

PRIMA LA MUSICA?: A CRITICAL PORTFOLIO

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A Dossier

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

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MASTER OF ARTS (1994)
(Music Criticism)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: *Prima la musica?: A Critical Portfolio*

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NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 171

ABSTRACT

This portfolio contains documented interviews, reviews, profiles and programme notes written during an internship in music criticism. The internship was undertaken primarily in Europe, but also in North America. A specific focus on opera criticism has been a primary objective.

Section I contains an introduction, which offers an overview of the critical internship project, its organization and execution. A subsequent essay explores my perspectives on opera criticism, as developed throughout the internship. Section II comprises a series of interviews which were conducted during the internship period in Europe. Sections III and IV contain music criticism written between September 1992 and March 1994.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For helping me to transform this opportunity into an ongoing personal quest, I extend many thanks to Roland de Beer. What began as a tantalizing discussion about Wagner has become an extended game of musical chess, marked by the potential *jouissance* of discovering new moves and rediscovering old ones. Mr. de Beer's patience and dedication in sharing his command of the game have eclipsed my initial expectations of the mentorship role.

For guiding me towards a clean finish and providing a valuable link between the internship project and the completed dossier, I thank Dr. Paul Rapoport and Dr. William Renwick.

My nuclear and extended families formed the supportive network which enabled me to realize this aspiration. I am more thankful, however, for their willingness to open their hearts and their ears and to share a small and meaningful part of my obsession.

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INTRODUCTION

The material contained in the subsequent sections of this dossier was written entirely between the fall of 1992 and the spring of 1994. This twenty-month period may be further subdivided to reflect evolving objectives and opportunities set forth below: the 1992-3 academic year; mid-May through mid-August 1993; the 1993-4 academic year. Each article is set off by a heading which indicates the subject of the article, and where appropriate, place and date of publication and published title. Unpublished articles are arranged chronologically according to the date(s) of the performance(s) reviewed. For the sake of unity in terms of content, the articles and items from all three periods have been organized into three main sections: interviews, reviews and programme notes.

While this segmentation is logical in terms of subject material, it also obscures the context within which individual performances were experienced and interviews were conducted. It is arguable that any meaningful context should be deducible from the articles themselves. Yet considering that a reviewer usually writes with a distinct readership in mind, my reader is on one page a student at McMaster University in Hamilton, and on the next a resident of The Hague, Amsterdam or Prague. The reader cannot be all of these at once. Some variations in style and content should be noticeable. The interviews have been edited to accommodate unnatural syntax which arises in spoken language, especially that of a non-native tongue. It may also be that some material is more than merely foreign—especially in the interview section and in other articles dealing with European events. Not every name and production mentioned may be familiar; neither may be all of the vocabulary particular to the industry, but it is hoped that the reader may glean from these pieces some sense of European artistic life in the summer of 1993.

It is fundamentally because of the varieties of intended readership that the following discussion focuses on the material more from a chronological perspective than from one which addresses the three categories of written material as distinct. Several articles are not discussed at all, as their content probably does not provoke any factual queries. Some aspects of these neglected articles will, however, be incorporated into the more general discussion of music criticism.

The first period is essentially represented by articles published in "Head", the Arts and Entertainment magazine of the McMaster University student newspaper *The Silhouette*. Several of the concert programme notes were also written then. My key objective during this time was to gain experience publishing my writings about music. Contrary to my expectations, contact and interaction with editors at *The Silhouette* were minimal, reduced to a few conversations about which concerts might be covered. The final period encompasses a body of published material, written for *Opera Canada*, *The Hamilton Spectator*, and *Hudební Rozhledy* amongst others.

These two exterior periods parallel the academic terms during which prescribed courses were completed for the Master's Degree in Music Criticism at McMaster University. They also, however, frame a middle period of intense and exhilarating research, unbounded by narrow geographical constraints: a critical internship in Europe under the guidance and direction of Mr. Roland de Beer, music editor of the Dutch daily newspaper *De Volkskrant*.

When Mr. de Beer, in October of 1992, agreed to assume the role of mentor for this project, there were a seemingly endless possible number of paths upon which this undertaking could unfold. Mr. de Beer's invaluable counsel from that time to the present helped to shape and define some of the larger-scale objectives. However, it is certainly his serious and devoted attitude for which I am most grateful. There is no doubt that his role in the project was not that of a mere catalyst or elucidator. My

respect for him as a writer, critic and instructor rivals my appreciation of his ability to inspire others through both the spoken and printed word. It was Mr. de Beer's suggestion that I adopt a top-down approach to planning this project by creating an ideal "wish list" of the music that I wanted to experience and employ as the basis for writing about live performance.

For most urban centres, European musical life during the summer months is not a drought-ridden antithesis to the hectic schedule of the regular musical season. Summer music festivals and seasons abound. With virtually every genre of musical performance available, I decided to focus my attention whenever and wherever possible on opera. This choice was primarily motivated by the fact that opera is still largely a European tradition, even in non-European opera houses. My aspiration was to come at least one step closer to some of the venerable operatic institutions whose acquaintance I had only previously made through secondary sources.

No fewer than 32 opera productions were included in the schedule planned jointly by Mr. de Beer and myself. But as operatic activity is but one thermometer of a city's artistic temperature, a secondary objective was also developed: non-operatic musical performances as well as spoken theatre and dance were also included in the schedule, whenever possible, to provide broader artistic exposure. In total, I attended over 60 live performances in 90 days, spanning eleven cities and six countries. While this may seem an exhausting calendar of events—and indeed it was—there was a very specific agenda behind this whirlwind of activity. The plan was to write articles and reviews of several of the performances, some of which would be published. I was also expected to verbally defend my writings and demonstrate my knowledge of the work(s) being reviewed, the actual performance along with other related issues.

Six months of correspondence with Mr. de Beer and various press departments throughout Europe secured the ingredients for a promising critical internship. Scheduling decisions, such as which festivals I wanted to include, were made several months in advance. Due to time restrictions, I chose to forego festivals in Italy, for

instance, and opted for some of the larger, higher profile festivals in Austria, Germany and Holland. Some of the interviewing possibilities were also discussed and arranged in advance, such as those conducted in Vienna, because of the time needed to arrange press appointments. Interviews conducted later in the internship were arranged once I had arrived at a particular location and had gathered some sense of who would have the information that I was seeking. As effective planning and scheduling is necessary for travelling arts writers, I was encouraged to assume all planning responsibility as soon as I had arrived in Europe.

The main reason for undertaking a critical internship is to gain experience in practical music criticism. It is expected that written articles and reviews based on specific musical events will undergo some sort of evaluation with the possibility that some material will be published. Mr. de Beer, as with any editor, is continually conscious of the readership of the publication for which he writes. I was therefore intrigued when Mr. de Beer recommended bringing on board two additional music critics who could offer two more distinct editorial perspectives: Mr. Aad van der Ven, senior music editor of the *Haagsche Courant*, and Dr. Eddie Vetter, music critic for *De Telegraaf* and professor of musicology and music journalism at the University of Amsterdam and the Utrecht State University.

The initial meeting with Mr. van der Ven and Dr. Vetter quickly revealed their individual musical preferences. It was agreed that the former would provide editorial feedback on several articles about contemporary and out-of-town performances, while the latter would focus on articles about opera performances. Fortunately, both Mr. van der Ven and Dr. Vetter were reviewing some of the performances themselves for their respective publications. Initially, Mr. de Beer had agreed to relinquish his supervisory capacity with regard to the articles delegated to the other critics. But his sense of general responsibility to the project prevented him from doing this. I was therefore able to discuss some of the written pieces with at least two editors.

The experience of working with different editors is particularly common for freelance writers. Although the more general objectives underlying reviews written for different publications may be similar, editors in command may have particular and divergent opinions on style, format and content. Editors may be a silent and unnoticeable link between the writing and the printed result or they can assume an integral role in moulding the finished product. Writing for a distinct audience may therefore entail more than just the consideration of a different collective group of eyes. The full-time music critic or arts writer writing full-time for a particular journal and editor may be the exception. As employment trends tend to support a swing away from such opportunities and towards more free-lance arrangements, the multi-editor situation is increasingly prevalent.

The ability to work comfortably with various editors is a necessary attribute to ensure self-respect and ongoing employment. A by-line never includes the editor's name. A published article, in its final and edited version, contributes to the writer's reputation, for better or for worse. The reader is neither aware of any changes made to the original text nor by whose hand they may have been made. Sometimes there are no editorial changes. Sometimes they are for the better. Sometimes they result in embarrassing errors. Fortunately, working with Mr. van der Ven and Mr. de Beer was both uncomplicated and agreeable, due largely to their familiarity with the subject material and their respect for my autonomy.

It was very apparent early in the internship that each member of the triumvirate would produce very different reviews of the same concert, as indeed I was able to verify after we attended, as a group, a performance of *Les Troyens* at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. Even our dinner conversation during one of the hour-long intermissions revealed the individuality of the four critical faculties at work. More important, however, was the feedback from the three critics about how my particular opinion was expressed in a written article. Even though healthy debate

evolved from differences of opinion, the main focus of each editorial meeting was how that opinion could be conveyed successfully in print.

Mr. van der Ven described the readership of the *Haagsche Courant* as a fairly conservative but knowledgeable one, reminding me that The Hague is the seat of Dutch government and primarily inhabited by civil servants. During our second meeting, after we had discussed some written material that I had provided, he decided that his readers would be interested in articles about two festivals that I would be attending. The reviews of the Swedish Drottningholm Festival and the Festival of Aix-en-Provence were written to meet this request. My specific assignment was to write articles intended for a reader who was not at the performances in question. In addition, it was recommended that some background information about the festivals and some sense of the local flavour would provide a suitable framework within which to discuss the actual performances. Photos were, of course, expected.

Mr. van der Ven's comments on overall structure with respect to the writing of an article which combines reviewing with general interest information were extremely helpful. Even more useful, however, were his insightful and eye-opening (or perhaps ear-opening) suggestions about reviewing new works. The article about a new opera by Ton de Leeuw, *Antigone*, was written for Mr. van der Ven. We also attended premières of works by Henryk Górecki, Sofia Gubaydulina, Henri Pousseur and Klas Torstensson. A lively post-performance discussion was always in order.

Dr. Eddie Vetter has avoided assuming the position of senior music editor at *De Telegraaf* several times in order to maintain his active teaching career. His academic research is mainly in the field of medieval and renaissance music. During the period that I worked with him, he was overseeing more than ten graduate and doctoral candidates while at the same time being responsible for weekly reviews and articles. Unlike Mr. de Beer and Mr. van der Ven, Dr. Vetter's professional life embraces an important duality, one that I envy for its overall balancing effect and preservation of diversity within.

The extremes of this duality are highlighted by the nature of the publication for which he writes. *De Telegraaf* has the highest circulation of any newspaper in Europe. It should also be noted, as Dr. Vetter readily admits, that its appearance, content and bias move towards the sensational. Dr. Vetter prefers to refer to this aspect as an interest in the personal side of matters. This appraisal is reflected in the fact that Dr. Vetter interviews a significant number of artists seeking that personal element. He therefore gladly offered to assist me in preparing for three interviews which I conducted in Amsterdam during the last week of June and the first week of August. Several meetings were spent discussing recent artistic activity in Amsterdam and some political background which would enable me to speak knowledgeably in an interview with some of the most influential people in Dutch musical life. Dr. Vetter also informed me of some of the controversial issues fermenting in the press at that time that could be used to draw out more than merely publicly available factual information. Openly sharing some of his own interviewing experiences and directing me to further sources of preparatory information were some of the many ways which Dr. Vetter assisted me in feeling comfortable in potentially intimidating situations. He also helped to validate the excitement and anxiety that I experience in interviewing situations. Perhaps a twin of the "butterflies" and "sweaty palms" that plague a stage performer, nerves should not be interpreted as a sign of fracturing self-confidence. On the contrary, the well-prepared interviewer and critic anticipates the discourse as a performance, never certain as to what will unfold.

Dr. Vetter's attention to detail and factual correctness was greatly appreciated in reviewing articles which I wrote for him about performances that we both attended, such as Verdi's *Aida* (a production that sent at least a dozen journalists clamouring for a phone before the first intermission). The fight to break the story of this ridiculous disaster was won by Mr. de Beer, a reality assisted by the fact that *De Volkskrant* is a morning publication. That his article landed on the front page was strictly the result of his journalistic sense for "the story"—a true bloodhound.

De Volkskrant is probably regarded as the most important Dutch daily in arts circles. Overseeing around fifteen arts writers covering everything from jazz to popular music to "serious music", Mr. de Beer's experience in grooming new writers is extensive and continually expanding. His conscientious work ethic and potent literary style have earned him an extraordinary level of respect from other critics, artists and musical administrators on an international level. I was not surprised that, despite efforts to slice the burdensome pie of responsibility, Mr. de Beer read every word that I wrote and turned upside-down every thought, always illuminating other possible vantage points. I must admit that the thought of adopting a de Beerian tone or phrase was often tempting, especially after discussing, for instance, one page of my text or one act for three or four hours. But this was always discouraged, and in the ongoing search for my own particular voice, some of his recommendations have not been incorporated. What I would likely have inserted would have been borrowed. The imperfections, however, are my own. I prefer to consider them not as flaws, but as important building blocks in developing my skills as a writer about music.

It may be taken for granted that in spending most of a lifetime in a specific geographical region, the artistic climate of that musical community and its idiosyncrasies are well understood and often even predictable. The human elements are also generally familiar. This is not always the case when one enters an opera house or concert hall for the first time. In fact, the only familiar element may be the repertoire. Even that may be a new experience. For this reason, it was agreed that a key objective of this project was to seek out a broader musical understanding beyond the periphery of a single opera performance. This translated into a network of activities which were pursued in each new city or artistic environment. Numerous art galleries, museums, tours, and musical performances contributed to this pursuit of a creative pulse.

Two days after arriving in Amsterdam, I headed to Vienna. With a smattering of published articles under my belt and limited international performance experience,

I had a list of contacts which would assist me in setting up interviews with four personalities in the upper echelons of the Vienna State Opera, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and Vienna Festival. It was also my responsibility during those six days to absorb as much of the musical and cultural life as possible, including five opera performances and one orchestral concert. Two hours before leaving Amsterdam, Mr. de Beer and I met for a crash course: everything I needed to know about Viennese musical life in ninety minutes or less. Armed with printed articles and books in three languages along with copious handwritten notes from that meeting, I departed on what Mr. de Beer called a dose of reality in the world of arts writing—a hectic schedule with a daunting deadline. My goal was to write a comprehensive article on my experiences by the time I returned to Amsterdam. Vienna was my baptism by fire that formed the foundation for my trip to Munich in July and the writing of a feature article published in the arts supplement of *De Volkskrant*.

My experiences in Vienna drew my attention to the inherent dichotomy between the musical tradition of the city and the self-assertive energies of more contemporary forces. This blatant opposition was certainly evident as I attended a 1972 Franco Zeffirelli production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at the State Opera the night after attending the world première of Alfred Schnittke's *Hommage à Schiwago* presented by the Vienna Festival. What I found difficult to reckon with was the strength of both veins, the old and the new, and their co-habitation in the city of Vienna. It was only through various interviews that I was able to comprehend the range of active musical life there. Interviews with Walter Blovsky and Wolfgang Schuster, senior managers of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, were also important preparation for my return trips to Austria in July and August for the Salzburg Festival, where the Vienna Philharmonic assumes summer residency. The articles which I wrote for Mr. de Beer during the initial visit were naïve at best, but at least they opened the floor for exploring ways to approach a similar project in any other city.

It should be clear by now that much of the activity of my critical internship is not specifically documented in this dossier. Likewise, the names of several individuals who enriched my experience abroad will remain unidentified. I would like to acknowledge, however, the contributions of another critic whose input would otherwise slip by unnoticed. Mr. Marc Vignal, a freelance critic and noted musicologist, assumed the most gracious role of host during my ten-day stay in Paris in July. As yet another variation on the theme "pursuit of the creative pulse", Mr. Vignal facilitated a tour of IRCAM, attendance at a performance of Bizet's *Carmen* at the Bastille Opéra, amongst other activities. Extensive discussions explored other facets of Parisian musical life. This particular period in Paris was perhaps not the most interesting from a musical point of view, because vibrant Parisian musical life relocates during the summer to the literally hundreds of rural festivals. For this reason, I had travelled from Munich to Beaune, a small village just south of Dijon, before arriving in Paris.

My summer schedule consisted largely of hearing music from the last two hundred and fifty years with a sprinkling of Monteverdi. The Beaune Festival was a refreshing diversion. Most of the concerts of the Festival of Ancient Music in Beaune are carried out in the Basilique Notre Dame, where I attended performances of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* and Ockeghem's Requiem. Both the quality of performance and the relatively rare choice of repertoire tuned me in to wondrous new musical frequencies, frequencies that a journalist would be hard pressed to hear in performance in southern Ontario.

Musical understanding or experience is certainly part of how a critic prepares for reviewing. This is an ongoing and cumulative process, although specific activities may be undertaken just prior to a performance to refresh and stimulate the critical faculties about individual works. During the last month of the critical internship, my main goal was to attend as many opera productions as possible at two specific festivals. Without a doubt, the festivals of Salzburg and Bayreuth attract the greatest

interest and activity from the press of any European festivals. Every production stimulates inordinate amounts of debate. Knowledgeable audiences obey unwritten yet understood rules of behaviour. Rippling effects from productions at these festivals can be detected in opera houses around the world. Familiarizing myself with the environments and some of the productions was specifically intended to develop some personal understanding of two significant points of reference in the opera world.

Since returning to Hamilton, I have had to refresh my understanding of the context in which opera productions at companies such as the Canadian Opera Company and Opera Hamilton are realized. Reviewing their productions is not like being at the Grosses Festspielhaus in Salzburg, nor should it be. Instead, I find it much more meaningful to experience each opera with fresh eyes and ears and then to distil the essence of that particular performance. The critical internship enabled me to modify and refine the distillation and crystallization processes.

