

Brio

Vigour, spirit, fire; *Con brio*, spiritedly.

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The newsletter of The Friends of Scottish Opera

February 2010

Introduction to The Adventures of Mr Brouček

It's not often that I come across an opera of which I've never knowingly heard a note, but until recently that was precisely my situation with regard to *The Adventures of Mr Brouček*.

It wasn't part of the joint WNO/Scottish Opera Janáček Cycle in the 1970s and 80s, productions conducted by Richard Armstrong and directed by David Pountney which, for me, as for many others too young to remember the ground-breaking performances conducted by Charles Mackerras at ENO in the 50s and 60s, provided an introduction to the work of this most original composer. Though David Pountney directed the piece for ENO in the early 1990s, productions of the work have never been as frequent as they have of other Janáček operas, notably *Jenůfa*, *Káťa Kabanová* and *The Cunning Little Vixen*.

Of course, ever since the first performances in 1920, the plot of the opera has come in for a deal of criticism and even ridicule – but the idea of a character who travels to the moon was used in an opera by Haydn in 1777, and time-travelling back to the period of the Hussite Wars, as Brouček does in the second

part of the opera, is no more ridiculous an idea in itself than the subjects of many 19th century opera plots. It is true that the final version of the libretto, particularly the first part, was the work of many hands, and this may account for a certain lack of consistency that some critics have noticed. There is also no denying the difficulties of staging the piece, but there are plenty of operas no less easy to put on which receive far more regular performances (several by Richard Strauss come to mind for a start...). John Fulljames, who directs this production which is shared with our colleagues at Opera North, has, by all accounts, succeeded in making sense of this most enigmatic of operas. As for the music, although Janáček asks a great deal from his singers, principals as well as chorus, and, above all, from his orchestra, it is difficult to see why the opera hasn't enjoyed similar acclaim to the other Janáček pieces.

One of my first impressions of the piece was how many echoes and pre-echoes of the other Janáček operas it contains. Here you will find the drama of *Jenůfa*, especially in the chorus writing in part two, and the great lyricism of the double love duet in the second act of *Káťa Kabanová*, which would be his next opera after *Brouček*, is foreshadowed in the music of the young lovers at the end of the first act here. So, too, the marvellous orchestral prelude and the interludes which cover Brouček's journeys to and from the Moon look forward to the glowing orchestral world of *The Cunning Little Vixen*. Even the ominous brass fanfares which punctuate the final act of *The Makropoulos Case* have their antecedents in the battle music in the 15th century scenes of this piece.

Of particular interest in *Brouček* is the writing for the chorus, particularly the men. It is an oft-forgotten fact that Janáček wrote a lot of secular music for unaccompanied male voice choir, and he knew how to incorporate the sonorities which male voices could bring into his musical textures. Frequently the tenor writing is very high, but the resulting brilliance is a large part of the sound world of this piece. In part two, set in Mediaeval Prague, Janáček has the chorus sing a traditional Hussite chorale

"Ye who are warriors of God", a melody used also by Smetana in his opera *Libuše*, and in the last two symphonic poems of his cycle *Má Vlast*. This music contemporary with the action on stage is the only actual quotation in the piece – Janáček makes no other attempt to evoke the 15th century in his music, but the patriotic use of this old Czech melody would not have gone unnoticed in 1920, when the idea of an independent Czech state was still in its infancy. Indeed the climax of this scene, complete with organ and bells, contains some of the grandest music Janáček ever penned.

Elsewhere, his ear for orchestral colour is always in evidence, be it in the small, repeated rhythmic fragments that give so much of the music's energy, or in the more lyrical passages. The lively waltz motifs that characterise much of the music for the scenes on the Moon make sure that every section of his large orchestra, and even the conductor, gets a good "work-out" – such music is never easy for anyone involved! At its heart, however, a very rewarding experience is in prospect for all of us, performers and audience alike – by turns funny, touching, zany, exhilarating, moving and ultimately life-affirming. But don't take my word for it – come and see for yourself.

