as essaying Mozart's Exsultate, Jubilate, and imperfections were apparent, where one expected her to be most secure.

One problem is that her glinting upper registers are not balanced by a corresponding warmth lower down, so sections of Exsultate, Jubilate lie awkwardly for her. Her coloratura flows with its usual ease, though an element of rhythmic waywardness has crept into her singing, while some of the slow numbers reveal a rapid pulse in her tone. She is very theatrical in concert - but though her bump and grind approach to Handel has something to say about Semele, her extravagant arm gestures added nothing to Mozart's motet.

Walker and the ASMF, however, were superb throughout, and never better than when left to their own devices. A sense of quirky daring was apparent in their performance of Haydn's 70th Symphony. Adam Walker and Sally Pryce were the young and phenomenally talented soloists in Mozart's Concerto for Flute and Harp, K299, exquisitely played and flawless in its perfection.



THE

July 21, 2008

Academy of St Martin in the Fields/Walker at the Barbican

Danielle de Niese's effulgent soprano revelled in the florid writing, feisty at one moment, feline the next

Hilary Finch



It must be difficult to resist becoming sick of self-love when one is lusted after by no less a god than Jupiter. The aria that Handel gives to Semele, in his eponymous opera, is all but autoerotic in its narcissistic self-preening. It's a gift for a soprano - particularly one who knows just how much to send up this ultimate send-up of a diva. It could have been written for Danielle de Niese, who relished it to the full in the first of her two slots in the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields Mostly Mozart concert.

As de Niese's effulgent soprano revelled in the florid writing, feisty at one moment, feline the next, she made it seem impossible to exhaust the possibilities in the endless repetition of just two lines: "If I persist in gazing, Myself I shall adore." Round and round they circled, countless times; yet neither she nor we ever wearied of it.

De Niese's own highly physical stage distract can from presence seriousness of intent and careful preparation. Her body longed to dance its way through Mozart's Exsultate, jubilate - but her voice, too, luxuriated in the shape of every ecstatic phrase. Her voice has its limits: there's not much down below and, up at the top, crescendos of passion can become a little unfocused. But an enraptured smile greeted the start of the Alleluia, as though de Niese could hardly wait to share its virtuoso joy.

No less generous performances were given by the 20-year-old flautist Adam Walker and the harpist Sally Pryce in Mozart's Concerto in C for Flute and Harp. Walker's pure, unbreathy piping and Pryce's deft musicality were exploited to the full by Garry Walker's sparklingly detailed yet lissom and long-sighted conducting.



Bloomberg

November 28, 2007

By Warwick Thompson



Miles, a pretty Victorian boy in kneebreeches, stares innocently into the eyes of his governess. Suddenly he grabs her tightly and kisses her long and violently on the lips. ``You see, I am bad, aren't I?" he says teasingly as she stares at him in shock.

After a devastating run of flops, London's English National Opera at last has something worth seeing. David McVicar's production of ``The Turn of the Screw" is full of penetrating psychological insights like Miles's brutal kiss.

For all that, the staging of Britten's ghost-story opera is not as chilling as Jonathan Kent's Glyndebourne production. McVicar's decision to concentrate on psychological detail comes at the expense of creepy horror. He scores a hit in his exploration of the characters of Miles and Flora, two

orphaned children who live under the care of a naive young governess in a remote house. He shows how Victorian patriarchy warps their development, and creates monsters of them.

Little Miles uses his burgeoning authority and sexual confidence to control those around him -- hence the kiss with his teacher. We also see his sister embittered by her gradual exclusion from Miles's world of masculine power.

It creates a thought-provoking background for the plot, which turns on the governess's belief that the children are being corrupted by ghosts.

Imaginary and Real

Designer Tanya McCallin creates the atmosphere of a dilapidated Victorian attic, half imaginary, half real. The stage is bare apart from a few pieces of tatty furniture and some dead leaves on the floor. There are several broken glass panels which look as if they may have adorned a once-grand conservatory. They slide across the stage to establish different locations.