I am continually reminded of the first act of Kurt Horres's production of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels. An enormous painted scrim depicting Christ after the crucifixion formed the backdrop during the opening church scene. When it came time for Walther's preliminary test, the Mastersingers relocated at a table suspended fifteen feet above the stage. This table appeared where a panel of the scrim had been removed, replacing what had been the eyes of Christ. Only Beckmesser was relegated to the stage level, with his curtained-off marking block. I am fortunate to have such a diverse and talented ensemble of musical and literary personalities seated at my table of Mastercritics. They sit and nod and shake their heads each time I open my ears or put pen to paper. It is like having a built-in editor, my very own Hans Sachs, constantly reminding me of the craftsmanship that must underpin all creative modes of expression.

Some Notes on Reviewing Live Opera

A printed review of a live opera performance enables the reader to borrow the critic's eyes and ears to relive, in just a few minutes, a musical event that may have lasted several hours. An opera review may include telling and significant facets of the performance being reviewed such as the quality of singing, stage direction, set and costume designs. But, as Joseph Kerman argues in his landmark publication *Opera as Drama*, understanding musical drama, and how music articulates drama, is a critically more responsible perspective than considering the contributing elements of an opera as mutually exclusive entities.¹ The interactive and inter-dependent network of ingredients contributes to a larger whole. Kerman's study is largely textual, focusing on the music and libretto. Reviewing live opera, however, must contend with a particular realization of a work, not only with textual and historical aspects. As Kerman's study highlights the need for operatic criticism which conflates musical and dramatic elements in an integrated whole, opera in performance likewise demands that the synergy of an extended network form the basis for meaningful criticism.

The age-old debate encapsulated in the title of de Casti's libretto, set to music by Antonio Salieri as *Prima la musica e poi le parole* (1786), seems destined to continue without a definitive resolution, if the interdependence of music and drama is acknowledged as the crux of musical drama.² Kerman's leaping-off point could

¹ *Opera as Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) focuses on a handful of operatic works, all of which can be considered part of the current canon of operatic repertoire.

² In this light, Richard Strauss's *Capriccio* may be viewed as a representation of this ongoing tug-of-war, with an explicit and planned lack of resolve.

indeed be an extension of this debate, substituting "drama" for "words," a facet of the debate which is essentially already implied. In an attempt to wrestle with the purpose and means of contemporary opera criticism, I have narrowed the following consideration to a specific writer-reader link: the journalistic music critic whose domain is a mid-sized newspaper and whose reader is an average urban dweller. Identifying a type of publication and audience does not preclude variation within that relationship, but it does presume that opera criticism is audience-specific. Based on my experiences in practical criticism accumulated during the critical internship on which this dossier is based, I propose that a critical approach which considers the aforementioned network should be the basis for meaningful journalistic operatic criticism. The responsibilities of such an approach, however, seem too easily ignored in practice, when occupational exigencies seduce the critic into thinking that a superficial accounting of musical and visual details is worthwhile opera criticism. The result is only journalistic, which, although valuable in itself, is not opera criticism.

One of the greatest challenges facing the music critic may be the amount of print-space (quantity of text) that the review may occupy—many critics bemoan a lack of space. Deciding which elements should be mentioned in a review may be a challenging task, especially if the production elicited a strong response (positive or negative) from the critic. But then how does a music critic decide on a hierarchy of production features that will not seem lacking, in conveying an entire opera performance or its aesthetic impact? Performance quality itself will stimulate attention towards particular details and away from others. Sometimes a tiny but carefully painted detail can effectively convey the broader essence of the production, precluding the need for extended examples. The main point is that a review must identify the personality of a work, the characteristics that distinguish that performance from others—either specific performances or from what may be considered traditional.

If even a small fraction of a newspaper's readership actually reads an opera review, it is likely that that number will greatly exceed the audience size of the opera performance being reviewed. The critic is therefore compelled, by this statistical difference, to consider the reader who was not at the performance. Connecting in a fundamental way with the reader who was or was not there may determine whether a review is read in full and digested, or discarded as meaningless. The reader who was in attendance will forgive a basic amount of factual retelling, but unknowing readers will quickly move on if they are excluded from a privileged vantage point. Yet if understanding, or connecting with, a readership were the only measure of worthwhile opera reviewing, there would be no need to identify the writer of any opera review that merely satisfies this criterion.

If the critic can identify the reader's knowledge of the opera being reviewed, a foundation of references may be used to underpin the construction of the review. Sound architecture, however, requires balance of design. A musical report card can be as dry and empty as hearing the score of a soccer game without knowing the dramatic highlights, the thrilling goals and devastating fumbles. Ignoring the musical aspects glosses over the very basis of the work and is equally irresponsible. Purely textual criticism of libretti has little value for the journalistic music critic, although some contemporary literary criticism can offer insights into multiple readings of the text.³ But balance is not measured by the number of words or sentences devoted to a

³ Paul Robinson's essay entitled "A Deconstructive Postscript: Reading Libretti and Misreading Opera," in *Reading Opera*, edited by Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) offers four well-argued reasons for the lack of significance behind purely textual studies of opera libretti. Two provocative studies which explore the network of meanings attached to sung text, argued by Robinson as unintelligible in performance, include Michel Poizat's 1986 publication translated by Arthur Denner as *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). Poizat's consideration of the "vocal object" is further developed in Carolyn Abbate's *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

certain element. For example, two cases which would invite a primarily musical focus might be reviews of new or lesser-known works. Unfamiliar repertoire lacks the shared musical reference base of the canon of commercially popular operatic repertoire. More often than not, however, it is this canon which predominates in most opera houses and is likely to be encountered most frequently by the critic.⁴

Regardless of the still dominant perception that opera is an elite art form, the last fifty years have witnessed significant growth, specifically in non-European audiences. Technological developments have contributed greatly to this expansion: radio transmissions such as the Texaco Metropolitan Opera broadcasts and opera film productions by popular directors such as Ingmar Bergman and Franco Zeffirelli have greatly increased exposure. Communities with busy repertory seasons have frequent access to many different productions. Arnold Schönberg's accounting of the experience of an active Austro-German opera-going public in his 1940 essay "Art and the Moving Pictures" loses little in accuracy when applied to a parallel contemporary audience.⁵ The ongoing recreation of canonic repertoire contributes to the experience and knowledge of a work shared by a readership, but may also fuel the critic's challenge to embrace each revisitation with freshness and vigour. Not every recreation, however, will make it to a critic's list of performances to review.

Typically, the première of a new production attracts more press coverage than performances later in the run. Likewise, revivals of productions, particularly those in

⁴ Top 100 lists such as the one compiled by David Littlejohn in his *The Ultimate Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) identify the repertoire as dominated by a handful of composers such as Puccini, Mozart and Verdi.

⁵ In this essay and others such as "The Future of the Opera" in the collection *Style and Idea* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), Schönberg presents an interesting debate about the role and life of opera in light of developments and potential in the film genre during the first half of this century. I am inclined to believe that his plea for a selective and elitist approach—as opposed to art intended for the masses—has emerged as the backbone of contemporary non-conventional productions of traditional repertoire.

a repertory house, often lose their journalistic newsworthiness with time. A shorter-run production, by its very nature, thrives in an atmosphere of hype and intense promotion which, in turn, earns press coverage. When editorial decisions isolate performances for coverage in a newspaper, opening nights usually command attention and, on a more detailed level, new productions usually take priority over revivals in terms of space allocation. Once these decisions have been made, critics must carry out their responsibility with the repertoire and production team at hand. Often, that leaves critics still in the midst of the canon. So when faced with yet another *Madama Butterfly*, *Don Giovanni* or *La Traviata*, what saves them from lapsing into a mere Beckmesser?

Underpinning these warhorses must be an amalgam of music, symbolism and drama which have retained some sense of beauty and meaning for today's audience.⁶ I seriously doubt that the social commentary pervading works such as *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Nabucco* has preserved its inherent societal relevance and meaning up to the present. But this does not prevent modern audiences from identifying and deducing meaning from archetypal figures and symbols. The general dramatic framework of an older work may be enjoyed from a contemporary perspective. Where criticism seems most divided is in dealing with opera productions which embark on radically different reinterpretations of traditional works. A gap is forged between the production in question and the conventional understanding of the work—the reconciliation of the two being a hot and thorny issue in current opera criticism.

In *Opera in Crisis*, critic Henry Pleasants delights in referring to what he calls "produceritis" and describes with relish the notches in his belt that he has earned from

⁶ Robert Donington's *Opera and its Symbols* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) explores the archetypal images and symbols inherent to the dramatic considerations explored by Kerman, but with performance practice issues at the forefront of his discussion.

sitting through the "pestilence" wrought by producers who mount operas with deliberate and significant diversions from the traditional⁷. The producers who have staked their ground by adopting this type of directorial approach have gained increasing attention since World War II. Extreme rethinkings have by no means displaced more conservative productions, but have contributed to the variety available to the opera-going public. Within one opera house, a single season may include productions ranging in age up to thirty years old. If we consider companies such as the English National Opera, whose mandate lies completely in this kind of rethinking, we must also recognize that the Royal Opera at Covent Garden serves more traditional fare, on the whole, offering the London opera community a variety of production styles and repertoire.

Reviewers facing radical rethinkings owe it to the reader to attempt to translate what is new, different and unexpected into a written form that connects with the opera as it is generally known. But as with the music, the singing and other variables, uniqueness of a staging or set design is not a quality which exempts the directorial "vision" from critical assessment. What is evident from a survey of reviews in newspapers and trade journals such as *L'Avant Scène*, *Opera News* and *Opera*, is a sharp division in critical assessment: Henry Pleasants is clearly among the staunch traditionalists who openly lay assault charges against blatantly non-conventional productions, while more open-minded writers such as Robert Donington have explored the motivation behind and artistic foundation for these rethinkings, prior to passing critical judgement.

Donington's *Opera and its Symbols* shares many similarities with other 20th-century opera surveys: an historical overview of opera starting with Peri, touching on Monteverdi and Gluck, then embarking on more detailed discussions of Mozart, Verdi

⁷ Pleasants, Henry. *Opera in Crisis: Tradition, Present, Future* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), p. 34.

and Wagner (complete with a *Ring* analysis). Donington firmly supports his identification of archetypal figures and inherent symbolism with musical examples, frequently extending his study to consider production aspects such as staging, design and lighting.⁸ Different realizations of the same figures and symbols are not immediately shunned, yet he qualifies his critical assessment with the criterion that any realization should be compatible with the original. Identifying compatibility is still a subjective process, but undefended biases against tradition or innovation have no place in Donington's considerations.

Reviews of staged opera productions of traditional repertoire must explore the link between archetypal figures and symbols and how they are realized. The singer may cry neglect, but as the "star system" continues to lose some of its lustre, vocal contributions to the musical and dramatic whole have already significantly displaced the importance of each vocalist as an isolated concert performer, disjoint from the enveloping production. I therefore completely oppose Hans Keller's opinion that,

"reviews of opera, especially the most professional, have come to concentrate on its phoney aspect, i.e. the production, as if the primary question (though of course not the only one) were not what it all sounded like when you looked the other way—or inward, where, for a developed and imaginative musician, an outstanding production is always available, especially if he knows the composer's stage directions."⁹

Meaningful criticism must acknowledge the current aesthetic which both motivates the production and colours the reception of its interpretation.

⁸ The reader may find V. Kofi Agawu's *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) an insightful companion to Robert Donington's *Opera and its Symbols*. Agawu specifically identifies signs and symbols in non-textual music, which may be explored to reinforce Donington's examples, which are mostly found in the text and stage directions.

⁹ Keller, Hans. *Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 21.

Journalistic critics usually acknowledge that musicians and conductors may significantly contribute to or detract from a performance with an interpretation which somehow surprises us by contradicting our expectations. But staging details from a production may often convey more, in a printed review, about an overall production than simply the music. For example, mentioning often-cited non-traditional productions such as Peter Sellars' Mozart/Da Ponte trilogy for the PepsiCo Summerfare in Purchase, New York in the late '80s, or Jonathan Miller's *Rigoletto* (set in Mafia-land) for the English National Opera in 1982, may trigger a memory of details pertaining to those productions, even for people who have only read reviews and seen photographs. I myself mentioned the Miller *Rigoletto* production in a published feature in *De Volkskrant* about the current state of opera in Munich. Peter Jonas, the new intendant of the Bavarian State Opera, had previously worked at the English National Opera, where the international awareness of Miller's *Rigoletto* was launched. As such, this simple reference, heavily imbued with subjective opinion, conveyed some sense of Jonas's artistic leanings. This connection reinforces the value of the shared knowledge of an opera's performance history in performance criticism.

In wrestling with divergent productions of a single work, critics can also examine the production system which launched the performance. Most North American opera companies, for instance, operate on some variant of the *stagione* system. The production team, selected for that specific production, typically converges for rehearsals a few weeks before opening night, which is then followed by a succession of performances. The repertory system, which offers a multitude of productions in a season in continual rotation, is often distinguished not simply by a higher level of activity: it usually operates with a resident ensemble. Each system has its advantages and disadvantages. Ronald Mitchell's useful overview of both systems in his *Opera: Dead or Alive* warns of the routine slickness that may coat a repertory performance. Mitchell's comment that "Good staging may be seen in a wide variety

of productions, from the humblest repertory (if a good director is in charge) to the expensive festival, and even, though rarely, in a *stagione* performance," hints at the need to understand the means by which a production is developed.¹⁰ Mitchell's segregation of the festival production, in particular, is an interesting case for further elaboration.

Opera festivals, or festivals which include opera performances, must adopt a production system related to or based on either the *stagione* or repertory systems. Festival seasons do, however, stand apart from the regular season in that festivals are usually much shorter in duration and more production-intensive, and often allow for longer rehearsal periods than a regular *stagione* production. Many festivals are located outside of urban centres, thus requiring special travel arrangements in order to attend performances, as in Santa Fe, Glyndebourne, Bayreuth, Aix-en-Provence or Drottningholm. The result is an increased intensity and a charged atmosphere that is hard to maintain, either at the end of a *stagione* production run or on the 200th evening of a repertory production. The unique and the spectacular are just two ingredients often found in festivals which attract the attention, time and interest of arts writers and patrons. Uniqueness may be manifested in the programming of non-traditional repertoire or in non-conventional interpretations of the canon. Essentially, summer festivals may be viewed as condensed versions of what happens during the regular season, but with a shift in balance away from the programming norms of the longer season.

Urban festivals such as those in Amsterdam, Paris, Vienna and Berlin come face-to-face with this dichotomy, often overlapping production schedules with the regular season of local opera companies. In an interview, Christof Wagner-Trenkwitz, press director of the Vienna Staatsoper, expressed his frustration in

¹⁰ Mitchell, Ronald O. *Opera: Dead or Alive* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), p.96.

trying to get press coverage once the Vienna Festival is underway. The 1993 Vienna Festival season opened with a barrage of contemporary works involving prominent international artists, which understandably attracted significant interest from the press, thus diverting attention away from performances at the Staatsoper. From a journalistic perspective, there is nothing foreseeably newsworthy about an old Zeffirelli production of *Don Giovanni* on the same night as a Steve Reich or Alfred Schnittke première.

The Holland Festival is an interesting example of a festival that co-exists with an active regular season. Since 1988, concert halls such as the Concertgebouw have offered continuous programming twelve months of the year. The Holland Festival spans the whole month of June, with several events each day. Not structured as a production festival like Salzburg or Bayreuth, the Holland Festival co-produces most events with local and foreign organizations, while also inviting companies from other countries. Some of the keenest criticism brewing in the Dutch press during the 1993 season was levelled at the lack of identity or *vision* fusing the overall programme. It was suggested that if the festival does not offer something beyond what is normally expected, it could be a wiser use of public funds to distribute those earmarked for the Festival amongst various arts organizations who could, in turn, augment their own seasons.

The Holland Festival was the offspring of the desire to foster a national cultural identity after World War II. Great programming diversity in everyday Dutch musical life, coupled with liberal musical tastes, makes it difficult for the Holland Festival to stand apart. Four interviews with artistic directors in Amsterdam highlighted an aggravated situation, in which individual artistic organizations were attempting to carve out their own niche. Both Jan Wolff (director of the contemporary music centre De IJsbreker) and Peter de Caluwe (press director of the Netherlands Opera) expressed feelings of invasion and manipulation. They were expected to sit back complacently while the fruits of their artistic labours were

kidnapped by the Holland Festival. These political shenanigans do not, however, seem to afflict Dr. Martijn Sanders, director of the Concertgebouw. Sanders' keen sense for rich artistic coalitions has already proved him a more exciting director than Jan van Vlijmen (intendant of the Holland Festival until 1997).

Another festival intendant, Gerard Mortier, has taken considerable steps towards ensuring that new productions, usually much costlier than remounts, will continue to characterize the uniqueness of festivals, despite economic constraints. He is actively encouraging festivals to co-produce works that could not financially be undertaken by an individual festival. Mortier had earned an enviable reputation for both himself and Brussels' Théâtre de La Monnaie before accepting the intendency of the Salzburg Festival. It could not have been expected that Mortier would continue the festival as it had been developed by Herbert von Karajan, his predecessor. The press challenged Mortier, claiming that his sidestepping of the conventional Karajan-style of festival production—the "star system" and reverence of the canon—would topple the festival out of the international limelight and into financial ruin. Mortier retaliated with the threat of his resignation. Karajan's innovative style, marked by moves such as the promotion of opera in its original language, is now quite common. But Mortier has pursued the vein of innovation in different ways.

When the 1993 festival opened with *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, with Nikolaus Harnoncourt conducting the Musicus concertus Wien in the Grosses Festspielhaus, the ensuing artistic debate which flooded international music criticism did not simply comprise reviews of the musical aspects of the performance. The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the resident orchestra of the festival, had been dethroned for the première performance, a spectacle at which six heads of state were present. Harnoncourt had chosen a significantly augmented orchestra to play in the large hall, with a surprisingly swollen string section compared to the one used in his noted 1974 recording of the work. The very next evening, the Bayreuth Festival opened its season with a new and controversial production of *Tristan und Isolde* directed by

Heiner Müller. From Gorbachëv's opening address to the post-production see-saw between vigorous applause and angry boos, there was not a moment of simple complacency. The Bayreuth audience is certainly more specialized than that of Salzburg. Without a doubt, the majority of those attending *Tristan* had attended previous Bayreuth productions of that work. The same could not be said of the Salzburg *Poppea* audience. This difference does not overshadow, however, the point that two of the more prominent opera-producing festivals in Europe were heralding the nontraditional. Both productions had been sold out long in advance.