Derek Clark
Head of Music

Muriel Parlane: Vocal Recordings

Some months ago we reported the sad passing of Muriel Parlane, one of Scottish Opera's most devoted supporters. Muriel (stage name Muriel Burnett) had earlier been a noted operatic soprano at Covent Garden and Sadlers Wells. After her death, recordings she made privately were found at her home, and a compact disc of these has been devotedly compiled by Ian Szymanski. A copy of this CD is available, and Anne Higgins will be pleased to receive requests for it.

This is not a commercial venture, and is offered as a gift. A voluntary donation (£5 - £10 is suggested) to the Friends of Scottish Opera would of course be welcomed.



Photo: John Graham-Hall and Claire Wild in *The Adventures of Mr Brouček*

Friends of Scottish Opera listings 2010

ANGUS OPERA GROUP

Angus Opera Group meetings take place at 2.30pm in Edzell Church Hall. For further details please contact Mrs Margaret Taylor (Secretary), Lundie Home Farm Cottage, Menmuir, Brechin DD9 7QW, telephone 01356 647351, e-mail margaret@lundiecottage.wanadoo.co.uk

Sunday 7 March 2010

Building a library – three recordings of Massenet's *Manon*

Sunday 4 April 2010

Neil Jones on Handel – from church to the opera house

Sunday 2 May 2010

L'Enfant et les Sortilèges (Ravel) DVD showing.

CLYDE & THE ISLES GROUP

Information from Mrs Dora Beeteson, Miramare, 9a Eglinton Terrace, Skelmorlie PA17 5ER, telephone 01475 522022, e-mail dorabeet@aol.com

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY BRANCH

Coach trip to matinee performance at the Theatre Royal, Glasgow – coach leaves from Dumfries – please contact Janet Patterson on 01556 612049 to book a place.

Saturday 13 March 2010

Coach trip to *La bohème*.

Saturday 10 April 2010

at 2.00pm Spring Concert at Douglas Arms Hotel, Castle

Douglas featuring Nadine Livingston (soprano) and Francis Church (baritone).

Further information from Mary van Zwanenberg in due course.

FORTH VALLEY BRANCH

Forth Valley Branch meetings take place at 2.30pm in the Smith Art Gallery and Museum, Stirling (except 21 March 2010). Entrance £4.00 (£5.00 guests, £1.00 students). For further details contact Elise Macrae on 01786 822 128 or macraefernbank@btinternet.com.

Sunday 21 March 2010

Donald Maxwell on *The Adventures of Mr Brouček* NB – this meeting will be held in St Columba's Church, Park Terrace, Stirling.

Sunday 11 April 2010

AGM *Favourite Singers* by Neil Mackay, composer and teacher.

GRAMPIAN BRANCH

Grampian Branch meetings take place on 7.30pm on Wednesday evenings at Rubislaw Church Centre. For further information contact Arlene Grant (Secretary) on 01224 212547, e-mail ahgrant@tiscali.co.uk.

Wednesday 24 March 2010

Professor David Hewitt: "Transformation – turning Scottish Narratives into libretti"

Wednesday 26 May 2010

AGM, buffet and quiz.

LOTHIAN & BORDERS BRANCH

Lothians & Borders Branch meetings – which are open to all – take place on Saturdays as listed below in the Empire Rooms, Edinburgh Festival Theatre at 2.00pm. Please enter by the Stage Door at the side of the Theatre. Entrance costs £4.00, including tea, coffee and biscuits, further information from Chairman Ian Hogarth on 0131 332 1503 or Colin Christison on mail@colinc.entadsl.com

Saturday 27 March 2010

Derek Watson on *The Adventures of Mr Brouček* (please note starting time of 2.00pm).

Saturday 10 April 2010

AGM at 2.00pm followed by 2010 *Five:15 Operas Made in Scotland* – Edinburgh Makar Ron Butlin on his new 15 minute-opera *The Money Man*, written in collaboration with Lyell Cresswell.

PERTSHIRE BRANCH

Pertshire Branch meetings take place in the Royal George Hotel, Perth on Sunday afternoons at 2.30pm. Entrance £6.00, including wine or soft drink. To book contact Dr Hamish McBride, Comelybank, by Aberfeldy PH15 2EF, telephone 01887 840355, email h.mcbride@homecall.co.uk or Mrs Marjorie Bourne, 6 Skye Crescent, Crieff PH7 3FB telephone 01764 650822 or e-mail marjoriebourne@hotmail.com.

