

I N T E R N A T I O N A L  
**RECORD REVIEW**

FOR THE SERIOUS CLASSICAL COLLECTOR

February 2006 £3.80

**Daniel  
Barenboim**

and the  
West-Eastern  
Divan Orchestra  
in Ramallah  
on CD and DVD

A new Schubert Ninth  
from Sir Simon Rattle

Mozart by the dozen

The Tallis Scholars  
on SACD

Birgit Nilsson  
remembered

Ken Russell has  
Too many  
records





*I puritani*. Daniel Oren does not rush the music, nor does he overpower it. He rightly allows the singers time to phrase and shape.

Before the music begins, we see Lisa moving with stylized gestures across a sloping lawn in front of a house. Stage Director Federico Tiezzi has set the story around the end of the nineteenth century, with the villagers, a sedate lot, in white dresses or white or light-grey suits. At one point there is some effective use of the lighting, giving the appearance of the setting sun illuminating the scene. The lawn later becomes a hayfield, in which is a large, red sofa (so maybe the field contained couchgrass), on which Lisa and Rodolfo sit and sing while Amina sleeps nearby. It is rather surrealistic but not objectionable. Snow covers the earth in Act 2. The chorus has donned overcoats or scarves, but Amina and Teresa, hardy souls, have not even a shawl over their dress. The bridge across which Amina sleepwalks is a metal affair with handrails. Not even an inebriated somnambulist would fall from that, so there is no illusion of suspense. The most convincing element in the performance is the singing of the leading trio. **John T. Hughes**

## Berg Lulu.

New

**Lisa Saffer** (soprano) Lulu; **Robert Hayward** (baritone) Dr Schön, Jack the Ripper; **John Graham-Hall** (tenor) Alwa; **Susan Parry** (mezzo) Countess Geschwitz; **Stuart Kale** (tenor) Painter, Second Client; **Anna Burford** (mezzo) Dresser, Schoolboy, Waiter; **Graeme Danby** (bass) Professor of Medicine, Theatre Manager, Banker; **Gwynne Howell** (bass) Schigolch; **Robert Poulton** (baritone) Animal Tamer, Acrobat; **Alan Oke** (tenor) African Prince, Manservant, Marquis; **Roger Buckley** (bass-baritone) Police Commissioner; **Claire Mitcher** (soprano) Girl; **Paul Napier-Burrows** (bass-baritone) Servant; **Jane Powell** (mezzo) Mother; **Moira Harris** (soprano) Designer; **Toby Stafford-Allen** (baritone) Journalist; **English National Opera Orchestra/Paul Daniel**.

### Chandos Opera in English CHAN3130(3)

(medium price, three discs, 2 hours 46 minutes). English libretto included. *Website* www.chandos-records.com. *Producer* Brian Couzens. *Engineer* Ralph Couzens. *Dates* May 14th-19th and 22nd, 2005.

#### Comparisons:

- Lear, Fischer-Dieskau, Grobe, P., Johnson *et al*, Berlin Deutsche Op Orch/Böhm (DG) 435 705-2 (1965)
- Silja, Gutstein, Straka, Mödl *et al*, Vienna State Op Chor and Orch/Böhm (Andante) AND3050 (1968, rev. Nov 2004)
- Stratas, Mazura, Riegel, Minton *et al*, Paris Op Orch/Boulez (DG) 476 2524 (1979)
- Wise, Schöne, Kmentt, Fassbaender *et al*, French Nat Orch/Tate (EMI) 7 54622-2 (1991)
- Hauman, Jaffe, Straka, Juon *et al*, Danish Nat RSO/Schirmer (Chandos) CHAN9540 (1996)

When I last counted, the catalogue included no fewer than seven CD performances of *Lulu*, plus two versions on DVD. Any new *Lulu* must meet a notably high standard in this

unexpectedly crowded field. Chandos knows this well, having released its first *Lulu* less than ten years ago. That live performance, although distinguished by Constance Hauman's appealing heroine, was sabotaged by unsatisfactory recorded sound, and one can't blame Chandos for wanting another try.

This new version is the work's first English-language recording. Richard Stokes's translation will serve, even if inaccuracies and awkwardnesses too often intrude: 'Oh, what happens now?' is not 'Oh, du tust mir weh!' (Schön), and I feel sorry for any Alwa who must sing 'Your lips have lost almost all of their fleshy flavour' or 'I hate such ludicrous whimpering'. If used by an American house, such phrases as 'Bugger it!' and 'You pathetic git!' would surely need to be rethought!