The most important break with tradition at Bayreuth was officially ushered in with the reopening of the festival in 1951 under the auspices of Wieland and Wolfgang Wagner. The directorial approach to the ten works by Wagner (the only operas to be presented there since 1876) was radically reshaped, stripping away the bondage to textual verisimilitude imposed by Cosima, and later, Winifrid Wagner. The Bayreuth revolution, as it is so often called, fostered a period of experimental rethinking that had far-reaching international impact for Wagnerian performance practice. Perhaps in Bayreuth, more than any other opera house in the world, the performance history of a work is a crucial cornerstone of artistic debate. Each new production must contend with what has gone before. There are still Wagner/Bayreuth devotees who openly lament the passing of the golden days of Kirsten Flagstad during every intermission as they dutifully gobble down a bratwurst sandwich in formal attire. But the detailed realism of the pre-World War II productions and the barren and striking symbolism of Wieland Wagner's productions have given way to a more complex staging of symbols, a style which diverts reception energy from the aural to the visual.

That a festival such as Bayreuth has been producing the same fixed repertoire with new directorial styles for over forty years, amidst heated artistic debate and incredibly long waiting lists for tickets, suggests that the multiplicity of symbolic interpretation inherent in these operas can support and indeed invites this continual

revisiting. Both Salzburg and, more so, Bayreuth operate on a variant of the repertory system for six weeks, a time frame which inhibits the lack of spontaneity that may afflict longer repertory seasons. The best German and Austrian orchestra players converge in these two cities, a mere few hours apart by train. High production and ticket costs demand a certain level of musical quality. Invitations to perform at either festival are highly valued, and reviews are taken very seriously. Many of the same faces appear in the audience at the opening nights of both festivals, which, not infrequently, take place on consecutive evenings.

Mortier's Salzburg years will not benefit from the period of economic expansion that facilitated Karajan's concentrated efforts towards glamour and musical excellence. Downward spiralling economic conditions have even taken a few injurious swings at the bastion of the publicly funded, the German Bundestheater. Closing some of the theatres not presently viable financially is part of the plan to develop a more selective approach to funding. The recognized canon from the Karajan years was largely directed at drawing a financial elite as much as, if not more than, a musical elite. Mortier's preferred public is the musical elite. His key challenge therefore lies in creating enough interest for repertoire slightly removed from the mainstream while sustaining the expected levels of quality. This challenge is not wholly unique to Salzburg. A balance of co-productions, re-thinkings of canonical repertoire and contemporary undertakings may be detected to varying degrees in most European opera season programmes.

Co-producing opera seems to be increasing, a production strategy which naturally demands a geographically diverse artistic responsibility for the work involved. If the production is a rethinking of an older work, what the critic may expect from a particular director or a certain house could be significantly diluted or distorted by the various influences upon the production. This is perhaps the *stagione* system under a magnifying glass, but one which critics will face with increasing frequency, and one which has its own idiosyncrasies. There is really no impetus to

join forces to produce a traditional work in a completely traditional manner, unless it is only the production costs which are prohibitive to a single producer. The effort and attention drawn to a co-production naturally encourages the artists to "do something different" with their production. Coping with this complex of contributing forces requires critical openness and the willingness to consider previously unexplored possibilities of an opera.

Journalistic music critics must address *how* and *why* a production evolves the way it does, as well as the more factual *where*, *when* and *what*. Opera, as an industry driven by market forces of supply and demand, is motivated by shifting attitudes and preferences which are in turn reflected in the final product. These factors and trends may stimulate meaningful artistic and critical debate, even within a relatively fixed canon of repertoire. There is no reason to suppose that a production style which acquires some status of tradition will prevail forever. But as opera programming trends increasingly reflect the openness to new directorial approaches, the blurring of international styles and the pooling of forces from various artistic spheres, critics must decide how they wish to fill the literary gap between the production and the reader. Production means and styles along with musical performance and interpretation, enveloped in contextual cultural considerations, are some of the ingredients for furthering meaningful artistic debate and embracing the fresh critical perspective offered by a shifting aesthetic.

SECTION II: INTERVIEWS

Christof Wagner-Trenkwitz — Press Director designate, Vienna State Opera
Vienna State Opera — May 19, 1993

You are fortunate to be spending some time working closely with Dr. Gaida before assuming his current position as Press Director.

Yes. Although Dr. Gaida has not announced his future plans yet, at the end of this season, I will succeed him. It is very helpful for me to work with him now. I have been involved with the Opera for many years, especially with the Friends of the Vienna State Opera organization, but there is still so much for me to learn in this new position.

What, do you feel, are some of the characteristics of the State Opera that make it stand apart from other significant musical organizations in Vienna, like the Vienna Festival?

Here at the Staatsoper, there is a continual state of improvisation. The Vienna Festival is a repertoire institution; they are able, for a short period, to create extraordinary events. The Staatsoper is everyday life, ongoing with 300 performances per year, with approximately 60 productions in the Staatsoper and 50 in the Volksoper. The Staatsoper does not have the artistic budget to continually create new productions.

How does the general organization of the various houses work from a structural point of view?

The Bundestheater is the umbrella organization of federal theatres that oversees the following: the Burgtheater and the Akademietheater, both drama theatres, along with the Staatsoper and Volksoper. There are obvious advantages in sharing much of the resources among the four houses: from set design to administration perhaps with some 1200 employees at a rough guess.

Are all four theatres also funded by the same institution? To what level are they funded by the government?

Although there has indeed been funding from outside sources, it can be considered that the entire operating budget for all of the theatres covered by the organization is provided by the state and that any external funding is only for "special projects". Subscriptions or *abonnements* are a significant and stable part of their revenue—a pillar of the system. There are approximately 12,000 subscriptions for the Staatsoper and 6,500 for the Volksoper. With almost two seats per subscriber, this translates into 20,000 pre-sold seats at the Staatsoper for the season. The seating capacity is 2,272–1,705 seated and 567 standing, which we must fill almost every night. As you must know, we do not have a problem selling these seats.

The new *Ring* has been very successful, in box-office terms. The last *Ring* was 23 years ago in the Karajan era and the new production, with Dohnányi, will play for two years. The performances for next year are already virtually sold out. Artistically, to do all four *Ring* operas in one season is very demanding, especially technically, as all sets must be changed everyday. Rehearsal time is very extensive for the production as a whole.

With a limited budget for undertaking new productions, and the continual rejuvenation of past productions inherent to the repertoire production system, would you define the Staatsoper as "traditional"?

The Staatsoper is a traditional house in the most comprehensive meaning of the word. They have always been convinced that their market is there and is responsive to their initiatives. Life changes very slowly here in Vienna. Not so for the rest of the world.

So who is your audience? Have you ever undertaken any surveys to find out more about your audience? Are they automatically replenishing themselves?

Approximately one third are foreigners or tourists. They have never carried out an audience marketing survey. Why would they have to? The Staatsoper is not losing clients or testing the market with a new product, but the plan is to carry out their first market survey this coming fall.

The audience *must* renew itself, and knowing behavior trends in advance may be good preventative medicine. To date, the market has always been self-regulated, but technology will certainly have some impact on the youth of today and their attitude towards traditional opera in the future.

Audience development is a critical component for most opera organizations in North America. Do you have any outreach programmes of this kind, especially something directed at children?

A new initiative still on the drawing board is a youth programme. This would result in the coming together of schoolchildren with Ulf Schirmer, who is the musical consultant to Ioan Holender. This workshop of sorts would involve the explanation of the production at its various levels; from libretto and set design to meeting the singers. For this experiment they have chosen their June 1994 production of Hindemith's *Cardillac*, with Schirmer conducting, because of its modernity and the German libretto. I would be pleased to see maybe 200 schoolchildren involved in this initial project. The initiative would then be considered a success and worthy of expansion.

The effects of television are becoming a significant component of daily life that will ultimately hit these children. The Staatsoper means more than just *The Nutcracker* at Christmastime or *Hänsel und Gretel* at the Volksoper.

Times are changing slowly in Vienna. The Vienna Festival attracts much more of the younger audience. During the Festival, it is difficult to get any press coverage.

But is there really competition, or are the two institutions complementing each other in the larger picture of musical life in Vienna?

I am not really sure if there is competition. We are very different kinds of organizations. Did you hear about the copyright problems that they had with *Schwago* and the Italian publishing house just one week before the première? Have you seen *The Cave*? How was it?

I had not heard about problems with "Schwago" but I will see it tonight and will be able to see if any problems plague the performance. As for "The Cave", I found the performances last night quite interesting, from a multi-media perspective.

I have heard that they use television cameras in *The Cave*. Can they really call this serious art?

Can you tell me a little about how the Staatsoper maintains its busy schedule?

The repertory system has, like any other system, advantages and disadvantages. Some of the productions have been around several decades—*Madama Butterfly* is from '57, *Tosca* from '58, *Arabella* from April '59. The Zeffirelli production of *Don*

Giovanni which you will see tomorrow night is 21 years old. Questions regarding the updating or complete revision of productions are unavoidably self-answered in light of fiscal management. Take *Madama Butterfly* for instance. Should they consider not performing an older production until they have the funds to overhaul it, or is there some merit in continuing to produce it in terms of a balanced repertoire and exposure for the audience? Should we use the sets for *Madama Butterfly* or burn them?

Unless a new production is significantly different from the one already in repertoire, the cost is hardly justified and the money could be much more effective elsewhere. Certain operas do not really lend themselves to reinterpretations that are really *way out* from the original. Does the house or the audience really want a different *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, or *Don Giovanni*?

Where else can 42 productions be seen in any one season, including between four and six new ones? Not even La Scala offers the same variety and quantity to its audience; they only do about 100 performances in their season.

As a repertory house, with *Götterdämmerung* for example, scenic rehearsals with piano commence four to five weeks before opening night. The orchestra rehearsals are during the last couple of weeks. That is the double identity of the Vienna Philharmonic. It is an incredibly active house. Only once in the '91-'92 season, in December, did they have to completely change a performance from *Samson and Delilah* to *Carmen*. The very nature of the beast makes them able to respond to minor changes in a continual state of improvisation.

But we still have our changing traditions. Even several years after World War II, Verdi and Mozart could be seen at the Staatsoper in German translation. With the beginning of the international "star system" and Karajan's arrival at the Staatsoper in 1956—he stayed until '63—a new approach evolved. In conjunction with Milan, Karajan brought many younger Italian singers to the Austrian people. In earlier years, Caruso had sung in Italian while the rest of the cast sang in German. Now, the original language is preferred and in the '92-'93 season, productions could be seen in German, Italian, French, Czech, Hungarian and Russian.

Are you ever worried that, in this restrictive economy, state funding may not remain at this high level?

This will probably not change in the foreseeable future. As a cultural republic, the Staatsoper represents the very crux of a cultural heritage shared by both Austrians and tourists.

In Germany, the incredibly large number of theatres existing in virtually every capital city are now experiencing some troubles in this changing **economy**. Even Frankfurt is in serious trouble. But, the Staatsoper is too symbolic for **the entire nation**.

Wolfgang Schuster — Press Director, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
Bösendorferstrasse, Vienna — May 21, 1993

How would you define the particular sound, the "Klangstil", of the Vienna Philharmonic?

Being aware of this *Klangstil* is part of understanding what we are all about. I will give you a press kit from our jubilee year in 1992 celebrating our 150th anniversary. Murray Schafer's *Tuning of the World* spurred a symposium which I developed to coincide with our anniversary concerts. It was very exciting for us to explore how our instruments along with the stylistic qualities and technical abilities of the players of the Vienna Philharmonic, blending together as the *Klangstil*, are representative of the sound-sphere of the 19th and early 20th century in Vienna.

It is this particular sound that was in the ears of the great Vienna-based composers of that time, and it is this sound that was partly responsible for the way they wrote their compositions. This *Klangstil* then gives us a sense of ownership to the music in the same way that French musicians have a link to the music of French composers. But the *Klangstil* is not the only relation.

We are very particular about our instruments. As a percussionist, I usually play timpani which have animal skin heads. The tuning is different from that of modern timpani; the kettle skin is fixed and the kettle goes up and down.

19th-century instruments have different mechanics than those of the 20th century, and also a very different sound. But music is first of all made in the mind before it is realized.

The instruments still prevailing in the Vienna Philharmonic emerged from a mid-18th-century heritage, before the French Revolution. These developments are different from the national schools of instrument making. Our oboes and horns are a bit harder than the French.

The Vienna Philharmonic plays music not only from the 19th and early 20th century. Do you use the same instruments when playing more recent works?

Contemporary music is realized with appropriate instruments for percussion and the like, but the strings and winds and horns always remain the same, and that is definitely part of our characteristic sound.

Walter Blovsky — General Manager, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
Bösendorferstrasse, Vienna — May 21 and 22, 1993

Please don't ask me any of those horrible questions about not including women in the Vienna Philharmonic. Last February when we were in Toronto—I remember the acoustics of Roy Thomson Hall being very sharp—a woman from the CBC who interviewed me only wanted to know how, in this day and age, we felt we could exclude women from the orchestra.

I heard that performance and am aware of much of the feminist press coverage. Today, I am really more interested in understanding the role of the orchestra here in Vienna and its self-governing nature.

The orchestra wears two hats: one for the State Opera and one for the Philharmonic. The State Opera is the pension source and requires that each musician participate in 149-150 operas per year. The orchestra is contractually permitted six weeks a year for touring along with 14 external concerts, 10 of which are subscription concerts. The morning of a subscription concert, the orchestra is free from opera rehearsals. A reduced orchestra goes on tour and a balance must be achieved so that the remainder meets the requirements of the State Opera. Often, works requiring smaller forces are done during this time. The Vienna Philharmonic is contractually bound to not force the Opera to incur additional costs for music during tour periods.

All members of the Vienna Philharmonic are also players for the State Opera but the reverse is not true. As such, players wishing to join the Vienna Philharmonic must carry out an apprenticeship of sorts lasting three years. They must assimilate the behavior of the orchestra and learn social accommodation.

The impression of the Toronto concert was certainly a conservative one strongly rooted in tradition. The orchestra surely undertakes more progressive programming than Mendelssohn's "Italian" Symphony and Beethoven's "Eroica" when they play here at home?

Although we play considerable contemporary music in Vienna, it is difficult to programme such works on tour. The programming decisions are jointly made by the conductors, orchestra and presenters, the last of which is the most demanding for traditional repertoire because of the desire to guarantee sold-out concerts and minimize risk for the host. The international audience is therefore served a self-perpetuating image of conservatism.

Even our own self-government cannot totally overthrow these decisions, for that is the public economic market at work. Of the 11 governing positions, the orchestra's three positions are the president, general manager and vice-president, which are each for three years in duration. At any point, however, this person may be asked to step down for any reason provided by the Philharmonic.

One might normally assume that these positions require certain business-related skills. If these people are musicians first and foremost, how is it ensured that they will have the necessary skills to carry out their management jobs effectively and well?

As for formal training, if one is interested in this area, you follow a path which at the onset involves committee work and the like learning the process of administration *en route* in a practical sense. There are no formal courses, but serious candidates would normally do these things if they are interested. I, for instance, have a son who is a computer maniac and, for my own sake, I took a computer-related course which in the end has proven very useful for my job here. These positions do not pay anything above incurred expenses, and therefore people must really want to do this. They must be naturally talented for this kind of work.

These positions are very strongly linked to the orchestra when it comes to making decisions that have a direct and perhaps questionable impact on them as a whole. If this is the case, I do not simply act on my own. On the contrary, I would then consult my peers and then if necessary bring the issue to one of the bi-monthly meetings of the orchestra.

Since the Vienna Philharmonic has adopted a policy not to have a chief conductor, how does this self-government make decisions about conductors?

Part of my job is seeking out *new* conductors—not simply *young* conductors. Along with the president and vice-president, we have many connections and are continually looking for the best possible combination of conductors. For the first time this year we will have Rattle and Boulez in the subscription series. The following year we will have Mariss Jansons and last year we had Schirmer. We are also always looking for the most interesting places to perform.

How do you adjust to playing in different halls, as when you are on tour?

The first two rehearsals for a tour performance always take place *in* the new venue. We are very particular about having an "acoustic" rehearsal, unlike American orchestras. The last visit of the Philadelphia Orchestra revealed that this was not the case for them, and they spent the first half of their concert adjusting to the foreign

surroundings and acoustic. On our last trip to New York, Solti was tired and asked us to forego the acoustic rehearsal. He is quite old now, you know, and so we obliged, but the orchestra complained. And they are right. It was all right, but everyone was not quite settled at the beginning.

Since you have this hectic double life with your own subscription series, do you have any plans for expansion in this area?

We started a new subscription series on December 2, 1992 in London which went then to Berlin on December 3. We played a subscription concert in Paris for the first time this October. Three subscription concerts per season are now repeated in these three other series. The intention is to install a strong subscription concert series in other cities, but Londoners just do not seem to embrace this concept and, although the 2800 seats in Royal Festival Hall are immediately sold-out, they do not seem to think they must subscribe for the whole series. Maybe they know they can get a seat each time.

Touring is usually very expensive. How are your costs met? Do your performance revenues cover all of the expenses?

For some tour concerts, the Friends of the Vienna Philharmonic have often paid for any deficits. The president of the active and strong New York chapter died last year, which is difficult. They, for instance, made possible the return to Boston after 30 years, along with the performance in Toronto last February.

The Vienna Philharmonic makes some very strong claims about their direct and continuous link to composers like Beethoven, Brahms, Bruckner and Mahler. How can you explain this?