Sunday 28 February 2010

Is Opera Legal? By Douglas Risk, retired Sheriff and Chairman of Grampian branch.

Sunday 28 March 2010

Donald Maxwell, renowned Perth baritone, on *The Adventures of Mr Brouček* and his international career.

STRATHCLYDE BRANCH

Opera Study Days

Saturday 20 March 2010

The Adventures of Mr Brouček Introduced by Derek Watson.

Saturday 8 May 2010

Five:15 Operas Made in Scotland

Introduced by Anne Higgins.

Study Days are held on Saturdays in Hyndland Community Hall, Novar Drive from 10.30am to 3.30/4.00pm. A regular speaker introduces each work and representatives of the cast, production and music teams contribute to the discussion.

Tickets cost £20.00, which includes lunch with wine, and should be booked directly with Mrs Anne Higgins, Friends Manager, Friends of Scottish Opera, 39 Elmbank Crescent, Glasgow G2 4PT, telephone 0141 242 0599 (office hours) or e-mail anne.higgins@scottishopera.org.uk by the Monday preceding each Study Day.

Branch Events

Tuesday 27 April 2010

at 7.00pm Branch AGM and speaker to be confirmed

TAYSIDE BRANCH

Tayside Branch Meetings take place at 7.30pm and are open to all. Talks are preceded by an optional buffet meal at 6.30pm and take place in the Art Society Rooms, Roseangle, Dundee. To book for the meal, contact Jan Bethell on 01382 667956 at least 3 days in advance. For any other queries contact Denis Bethell on 01382 667956 or e-mail bethell.dundee@virgin.net.

Thursday 4 March 2010

The Piano: how it evolved, how it's made, how it's tuned by Jim Clow.

SCOTTISH OPERA ON BBC RADIO 3

Radio 3 is to present a week-long celebration of the finest artists performing in Scotland today, featuring a recording of Scottish Opera's recent production of Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*.

Tune in to Radio 3 at 7pm from 1st – 5th March 2010 when you can hear all of Scotland's major performing groups featured on Radio 3's Performance on 3 from 7pm; *Royal Scottish National Orchestra* (1st March), *BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra* (2nd March), *Scottish Opera The Elixir of Love* (3rd March), *Scottish Ensemble* (4th March) and *Scottish Chamber Orchestra* (5th March).

And every lunchtime at 1.00pm from Tuesday 2nd March - Friday 5th March, Radio 3 will broadcast a series of Lunchtime Concerts LIVE from the concert hall at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama featuring a line-up of top international artists including one of the RSAMD's most famous alumni, soprano Lisa Milne, celebrated for performances as

diverse as Mozart to Janis Joplin and Jacques Brel (2 March)!

The inspirational young violinist Nicola Benedetti, whose meteoric success has made her a household name, makes her début performance on Radio 3's Lunchtime Concert as a recitalist.

The celebrated and well-established Hebrides Ensemble, based in Edinburgh, make a welcome appearance back at the RSAMD with a programme inspired by the Italian Commedia dell'arte figure of Pierrot and works specially commissioned for them.

And finally, not to be confined to Scottish artists alone, the French-Canadian pianist Marc-André Hamelin treats listeners to a double bill including the great Piano Sonata No 1 considered to be Liszt's finest masterpiece.

Dame Anne Evans: Emerging Artists' Masterclass

Scottish Opera's Emerging Artists programme, in partnership with the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, gives graduate singers the opportunity of a lifetime – a year of full-time work with the Company to help them launch their careers.

On Tuesday 10 November 2009 Dame Anne Evans, one of Britain's most successful singers, gave a masterclass at Scottish Opera's Edington Street Production Studios before an invited audience of Friends and Patrons of Scottish Opera.

Nadine Livingston, soprano, sang the Letter Song from Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*; Louise Collett gave two arias from Massenet's *Werther*; and the Albanian soprano Miranda Sinani sang one of Norina's arias from Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* plus the Song to the Moon from Dvořák's *Rusalka*.

There followed a lively discussion chaired by Dame Anne, concluding a most impressive and enjoyable evening.