McCallin chooses period costumes, but all in black and gray. Flora looks like a disturbingly funereal version of Lewis Carroll's Alice, in the famous Tenniel



illustrations.

By using clever side-lights and intriguing of chiaroscuro, lighting designer Adam Silverman makes it all resemble a faded daguerreotype.

Rebecca Evans is superb as the governess, never losing her lustrous, golden tone and clear diction even when pushing her acting to the point of hysteria. She's matched by an equally riveting from performance tenor **Timothy** Robinson as Quint, one of the ghosts. He sounds eerily like Britten's partner Peter Pears, for whom the role was written.

Veteran mezzo Ann Murray is Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper, and she brings firm authority to her singing and acting. George Longworth (Miles) and Nazan Fikret (Flora) both give detailed, beautifully sung performances.

Conductor Garry Walker keeps it all alive in the pit and isn't afraid to take risks. His use of outrageously slithery strings to accompany the arrival of Cheryl Barker as Miss Jessel (the other ghost, who had died by drowning) is memorable.

For all his insights into Victorian gender roles and sexuality, McVicar misses a trick in failing to build up more horror. It's a good show, but just needs one more turn of the screw to be the revivable hit that the ENO so desperately needs.

thisislondon.co.uk the entertainment guide

Novermber 27, 2007

A fearfully good ghost tale

by Fiona Maddocks

In the nick of time English National Opera has a hit. David McVicar's gripping staging of Britten's The Turn of the Screw, first seen at the Mariinsky Theatre, St Petersburg, last year, restores a glimmer of hope to St Martin's Lane.



Huge Talent: George Longworth is mesmerizing as Miles and Rebecca Evans makes a potent debut as The Governess

McVicar and his team - designer Tanya McCallin and lighting designer Adam Silverman - have opted for spooky Victorian country house simplicity: all is black, with rocking horse, iron bedstead, upright piano illuminated in pools of sharp light. The ghostly Peter Quint and Miss Jessel emerge from shadows. Sliding screens provide mirrors, windows and suggestions of faded grandeur. The photographs of Julia Margaret Cameron are a visual touchstone.

From the start, nothing is normal. Henry James's novella, on which Myfanwy Piper's libretto is based, remains elusive about what the Governess or her charges really saw at Bly. McVicar is faithful in keeping all options open. One is merely relieved not to have been a house guest.

Musical standards are high. Garry Walker, in a distinguished ENO debut, conducts with clarity and a good ear for pace and drama. The 13-strong instrumental ensemble - a combination borrowed by so many composers since Britten - excelled.

As the creepy children Miles and Flora, 14-year-old George Longworth and Guildhall student Nazan Fikret were mesmerising. Both have sung their roles before. What huge talent.

A special joy of the production was hearing Ann Murray in a new role: vocally incisive and miraculously flexible as the housekeeper Mrs Grose. It's a change for once to have her played lean and imposing, rather than as a cuddly old biddy.

Rebecca Evans, making a potent role debut as the Governess, wisely played down nervy hysteria until the moment it was required. Cheryl Barker was an accomplished Miss Jessel, gliding in and out with ghostly menace.



As Quint, Timothy Robinson proved icy, hypnotic, terrifying. A short silence at the end - always a good sign - was followed by extended applause and bravos, of which the Coliseum has too long been starved.

FINANCIAL TIMES

August 28, 2006

The Assassin Tree Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh ANDREW CLARK

Few composers are born to the theatre. Most remain foreign to it but some have an aptitude that needs time to develop. That may well be the case with Stuart MacRae, whose first opera is the creative centrepiece of this year's Edinburgh International Festival. The Assassin Tree suggests MacRae has something interesting to say but has not yet found a way of saying it effectively in the theatre.