As so often with native speakers singing in English, the principals lack a basic naturalness in their textual communication. A distanced feeling is apt to colour much of the singing, with words pronounced as if in an elocution class – it is all too careful, too *polite*. An exception is the suitably robust-voiced Robert Poulton, who relishes his larger-than-life roles (Animal Tamer, Acrobat) and isn't embarrassed to sing various four-letter words, not to mention 'the bloated porker' and other unfortunate phrases. One would have thought their native tongue would help the artists in delineating the details of their characters' relationships, but that is hardly the case. The Lulu/Schön scenes, for example, all fall flat – one need listen only to the incomparable pairing of Teresa Stratas and Franz Mazura (DG) to realize what is missing.

The blankness of Lisa Saffer's *Lulu* seems partly the result of extended passages in which the words emerge very vaguely indeed. Except for sporadic middle-register passages with minimal accompaniment, the voice is limited in colour and, above the stave, distressingly harsh. Saffer is reasonably precise in coloratura – in the 'Lied der Lulu', for example, although the sentiments expressed there make no impact. Most of the spoken passages prove awkward, even embarrassing (the vital declaration to Schön, beginning 'If I belong to one man in this world' goes for nothing). When a definite dramatic response emerges, it is most often petulance or forced coquetry. This girl/woman's essential *fascination* is conspicuously missing, as is the agony of her degradation in the final scene, where Saffer spares herself the final *Todesschrei*.

The rest of the principals do little better, especially Susan Parry, a dramatically feeble and vocally blowzy Geschwitz. In Robert Hayward one hears none of the frustration, bitterness and rage that so consume the Dr Schöns of Mazura and (in Böhm's DG studio recording) Fischer-Dieskau. The singer's virtually benign Jack the Ripper makes no impression. Gwynne Howell is a disconcertingly mellifluous Schigolch – the lovely sounds seem, for a change, entirely out of place. Stuart Kale works hard in the

Painter's notoriously ungrateful music, while John Graham-Hall's Alwa is similarly hard-pressed (even if his 'I worship you' sounds effectively obsessed in its high *pianissimo*). He lacks the passion that is this character's undoing. Except for Alan Oke, who brings much-needed vitality to the proceedings (a nicely menacing Marquis), the  *comprimarii* are undistinguished, especially Anna Burford's absurdly heavy-voiced Schoolboy – she sounds like a provincial Erda.

Paul Daniel maintains exceptionally tight control, even in passages as loaded with minefields as the Painter/Lulu duet early in Act 1, not to mention the ensembles that make the first scene of Cerha's Act 3 such trying listening in any performance. Daniel – like Böhm in his live performance – goes for the lyrical element whenever possible (listen to the *Verwandlungsmusik* between the second and third scenes of Act 1, contrasted with the blatant raucousness of the transition between the two scenes of Act 3). The English National Opera players do themselves proud technically, even when tonal sumptuousness is missing. Although Daniel does get some steam going for the murder of Schön, overall the last drop of dramatic tension is absent; one misses it in many crucial dialogues, for example, the letter-dictation episode that ends Act 1.

The recorded sound is not notable for warmth or spaciousness, but its clarity is welcome. Still, the performance doesn't measure up. Stick with the original language (the luminous Patricia Wise with Jeffrey Tate if you can track down the EMI recording, otherwise Stratas with Boulez on DG) and study your libretto. **Roger Pines**

## W. Goehr Malpopita.

New

**Thorsten Hennig** (tenor) Adam Schikedanz; **Lilia Milek** (soprano) Evelyne; **Axel Herrig** (baritone) Piet Hein; **Klaus Wegener** (tenor) Steuermann Richard; **Tobias Hage** (bass) Captain Parker; **Daniel Steiner** (tenor) Jim; **Markus Kopp** (baritone) Jack; **Malpopita Chamber Choir and Orchestra/Jin Wang. Capriccio 60 124** (full price, 1 hour 17 minutes). Includes a bonus track about the production. German libretto and English/French translations included. *Website* www.capriccio.at. *Producer* Frank Schneider. *Engineer* Axel Sommerfeld. *Date* May 2004.

Walter Goehr was an important musical figure in inter-war Germany as well as wartime and post-war England. He began his professional life as an operetta conductor, took composition lessons with Krenek and Schoenberg in the mid-1920s, and was apparently one of the busiest composers for broadcast in the Weimar Republic. He settled in England in 1932, where he conducted the première of Britten's *Serenade* and the British premières of Messiaen's *Turangalila* and Mahler's Sixth symphony, as well as revivals of Monteverdi's *Vespers* and *Incoronazione di Poppea*. He remained active as a composer, supplying music for wartime