The oral tradition is very strong. We have had five generations of one family play clarinet. History and tradition are fluent. We still use the scores from the times of Toscanini and Furtwängler, with all their markings. There has been no real break except during World War II. This break perhaps most strongly affected the tradition of playing Mahler. Now we have a new tradition of playing Mahler, thanks to Bernstein, and anyone now who wishes to conduct Mahler with us will be compared to him.

Apparently the orchestra refused to follow the directions of a particular conductor recently during a ballet performance of Prokofiev's "Romeo and Juliet". Does this not undermine the very position of the conductor, if the orchestra behaves with a mind of its own?

This new conductor wanted very quick tempi and the orchestra is very critical, not only of itself, but also of extreme changes from the way we feel a work should be played and the way we have played it in the past. We have more backbone than other orchestras. In the last two years, the conducting situation at the Opera has improved greatly. The orchestra is very critical and will not want a conductor back who diverges significantly from what they see as artistically valid.

You have complete control over the hiring of conductors for your subscription series and no absolute control at the Opera. How does it work with the Salzburg Festival?

In Salzburg, there is a Philharmonic representative that sits on the Curatorium board, but in a purely advisory capacity. There, their only veto power, in terms of conductors, is for the concerts, but not for the opera. The contract with Salzburg has lasted for over 70 years, and it is like their second home. Many of the orchestra members have summer homes there, and even though it is hard work, we look forward to it each summer.

Klaus Bachler — Intendant, Vienna Festival
Lehár-gasse, Vienna — May 21, 1993

Your programming for this season freely mixes the ancient with the contemporary, but why have you stacked the contemporary material at the beginning of the festival? Are you trying to immediately set yourself apart from the more traditional programming that pervades the regular musical season here in Vienna?

The sense of tradition in Vienna is obvious, but the Festival offers what is normally *not* in the city. Even the 18th century does not really have a presence in Vienna anymore. Completely on the other side of the productions from or related to the 18th century which we have chosen, are the contemporary works. The Vienna Festival is the only organization in Vienna embarking on the contemporary works—*Alkestis*, *The Cave*, *Schiwago*—they are all new. Performances are completely sold out. The antique things in this year's programme come later on, because we start with a completely contemporary programme. I think that it's important for the city to have a profile that doesn't follow up on *anything* that anyone is doing during the year.

The Cave is definitely a production that will create waves. It will, however, be a completely different version in Berlin; the orchestra will be in a pit and the metal structure will have to be altered and significantly reduced.

Our festival is mainly for the people of the city and the Austrians. They wouldn't see a lot of what is going on in the world if the Festival didn't take place. The only possibility to get in contact with the rest of the world, for normal people who don't travel to Paris or New York, is to see these performances, either productions we invite, or co-productions. But, of course, especially for the concert programmes, and also for our productions, we attract a fair amount of tourism. But it is not our aim to draw tourists. The main point is to attract the people who don't get out of Vienna.

Do you have an idea what percentage of your audiences may be foreigners?

Maybe 10 per cent.

That is very low compared to some of the other large European festivals.

We are in a very special position. We are not to be compared with festivals like Glyndebourne and Salzburg and so on. Maybe more in line with the festivals in Amsterdam and Paris, we are part of the whole year's cultural life in the city. So it's not that people come to Vienna to see the Festival first and foremost. It's for the people here, like the Paris Festival is for the Paris people. Of course you attract

tourists who come and are interested. Maybe 90 per cent of the people who go to Salzburg live outside of Salzburg. But with us it's the other way around.

What is the initiative behind undertaking co-productions? The end product is not completely your own, completely a statement of the Vienna Festival. It is an expression that must be shared with other festivals and other creators. What is your motivation in this direction?

First of all, we are not a production festival. There are neither the finances nor the logistics. Therefore we invite dramaturgy to share in international works. The result is that we can offer something very international to the everyday Viennese. As a result, each co-production reflects the careful selection of working partners. As with the development of the Spring Festival and the Festival d'Automne: when they were founded, they developed by inviting productions. The sense of trying to change that, which I feel is necessary, means that you must get your own dramaturgy. If you want to get dramaturgy and can't produce anything of your own, you have to co-produce; it's very simple. To share is still a very good thing, for you are working in international terms and creating something together. So I, especially, find it much less interesting to do everything alone; it is better to do very special projects with special partners. For instance, when we work together with a group from Berlin, we all make decisions together; we discuss casting, where we will record. So there's a real possibility that everything becomes international, in an everyday sense.

So it was really funny for me, one month ago, when Gerard Mortier invited intendants from ten big festivals together, in Salzburg. We met for three days, like a club or something. We discussed policy, financial situations, the economic situation, how it is with the public, and so on. Now, with *The Cave* in production, I have the nine festival directors here, but in a regular working environment. This simple difference, I mean, is that you have your everyday work. I am working on the telephone and have meetings.

The important thing is that in favouring co-productions, I am not trying to make a big corporate trust, like getting a big company of five festivals that are the same. We have our individual profiles because each festival specifically chooses partners for each idea. It is not like these things just go around to all the festivals, the same things. For instance, if we do one thing with the Festival d'Automne, we might do another thing with Budapest and another with Edinburgh. It is therefore *our* programme, and some parts of it will move around and their programmes will have one piece from us.

How do you feel, then, that you assert your own personal profile and stand apart from the other big festivals that share some of the same productions?

We make *our* programme. That means that we have our ideas that we want to concentrate on, for example, antique themes, and then we go ahead. We talk about the baroque and we are starting with Gluck and then there is *Alceste*. We invite a German company to do an *Alceste* for us. The original ideas and programming start here, in these rooms, in Vienna. And let's say that for Edinburgh or for the Holland Festival it is the same, but in their cities. They make their programmes and then say OK, this production makes sense to co-produce. But you still won't find an identical programme in another festival.

What do you see as the particular fingerprint of the Vienna Festival? What external image are you trying to project?

For us, it's such a sensitive and delicate thing, not in a publicity way. In Europe, it's almost a secret of the artists, how things come together. Our programme has a lot more to do with atmosphere and inexpressible things than putting in a programme "this is our thing", like a car company. The main thing for the Vienna Festival is that Vienna is one of the most important *natural* art places. There are very few; maybe Berlin is another, and maybe, in another sense, Paris. But there are very few places in the world where artistic life is a completely integrated part of society. This Festival is a chance to create a forum for international work. All the artists who come here, like Steve Reich, are amazed at the working possibilities. This is one of the main things of the festival for me, that it is not only an open window for Vienna but is also a forum for bringing people together in an international spirit. Using this geographic situation, in the middle of Europe, as an artistic axis is one of the main points of this festival for me.

Are the programming trends of this year's festival indicative of future seasons?

Programming is not an academic checklist where we do this now and then we do that. The lines in between the projects are much more complex than simply doing it by checking things off. The other thing is that a programme does not result from just sitting and thinking alone in your room. What you have to do, to realize these ideas, is to also consider the necessities of the artists. The programme has to *emerge* from the artists. It was not like I just thought we had to do, in '93, the antique. I was interested in a lot of artists and, in talking with people like Achim Freyer and Frank Castorf and many others, there was a shared interest in certain themes which could be developed. So a programme comes together which is inter-related. And if there is a

project involving the 19th century, it would make no sense to do it this year, so I would switch it to another year.

At the moment I am working a lot on the acting plans for '94, in which there is a strong pull towards the end of the 19th century, the *fin-de-siècle*. We are already looking at opera for '95 and '96. One of the main creative areas will be the contemporary, for every year. Especially for a festival, a measure of life and relevance is that you are in contact with what are the developments of today, where things are going—much more than for a whole year's season.

For many people who look at the Vienna Festival from the outside, it is the contemporary component that they use to gauge how important the festival is in international terms.

This is somewhat of a problem. One of the main reasons why we do art is to preserve the sensitivity of mankind, the direct human contact, in a time where everything goes so quickly, where everything can be so isolated, and everything is so mechanic. Art represents emotions and feelings: for taste, for looking, for listening, for smelling. In that sense, it is timely work and in another sense it is to keep these things alive.

But the market examines contemporary things as new events, and today's market is not interested in repeating a new creation. This is dangerous because artists still have to work after a première. So we thought that in maybe one or two years, we might not do any new creations, but we could just do creations for a second time. Let's say, for example, that in '93 we do *The Cave*, but, in '95, nobody might want to do it anymore because it is not brand new. But if you accept responsibility for what you do, and you don't *simply buy* a programme, if you have personal feelings for what you do, then the main thing is that you want to tell something and not just organize something. You can call it a mission, that you are responsible to the artists. You are responsible to follow-up on what is happening, what they are doing.

This is very often against the public opinion; it is really often against what they think they need or want. One of the stupidest sentences you hear all the time is "We know this already" or "We saw this already". This is no criterion for art. Since the ancient Greeks, all the creative tools have been available. There is nothing new at all. It may be a modern re-evaluation—what gives us a feeling for today, for what we see—but what Steve Reich does, in a way, uses ideas from the old Greek chorus. Minimalism is, in a way, the Greek way of repeating things, developed in different terms.

Even if you do not pursue a plan to re-create the works of today in a future season, the idea of co-producing something lends some longevity to the initial birth and lifespan of a contemporary work in that it is mounted in multiple cities within a short time of its première. The concert programme reflects this re-capturing aspect in re-creating some very important premières of 1913. But it also seems, at the onset, completely unrelated to the music theatre part of the programme.

There is a division between the organization of the music theatre works and the concert programme, which could be criticized, but it is just like that. There is the programming of the staged works—opera, theatre, dance and so on—which is my responsibility. I am the intendant of everything except for the concert part. One year concerts are held in the Musikverein, and in another year they are in the Konzerthaus. This year it is the Konzerthaus, which was very big in 1913. There was a strong musical movement with Schönberg and Alban Berg and so on. And so Karsten Witt, the director of the Konzerthaus, did the programme looking back on 1913. It was the birth of the Konzerthaus, and now it is already 80 years ago, so this is the focus of his programme.

How does the Viennese public embrace the festival in light of a very traditional permanent season? What reaction have you seen?

I have to say that this is my first programme. We made a completely contemporary start and what can I say? Every performance was sold out. *The Cave*, 800 seats, was full. I just had a phone call earlier about the possibility to get one seat for *Schiwago* and I cannot do it. It is exciting. The Wooster Group (an American theatre troupe) is sold out. This is the response. It is not true that there is such a traditional public here. There is much for them to discover here.

From the audiences I have seen, I detect a particular interest in these works by a very particular group of people. Perhaps the Viennese audience can be seen as a group of audiences, each with its own particular interests. One of those groups, for instance, is very interested in your contemporary programming while another, with more traditional leanings, may not come to the Vienna Festival at all.

I think that our audience is definitely the first group. We see a lot of public that you never see in the popular theatres. They are seeing the Wooster Group and Steve Reich. Artistic life in Vienna is intense but not so large. Therefore you know the people, you know them by face. In the audience of *The Cave* and *The Wooster Group*, you see people who are normally involved in the visual arts, the ones who go to Bayreuth more than those who go to the Burgtheater.

I have also noticed that the audience at, for instance, "Schiwago" was much younger than the audience at the Staatsoper's "Don Giovanni" last night.

The younger audience that we see is, in a way, both fantastic and a problem; we immediately sell out the cheap tickets for all performances of the whole festival. But we also have higher prices, especially for the Theater an der Wien and things like *The Cave*, the expensive seats, and they go quite a bit slower. This happens with a younger public.

Other than state sponsorship, how does the operational budget of the Festival work? Your programme includes acknowledgement of several corporate sponsors. Who is responsible for soliciting these funds?

We are. Corporate funding is about 10 per cent of the budget. 65-70 per cent is from the state, the city. 10 per cent is box office and the rest is from television rights. They filmed the opening and they also did something on *The Cave* and another about *Schiwago*. They will also film some things later about *Alkestis* and other productions.

So, although you have been working on plans for the Festival for some time now, your first season as intendant has just opened. How long do you plan to stay with the Vienna Festival?

My contract as intendant is until 1997.

What vision do you have for the next few seasons that will leave your mark, so to speak?

I want a little bit more concentration. I want to play each production longer so that they all can develop more. *The Cave* was full four times but could it be full five times, or ten times? I don't know, so this we have to develop. I want this to be a creative place, an international artistic meeting.

When you are not here, working in the Festival offices, how do you spend your time expanding and developing your own artistic interests?

Outside of the festival period, half of my time is spent travelling all over the world. I try to find projects which may interest me and to discover new people. One day I could be in Rumania or someplace else in Europe, or New York. In the summer, of course, after the Festival is over, it becomes a very busy time for me. I see as many of the other festivals as I can. I am going to Avignon. I am going to Edinburgh. I am going to Salzburg and Aix-en-Provence. So it's a lot.

You mentioned earlier that you had been speaking with Robert Lepage yesterday. Is there the possibility of a project with him in the future?

Yes. We are working on something for maybe '95, but I can't really say anything certain yet. He was here with a project, I think two years ago, and now we are talking about a creation together, maybe with Prague.

His recent departure from the theatre division of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa has provoked much discussion, especially with his very recent venture into opera directing and his well-received "Bluebeard's Castle"/"Erwartung" double bill with the Canadian Opera Company.

He is a daring young man, and I like that.

Dr. Martijn Sanders — Director, The Concertgebouw
The Concertgebouw — June 2, 1993

Concert programming at the Concertgebouw has become a very serious business. How do you satisfy your goal to fill the halls each day and night along with preserving or developing an artistic policy?

The focus on concert productions has only been strong in the last five years. The audience here in Amsterdam is only 6-700,000 people but it is very devoted. The concert with Heinrich Schiff and Ton Koopman, which you just saw, for example, was the disappointment of this season because when it was originally conceived, there were to be several concerts and recordings with this trio that never materialized except for one recording made one year ago. It is always a risk to combine major players with their own individual priorities and schedules. Few such combinations work well—maybe Ma, Ax and Stern do, for example. Artistic policy is completely in my hands, so to speak. I make the final decisions on who will play in the Concertgebouw.

You have also developed a summer programme that makes your season continuous year-round.

Yes, that was a major undertaking but you must understand some of the history particular to the Concertgebouw for the last five years to make sense of this. The Concertgebouw originated in 1888 as a private enterprise at the initiative of the people of Amsterdam. The Concertgebouw orchestra was founded half a year later as part of the same enterprise.

Mengelberg was the first long-term permanent conductor; his public popularity at the time probably exceeded that of the Queen. In 1945, he accepted voluntary exile in Switzerland following a difficult period during WWII. Some of his decisions during this time were not perceived as pro-Dutch, but the complexities of trying to do the best possible thing for all the orchestra members concerned must have been most troublesome. Haitink has also had an extremely long association with the orchestra, and Chailly has been here since 1988.

Around '51, serious difficulties developed between the orchestra and the board—the prominent differences arising between the physical labourers and the intellectuals. The board did not want to empower the orchestra and, perhaps more so, the blue-collar workers. It was at this time that the orchestra stepped away from the Concertgebouw organization to form their own non-profit association. The separation

has proved beneficial, for each entity can specialize on the individual needs of its members.

The hall has become extraordinarily busy with many productions beyond those of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, although they retain booking priority. Private companies can rent the facility and, in the '60s, jazz performances were not infrequent. Up until recently, however, there had been no artistic priority for performances in the main hall.

What is your history with the organization?

I have been director of the hall for over 11 years now.

Even when I arrived, there was only some semblance of artistic priority for concerts in the recital hall. Also at that time, the annual subsidy from the city of Amsterdam was not sufficient for the level of maintenance required for the aging structure. Two key priorities that needed to be addressed were the structural collapse, necessitating a complete reconstruction of the foundation, and the implementation of artistic prioritization for performances.

A capital campaign was initiated in 1983, turning to the private sector, which raised 47 million guilders (about \$33m CDN). In '85 the renovations were made and in 1988 the centennial celebration took place. It was around the centennial that the sub-goal of renters was addressed.

The strategy that evolved is most apparent in the Concertgebouw season and the radio broadcast programmes, as with the Mahler and Shostakovich cycles, and concerts dedicated to a particular artist or composer that include new commissions, an extension into the future. When developing the season's calendar, the Concertgebouw does not try to compete with the renters but instead tries to fill the gaps and complement the existing programming. Developing new concert series is part of this process. In '84-'85, several orchestras were invited to perform benefit concerts for the campaign. The success of artists and orchestras that had not played in the Concertgebouw for many years, spawned the "Great Artists and Orchestras" series. The resultant strategy was to continue to bring back major vocal and instrumental names.

Another initiative was the development of the summer season in '88. The summer season, unsubsidized, has been sponsored by an organization whose participation will finally be made public in about one week. This sponsor carried out a study which revealed that over half of the summer audience is not part of the regular season.

Therefore both tourists and Dutch people from outside Amsterdam and those who cannot afford the regular season benefit. There are no subscriptions for the summer, only single tickets, but the cost is less than regular-season tickets. There is a special foundation responsible for the summer season that is in itself a renter of the Concertgebouw facility.

The Concertgebouw has also taken over the "Authentic Orchestra Series" from an impresario and has found a sponsor for the series. The series sold very well at the beginning but then did not get as much as we wanted for the second year. The requests for next season are up 30 per cent.

For all of the subscriptions, there has been an increase of 15 per cent in orders which, for the big three, "Authentic", "Great Soloists" and "World Famous Orchestras", means an excess of about 1000 orders. As such, they have created a sort of mixed bag series out of some of the other concerts to address this surplus which you will now see in our new brochure.

There are also closed concerts, some evening rehearsals and recording sessions along with private events but, in the entire year, there are maybe only 25 dark days.

Two new series were introduced last season: "Carte blanche" with Yo-Yo Ma—Gidon Kremer will do it this coming season—involved seven concerts at the end of August and March. Yo-Yo incorporated the authentic movement in his concert with the Amsterdam Baroque group and Ton Koopman, but he also did a children's concert. Kremer is taking a completely different approach and is responding to many aspects of Dutch musical life.

What is your approach for incorporating contemporary music into the programme?

We have undertaken several projects focussing on contemporary composers like one we did on Messiaen. Incorporating contemporary music into regular programming is best done through a subtle integration, although there is a declining resistance to newer music. Composers are now more interested in reaching the public.