Scottish Opera Listings end February to June 2010

OPERA HIGHLIGHTS TOUR CONTINUES

All performances are performed with piano accompaniment and begin at 7.30pm. Tickets costing £10 (£5 under 26s) can be booked online at www.scottishopera.org.uk or by telephone on the 24 hour booking line 0844 847 1645 (booking fee applies) or at the appropriate address below:

Saturday 27 February
Sgoil Lionacleit, Isle of Benbecula
Tickets from Macgillivray's Shop, Balivanich, Isle of Benbecula, HS7 5LA. Tel: 01870 602 525

Tuesday 2 March
Castlebay Hall, Isle of Barra
Tickets from A&C Maclean, General Store & Fuel, The Square, Castlebay, Isle of Barra, HS9 5XD. Tel: 01871 810 291

Thursday 4 March
Benderloch Victory Hall
Tickets from Terry Donovan. Tel: 01631 720 498

Saturday 6 March
McLaren Hall, Killin
Tickets from Newsfirst, Main Street, Killin, FK21 8UJ. Tel: 01567 820 362

Tuesday 9 March
Tarbert Village Hall
Tickets from Kintyre Electrical, Campbelltown Road, Tarbert, PA29 6TN. Tel: 01880 820 272

Thursday 11 March
Darvel Town Hall
Tickets from The Palace Theatre, 9 Green Street, Kilmarnock, KA1 3BN. Tel: 01563 554 900

Saturday 13 March
Eastgate Theatre, Peebles
Tickets from Eastgate Theatre, Peebles, EH45 8AD. Tel: 01721 725 777 www.eastgatearts.com

Tuesday 16 March
Heart of Hawick – Tower Mill
Tickets from VisitScotland box office in Tower Mill (box office hours). Tel: 01450 360 688 www.thebooth.co.uk

Thursday 18 March
Lochside Theatre, Castle Douglas
Tickets from Lochside Theatre, Lochside Road, Castle Douglas, Dumfries and Galloway, DG7 1EU. Tel: 01556 504 506 www.lochsidetheatre.co.uk

Saturday 20 March
Howden Park Centre, Livingston
Tickets from Howden Park Centre. Tel: 01506 777 666 www.howdenparkcentre.co.uk

THEATRE ROYAL, GLASGOW PERFORMANCES

Tickets priced £8.50 to £63.00 (concessions available including £10.00 under 26 tickets) are on sale from the King's Theatre, 297 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4JN or phone 0844 871 7647 or visit www.scottishopera.org.uk or www.ambassadortickets.com/glasgow

Saturday 27 February 7.15pm
La bohème

Tuesday 2 March 6.00pm
La bohème Unwrapped (free event but tickets must be booked)

Wednesday 3 March 7.15pm
La bohème

Saturday 6 March 7.15pm
La bohème

Thursday 11 March 7.15pm
La bohème

Saturday 13 March 2.15pm
La bohème (free pre-show talk but tickets must be booked; audio-described performance and touch tour for visually impaired patrons, contact box office for details)

Thursday 8 April 7.15pm
The Adventures of Mr Brouček

Friday 9 April 6.00pm
The Adventures of Mr Brouček Unwrapped (free event but tickets must be booked)

Saturday 10 April 7.15pm
The Adventures of Mr Brouček (free pre-show talk but tickets must be booked; audio-described performance and touch tour for visually impaired patrons, contact box office for details)

EDINBURGH FESTIVAL THEATRE PERFORMANCES

Tickets priced £14.00 to £62.00 (concessions available including £10.00 under 26 tickets) are on sale from the Edinburgh Festival Theatre, 13-29 Nicolson Street, Edinburgh EH8 9FT, telephone 0131 529 6000 or visit www.scottishopera.org.uk or www.festivaltheatre.org.uk

Wednesday 14 April 7.15pm
The Adventures of Mr Brouček

Thursday 15 April 6.00pm
The Adventures of Mr Brouček Unwrapped (free event but tickets must be booked)

Friday 16 April 7.15pm
The Adventures of Mr Brouček (free pre-show talk but tickets must be booked; audio-described performance and touch tour for visually impaired patrons, contact box office for details)

