

A Peep at Newsletter No. 46 of the Richard Strauss Society

Joyce and Michael Kennedy Competition – A Trust is Born [A letter from Joyce and Michael Kennedy]

We thought your members, who have always been so supportive of our Prize for the Singing of the *Lieder* and arias of Richard Strauss, would like to know that we have now formed a trust to govern the award. We have recently been accepted by the Charities Commission, so all future donations to the prize are eligible for Gift Aid. ...

Elisabeth Schumann and Richard Strauss [By Joy Puritz]

Already in 1905, when she was a 17-year-old student in Dresden, Elisabeth Schumann was beginning to nurture a special love for the music of Richard Strauss. His new opera, *Salome*, was then being rehearsed for its first performance at the Dresden Court Opera. Elisabeth, who already knew one or two Strauss songs, went along to some of the rehearsals and found the music very exciting.

The social circle she moved in at that time, which revolved around her musical mentor, Professor Felix Draeseke, didn't approve of this controversial composer: Draeseke maintained that Strauss's music was unbridled and extreme and that there was too much programme music among the composer's works....

Letter to the Editor

From Timothy Harris re Strauss's *Enoch Arden*

I tend to think that the music is a bit better than either Strauss or you allow [*cf.* Newsletter No. 45 p.23]; I suspect Strauss didn't much like having to play second fiddle, as it were, to a poet, and this coloured his view of things...

Richard Klein – In Memoriam

Members of the RSS Committee were saddened to learn on 27 June that Richard Klein had died that morning in St George's Nursing Home in Cobham. He was 84, and had been ill for just three or four months. Richard had been living alone for several years on the outskirts of Leatherhead having lost his wife many years ago. Opera was his great love in music, this interest having started at an early age. This interest covered most composers, but especially Richard Strauss and Benjamin Britten – as was evident from the structure of the Service of Remembrance at Christchurch, Coldharbour, Dorking on 16 July, there being during the service extracts from *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd* and *Der Rosenkavalier* (Presentation of the Rose scene) concluding with the fourth movement of Mozart's Symphony No. 39....

Richard Strauss Society: Chairman's Report 2011

It is good to see that we are managing to sustain our membership level at around the 150 level and I do hope we can now use this steady base to begin to grow the Society

which will enable us to sustain a more regular series of meetings and events. I urge every member to see if they can introduce one new member during 2012.

Nevertheless, we did manage a number of exciting and more than interesting events during 2010. As usual, we supported the Joyce and Michael Kennedy award for the singing of Strauss at the Royal Northern College of Music and it was good that we were able to follow up with our own lieder recital in London with the winner and one of the runners-up. I am pleased that we will be able to repeat this event later this year.

I was privileged to be able to interview Lady Solti about her great husband who played such an important role during the last, post-war, years in Strauss's life....

The Ballet Collaborations of Richard Strauss

By Wayne Heisler Jr. University of Rochester Press, 2009,
355 pp, £55.00

[Review by Roy Browning]

"Strauss . . . thinks he is suffering from senile decay - he wants to write a ballet." [Romain Rolland Diary, 1 March 1900.]

We know a great deal about Strauss as a composer of opera; who hasn't seen *Der Rosenkavalier*? And also about Strauss as a composer of tone poems and Lieder. We even know much about his orchestral works, concertos, choral works, melodramas, a cappella pieces and chamber music. But his creations for ballet? Actually, we do know quite a lot about them! Michael Kennedy gives certain details about *Josephslegende* ("What saves the work is the quality of Strauss's music . . . [he] turned the score into another symphonic poem") as well as *Schlagobers* and he

mentions *Verklungene Feste* and the incomplete *Die Insel Kythere* in his *Master Musicians Richard Strauss*. Alan Jefferson in his *The Life of Richard Strauss* provides much the same level of detail and, as one would expect, Norman Del Mar deals with all four in considerable detail in his magisterial, 3-volume, *Richard Strauss*. The ever-reliable Franz Trenner tells us about the premières of the three completed ballets and provides original cast lists...

Die Frau ohne Schatten: the Mariinsky Opera at the Festival Theatre, Edinburgh

[Review by Michael Fuller]

Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Opera have a long-standing association with Edinburgh. Voices still speak admiringly of their all-Russian residences at the 1991 and 1995 International Festivals (still billed, then, as the Kirov). The orchestra returned in 1997 and 2008 saw a staging of *Król Roger*, with concert performances of other works. For the concluding operatic performances of the 2011 International Festival, they scaled one of the greatest operatic heights of all, bringing with them Jonathan Kent's staging of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, and doing so triumphantly. At the end of the first performance (1 September), it was announced that Gergiev would be the Festival's new President, cementing his relationship with the city.

This was the Scottish première of Strauss and Hofmannsthal's masterpiece. To enable performances to be given on three successive evenings, the Mariinsky fielded two casts in all five of the main roles: I attended the second 'A' cast performance, on 3 September.

Die Frau ohne Schatten is a huge work, its fantastical scenario posing all kinds of problems in terms of its staging.