I understand that you were responsible for an initiative which prompted an organization of major concert halls.

Two years ago, 12 major concert hall directors united to explore issues shared by their organizations. Previously there had been no formal contact. Carnegie Hall is the only non-European member. We all share some similar challenges even though each concert hall is distinct and unique.

How does the operating budget of the Concertgebouw work, with all its affiliate organizations and renters?

While the Friends of the Concertgebouw solicit private donations, the revenue is quite small compared to the corporate sponsorships which represent two to three million guilders annually. The total operating budget of the Concertgebouw is approximately 10 million guilders annually. About 60 per cent of this is earned back through rental, 20 per cent from catering, 15 per cent from subsidies and 5 per cent from miscellaneous revenue. There is a special foundation specifically set up for hall rental. Their revenue is about six million guilders, two-thirds of which comes from tickets and the rest from sponsorships.

The sponsorships are largely still derived from the contacts established through the capital campaign. There has been significant fluidity in this aspect; about 90 per cent of the sponsors now are contacts that I made over five years ago. Most commitments are from three to five years and there are four sponsors of complete series. All of the regular concerts are sponsored along with half of the extras.

New sponsorship opportunities are primarily my responsibility. Much of this networking process is achieved during the "after-glow" of a performance, at parties with the soloists where I can approach people personally while they are enthralled with what they have just heard—which is our product. The most suitable candidates seem to be companies with a small, identifiable and specific consumer group.

There are strict rules for sponsors with regard to seating privileges: 80 per cent are sold to the public, 5-10 per cent must be kept for the press and board members, leaving 15 per cent maximum for sponsors—even though they may support up to 40 per cent of the budget.

The Concertgebouw is unusual in that ticket costs for all seats are the same price—a very egalitarian approach. The average costs seem to be in line with other comparable concert halls, but all other halls have tiered pricing schedules.

What experience did you bring with you to this position, before formally taking over the helm?

I studied organizational sociology, graduating in '68, and spent one and a half years studying in Michigan. I also spent some time in the navy. Upon returning to Holland, I spent some ten years on the film board before joining the Concertgebouw. But I was basically an outsider of the music world; I was much more interested in opera.

What part of your work do you find most exciting and rewarding?

It is most thrilling to see new projects and ideas that fly, like the "Carte blanche" series, which is such a success. The result is right here, in our new brochure. It is most exciting when it is *different*, somehow, from traditional programming. With the Schiff concert, it was the exact opposite result. There is an extended advisory council for the recital hall, but for the main hall I call most of the shots. Even though you cannot print this now, I just got off the phone with Rostropovich this morning. There is a great idea for a birthday concert which we are working on.

How do you negotiate with some of the tremendously high costs for bringing in some of the big name artists?

Thankfully, artists' fees have levelled off significantly—producers in Japan, Spain and Italy are no longer offering the enormous contracts which used to set a horrible precedent for other concert producers. Artists are much more reasonable now and it is easier for me to say that I can offer a certain amount, and if that amount is less than their manager wants, they will be more flexible because they want to work—and they want to work in the Concertgebouw because it is good for their career.

Peter de Caluwe — Director of Communications, The Netherlands Opera
Het Muziektheater — June 24, 1993

We have many people from around the world who visit us. I think it is always a good idea to meet the people who are involved and ask any questions that you may have about our productions, about our company, about opera in the Netherlands or in Europe. I am quite good at that—in European opera—so ask anything.

How long have you been involved in opera?

Not very long, actually. I have been around, in the business, passionately since I was 12 or so, but only really employed since I was 26.

I started working when I was 23, in Brussels, and came here when I was 26 in 1990. That was quick, absolutely, a very, very big move somehow—but it worked out perfectly. The house had already been in operation. When I came here, it was to start a "new era" with a new management. Our first real season was 1990-91. All the rest before that—when the house opened there was an intendant, Jan van Vlijmen, who is now in charge of the Holland Festival.

He was a man who was extremely talented in getting big international names, but the problem was that the money was not available to get those people here. One of the things about being an intendant and being in charge is that I don't think you can put one person in charge of a company in which there is so much public money going around. Certainly not in a company in Holland where everything is super controlled. I'm not Dutch, I'm Belgian, I'm Flemish, don't worry, so you can say anything about the Dutch you want.

It is unique for me to see this sort of an operation where everybody is so involved in each decision. I am more accustomed to individuals being empowered to make decisions, sometimes almost single-handedly.

That can be good. It's a little bit frightening. The system, in artistic matters, is compromised because it is, more and more, business. It's not like we put up a show in a house of 800 and put on 50 shows per year. We cannot allow an attendance of 50 per cent anymore. If you look at the money which is spent on opera every year, which is the most expensive art form anyway, it would be completely irresponsible to do this. So we have to have full attendances, and we have to have good management, not only financially but also as a house.

The ballet and opera live together, in this Muziektheater, and with guest programming, it translates into over 700 people working here. The structure of the management is now such that the general managers of both the opera and ballet constitute the managers of the Muziektheater, combined with the two artistic heads.

How is the management structured, hierarchically? Are the artistic and financial directors the same?

Pierre Audi is artistic director and Truze Lodder the general manager, so, in fact, she is ultimately responsible. She is incredible. She has done some amazing things, for instance, in '88 when Van Vlijmen left after two years, there was a deficit of over seven million guilders. So she reduced the number of performances from the expected number to 70 and got out of the crisis in two years. And then Pierre was appointed and in 1990 we could start fresh—like nothing had happened.

The problem is that in the meantime, the government has taken away lots of money again—they've reduced again, but not only for us, that's the good thing. It is similar all over the world now. They are reducing the budgets for culture. It is incredible.

We are not immune to these cutbacks in North America. It was recently very humiliating for the Canadian Opera Company when funding for a new opera, already in progress, was revoked because of structural changes in the grant-administering body and process. Financial uncertainty can create many problems for artistic planning.

If you look at planning we are doing, and it is the same for theatre as well, we have to know which evenings we have, together with the ballet, for not only performances but also for rehearsals—dress rehearsals, live rehearsals, everything. All of that has to be booked years in advance. In fact, we are planning '96-'97 at the moment. But that also means putting on productions. That also means making contracts. So, in fact, you make contracts for '96 and '97 at the moment and you do not know what money will be available in '97. We know until '93 because the grants come in blocks of three years. But the problem was that last year, in September '92, it was decided that it would be one million less per year than in '91-'92, because the budget for culture went down.

At the same time, the government keeps saying that we have to continue doing 100 performances on the same level of quality. We are absolutely completely publicly funded. There is no private funding, at the moment. We are working on that.

Is there any corporate funding?

Nothing, absolutely zero. We are completely government-paid. That is absolutely how it is in Europe, I'm afraid to say. All the arts institutions are public.

I encountered that in Vienna but did not think that it was possible throughout all of Europe.

Vienna is the same, but that is like 50 times our budget. So for the period '93-'97 it is one million less! So we said OK, we maybe can do the one hundred performances. But in the first place, we have convinced them that we cannot do touring anymore. This is the first year we have not done touring and something should be done to work this out. To get on a bus and go to another city, it's just like going on a holiday. It is worth it, because it brings the company much closer together.

But what about the people in rural communities who would normally only be able to see the touring productions?

There are two answers to that. Holland is so small. If you travel from one part of New York to the other, you travel from the north of Holland to the south of Holland. So for people who want to go to the opera in New York, they have to travel to NYC. In Holland, they also have to come to the centre. This is Amsterdam. The public transportation system in Holland is just amazing, so, in fact, there should be no problem.

On the other hand, the story's only half finished, because once you simply cross the border, there are many opera houses: you have Dortmund, Düsseldorf, Köln, Bonn, Liège, Brussels. There are plenty of opera houses. Depending on where you live in Holland, some of these houses are even closer than Amsterdam. So there really is no problem.

The second reason is that there used to be a touring company which will stop working by the end of this season because of money. There is only one little company in the south which will do three productions, which is quite good, I have to say. Their productions that I have seen are in fact better than those of the national touring company. So now they are trying to get a national touring company by the '94-'95 season, but that's also very problematical.

What is the total operating budget?

The total budget is 30 million per year, plus 12 million in box office receipts. So in fact we have something like 42 million.

What we do is not little, it is quite impressive. If you look at the productions which are on stage here, like the *Figaro* and the *Pelléas* which you saw, it's not little.

And neither is the stage!

It's a monster!

We are quite fortunate to have a performance hall with good acoustics in Hamilton but neither Hamilton nor Toronto have an opera house proper that the respective opera companies can call home. We do not have the abundance of opera houses that you have here.

That's the funny thing about Europe. I mean every city has to have its own theatre, its own concert hall. That is a wonderful thing about Holland. There are so many orchestras that all want to survive. The difficult thing, of course, is that no one can pay for it anymore because the money isn't there. But that is the reason why there are so many good orchestras. Because you know you can't have the Rotterdam or the Concertgebouw Orchestra without having all these little organizations and provincial orchestras. That's how you educate, how you breed people, and you make a cultural life.

And you also need healthy competition, which seems to exist here, strangely enough, between different cities.

That's one strange thing about Europe, the political developments. What's happening now, with people in different countries not getting on with one another—I come from Belgium, so it's a perfect example. I don't know how we have survived 150 years of Belgian occupation, as many people call it. Because, in fact, the Walloons are forced to live together with the Flemish, and that is not a really healthy thing. You can see that in Europe, everything is falling apart. Belgium is falling apart—fortunately not like in Yugoslavia—with mutual understanding. You can see it everywhere, in Germany, in Spain. In the end, I have the feeling we are going back to age of the cities.

It's crazy, but people in Rotterdam are not only jealous of what happens in Amsterdam, but they sometimes refuse to come to here. If Amsterdam has the

Concertgebouw, they have to have the Rotterdam Philharmonic. If Amsterdam has to have this, they have to have that. If Amsterdam has this museum, they have to have that museum. It's incredible. It's one hour by train. It's 80 kilometres. We are going back to the middle ages, to the age of the cities. You can also see it in the structural part of the organization where the power is delegated from the centre. You can see it on a European scale.

But opera is not quite in the same boat as orchestras, which are easier for cities smaller than Amsterdam to maintain.

Yes, this will remain the National Opera. But in Brussels, for instance, there is a real problem at the moment because there is now a Flemish government and a Walloon government.

I saw their "Die Meistersinger" production a couple of weeks ago. It is a charming and beautiful little theatre.

Ah. It is so lovely. That is a great production. I really love it.

Brussels is almost completely in Flanders but is mostly French and European. Nobody knows what to do with Brussels because geographically it is in Flanders and the money comes from Flanders and from Europe and not from the Walloons. What you have there is a very strange situation; La Monnaie is one of the only national institutions left. The money is coming from two, three communities. It's an unlivable situation. So where you would normally only have one cultural minister, you have three.

This is certainly a business full of very intense personality types. You have to interact with a fresh set of these obsessive personalities with each new production.

And that is a wonderful thing. But you know that when a production is over, you get a whole bunch of new people and you start all over again.

What percentage of your box office are repeat customers, subscribers?

We have an increasing number of subscription buyers. When I came here there was absolutely no communication structure. The press list was something like one page. The public was only informed by one brochure per year. Now every month they get a magazine.

I really enjoyed the last few issues and some of the interesting articles on current productions like "Gassir" and "Il Combattimento". They must be good promotional vehicles for catching the interest of people who are not already subscribers while also providing ongoing stimulus for your loyal consumers. It is interesting information instead of something glossy that merely tries to sell tickets one production at a time.

That's good. I am glad you like it. I'm not a marketer, I'm just someone who likes opera. The problem was that all the people before me came from marketing backgrounds. They were trying to market a product they don't know, and you cannot market opera.

It sounds obsessive, it sounds like marketing terms if you say this, but you can only get people motivated when you inform them right. We think that over the last three years we have found *the* opera-going public in Holland, which is not that big. We have now an address list of about 50,000. You always have to look at that and multiply by two or three to know how many people you reach. That is, I think, the size of the opera-going public here is 100,000 people. We can get them in for one performance per year but not ten. We have 1600 seats in the house to fill for each performance. By informing them on a more regular basis, not only telling them what we are doing but why we are doing it, who are the people behind it, they are getting the information. Getting this into their minds is the only way to motivate them to come.

What I have also discovered, which is very interesting for the arts, and why I don't believe in marketing of the arts *at all*, is that if these people are informed, they talk with other people, and these people come into the house. When I came to Amsterdam, my first friends—you know, the first friends you meet you bring to the opera—were about two people. If I look at them now, there are about twenty of them. Not my friends, but friends of friends of friends. They bring people with them and they all have subscriptions. That's how it goes. It is like a stone in the water.

Enthusiasm is contagious. But the reverse is also true. In the 1990 "Opera Now" article, featuring Pierre Audi on the cover, there was mention of some significant bad press in the earlier years. Has the situation changed?

There has been a significant change in the last three years. By building up this information and motivation, in which we have had a lot of investment since the beginning, things are now easier. It is always good to rethink the way you are communicating, but to have it right from the first moment is also a very nice feeling. Since 1990, in fact, and it is not exaggerated, we have 50 per cent more subscriptions. Even when

we raised the prices last year, the demand for subscriptions continued to grow. In 1990 we had nine or ten thousand subscriptions. We have over 15,000 now.

Does that figure represent group subscriptions, such as when a husband and wife subscribe together, or individual seats?

No. That number represents a fixed number of combinations which we offer. Our present *abonnement* system is designed so that people always see new operas. If you let people make their own package, they will all pick next year's *Parsifal*, *Il barbiere*, *La Traviata* and *Falstaff*. We could play those four operas all year. So we say yes you can have a ticket for *Traviata* and *Falstaff*, but we also offer you *Symposium*, a new piece which nobody knows.

There are two new Dutch works on next year's programme.

You're right, that's pretty amazing but that's part of the policy—we try to do the whole stream of opera and have diversity. We start with the Monteverdi but people like Schnittke and Schat are also on the programme, and they should be. The Schnittke opera we did last year, the world première we did with Rostropovich—that was an amazing production—was the best-sold production. In fact, there was an attendance of 102 per cent. I don't know how that is possible, but it is amazing for a contemporary piece, a new work—and the press was very good.

One of the problems for the press in Holland is that there is so much. The democratic system in Holland makes them write about everything as if it is as important as everything else. They always write in a democratic way, saying, "OK, we know that forum has less means, so we will write about that production in another way than we write about the Netherlands Opera—because they have a lot of money—we must be much more critical of the Netherlands Opera." So you get two reviews in the paper after two premières, and the horrible production of whatever gets raving reviews because, on their level, it's wonderful. I agree that it's wonderful with the means that they have. And then you have next door to that a production with a major producer, a major conductor, major singers, for whom the scrutiny is that much greater.

It is important that we defend the artists that we hire. For instance, during our recent production of [Saint-Saëns'] *Samson et Delila*, Samson was in a deep personal crisis. He should have canceled, but didn't. You cannot make the crisis worse by sending him away. But you cannot, of course, tell that to your public. If you write in the newspaper the most horrible things about that person, write that he was one of the biggest Siegfrieds of the last ten years.

How do arrangements with the Holland Festival work?

The Holland Festival is a major cultural event for Holland, but it is not a producing event. It is something which brings together things that are already there and are already happening. What I take very, very seriously as a criticism is the fact that the Holland Festival organizes everything into a programme as if it's their own.

Who decided to do "Pelléas"?

We decided to do *Pelléas*. The Holland Festival had nothing to do with that. It is just our programming. We always have a block in the house that we can open on the first of June, and the Holland Festival happens to open on the first of June as well. So, if they like what we do—they look around and take what is there—they simply take it. They only make one or two multimedia things a year like *The Cave*, which is a co-production. They are also doing this opera by Ton de Leeuw, *Antigone*, which is their own production. They do not really have a budget to produce themselves. In fact, if they get a production on their list, they don't have one cent to pay for it. So we gave them the opening and they didn't pay anything.

The publicity side is extremely difficult because I try to inform the press, by sending them a special release about this, saying that you have to know that the only possible billing of *Pelléas* is as a production of the Netherlands Opera presented in the Holland Festival. From the programming point, the financial point, the artistic point, the Holland Festival has nothing to do with this. Pierre invited Simon Rattle and Simon invited Peter Sellars. We did the casting ourselves.

When did this planning for "Pelléas" start?

When I first arrived in 1990 we were discussing this. I think Peter was invited in June 1990. Sellars has been talking with Pierre for three years already.

I was trying to deduce an underlying sense of unity in the artistic programming of the Holland Festival with "Pelléas", "Roméo et Juliette" and "Les Troyens", but your comments really only support a theory based on coincidence.

Roméo et Juliette is a joint production between the Netherlands Opera and Rotterdam. And they call it *their* Berlioz cycle, where it is part of *our* Berlioz cycle because we have done *Damnation*, we are going to do *Béatrice et Bénédicte*, we are going to do *Les Troyens*. And then they say "We are doing a Berlioz cycle" as if they influenced the VARA-Matinée and the Netherlands Opera to produce it. No. And that is my major criticism. Jan van Vlijmen cannot put into his international brochure *Pelléas et*

Mélisande without mentioning the name of the Netherlands Opera. All that appeared was the last page: "this programme has been made possible by the support of the Concertgebouw, the Rotterdam Philharmonic, the Netherlands Opera." But we gave them the two major musical events of the Festival.

Is there really a problem now because of all this?

Well, Jan spoke to my general manager. But she says exactly the same thing, because she's as furious about this as everyone else. And rightly so, because first it is our programming, it is our money.

All the credit should come to the Netherlands Opera and they should be happy that we put it in their Festival because we give them a "glam" opening. Instead, they invite the Queen and then it all starts going wrong. We say we want a joint invitation to the Queen to come to this opening. No—Mr. van Vlijmen invites her. So, of course, for her, and all the protocol, it is all the Holland Festival because it is the Holland Festival who invites them. But all that is not important, in fact, because the people who are working here, Simon and Peter, haven't really met Jan van Vlijmen, I'm sorry to say. They only met him at the opening. They know who is really producing *Pelléas*.