Sunday 18 April 4.00pm
La bohème

Monday 19 April 6.00pm
La bohème Unwrapped (free event but tickets must be booked)

Tuesday 20 April 7.15pm
La bohème

Thursday 22 April 7.15pm
La bohème

Saturday 24 April 7.15pm
La bohème (free pre-show talk but tickets must be booked; audio-described performance and touch tour for visually impaired patrons, contact box office for details)

THE LEMON TREE, ABERDEEN PERFORMANCES

Tuesday 27 April 7.30pm
Kátya Kabanová
Piano-accompanied performance sung in English

Wednesday 28 April 7.30pm
Kátya Kabanová
Piano-accompanied performance sung in English
Tickets £13 (£5 under 26s) from outlets listed below.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE, ABERDEEN PERFORMANCES

Tickets priced £15.00 to £47.00 (concessions available including £10.00 under 26 tickets) are on sale from His Majesty's Theatre, Rosemount Viaduct, Aberdeen AB25 1GL and The Music Hall, Union Street, Aberdeen AB10 1QS, telephone 01224 641 122 or visit www.scottishopera.org.uk or www.boxofficeaberdeen.com

Thursday 29 April 7.30pm
La bohème

Friday 30 April 6.00pm
La bohème Unwrapped (free event but tickets must be booked)

Saturday 1 May 7.30pm
La bohème (free pre-show talk but tickets must be booked; audio-described performance and touch tour for visually impaired patrons, contact box office for details).

EDEN COURT, INVERNESS PERFORMANCES

Tickets priced £15.00 (restricted view) to £46.00 (concessions available including £10.00 under 26 tickets) are on sale from Eden Court, Bishops Court, Inverness IV3 5SA, telephone 01463 234234 or visit www.scottishopera.org.uk or www.eden-court.co.uk

Tuesday 4 May 7.15pm
Kátya Kabanová

Piano-accompanied performance sung in English

Wednesday 5 May 7.15pm
Kátya Kabanová
Piano-accompanied performance sung in English

Thursday 6 May 7.15pm
La bohème

Friday 7 May 6.00pm
La bohème Unwrapped (free event but tickets must be booked)

Saturday 8 May 7.15pm
La bohème (free pre-show talk but tickets must be booked; audio-described performance and touch tour for visually impaired patrons, contact box office for details)

ST ANDREW'S IN THE SQUARE, GLASGOW CONCERTS

(For tickets (£11.50/£8.50) visit www.scottishopera.org.uk or telephone the 24 hour booking line on 0844 847 1645 quoting "St Andrew's in the Square".)

Sunday 6 June 3.00pm
Rory Macdonald conducts and featuring Nadine Livingston (soprano) in a programme of Bartók, Mozart, Rossini and Mendelssohn.

FIVE:15 OPERAS MADE IN SCOTLAND PERFORMANCES

ELPHINSTONE HALL, ABERDEEN – on sale 25 March, see Scottish Opera website for details.

Saturday 15 May 7.30pm

Sunday 16 May 3.00pm

Sunday 16 May 7.30pm

Tickets priced £15 for Edinburgh and Glasgow performances from the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh on 0131 228 1404 or at www.traverse.co.uk

TRAVERSE THEATRE, EDINBURGH

Thursday 20 May 7.30pm

Friday 21 May 7.30pm

Saturday 22 May 7.30pm

ORAN MÓR, GLASGOW

Tuesday 25 May 7.30pm

Wednesday 26 May 7.30pm

Thursday 27 May 7.30pm

Changes at Brio

I am pleased to share the exciting news that we are making some changes to *Brio*.

From May, it will take a magazine format which will give us space to bring you more in-depth news and information from the Friends and Scottish Opera. As well as the Friends, branch and Company news you are used to receiving, the new expanded publication will bring you news from behind the scenes of the latest productions, interviews with singers, creative teams and staff, reviews, competitions, and articles about the operas Scottish Opera is performing.

Brio magazine will be published 3 times a year, and in between you'll continue to get shorter updates from Friends Manager Anne Higgins about local branch activities.

I hope that you will enjoy the new *Brio* when it comes out in May - do let us know what you think.