MacRae's instrumental and orchestral occure is already testimony to one of the most fertile minds among younger-generation composers - individual in timbre, technically "finished", immune to market pressure.

Two years ago his concert fantasy, Two Scenes from the Death of Count Uyolino, revealed a dark streak of drama in his creative psyche while indicating he was never going to be interested in the sort of "kitchen-sink" opera that many of his contemporaries have espoused.

So it was intelligent of Sir Brian McMaster, in his final year as festival director, to ask the precedences 30-year-old to try his hand in the theatre.

The Assassin Tree is barely 70 minutes long and economically scored for four voices and 15 instrumentalists. It is so multi-layered that you emerge feeling you have. had a full evening's worth and more. That says something about the imaginative landscape that MacRae and his librettist. the poet Simon Armitage, have encapsulated within their crucible of ideas and sounds. Based on Sir James Frazer's classic 1922 study of folklore, magic and religion, the opera mythologises the eternal cycle of death and renewal.



Sensuous: Gillian Keith

Diana; giver of life, is attended (and presumably fertilised) by a succession of protectors, each of whom needs to kill his predecessor in order to take his place at her side. At the moment of death, each recognises a father-son kinship with his successor.

Here are the makings of an operatic allegory, a genre with a distinguished history. But in MacRae's hands the story is too stylised, too high-minded. He never gets down and dirty: it is as if he does not want to write anything as common as a melody or stoop to something as obvious as human emotion. None of his characters emerges as flesh-and-blood. You can't hear the words hardly surprising, given that the uninteresting vocal lines remain secondary to an instrumental score that sweeps all before it in power and expressive range. Apparently MacRae didn't like opera until he went to a performance of Tristan amd Isoide a few years ago. and you can sense the after-shock resonating through his crescendos and decrescendos.

The problem with The Assassin Tree is that, for all its wonderfully tense climax, it is more concerned

with aesthetics than with practical elements of theatre. It is a bit like an . installation, hermetic and allusive, that you look at from outside but are discouraged from entering. I'm not sure how far that view was influenced by the Emio Creco/Pieter Scholten production, which is really an act of choreography. It looks cool and hieratic. with lots of slow arm-gesturing in the Bob Wilson mould. But it was an inspired idea to use a lighting turret as a tree and a circular video panel as the moon.

The revelation of Friday's first night was Garry Walker: not only did he show theatrical antennae in his conducting of the Britten Sinfonia but he also allowed us to sense the dramatic volcano underlying MacRae's instrumental writing. I liked Gillian Keith's pristine, sensuous Diana, a cousin of Wagner's Woodbird. Paul Whelen was the noble priest/king, Colin Ainsworth and Peter Van Hulle his youthful rivals. **** Repeated at the Royal Opera House, London, September 6-8, Tel 020 7304 4000 or visit www.royalopera.org

The Daily Telegraph

April 19, 2007

Strange world in a virile embrace: Geoffrey Norris reviews the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra with Walker at Cadogan Hall, London

Two of this year's anniversary composers - Grieg and Sibelius - shared the bill with one of last year's in this Royal Philharmonic Orchestra concert.

In 2006 it was almost impossible to move for performances of Shostakovich's music, and at times there was a danger of his being a victim of overkill. But now, with the passage of a few months, it was refreshing to hear the Cello Concerto No 1 again, particularly as Robert Cohen's interpretation of it had both virility and the sensitivity to embrace the strange world of Shostakovich's inner thoughts that colour and cast a ruminative cloud over the central slow movement.

Just as important, the orchestra's individual and collective instrumental timbres were given a strong profile under the conductorship of Garry Walker.

The RPO has just announced that, from the autumn of 2009, its new artistic director and principal conductor will be the seasoned Charles Dutoit, but it is good that the orchestra also maintains a commitment to the younger generation of maestros in having Walker as its permanent guest conductor.