In the international scheme of things, in terms of other houses who watch for exciting new productions, the people "in the know" in the opera world know that this "Pelléas" is part of the Netherlands Opera season.

They know that, absolutely, because they get *our* press releases, they get our season brochures, they get a joint invitation from the Netherlands Opera and the Holland Festival. So they should know, in fact, but people tend to make life easy and put a label on it and the label Holland Festival sounds more interesting than Netherlands Opera, in a way.

You seem to take a very responsible stand for the image of the company as a whole.

I had a clear idea, when I came here, what this company was missing in communications. This is our first poster we made and it is still my favourite, because it's so right. The posters we make must communicate something about the piece, the essence, and be very strong graphically so they have value on their own. But a poster must also be informative so that you see that it is an opera production, which production it is, when it is. These posters are made for being in the streets. Some people say "I don't like it, it's all these different layers all the time. What is it?" *Pelléas* no one understood until they saw the performance. That's what I want.

There always have to be connections. The programme book has to be the same way, with a specific atmosphere of its own.

How is your monthly publication circulated?

It is mailed free to 25,000 addresses, to every person who subscribes, and to people who are interested in a subscription but could not get one. This year we had to write to 5,000 people that we couldn't sell them a subscription because we sold out. But we don't sell out everything to subscriptions, because you always want to have single seats available. You cannot force everyone to take between five and ten performances per year. It's expensive, but it works in the sense that people are prepared when they come to the show. But they may also say, "This is an extra performance that is not in our subscription. It seems interesting to me. What Fassbaender says here is quite interesting. It's nice. Oh, I forgot they were doing that piece. I want a ticket." And that's how it works.

It can be a mental trigger.

Exactly, because this is mailed to places like Hillegom and Groningen, but the posters are only in Amsterdam.

Have you carried out any marketing studies? What is the demographic profile of your audience?

It's very mixed. I had arranged for a big public survey before actually coming, so that when I officially started, I already knew some of the results. If you do things based on the concept that opera can be sold on content and information, and your public doesn't think the same way, you're wrong. If the public is only interested in attending because they like the building, or they like being in a glossy atmosphere, you have to try another approach.

Early on, we embarked on a big campaign because I wanted to know how big the potential market was. I wanted to know how effective our address lists were, the penetration rate, and to get rid of, as soon as possible, addresses which have not been responsive for the last three years. They shouldn't continue to get our mailings.

We are now working on a box office system which will make it much easier for us to trace single-ticket buyers. We are still so lacking, in comparison to America. It's possible in box offices there to find out almost anything.

Much of the American marketing approach to which you are referring is the result of reactive attempts to fill emptying houses. I sense that in Europe there is a slight advantage in that many of the imported marketing techniques are being used to manage a proactive approach to an evolving market base.

Yes, we are coming at it from a slightly different angle, not like if Mr. X eats Wheaties for breakfast and takes the 7:00 am train from Utrecht to Amsterdam, what is the probability that he will buy a ticket for *Wozzeck*. I have a joke about that kind of approach. There was one of these big marketing companies showing me, "Yes, you can draw a map"—and they showed me a map of London—"and because people have to cross this bridge, they don't want to go because they know there will be a traffic jam at this bridge, and then they know that they won't be able to find parking. So don't do a mailing to people who live here past the bridge, mail to people over here." So I said, "Well I can't use this, because in Amsterdam we only have bridges. I don't know to which part of Amsterdam I could mail."

The season just closed yesterday, and everyone seems to have evaporated from the office. What sort of planning work do you do between seasons?

This year I am working on plans with Pierre. We don't close in the summer. It's not like in other theatres, where everyone might be gone for a month. The advantage to such a shut-down is that you have a fresh start in the fall. Now we have some people taking holidays in December, others in September, and the work of those people lands in my hands. This isn't so much of a problem because I like to be involved with the practical things from time to time. "Make me a copy of such and such"—you should never say that, because you can become very, very spoiled. But some people have never made copies. They don't know what it is to do a mailing. Those people are really the bad managers, I am afraid to say, because they don't know how things really work.

Hopefully this tight economy will make them a dying breed.

Well, I hope I am a new breed. I hope that's the way people want to work in the future. Many people, especially from the universities, don't work that way, although it depends on the individual. But maybe I shouldn't say that because I am also in that position.

Another area I want to investigate is our income potential. Ninety guilders, for many people, is the top, top price, although when we raised the price to that level, sales kept rising. That doesn't mean that we want to go to 100 guilders. You shouldn't just keep pushing the limit because at some point you will really get into problems.

It is difficult to forecast what that magic number is, one that still retains a realistic sense of value for the consumer and yet provides the necessary income for the operation of the house.

I think that we should stay on this plateau for now. The income which we have now from the *abonnement* system is such that we have over five million in the bank right now. You get good interest from that. It is much better than having it from your single ticket sales because when you get that income, it's already spent.

Everything that's left over from productions goes into the pot, and it stays there for a special project. So, by good management, we have been able to do this touring production that was "out of the pot," which no one touches.

I was surprised by the percentage of younger people in the "Pelléas" audience—much higher than I expected, compared to, for instance, the Canadian Opera Company.

It's nicely mixed. In order to find the limits, we did a huge campaign in major papers and glossy magazines, with a full-page picture spread and a part that you tear out. We paid a fortune for that. Don't be shocked—we got 2500 reactions to it. It's an incredibly low response rate, so that proved to me that that was not an effective way of reaching people. You don't sell opera the way you sell Nivea cream.

We also turned away from the bulk *abonnement* sort of thing, which, here in Amsterdam, offers packages of tickets for all cultural institutions. I wanted our own subscription programme. None of these new box office systems which people want to sell us can match our own system, because ours is so closely tailored to *our* public.

Now to come to the answer to your question, "Who are they?". What we knew from the 1989 survey is that 65 per cent of our audience is between 35 and 55. That is quite young. The next big lump is younger than 35. The 55+ group is around 20 per cent. I think we will look really closely at the age distribution again, because I am going to do another survey soon.

We also know that our subscribers mainly have an above-average level of education. This is interesting; most of them read *De Volkskrant*, or something like *Vrij Nederland*, which are the more intellectual newspapers. So none of them read this horrible *Telegraaf* or whatever, which is the national newspaper. Don't forget that it is also the biggest newspaper in Europe. It is bigger than any of the British newspapers are in Europe.

If we do a new public survey, I would also like to explore other questions, like how people react to our productions. I want to know if what I think is really true; I want to find out how these people got involved in the opera. Did somebody bring them? I want to know more than just who they are and what they are. I want to try to find out why they are subscribers—do they just want to be sure of a ticket or do they want to be presented with something they don't know?

If you look at the development of the public, from what I can see, a lot of it depends on the production. For *La traviata* and *Il barbiere* you will get the major opera-loving public. But *Pelléas*, yesterday—I am sure most of the audience had never been in the house before. So a non-opera-going public will come for a specific production. But do *these* people come back? I am not interested in the basic public. They will always come, the cult people, even if they are shocked.

Some people come to you because, as you say, they are so passionate about opera, and they know my face. They say, "I'm going to kill you for this because this is horrible" or the next time they come to you and they say, "You know I have to congratulate the company because this is magnificent." Even for the "horrible" things they will add to it, "I've come three times to be convinced that it's horrible." It's wonderful. You know that if people want to come three times, it proves that they're really serious. They have the right to feel that it's horrible. But you will have those people all of the time.

One thing with the Netherlands Opera is that it is one of those companies that will not have a name like Covent Garden or Wiener Staatsoper or La Scala, because these are houses which exist on their names. If you look at the programming—and I don't speak of Covent Garden now, they have some quite good things—in Vienna or Milan, it's rubbish, it's absolutely horrid what you can see there. The quality of the chorus, the quality of the orchestra—even the Wiener Philharmoniker, even the quality of the singers, flying in and out the next day, it's absolutely a shame what you can see there. But these houses will remain because of their name. Next to that you have houses which claim a prominent position for a few years, like we had Frankfurt in the '70s and Brussels, clearly, in the '80s.

But these semi-prominent positions shift, depending on the synergy emanating from whoever is working at a house at a specific point in time.

I knew that when I came to the Netherlands Opera. I'm glad that everyone acknowledges now that we are, at this moment, at a spearhead position because artistically things are happening here. But we also know that this will come to an end

in about five years' time. Look at Brussels. Mortier has left and now it's doing quite well, but they will always be in the shadow of Mortier.

It's cyclical. How do you plan future programming here to stimulate your public and always be on the artistic forefront, while hoping to defy this cyclical pattern?

One of the things that you have, as a company, is an artistic policy. First of all, you try to be adventurous. What you see, more and more now, is that the adventure is becoming institutionalized. And that's why it dies after seven, eight or nine years. You start with young, innovative singers and youthful conductors, but suddenly people focus on it and say, "Hey, I want to be involved in that." So you get a Boulez here or a Peter Stein or a Haitink or a Luc Bondy, and suddenly you say, "Hey, we have done this all now." And then it dies. I know it's like that. I am sorry to have to say that, but you have to keep refreshing things. That's why we know that the Netherlands Opera will be on the map for at least five more years. But after that, it will be difficult for them to cope, because there will be another house which is gaining. I have been very, very lucky that I have been in both Brussels and Amsterdam at the right times. I have to start looking now for '97-'98.

How would you describe the current fingerprint of the Netherlands Opera?

The visual element is very important, as well as a balance between the music and theatre. None is more important than the other. Frankfurt, in its heyday, focussed too much on the theatre and drama, like with Wieland Wagner's second-act copulation in *Tristan*. Brussels took the theatrical approach from Frankfurt, yet its aesthetic approach coats the dramaturgy in a creamy sauce. There must be some unity among the time of an opera, the time of its writing, and the time of the production.

In Amsterdam, we have found many contemporary references which work well emotionally. For much of the visual arts, we use Dutch artists. Pierre is very much interested in the visual aspects. We don't want singers who look like Pavarotti or Caballé, because their image is unbelievable in a story. Half of the singers we use are Dutch. Most of them are in the chorus, but you cannot blame us for that. That is a result of the education system. Studio programmes don't work anymore, just look at the German schools. There must be a stronger link between the education systems and the local houses.

In terms of other Dutch artists, we had a real problem trying to support Frans Brüggen. His first real breakthrough as a conductor had been in Salzburg, so people were angry that we had not had him first, here in his native country. So we planned *Zauberflöte* with him but had to cancel because rehearsals were going so poorly. So

then we decided on *Idomeneo*. Rehearsals for that also went poorly, but we had to **stand** behind our decision and support him when he got on the podium on opening **night**. Each failure is the result of a different set of reasons, not just bad management **or one** other small link in the whole system. And the same can be said about the successes. It wasn't just Simon or Peter or Pierre that made *Pelléas* so wonderful, it was everyone working together.

Jan van Vlijmen — Intendant, Holland Festival
The FilmMuseum — June 28, 1993

I don't like those things [tape recorders]. This is my experience—I am almost always unhappy with the results of an interview with a machine as opposed to without a machine.

I came across a photo in an old Keynotes publication of you standing with Misha and Amy Mengelberg and Rudy Koopmans. You have played a very active role in many different areas of Dutch musical life. In some ways the Holland Festival brings together these various strands, but because of the intense amount of activity in a short period, the Festival also stands apart. What is your personal artistic mandate for the Holland Festival?

I was the director of the Royal Conservatory in the Hague for 18 years including during the '60s which were very exciting. I am a composer, though, so I will do this until '96 and after that I will finish everything and just devote myself to composing.

When I came to the Festival three years ago, it was in a sort of crisis, I must say. There were a lot of people arguing that the Festival has to be finished. This is an important part of the history of the Festival. There were a lot of financial problems. There was a special commission established by the minister of culture to judge the results of the Holland Festival in order to decide whether it is possible to continue this intention or not. I must say that at this moment, the situation has completely changed. In the first place, the public interest, this year, is very, very high. Almost all the performances—dance, opera and music—are sold out and the results of this year's Festival, in that respect, is much better than the other years.

I think this is a new situation and I think that it is very good that we have changed the artistic policy in the first place. We have cleaned up the financial problems and this year I think the festival functions the way it has to be. There are still, of course, small problems that have to be solved. It would be very difficult to make a festival that is really different from the regular season because, as you already said, during that time there are a lot of things happening. So the festival has to do something very special, to have a profile. I think that what we can do is to produce things that are really special.

The regular institutions and companies cannot do everything and so we have to do things that are really very special, for example *Antigone* in this new facility. It is not a permanent facility; it is just for this production. It has recently been decided that there will be a new centre for performing arts on this site, specially devoted to

contemporary music and probably music theatre. Such a project as Anna Teresa de Keersmaeker which took three weeks, a sort of retrospective, culminated with a new production. It would be almost impossible for the regular companies to produce Steve Reich's *The Cave*. You need special theatrical facilities for such a project.

But "The Cave" was also an event co-produced with Vienna, the Festival d'Automne and BAM amongst others. In that sense, there are also financial advantages to such a co-production, as well as a sense of artistic teamwork with people outside of Amsterdam.

Co-productions are only good if you are on the same artistic level. That is not always so easy.

What, do you feel, happens when you have a co-production that travels from place to place? Each festival has its own spirit. Do you not feel that these individual identities are somewhat threatened by the increasing number of travelling co-productions?

There is no real danger of co-productions interfering with individual identities of European Festivals. The audience in Amsterdam, for instance, is far away from Vienna. Especially for Europeans. I know that the scale in the United States and in Canada is completely different. We think completely differently. The public in Amsterdam will never go to Vienna to see this production. It is even difficult to get public from The Hague, which is only 50-60 kilometres from Amsterdam, to come to Amsterdam.

So the Holland Festival, in the past, took place throughout the whole country, sometimes in six, seven or eight cities at once. Now it is only in Amsterdam and we think that is good. If people want to participate, they will come here for performances, but only a small number do.

Who is your audience?

We have done surveys in the past and this year there is a special investigation to find out what part of the audience comes from other countries. Last year the result was that almost 13 per cent were from other countries. That's not so bad. Probably, of the 87 per cent that are Dutch, 80 per cent are from Amsterdam. They don't travel between cities here for concerts. This is typical of Europe and because of this, co-productions have no danger of blending identities.

Really big productions like *The Cave* are really demanding from a financial point of view and couldn't be realized if there is no co-operation between the different cities. So for special events and productions I think it is very useful to have this co-operation between the main festivals.

What motivated the focus on composers like Ton de Leeuw and Górecki in this year's Festival?

We are looking for those composers and artists in general who are not really well known in this country, or are not really familiar to the public. For example, Górecki is very unknown to this country and he is a special man, a special composer, I think. He is for my feeling, more or less the equivalent for Steve Reich in America—Górecki in Europe. He is also working with these minimal techniques in quite a different way. So when we decided for Reich's opera and the Keersmaeker choreography of his work, we decided to pay attention to the post-Reich American generation. And so Górecki was chosen as more or less of a European equivalent.

The music theatre programming, however, is more or less the backbone of the project. Next year we will perform new Chinese operas composed by young Chinese composers. As a part of this we will pay special attention to Chinese music. Another important European composer Wolfgang Rihm, we will perform an opera of his. So in the other music programming there will be some Rihm orchestra and chamber music.

The Festival, or more accurately you, select certain areas that you wish to explore. How do you then coordinate the interaction between established houses here in Amsterdam to mesh with your ideas?

The Netherlands Opera, for instance, proposed to me to do the *Pelléas* and I accepted. If I don't want it, I don't take it. If I can fit in a certain project in the Festival programme, I like it. So we paid attention to French opera with the two Berlioz pieces. *Antigone*, in fact, is a French opera. Ton de Leeuw lives in France. Even his wife is French, and he is very much connected to the French culture.

We all get involved in discussing who must sing this and who must play that and it is sometimes very difficult when we have different ideas. Next year we will probably not use *Falstaff* as the opening. We are still thinking about something else. We cannot do each year the opening with a regular opera production.

Financially how does this work with so many local organizations involved, with their own respective budgets?

About 30 per cent of the total budget, six and a half million guilders, is from the government. It is not so much compared to 75 million for Salzburg. That is more for tourists. The Vienna Festival is 25 million for four and half to five weeks of performances. They don't have so many concerts, rather theatre, opera and sometimes dance. Their concerts are a part of another organization. I am not exactly sure how this works.

When we want something special, say the Netherlands Dance Theatre, we have to pay for it. If it is part of their regular repertoire, it is not always necessary to pay—if they are our guests. Next year, for example, we will do a common project based on Mondriaan, because it is a Mondriaan year. We must pay for special facilities that will be needed to realize this.

How do you get from 30 per cent to 100 per cent of your revenue to be able to afford and plan these projects?

Apart from 30 per cent from the government, 8 or 9 per cent is from the city of Amsterdam, and this year 16 or 17 per cent from sponsors and about 12 per cent from tickets. I am not quite sure yet because we are still figuring out all of the numbers from this year's Festival.

What role do private sponsorships play in the whole scheme of things? Fundraising for the arts, in the North American sense, is a somewhat young concept here and, as I am sure you are aware, very time and labour intensive.

I put a lot of energy, last year, into sponsors, and I think that was very successful. It is the highest amount of sponsorship since the festival started. I have become connected with a group of special friends who are rich. They are very helpful. They represent, say, fifteen very important industrial or financial people who pay 10,000 guilders per year each. They help me to find other sponsors, to introduce me into this specific circle.

This sounds like many hours of your personal energy. Are other people hired by the Festival specifically to assist in this area?

It doesn't work if you simply appoint someone to do this kind of work. It is very personal. Before I came, they used a special organization that was not nearly as successful. This kind of fundraising is fairly new for Holland. You have to know

that. Only in the last seven to nine years, has it been part of our work. But you have to use, as you say, a personal approach. Donors only want to talk to the director.

(Jan van Vlijmen's glasses, which had been taped together rather ineffectively, finally freed themselves, leaving a lens dangling freely from each ear.)

I can still talk but I cannot see what I say. I have to go to the ocular, how do you say? Optometrist?