Intended to be a 'fairy-tale', the story juxtaposes a spirit-world with that of human beings, necessitating numerous scene changes. The moral and symbolic world of the piece is complex: the shadowless Empress is unable to conceive; unless she does so, her husband will be turned to stone. Inspired by her daemonic Nurse, she seeks a woman of the 'lower' world who is prepared to sell her shadow (and thereby remain childless herself). Ultimately, realizing the misery which has driven the woman to contemplate making this sacrifice, the Empress refuses to close the deal. Her semi-petrified husband is freed by this act of compassion, and the two women – both now possessed of shadows – are reunited with their husbands in matrimonial bliss, off-stage voices prefiguring the children who are to be born to them. All this dramatic and symbolic complexity requires clear elaboration on the stage...

Die Frau ohne Schatten (Kvinden Uden Skygge)

Copenhagen 22 May 2011

[Review by Andrew Neill]

It will surprise few readers that this production was something of a curate's egg: the ideal version of *Die Frau ohne Schatten* being more or less an impossibility. However, the more I think about what I attended in Copenhagen the more I feel frustrated. Having said that the good outweighed the bad, even though the part of the Empress taxed the voice of Sylvie Valayre beyond her capabilities and made the final act rather uncomfortable. Mind you, Strauss is at his most demanding (particularly in Act 3) and many a soprano must be dreading the moment when she takes centre stage.

As usual, it is best to start at the beginning and, therefore, with the Opera House itself. Opened in 2005, it was designed by the [architect](#) Henning Larsen and the acoustics were managed by Arup Acoustics. Costing \$500m, the Danes have been given an uncompromising building perched on the harbour-side across the water from the Little Mermaid. It sounds wonderful, although the sight lines in the stalls were not good and anyone shorter than me would not be happy sitting behind someone of my height. ...

Before looking in more detail at the production, it is perhaps wise to look at this longest and most complex of Strauss's fifteen operas. It is, in my view, essential to ensure clarity in any production to assist the average opera-goer obtain the maximum from their experience. William Mann highlighted part of the problem when he looked at Strauss's contribution: "'We', wrote Hofmannsthal (meaning 'you', one suspects), 'have missed lightness of touch in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*'. The general opinion is that it was Hofmannsthal who ruined its chances of success by overloading the piece with symbolism...

Richard Strauss: A Musical Life

By Raymond Holden; Yale University Press, 2011, 162 pp.

[Review by the Editor]

The amount of work encapsulated in this survey of a hero's life, the hero, of course, being Richard Strauss, must have been prodigious. Not only must the labour of tracking Strauss's movements as a popular and much sought-after conductor have been exhausting, so too must have been the peripatetic life style that Strauss adopted soon after being recruited by Hans von Bulow to the Court Orchestra in Meiningen. In a sense, Strauss never looked back

and one wonders when examining the lists of his conducting engagements whether he ever thought about resting on his laurels. After the stunning critical, popular and financial success of *Salome*, he could have taken life a little easier even if at home his wife Pauline was forever making sure he did not slack at his compositional duties.

Since the time (1947) that Strauss embarked on his first flight – to Northolt – life for conductors and singers has become progressively easier as journey times became substantially less than they were than in the days of the great ocean liners, albeit probably a lot more stressful and, of course, facilitating the timetabling of yet more engagements in the opera house, the concert hall and the recital room. There are, within one of the appendices of Raymond Holden's book, nearly 50 pages detailing the works that Strauss conducted during his time as a tenured conductor embracing stints in Meiningen, Weimar, Munich, Berlin and Vienna. Strauss seemed not averse to extended travelling away from home, touring some his favourite works (including many of his own of which he could be said to be inordinately proud...

Suggested RSS Trips in the 2011/12 Season

[Outline of possibilities by Colin Murison Small]

A list is given below of possible RSS trips for the coming season. As in recent years, I will provisionally reserve the opera seats and usually the hotel to permit easy socialisation in the relevant city. Participants will continue to book and pay for their own air travel and simple Eurostar rail journeys (on-line or through a travel agent), though I will happily help if needed. For non-Eurostar trains, I will normally make a group booking, with the cost being paid to the Society

when the opera seats are paid for. Those opting to join any of these trips will need to pay their hotel bill direct to the hotel... For **further information**, it is recommended that you visit the RSS website (www.richard-strauss-society.co.uk) where you can find out 'everything' about the productions and the theatres in which they are being performed. ...

Feierlicher Einzug der Ritter des Johanniter-Ordens

[Note by James Stobart]

Richard Strauss's short prelude *Feierlicher Einzug der Ritter des Johanniterordens* (TrV224) – Solemn (Holy) Entrance of the Knights of St John was written in 1909 for large brass ensemble. The first recording of *Feierlicher Einzug* was made by the Locke Brass Consort, conducted by the writer for an LP of Music for Symphonic Brass released by Chandos Records in 1979 (and still available today). The recording was made in the Unitarian Chapel, Rosslyn Hill, Hampstead. The main piece of the day was Strauss's *Festmusik der Stadt Wien*, extravagantly scored for ten trumpets yet outdone by the fifteen trumpets that Strauss required for *Feierlicher Einzug*! Some years later, we witnessed a procession of the Knights of St John across an impressive courtyard when visiting the Chateau at Blois in France. Resplendent in their flowing robes and moving at a solemn pace, the Knights were accompanied by the strains of Strauss's noble music relayed from several loudspeakers....