He has also been making waves in a similar post with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and in this programme he confirmed a talent for intelligent, well-balanced music-making, on this evidence thoroughly prepared and with a keen ear for detail. There is nothing ostentatious about Walker's conducting style. Quite the reverse, in fact; but what he does do is to the point and provides a clear guide to his expressive intentions.

Grieg's first Peer Gynt Suite at the start of the concert was played with unaffected grace and charm; Sibelius's Fifth Symphony in the second half was underpinned with ideas about structure, atmosphere and perspective that were firmly founded and true to the

music's idiom.

Walker oversaw the spectrum of sonorities and motifs in the finale so that the peroration emerged with inevitability, the volume of the brass kept in check yet making a radiant, stirring impact, the scurrying strings well-controlled yet with a strong forward momentum.

The various layers of which the symphony's texture consists were lucidly delineated, but at the same time had cohesion and integrity. Pacing was thoughtfully geared to revealing how the symphony is constructed with tautness.

The RPO's playing was alert and responsive to Walker's well-reasoned guidance. The performance exhibited insight and communicative assurance that are already confident and can only develop further.



November 28, 2007

by Edward Seckerson

Opera

THE TURN OF THE SCREW Coliseum LONDON

Like all paranormal tales, The Turn of the Screw invites many different interpretations. And many questions. Britten's opera adds a further layer of intrigue. Knowing how much or how little to reveal is at the heart of any successful staging, and David McVicar, while living more dangerously than some, does not allow interpretative theories to overwhelm the elusive nature of the piece. Only one thing is clear: that the essence of the story and the opera is the corruption of innocence. Everything else is in the eye and mind of the beholder.

So, who is the mysterious man who opens proceedings and goes by the name of The Prologue? The role is doubled with that of the ghostly and predatory Peter Quint, implying a kinship of sorts. But is he not also the "handsome employer" who so infatuates the Governess that she undertakes his engagement without meeting him? McVicar suggests that he is, and in a single gesture sows a dramatic seed from which his whole interpretation will grow.

Just as the Governess is about to begin her journey (metaphorically speaking), she reaches out to touch the man that she has so vividly conjured up in her imagination. But he is, of course, out of reach, a figment of her deepest desires. Are we to believe that the entire opera is seen through the eyes of a sexual hysteric? A repressed Victorian woman seeking sexual liberation? Is the ghostly Peter Quint the embodiment of her employer and her desires? Possibly.

But the fact that I write "possibly" and not "undoubtedly" is a tribute to the psychological balancing act that McVicar maintains with this production. It is played out on an open stage shrouded in darkness. Tanya McCallin's somewhat rudimentary (and noisy) design has translucent sepia panels sliding back and forth with the shift of each scene - almost as if the house has no form and itswalls are continually dissolving into the night. A ghostly group of servants rearrange the furniture as they might rearrange our



thoughts. Adam Silverman's lighting works wonders in maintaining oppressive shadows, and only fleetingly allows the light from without to penetrate the darkness within.

But by far the most telling aspect of McVicar's staging - and his casting is the erotic tension that pervades throughout. Timothy Robinson and Cheryl Barker as the ghosts Quint and Jessel, the former governess, make much of Britten's seductive vocal melismata, but McVicar mirrors them with a strenuous physicality, leaving one in no doubt as to the nature of their sexual games. And what are we to make of the Governess's nightmare at the start of Act II, when Quint drags Jessel up from a shallow grave to have his abusive way with her? Has their reality become her fantasy? One thing is certain: the children, Miles and Flora (George Longworth and Nazan Fikret, both marvellous) have grown up too soon. When Miles confronts the Governess with the words, "You see, I am bad", at the end of Act I, he kisses her long and hard on the lips. The ceremony of innocence is indeed drowned. The boy has become a man in Quint's image.