SIMON PATERSON, CHAIRMAN, THE FRIENDS OF SCOTTISH OPERA



Ian Wallace 1919 –2009

The original “crossover” artist, Ian Wallace was a born entertainer.

A marvellous raconteur with impeccable comic timing, he was also an accomplished wordsmith and consequently a natural broadcaster. His natural warmth and wit meant that he had a genuine and wonderfully warm rapport with audiences throughout his long and varied career.

Above all his many talents, he was a very good opera singer. His recordings of the Rossini buffo baritone roles stand with the very best and he was one of the first British singers to have a post-war international career. “Basso Scozese” was his Italian title, and a fitting tribute to a first class operatic performer. A wise mentor, he was held in great affection by colleagues and audiences alike.

DONALD MAXWELL

Mikhail Agrest Conducts a Dazzling Concert

On Sunday 6 December 2009 the Russian-born conductor Mikhail Agrest conducted the Orchestra of Scottish Opera in a concert played to a packed and enthusiastic audience at St Andrew’s in the Square, Glasgow.

The concert opened with Schnittke’s *Suite in the Old Style*, a work which in form and musical language was deliberately reminiscent of the dance suites of the baroque and early classical periods. Nonetheless, the closing bars made clear that this was composed in the late 20th century.

There followed Janáček’s very youthful *Suite for Strings*, markedly different acoustically from the more familiar mature operas of this composer. The players clearly revelled in the luscious sonorities of the hall.

The concert concluded with a truly dazzling performance of Beethoven’s *Symphony No 7*.

There could be no doubting that here was a conductor and an orchestra of the very highest quality.

Wyn Davies Entertains

On Sunday 22 November 2009 Wyn Davies, conductor of *The Italian Girl in Algiers*, gave, at Scottish Opera Headquarters, Elmbank Crescent, Glasgow a one-man piano and vocal cabaret entertainment.

As the notice of the event correctly stated: “Wyn can be relied upon to perform cheap tunes (some of them lovingly salvaged from bins of other people’s discarded music) in the most tasteful of styles, including songs which take opera less than seriously, as well as good ones by Noel Coward, Cole Porter and others”.

Two illustrative pieces comprised a ballad praising Scottish glens (and whiskies), and a lament by a hospital patient who had received so many organ transplants that “I’m not myself any more”.

Wyn’s performance was followed by a substantial supper with wine, (early) Christmas crackers, and a raffle, all organised by the Strathclyde Branch of the Friends.

The large and enthusiastic audience thus also made a valuable financial contribution as part of the Friends’ support of Scottish Opera.

Once again Balloons and Gas supplied the decorations free of charge – for which we are most grateful.

CLYDE AND THE ISLES AT KNOCK CASTLE

At our third introductory Friends of Scottish Opera event on 27 April 2009, presenting excerpts from *Così fan tutte* Act 1, a core group of Friends was formed. Bruce and Nicky Walker were among the new Friends. Their home is Knock Castle - entirely private, no coach parties, no souvenir shops - though many may wonder how they might gain admission as they make their way along the coast road to Largs. The Greenock shipbuilder who built and lived in this building certainly had an eye for location with splendid views out to Bute and Cumbrae across the Clyde.

There on Friday 16 October last year was a brand new shiny black Yamaha piano, perfectly in tune, ready to take a bow at the inaugural meeting of our fledgling branch – now known as Clyde and the Isles: an introduction to Donizetti’s *The Elixir of Love*.

Far from being cold as Scottish castles are fabled to be, our meeting was held in a warm comfortable drawing room seating about 30 people. James Grossmith, Scottish Opera’s Chorus Master, was paying his third visit to us. Each time has been to a different venue but none quite like this one. He enthralled the audience with tales of Donizetti’s life and the broad influence of bel canto. Francis Church sang some of Belcore’s music, and then wine and nibbles were served. Our hosts made us very welcome and Bruce told me he would like an opera in his house. Actually, he said garden but I know the West Coast midges are not something singers need to get acquainted with. We will be meeting again at the Seaview Café in Wemyss Bay on Friday 19 February to hear excerpts from *La bohème*.

DORA BEETESON

Opera Now

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R RHINEGOLD
PUBLISHING

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