As you reflect on the season which has just closed, how do your assessments affect your plans for future seasons? Will you continue to incorporate so many different artistic genres—spoken theatre, music theatre, dance, opera, instrumental music, film and other visual arts?

The thing with spoken theatre is that guest performances by theatre companies are very expensive. I cannot do so much. I must say that the budget sounds high but it is not high. I have only just under four million guilders for programming. Two and a half million guilders are for publicity, the office and the administration. To make a programme during one month including theatre from other countries, it is not so much. I like to show foreign companies. I try to work together with Dutch companies but I am not happy with their quality of production and acting.

Is it critical to include all of these different branches of performing arts?

Yes, it is necessary to have all these art forms. It has been done all of these years since 1947 and I don't want to change this. I like the broad spectrum of different genres. It is very interesting.

Many people associate a festival with a special kind of spirit and excitement. Do you think that this is necessary and how do you plan in a way to create or foster this kind of spirit, to maintain electricity and tension over four weeks?

I want that kind of hype. I think that it is part of the festival idea. I think such a project as Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker gives this continuity. It is a line until the very end. So that's a possible way. It is also very important to spread out important events across the whole period. We are concentrating, more and more, our activities around the weekends. If you look at the programming, it is not always possible because of when a company may be available, but the main activities are concentrated on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, the weekends. Then you can more or less keep the

tension during the whole period with those small dips in between. But I am not against changing the period—say to three weeks. In fact, I would prefer that. It would be much easier, but we do not have enough theatrical concert hall facilities to do so. Some of these productions must be done in a regular theatre. There are no other possibilities. That's why we are spread out over four weeks, but I think the concentration on the weekends is a solution.

What was your takeaway, both personal and for the Holland Festival, from the meeting of festival intendants called by Gerard Mortier?

I felt very good about that meeting. I feel very happy with Vienna in this group because the man in charge of the Vienna Festival has the same kind of ideas, artistically, as me. Therefore I like this interaction. There are other managers whose festivals interest me: The Festival d'Automne in Paris, the Vienna Festival and, more or less, the Berlin Festival. Out of the whole group, they have more or less the same feelings about artistic policy.

Is the main purpose of the group to share artistic ideas?

The group came together to explore ideas and discuss co-operation, for co-productions of course, to inspire each other. Spending a weekend talking with colleagues, sometimes there are ideas that are new for your festival. It's not so good to be so isolated. But we all have different working parameters, and certain ideas are not well suited to everyone's festival. This open door, the dialogue, must continue for special co-productions.

In reflecting on another closed season, what ideas do you think were really successful?

Definitely the Reich and the Keersmaecker, but also *Antigone*—and the Graettinger was fantastic.

Did anything not really work the way you had hoped?

The Flemish Opera orchestra and choir was a group I felt that we should invite because of cultural cooperation with "Antwerp '93". The programme was interesting but it just didn't work. But now we are already excited about next year's Chinese theme in opera, chamber opera, and Peter Brooks and possibly some co-production with Paris.

Jan Wolff — Director, IJsbreker
 IJsbreker Café — July 3, 1993

As the grand Pooh-Bah of new music in the Netherlands, would you explain how you feel contemporary music fits into everyday musical life in Holland? As an extension of that, what parallels did you see in Canadian musical life that encouraged you to turn to Canada for creative partnerships?

One of the main reasons is that I thought it was a similar structure in Canada, very similar to the Netherlands. Canadian people have a strong background of European influences, and they don't want to be like Americans. Those Americans, they are terrible, in my point of view. They think that they produce the best and the highest and the biggest, but they don't. I know the structure in Europe very well, so after fourteen years with the IJsbreker—I developed the whole IJsbreker—when I found such nice people, and a similar structure, I saw a potential link Canada.

But your first question was about Dutch musical life. It's a very little country. It's 200 kilometres down one side, and, on the other side you have twenty kilometres of water. We had this German war, from '40-'45, which had a strong influence on cultural life. They built up the opera from the Wagner Society and they created many symphony orchestras. At the same time, many people started to play in the symphony orchestras or do something as a musician or an artist so that they didn't have to fight in the war. So during the war, here in Holland, there were too many symphony orchestras. After the war, we had 16 in this little country. It was crowded with orchestras.

Then all the musicians started teaching. There was also a high level of performance, because all the orchestras raised their level to match the highest level of the Concertgebouw Orchestra. After the war, children started practising and were beating their teachers. And so this little country became crowded with good musicians.

The Dutch want to view every inch of the country because it is so small. Because we don't have much more money than other countries for music or cultural life, we have changed this structure of symphony orchestras in the last 25 years. We cut half of them and also the funding. The government gave us money for other musical organizations, and the composers had to fight hard for their own foundation.

In 1958 we had only one woodwind quintet in the Netherlands. It was of the highest level and performed all over the world. At that time, we founded the Nederlandse Blazer Ensemble. I played in it for many years—till '68 or so. In the early '60s, the

change in the symphony orchestras brought about the development of many ensembles.

But the governments still had this old way of giving money and not getting involved with programming or management. That is why we—"we" are about 15 or 20 like Louis Andriessen, Reinbert de Leeuw and myself—tried from the 60s to '75 or '76 to get together to start a centre for chamber music. We didn't want to belong to a symphony orchestra. It's a boring job. One of us started to conduct—it was Edo de Waart. One went out to have a solo career on oboe. I went out and I played in many ensembles and, incidentally, in some symphony orchestras because they still needed good performers.

So we tried to develop a chamber music centre in the Netherlands but it didn't work out. Each time there was a chance for funding from the city, or the government was willing to do something, all the ensembles—they had so much identity of their own—feared having just one boss on top. We were afraid, myself included, that someone else would be your new chief. You want to be your own artistic director, manager and everything. You want to decide where to play and what to play and how to play it.

I tried to interest the musicians of an orchestra—it's called De Volharding, "The Perseverers"—in developing a chamber music centre. De Volharding knew that this place was empty, the IJsbreker, but they were afraid to get involved and then have to manage everything. It didn't work out again, so I decided to approach the city of Amsterdam. I told them that I wanted to start a little chamber and contemporary music group. Alone, you can be much stronger than with many others.

We now have the gas factory. It will take them two years to clean the grounds but they have allocated this facility for chamber and contemporary music. We are now in charge of the facility for many years, and of other places as well. This position, in a way, is strong, but it is also very dangerous.

In Amsterdam, the government starts something by saying one thing, but there are many more steps before it is really finished. So I am a little bit reserved. We have a very good chance that we will have the whole area including this gas hall. It's very much what we need. We have developed very specific plans for another building with two concert halls—one with 750 seats and one with 200—along with many rehearsal rooms. Then, all the ensembles can perform in this chamber music centre. Gaudeamus, Donemus, IJsbreker and the Holland Festival will all move to this area, to this large building. I have the next four months to account for every detail, to the penny.

What will happen to this location?

This will be a nice café. We will open up the back again. For 300 years it was a little pub called the IJsbreker—of course we didn't invent the name. There was a ship in front of the door which was owned and restored by the city of Amsterdam and the beer brewers. This ship broke the ice—they were all pulled by horses on the wall—so that the water boats could get out of the canals to pick up fresh drinking water for the city. The name, the IJsbreker, was very successful. It was the only thing we didn't have to work for.

And now Canada. In the years that the IJsbreker has been here, we have had festivals, but mostly evening programmes. In '85, we had a focus on Canada in the Holland Festival. Murray Schafer's *RA* was performed, and some of his older chamber music. The selection made at that time was, say, old-fashioned classical music from Canada. There was the Canadian Electronic Music ensemble.

Can you define what you mean by "old-fashioned classical music from Canada"?

Oh, no. I meant to say old-fashioned contemporary music.

How would you define old-fashioned contemporary music?

Old-fashioned is always a wave. I don't want to insult anyone. The Canadian Electronic Ensemble in the '60s was WOW. But developments in this area, over the last 30 years, happen very quickly. All of a sudden, you are boring and quickly out of date. So you can't come, in '85, with the old material from the '60s as a representation of the best development of electronic Canadian music. We knew that there was much more going on in Canada at that time. It disturbed me, because a negative image of Canadian music was confirmed. Everybody determined, by what was performed, that there was nothing going on in Canada.

As with the Holland Festival, many people think that during every festival, things are a little bit different artistically, on a higher plane. That's not true, in my opinion. The Concertgebouw Orchestra is not able to play any better in June than in January. You do your best all the time. The only thing you might do is have a few more rehearsals, because there's a contemporary piece or you have a better conductor, a conductor you might want to have all of the time.

We used to save some things for inclusion in the Holland Festival. We would look for special projects from other countries. Every year after '85, we received Canadian proposals. I sometimes referred to the IJsbreker as the Music Gallery, as a joke,

because there's a contemporary music/jazz kind of club in Toronto of that name. The Canadian project had been nice, but it still disturbed me painfully that the Canadian image was significantly damaged. In '85, '86 and '89, we received more proposals and did some other Canadian things. We also did things with other countries like Japan and Australia.

But there was another problem: we were always building up contacts for one or two concerts and then they flew away. About five years ago, I started to think that it was stupid for all of us to work and build to a certain point and then break it down. Composers want to write and ensembles want to tour. We want to continue to show our countries to each other. So why not start working on a regular basis, cooperating structurally? You don't have to work together every year, but if there's a good reason for a project, you should do it.

Then I started to think about target countries. You can go with Japan, but I don't like them so much, because you can't speak properly to them. Even if you do, they do their own things first and you second. That's not a balanced exchange. Sorry about Japan. I went there a few times, but that only confirmed my opinion. Then I went to do my research in Canada.

When did you start your investigatory visits?

I can't remember—three or four years ago. I spent a month in Vancouver, Montréal and Toronto. I did my research in the same way as you have been doing your research here. First I went to the regular places like the Canadian Music Centre and the regular organizations—you must do that. The CMC is very similar to what we have in the Netherlands—it's a promotional thing. They took, in the past, Donemus as an example for developing the CMC. Then I went to jazz clubs. I wanted to speak with jazz musicians, music critics and radio producers.

The critics, in particular, didn't receive me very openly. They were a bit mmmhmnmmhmn this music mmmhmnhhmnmh our music hmnhhhmn. The critics were—I'm trying to find the right word—in Dutch it is "behouden". They were not fond of renewal. This was very apparent because they had no knowledge about it. They're afraid of losing their jobs as music critics. They think that they should write about how Beethoven is performed again, because they can "prove" things. When they speak about new things, there is often disagreement. One may say that something is a masterpiece and another that it is completely nothing. But you must confront the music or music won't develop. That's necessary in this field. There must be discussion.

Investigating electronic music in Canada, I came upon a few organizations which I found interesting, like the New Music Society in Vancouver with Owen Underhill. In Montréal, there was the SMCQ. We had them here to the IJsbreker with Walter Boudreau, and I liked it. As a conductor, I was a little bit disappointed because I saw that Boudreau was not really a conductor. He is a composer who conducts. More often than not, a composer who conducts is a good conductor, but with him, this was not the case. He is too big.

I had also heard about a woman, Lorraine Vaillancourt, and the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne in Montréal. Most of the funding, at that time, was going to the SMCQ and only a little bit to Lorraine's ensemble. I attended her rehearsals and was very impressed. She has a great gift which no one knew about then. I went to the government in Ottawa and explained that I wanted to cooperate structurally, that I wanted to invite the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne to the Netherlands. But she suggested the SMCQ. I had to tell her that we had had them already and that we wanted this other ensemble because they were better. That's how it goes. Claude Vivier had his period, it's a pity that it's finished, but you can't maintain it for sentimental reasons. You have to continue to develop.

So I asked this woman in Ottawa to believe me, as a professional, that the Nouvel Ensemble, and, in particular, Lorraine was very important to Canada. She is really a very great conductor and a good trainer for an ensemble. Many people want to play in that ensemble, more than other ensembles. We finally initiated a successful contract.

Toronto is a very American city in my opinion. This makes it a little bit difficult for me to go to the CMC headquarters there. I had some meetings there and also visited their own little place where they play their own music for their own friends. Hemisphere and a few other groups are not strong enough for us to work with, so I decided that I definitely wanted to work with NEM. We had another project called Forum in '91, and again in '93. I went to my government to explain that this is the way that I wanted to work in the future. But I had to explain what I meant by working together *structurally*.

If we wanted to do a project on harpsichord, for instance, we could find a partner in Canada who is interested. They could be involved with 60 per cent or 50 per cent or perhaps 80 per cent of such a project. This other 30 per cent or whatever would also be influenced by Canadian consultants. We would research the project for three or four years, because we must plan the composers' funding. If I commission a piece from a composer, a good composer, they don't write a piece next year, but maybe after four years. So, such plans must be made many years in advance.

I went to museums and asked how they co-operate and mount joint exhibitions. They said that they solved many problems by careful cost management. For instance, if they have managed a collection, they may offer it to their colleagues. They don't charge for borrowing the collection, only its transportation. All of the research and organization has already been done. It is an exchange programme. When I wrote about this to our government, they gave me a little bit of money to start doing some more detailed research on how this might work for music organizations.

What do you see as important developments for the future of contemporary music?

What is important for contemporary music now, in my opinion, is that music theatre must be developed very strongly. Not only concerts—there are always concerts, don't misunderstand me, and dance performances.

So you want a particular focus on music theatre?

Yes. Opera. No one seems able to write about all this, about opera and this new form which we are searching for. This will be, in my opinion, part of the next 100 years. We used to have music connected to the church, listened to in the church. But since the time of Beethoven, we have been listening to music in concert halls. This is, in a way, classical listening and it will exist as a museum. We will preserve this, because it is very important for masterpieces. But for a centre like this, and for many others in the world, we need to explore and develop this theatre thing like what you saw with *Antigone*. It was not a real theatre piece, but more a concertante oratorio. We don't need more concert halls: we need specific music halls for the variety of ensembles.

What key similarities and differences do you sense in the Canadian approach to future developments of new music?

There's not too much difference right now. Music does not only develop in Europe. Canadians and Europeans are not really different, in this respect. You can make them different, by writing about the differences, but I don't think it's true. You can say that there is an Italian style of composing. No—I think that there is a style in which, for instance, Donatoni may write, and many people may start writing like Donatoni. Most composers have information about Western culture and how a particular composer may be original. This is the same in Canada. But it is up to composers to decide what they do with this information.

Canada may have fewer musicians than in Holland, but they still have some good impulses, because the infrastructure is similar. As for differences, we are more specialized, in a way, in certain kinds of music such as contemporary and electronic.

And with some older music as well.

Yes—we explore each style in detail. In Canada, they like to have things *good* and *nice*. In this specialized world in the Netherlands, music should be very well done and very *proper*. The Canadians aren't so extreme. I like their attitude very much, because sometimes we are more Catholic than the Pope. This is why we have a large amount of contemporary music. Sometimes it's terrible. But if you listen to it, not all of it is worthwhile. I can sense the Canadian attitude by the way they perform and make their decisions. I am attracted to this approach, quite different from ours, and that's why I want to continue developing a Canadian-Dutch relationship.

Do you attribute any of this so-called Canadian "niceness" to differences in the way musical life is funded in Canada and Holland?

The European tradition is a responsible attitude towards the arts. Canada has felt more of the North American influence, where the arts must justify some tangible value for society. This has a definite impact on music programming and development. Here at the IJsbreker, the government funding is conceived structurally over many years. We all agree that we need a strong infrastructure. In Canada, the country is so big that the government cannot build up the infrastructure as easily. It is much more difficult to coordinate something musical in both Montréal and Vancouver, because of geographical distance and, sometimes, political considerations. But if you don't have new music organizations in cities like Vancouver, and in other cities besides Montréal, you have no competition. European structural partners may enable them to develop this external influence, without which each organization becomes very isolated. Even competition within a city can be good, like with the SMCQ and NEM both in Montréal.

The development of music theatre in Canada is an interesting case. It's new, and they want to have new. What I see here has so much tradition in the Brecht-Eisler theatre, but Canadians are free to go their own way. Their isolation from the European sense of tradition is a good thing for their own development. Remember how I look when I say this because it is difficult to explain this Canadian way, precisely, and maybe *nice* is not the best word.

How are organizations such as the Holland Festival able, in some way, to stand apart from the regular year-round programming in Amsterdam?

We make it very difficult for them. The government wants each organization to be important and strong. But it is very difficult for organizers to exclude an important musical event from regular programming in the hopes that the Festival will want it. The intendant might say, "No, oh no, that's not for us. Do it in January or whenever you want." So it is unrealistic that everyone will save their beautiful projects, performances or concerts for the Holland Festival. They want to show their best all year.

The Festival formula should be one of a special feast, specially prepared. This does not mean that you have to produce what is most expensive, but it has to be original. That sense of competition, for the original, is very strong in the Netherlands. The Festival's role should be a connecting one, like bringing together expensive projects like *Antigone*. The radio, the IJsbreker, and other producing groups all worked together on that project for the Holland Festival.

Every festival director has a different focus. One might promote the development of all types of music, whereas another might favour classical or older types of music, or something for the symphony orchestra, or to bring out a beautiful *La traviata* or something. Jan van Vlijmen (current intendant of the Holland Festival) has a great heart for contemporary music, but he thinks that there are only a few good composers—three, or something like that. In my opinion, that's because he is a composer himself. He is a little bit too selective. I think that you should bring young talent into the Festival. He doesn't do that.

If you had been in charge of contemporary programming at this year's Holland Festival, what would you have done differently?

Why do you ask such a heavy question? Of course I would do it differently. I would have focussed more on Dutch composers and on new European developments. Everyone fights to get into this spotlight. During the festival, many people say: "Now it is the Holland Festival. I didn't go to anything for 11 months, but now it is the Festival. If the Festival says that I have to go to Torstensson, then I will go to Torstensson." But there's more to show about Dutch musical life than only Ton de Leeuw and Klas Torstensson.

Three years ago, I collected world premières of, in my opinion, interesting Dutch composers. I collected these new pieces and saved them for the Festival. Because Van Vlijmen had just taken over the Holland Festival, we (the IJsbreker) thought he

might be interested in a project which included our best composers. We thought we would call it New Vintage. It could be done during the Festival because the IJsbreker might be too small to handle it. Van Vlijmen looked at it and said "No". Now you ask me what I would have done. Well, I did it.