And yet the Governess - as portrayed in Rebecca Evans' ethereally sung performance - is drawn to Quint through the boy. She regards Jessel as competition, and resents her for it. And therein lies the conflict and turmoil, beautifully conveyed by Evans, that eventually alienates the housekeeper Mrs Grose. She is passionately realised in the power casting of Ann Murray, who personifies Victorian moral outrage, but does so with real heart. Garry Walker does not spare the instrumental extremes of Britten's sensational score. There is at once startling clarity and deep equivocation. So go - and see what you make of the final image...



January 21, 2007

SCO, City Hall, Glasgow

By Michael Tumelty

Star rating: ****

SHE said Baroque; she meant Baroque; and Sally Beamish's new Chamber Concerto, premiered on Friday by the Rascher Saxophone Quartet with the SCO conducted by Garry Walker, did derive its structure, exuberance and sheer vitality from the music of the Baroque period, particularly from Bach's Brandenburg Concertos.

You could hear that everywhere in the music, from its lucid structures to its momentum, bristling with the motoric elements that give Baroque music its exhilarating drive and energy.

At the same time, the three-movement concerto, stunningly played by the versatile Rascher Quartet, was authentic Beamish: there was not a note that could have been so penned by another composer. Yet there was a fundamental difference between this concerto and the other dozen or so in the genre by Sally Beamish: its directness and accessibility.

This piece will go everywhere.

It is the quintessential concerto for Everyman. The sizzling playing of the Raschers, with the SCO and Walker at their most athletic, brought the piece bounding off the page and into The phenomenal anybody's orbit. interplay between saxes and orchestra, within the quartet itself and with significant contributions from orchestral soloists joining the party, gave the fast movements outer sparkling a spontaneity.

The beguiling slow movement, massively influenced by Scottish music, with a touch of heterophony in the writing, wove a haunting tapestry of atmospheric sound.

The concerto was the perfect complement to Thomas Wilson's serious and deeply impressive Fifth Symphony, with its long, soulful woodwind themes garlanding Wilson's pungent rhythmic writing, and its poignant, valedictory conclusion coherently and sensitively presented by the SCO and Garry Walker.



MusicalCriticism.com

January 24, 2007

Scottish Chamber Orchestra/Garry Walker

By Mary Robb



The Scottish Chamber Orchestra were on top form as they performed an allmodern programme of Beamish, Wilson and Stravinsky. Two of these works took their inspiration from Brandenburg **Concertos:** Stravinsky's 'Dumbarton Oaks' (written for Mr and Mrs Robert Woods Bliss of Dumbarton Oaks for their thirtieth wedding anniversary) and Sally Beamish's Chamber Concerto for Saxophone Quartet and Strings.

Partly commissioned by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Beamish's Chamber Concerto received by far the most and musically interesting exciting performance of the evening. The piece comprises of three movements which engaged the Raschèr Saxophone Quartet (pictured) as both soloists and a crucial part of the larger ensemble. Shaped by the structure of the Fourth Brandenburg Concerto, the first movement was structurally dense with interesting articulation including col legno, pedal bass and glissandi. Conductor, Garry Walker's commitment to strict ensemble created an intense performance which illuminated the depth of Beamish's writing.

But it was the second movement, Adagio, which exposed the sonorous sound of the Rascher Quartet. From its canonical beginning, this movement was marked by soprano saxophonist Christine Rall's haunting tone. Her wide vibrato and clear harmonics in the highest registers beautifully captured the Gaelic character of the movement, enveloped by scotch snaps and solo string lines.

Opening the concert was an energetic performance of Stravinsky's Concerto for Orchestra in E flat, 'Dumbarton Oaks'. The SCO's playing was strong and vibrant and made the most of the composer's individualistic orchestration. Out of the three short movements, the charismatic was the movement con moto, during which Walker Stravinsky's brought out rhythmic string writing whilst also championing a beautiful wind melody on top.

Contrasted with these pieces was Heinz Karl Gruber's 1968 Manhattan Broadcasts. **Embracing** the faceted music of New York, this piece attempted to fuse two very different mediums: serious classical music and serious jazz. Although excellently and energetically performed, performance was hampered by Gruber's conservative jazz orchestral writing. Short drum kit fills, double bass (plus bass guitar) soli and a pseudo-jazz melody the in movement exposed a lack of authenticity for the jazz medium. That said, the

SCO's performance was charming and delightfully performed.

The final work of the evening was Symphony No. 5 by Thomas Wilson. Commissioned and premiered by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in 1998, it is a work of one movement constructed in three distinct parts. Beginning slowly with a solo timpani, the tonality of the first part became ominously determined by the glissandi of the timpani pedal which was controlled. excellently **Fragmentary** melodies (often in unison) showed off the SCO's impeccable intonation, especially when confronting the harsh intervallic clashes.

But it was the second part which really impressed. In stark contrast to the earlier first 'movement', the SCO coped under the quickening pace which soon gave way to a frenzied tempo as the piece climaxed in a wallowing mesh of sound. The melodic clarity that followed in the heavy bass and light expressive flute writing displayed the SCO's fast adaption to the changing ambiance of the piece. Walker captured the ending beautifully: after the recapitulative measures of the timpani pedal the piece drifted away as the sound finally turned into silence.



January 2013

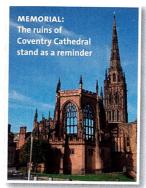
ON THE JANUARY CD

Our in-brief guide to this month's Britten cover disc



Britten War Requiem

Artists
Olga Guryakova (soprano)
Mark Padmore (tenor)
Christian Gerhaher (baritone)
BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra
Paragon Ensemble
Edinburgh Festival Chorus
National Youth Choir of Scotland
Ilan Volkov, Garry Walker
(conductors)



About the music

'The one musical masterwork we possess with overt pacifist meanings' was how composer Michael Tippett hailed Britten's *War Requiem* in an obituary of his friend. Composed during the Cold War to mark the consecration in 1962 of the new cathedral at Coventry, built next to the ruins of the old cathedral destroyed by German bombers in the Second World War, the work was an intensely

personal statement that resonated with a huge international public. Although a believer in the need for music to be both useful and communicative, Britten can scarcely have expected the almost universally positive critical reaction to the piece and the phenomenal commercial success achieved by his own recording of the score made for Decca in 1963, which sold 200,000 copies in just five months. Half a century on from its first performance, Britten's *War Requiem* still has the power to move, disturb, shock, and above all encourage reflection on the perennial horrors of the inhumanity of military conflict.





Christian Gerhaher Romantic Arias *Sony 88725422952* Christian Gerhaher ventures into the operatic realm to present exemplary performances of early 19th-century arias.

Christian Gerhaher Ferne Geliebte *Sony 88691935432* Gerhaher shines in Beethoven, Berg, Haydn and Schoenberg.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Dies Irae: 'The Next War' (Track 2, 9:12) Britten's bitterly exuberant setting of Owen's disconcerting picture of soldiers fraternising with Death is a reminder of similarly sardonic and energetic 'dances of death' in the composer's politically charged works from the 1930s.

Offertorium: 'So Abram rose' (Track 3, 3:22) The moment of the War Requiem richest in irony: Britten reworks music from his 1952 Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac for Owen's parody of the Bible story, in which Abraham slays Isaac 'and half the seed of Europe, one by one'.

Agnus Dei (Track 5) The only movement in which the Owen and Latin components share both emotional and musical common ground, its simple lyricism culminates in the tenor's beautiful 'Dona nobis pacem'.

Libera me: 'Strange Meeting' (Track 6, 7:49) With an extreme musical economy all the more striking on account of the cataclysmic orchestral explosion that has preceded it, Britten evocatively recounts Owen's eerie tale of enemy soldiers reconciled in death.

FURTHER LISTENING



The pacifist ideals that inspired the War Requiem lie at the heart of Britten's opera Owen Wingrave, composed for TV in 1970 – Richard Hickox's 2008 recording (Chandos CHAN10473(2) £22.99) is outstanding. Similarly, the Sinfonia da Requiem, composed in 1940 and a work described by Britten himself as being 'as anti-war as possible', was recently given a superlative performance by

the BBC Symphony under Jiří Bělohlávek (Supraphon SU40952 £15.99). For a choral work of similar scale and inventiveness by one of Britten's

contemporaries, try the LSO and Colin Davis's disc of *Tippett*'s 1941 oratorio *A Child of Our Time (LSO Live LSOO670 £9.99)*. Finally, *Vaughan Williams*'s 1936 *Dona Nobis Pacem*, as performed by the Bach Choir and Bournemouth Symphony (*Naxos 8.572424 £5.99*) doesn't look back on the horrors of war but predicts them with eerie prescience.





New Zealand Herald

June 28, 2014

Classic CD: Ross Harris: Cello Concerto/Symphony No 4 By William Dart

This CD, beautifully produced by Wayne Laird and expertly engineered by Adrian Hollay, presents two 2011 works, the Cello Concerto and Symphony No4.

For some, this disc will be a muchappreciated souvenir of two concert hall triumphs; for others, it offers a glimpse the extraordinary partnership composer between a fine and committed orchestra.

The Concerto is cast in a single movement of just under 25 minutes. Originally described by Harris as an ascension from darkness to light, its journey could not have been undertaken by a more eloquent protagonist than Australian cellist Li-Wei Qin.

This recording confirms first-night impressions of an inspired soloist; Li-Wei draws such vibrant pathos from the lyrical passages and yet astonishes with his ferocity when playing the virtuoso

The orchestra is in top form, responding with ease and finesse to an intricate

With hindsight and the luxury of being able to revisit this performance, I am even more impressed by the terrier-like persistence of Scottish conductor Garry Walker pursuing the symphonic arguments set before him.

The Symphony No4, conducted by Australian fellow-composer Brett Dean in 2012, is dedicated to the memory of Harris' friend and collaborator. songwriter Mahinarangi Tocker.

A rich and sometimes dark-hued cloak has been laid out in these pages, revealing a remarkable skill in bringing together disparate musical elements.

The various links with Tocker are explained in the programme note, although those familiar with her music will doubly appreciate hearing her song My Love Be Strongunleashing the first movement's seascape.

Towards the end of the symphony, the anger that breaks out during the fourth movement eventually finds peace and acceptance in the finale.

Principal viola Robert Ashworth, who acquits himself magnificently with Harris' musical demands, closes the piece, recalling Tocker's Forever.

The songwriter talks here of her grave being blossomed with stories of old, spoken to song; a heritage for which Ross Harris has created a new and resonant kete.

TheGuardian

July 23, 2009

by Tim Ashley



Dvorák: Violin Concerto, Sonata and Sonatina

Jack Liebeck's Dvorák album consolidates his reputation as one of today's finest young violinists, though the task he sets himself could also, perhaps, be described as ungrateful. Dvorák's major violin works are notably problematic, as if hampered by some deep-seated ambivalence towards the instrument. Written in the US in 1893, the Sonatina, despite - or possibly because of - its stylistic simplicity, is the most consistently moving of the three. The more virtuosic Sonata (1880) and Concerto (1883) both suffer from lapses in inspiration, which no interpreter has ever

managed to disguise. Liebeck's tone, dark yet sweet, is ideal in this music, and the prowess and finesse of his playing are never in doubt. But while he is able to refute the usual criticism Concerto's the finale repetitive, one is still conscious that the Adagio sprawls a bit, and also that Sonata's first movement is diffuse in comparison with the rest of The Royal Scottish National Orchestra, on blistering form for Garry Walker, are his accompanists in the Concerto. Pianist Katya Apekisheva takes over for the Sonata and Sonatina.