When I faced this problem, the press had noticed that we seemed to be collecting things. The press also thought that, with Van Vlijmen in charge, we would now have our Dutch composers, and that he would do something for his colleagues. When the press asked me how it was going and I had to explain that he had refused our idea, the newspapers were instantly full of stories about Van Vlijmen. Then I did the New Vintage, here, one week before the Festival. You can see how the Festival presents many challenges to our strong infrastructure.

How was New Vintage received by the public?

It was very successful and it was very well covered by the press because they all wanted to know what we had "saved". We will now store this idea for two years and then recreate it. I don't want to polarize our efforts and make people think that we are working against each other. I co-produced the Ton de Leeuw work in this year's Festival. Everybody has the right to make his own mistakes. But if I ran the whole Festival, I would do many more crazy theatre things. The Festival should be more of a large party in the city of Amsterdam. Right now, it's a little bit too grey. We have done all of the Reich and Philip Glass things from the beginning, and that's OK. But that's not new any more. I would have had the NEM in this festival, for instance. Van Vlijmen seems to ignore the need for fresh things. I don't mind, of course, because it's good for the IJsbreker.

Do you not think that Jan van Vlijmen's job is much more difficult because the IJsbreker is successful?

It is difficult because we have good healthy competition. In the beginning, we had 80 per cent Dutch content, because there were no other new music concert halls. Now there is one in Rotterdam and one in Maastricht, and it's all spread out all over the country. They all want to have their own IJsbreker. Now, only about one third of what we present in our regular season is Dutch: the rest is from all over the world. This is not a fixed percentage because we build our programme based on quality, not on nationality. We try to programme organically, but, for instance, if we find out that we have four piano concerts in one week, we would have to make some changes.

How is the IJsbreker currently funded?

We are completely funded by the City of Amsterdam. The rule in the Netherlands is that the municipal governments pay for the house—the accommodations and the management. The government of the Netherlands pays for what is in the house—the musicians, composers and projects. We are heavily subsidized, and I have two bosses. The funding is guaranteed, but we need more of it.

What is the total operating budget?

Two and a half million guilders. Then there's another million coming in from the café. Box office receipts account for 15 per cent of the total budget.

What statistics do you have on audience capacity?

For our own productions, 78 per cent, and about 65 per cent for other organizations like Gaudeamus who rent our space or co-produce projects. There are about 200 concerts per year. About 58 of them are broadcast on radio, which involves a very large audience. Five or six of the radio broadcasts are done in a series with VARA, while the others are just picked up by radio producers for later broadcast. We also do projects outside, like with Kagel.

You mean the bell commission for the Oude Kerk and the Dom in Utrecht?

Exactly. What's the estimated attendance for bells chiming in an old church? Millions? We did one project with Henry Brant, an American composer. We developed the idea right here on the terrace of the IJsbreker when I asked him to write a piece. It started something like this:

J.W.: "What shall we do? You wrote a piece for 45 trombones."

H.B.: "Yes, yes, it was great."

J.W.: "But that's too loud. The brass players in the Netherlands are very well known, but we should do something with, say, flutes."

H.B.: "Yes, 100 flutes on the canals. We need four barges for that. We should also include the street organs on the bridges."

J.W.: "Why not use the bell towers as well, because the barges can go through the canals?"

Then we started writing letters to each other and he wrote this piece. It was summer, and it was the opening of the whole Festival six or so years ago. There was another director, Frans de Ruiter, and he was not afraid of doing this. We had an audience of a whole city. The whole city was disturbed, everyone had to listen. Traffic was completely a mess in Amsterdam. It was all over the newspapers. Do you know what happened? There were four open boats—I found them in Alkmaar, in the North—and it caused a sensation because, at that time, most people weren't used to seeing open boats. All these people started smiling because it was like a zoo, the flutes going *doodoodoo doodoo doodoodooooo*. It was so innocent and beautiful. I have never seen so many people smiling from a contemporary music project. It sounded like birds.

What will you plan to do over the next couple of years as the plans to move to the Westergasfabriek evolve?

I would like to go to Canada again. But I will also continue fighting—what I do is a polite way of fighting. It's not just lobbying, and, although I make jokes, it requires an enormous amount of energy and power to convince people that there should be more done for contemporary music. What I think is very important for us now, in the Netherlands and for the IJsbreker, is that we should have this *new* building. We must convince the government how important and urgent the project is. If not, the project will suffer if there are cuts in arts funding.

It's like a large bed: in the middle, there are the opera and the ballet and the symphony orchestras. But we are on the side. If they turn a little bit, we fall off. Now, I want to be in the middle and turn this way and that.

So it's very disciplined. We have to work on this new building with a lot of lobbying, convincing and strategy. But we must not forget to remain strong within: you have to be healthy in all parts.

Who are your counterparts in developing this new programme?

Counterparts change, depending on which aspect you are working on. Sometimes you need them more than they need you. With my group of people, I ask for specific information if I don't know something. I communicate with the whole coalition and 15 or 17 foundations. I might talk to groups like the Schönberg Ensemble or people like Reinbert (de Leeuw) very little, because I know them very well. They trust me and I always welcome their input.

Which organizations are included in the coalition?

The coalition includes the Ijsbreker, Holland Festival, Gaudeamus, Donemus, Schönberg Ensemble, New Ensemble, Volharding and several percussion groups. There's also a foundation for microtonality, one for women in music—they're very little, but they have a job. I am in control of everything, but they trust me because they know that I don't want to be their "boss". I always remind them that they need to keep their own strong identity.

What exciting new developments can we expect to see in Dutch music during this period of expansion and growth? Many of the mature and better-known Dutch composers have seemed to withdraw, somewhat, into the trenches, following adventurous phases during the '60s and '70s.

There was aleatoric music in the '60s. Now, the development of commercial music is enormous in my opinion. But I also I think we are all capable of a large amount of bullshit, terrible music. With new music, composers are trying to write on a higher artistic level, sometimes without knowing it or saying it. But I don't think that we should ignore the enormous influence of rock and pop music, commercial music. It's extremely exciting when you see young composers connecting things, in an intelligent way, and putting them together with electronics.

What impressions did you get from the young composers at the Bang On A Can concert?

Nothing new. Typical. I am very honest. It is also typical that we are impressed with what Americans do. I am not impressed at all. It makes me a little bit sad to see this enormous country, with so much potential, represented this way here in Europe. They don't say, "this is new, exciting and fantastic," they say, "we are the Bang On A Can and we do better blah, blah, blah." This proves that this country—which did a lot for us, for Europe and for world peace—is also doing a lot in the other direction.

So the Bang On A Can is, with all my heart and sympathy, a normal, middle-of-the-road, little day of some nice pieces and a few very bad pieces. I have nothing against it, but that's my answer.

Dr. Ulrike Hessler — Press Director, Bavarian State Opera
Munich National Theatre — July 6, 1993

With the re-opening of the Munich National Opera house, after yet another closure for repair work, it is understandable that there is a special atmosphere for this year's festival. How, in other years, do you achieve something "different" from the regular season?

It is always difficult, as a festival, with Salzburg and Bayreuth so close.

We try to programme six new productions per year during the regular season, and it is these productions that we want to show to the international audience, many of whom are *en route* to Bayreuth and Salzburg. We also pick other highlights from the season, so that, altogether, we mount 15 productions in three and a half weeks.

What percentage of the festival audience, do you think, is international?

About 25 per cent of the audience is what I would call international, with the balance coming from all over Germany and Austria. In our surveys, we have found that 15 per cent of our regular season audience come to the opera more than once a week. Even though they have seen the Festival productions during the regular season, they are still eager to see them again.

It must have been very expensive to undertake the recent repairs necessary to make the hydraulic system fully functional, not to mention the foregone income that you would normally receive. How has this been financially possible?

The state, for the moment, has footed the bill for all of the reparations. We are completely funded by the state, and they are completely responsible for our expenses.

Do you foresee that this might change in the future, as cultural budgets are being cut throughout Germany? Berlin, for example, has been the victim of some severe funding cuts recently.

I do not foresee any problems. 30 per cent of our income comes from box office receipts. Peter Jonas, our new intendant, will find it difficult because we may not see any increases in funding.

What will Jonas's artistic standpoint be when he formally comes on board?

As you know, Sawallisch was here for more than 20 years. Peter Jonas will try to develop a new aesthetic in theatre, based on the foundation of our established musical tradition. He will do this primarily through his choice of directors. In programming, for instance, there will probably be less Strauss, as we did all 16 in 1988. Jonas has also commissioned five new operas. He will also enlarge the repertoire into the baroque and 20th century.

As for the money he will get, we still have money in Bavaria and because we perform every night, the state has to give us the money. Each opera house has its own image. We are, maybe, less important than Vienna. We are different from Bayreuth, but that, at the moment, is really only because of our diversity in repertoire. I am certain that Peter Jonas will create a definite aesthetic mark.

Who, besides Jonas, is responsible for artistic decisions and programming?

There is a production selection team of six or seven, of which I am one. Jonas does not officially start until next season, which makes it difficult to make decisions right now. We have no boss for the moment.

Much of what you see now is the result of planning that took place during the Sawallisch period. For *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, planning started about five years ago. Along with the other new productions in the Festival, *La Traviata* and *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, *Lady Macbeth* was originally scheduled for last season, the *lost* season. It was extremely important that we include them in the Festival. Besides, *Lady Macbeth* is one of the more interesting 20th-century operas, and it had not been done in Munich before.

As for why we chose *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, it was a co-production with the opening of the first real opera house in Japan. It was absolutely exciting in Nagoya, because the Kabuki director is as popular as Placido Domingo. The Japanese understand the intricate detail of this style of theatre. Sawallisch had been working in Japan for more than 25 years. He thought that the stylized attempts at theatre, as opposed to a more realistic attempt, was an interesting idea, especially for *Die Frau*. Opera is not really realistic theatre, and I am sure that the audience here will understand the production. In the style of Kabuki theatre, every gesture means something and is connected to the plot. *Die Frau* has a very difficult and complex plot. It is a bit like a fairytale; a bit like *Zauberflöte*. Following the reconstruction in '63, the house reopened with *Die Frau*.

Other than the frequency with which your regular audience attends the opera, what else can you tell me about opera-goers in Munich?

We did our first survey last year. I think that our audience is a little too old; most of them are between 45 and 55. Together with Peter Jonas, we are working at trying to get a younger audience. We need a new younger audience.

But, in the meantime, we are making up for lost time. Even the Festival has been shifted back a week, compared to the usual, because the shutdown did not end until the first week of August. And now there will be the problem of trying to get compensation for the 112 million DM it has cost to clean the hydraulics. The government has just filed a major legal suit against the contracting firm who did the original work. But who knows what will happen? We are just happy to know that we can now go the opera every night again.

Louis Erlo — Intendant, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence
Théâtre de l'Archevêché — July 20, 1993

What, do you feel, draws people from all over the world to the south of France for opera, when there are dozens of opera-producing festivals throughout Europe?

The Festival is unique. The programme is both original and unique from those at Salzburg, Glyndebourne or Munich. It is a festival with imagination in its programme. We rediscover lesser-known works, those forgotten and buried beneath the traditional repertoire. Gabriel Dussurget, who created this festival, gave it a particular artistic profile. When he did Mozart's *Così fan tutte* in 1948, it had never been done before in France, and hardly at all in the rest of Europe. *Così* is now considered a standard in the repertoire. Dussurget also did many new works that the public could not see except by amateurs, works they could not see in Paris, Marseille, Salzburg or Brussels.

The Festival continued with Bernard Lefort. In 46 years, there have been three directors: Dussurget, Lefort and myself. Lefort made *bel canto* his own, but I have rediscovered the profile, the vocation, of the Festival of Dussurget. I have been officially responsible for the Festival since '82, but I was chosen in '79 and started immediately on creative plans. I chose works that were almost unknown, such as an adaptation of Rameau's *Les Boréades*, along with *Mitridate*, *La finta*, and *Les Indes galantes*. Every programme was something new. Two works, *Euryanthe* and *Orlando*, are works whose worth has never been realized.

Therefore, I have confirmed that the vocation of this Festival is one of originality, of augmentation and enrichment for the awareness of an elite group of spectators. It is an elite. The curious and inquisitive come to Aix-en-Provence. They do not come to Aix especially to have dinner on Les Cours. They come to Aix because they are curious. It is an elite, a different social class. It is not an established social elite, it is an elite marked by their curiosity, amateur melomaniacs of music and opera.

And you do not feel that this is also a financial social elite?

No. Not at all. I am sure.

There are also, down in front [of the house], those who have money, those who are very comfortable and established, who come to the Festival in Aix. But there are two tiers which are quite inexpensive, compared to the prices at Glyndebourne and Salzburg. The people who sit there come to discover *Orlando*, to discover *Euryanthe*. There are those who have a lot of money. That is a different kind of

elite. It is evident that they go to the opera in Marseille all year to see their favourites like, I don't know, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* or *Carmen*. Those people do not come to *Orlando*. It is an elite from all over France and the rest of the world who come here: Swiss, Belgians, Germans, Austrians and Italians. Now, we even get many British and a growing number of Americans.

What else do you know about your audience?

Actually, a survey was done several years ago to give us some sort of profile of our audience. It has not come to be taken very seriously. It is very difficult, because if you use a Paris agency, you do not know if they are able to understand what goes on here. We are planning to do a much more serious survey next year.

What percentage of your audience, do you feel, comes from outside of France?

About 30 per cent, but it depends on the work. On average, about 30 per cent are from Aix or the Midi region, 30 per cent or so from the rest of France, and 30-40 per cent are foreigners.

What possible benefits for the Festival may come from the meeting of intendants called by Mortier that you attended?

There is one major advantage, because we undertake co-productions for works we might otherwise have to forget about doing. In doing *Orlando*, if there were no co-producers and no fanfare, the city of Aix and the ministry could question why people were not interested in this particular work. They will support the arts if they see that there is interest in something.

Financially, it is helpful because we will then share some of the costs—but the première will take place here. But maybe, with Mortier, we could exchange works. It would be interesting to see if this could be possible, to exchange something with, say, Glyndebourne. Next week, I will host the director from Glyndebourne and we will see if we can coordinate an exchange, not a co-production, but an exchange.

Do you feel that the unique nature of the Festival, which you described yourself, is somehow endangered when you undertake a co-production that will be seen at another festival?

Yes, it is a little bit dangerous, certainly. But you can plan co-productions with carefully selected places that are somewhat like yourself, of the same family, of the same world. But it is true that these are attempts to find a solution of how to retain

our identity while taking advantage of the benefits of co-producing. In France, there is an expression: we say, "the solutions of fortune".

How do co-productions work for you, logistically?

First, and foremost, there is the obvious cost-sharing. But we will only do something like this if we get the première. We always try to preserve the same cast for both locations. There would only be an exception if one of the singers had a contractual conflict that could not be avoided.

Do you sense a similar spirit and approach to production at other festivals?

Happily, it is a spirit unique to us. You don't see it at Salzburg or Glyndebourne or Bregenz. This festival is a bit particular. There are others which have particular qualities. But we are the only festival to do three *new* productions, sometimes four, in the space of 20 days. This is a very intense production period, and that is without repeating productions. Glyndebourne does not repeat productions, but I have seen repeated things at Salzburg. Maybe things will now change at Salzburg, now that Mortier is there.

Does your undertaking of "Euryanthe" suggest future plans for other Weber operas? A Weber cycle?

Yes. We have planned to do *Oberon* in '95 and maybe *Der Freischütz* in '96. It is really a question of budget. We received 41 million francs this year but I am waiting to make plans for next year with the minister. I would like to extend the Festival to one month next year, but everything depends on the minister.

How do you feel about the reaction of the press to "Euryanthe"? You cannot help but notice that most of it is not very supportive.

I direct this Festival, guided by my judgement, by what I think is necessary, what I know, with my whole being. I verbally support my decisions and I find that for me, I am satisfied with *Euryanthe* because it is an incredible score that is very beautiful but hardly known at all. We therefore sought to see if a realization of the score was possible. I do not want to impose my opinion on the press. The press did not like it very much. I have my personal opinion which I will not tell you. But there are also times when the press say that something is extraordinary, and I do not find that it is very good. It is meaningless.

The press which returned for the second performance, with the exception of one journalist, was very good. The première was very powerful and I was very proud, personally, because I do not know a theatre in the world, let alone a festival, that is capable of pulling off a première in an international festival in our position. We had eight days without rehearsals; no orchestra, no chorus, no technical or scenic rehearsals. It had rained continuously for three days before the dress rehearsal of *Euryanthe*. After eight days of interrupted rehearsals, all the artists, together, were trying to rediscover the sense of ensemble.

It was the most catastrophic situation. The spectacle which occurred was not an extraordinary spectacle, but I was professionally very proud of both the orchestra and the singers.

SECTION III: REVIEWS

A — OPERA

La Cenerentola (Rossini), Opera Hamilton, Hamilton

"Head", *The Silhouette* — December 3, 1992

"An operatic Cinderella story"

Stripping the popular Cinderella story of the usual fairy tale trappings leaves a core story of transformation.

As the essence of *La Cenerentola*, Rossini employs this idea of transformation in a literal sense for the characters in his opera save the two sisters and "wicked stepfather" who, by their corrupt nature, defy redemption although they yearn for another life full of material wealth.

This is not a fast-paced action thriller. This is not "serious" opera. Opera Hamilton's setting of choice aboard a 1930s luxury ocean liner helped to balance the philosophical nature of the text in this entertaining production last Saturday night at Hamilton Place.

Comedy abounds, and with Sally Dibblee and Marcia Swanston playing the jealous stepsisters to the hilt, a farcical element prevailed. Claude Corbeil (as Dandini, the prince's valet) certainly enjoyed dressing and acting as the Prince in search of a suitable wife, but his continual hamming it up tired by the second act. Nonetheless, Corbeil was in much better voice than his last appearance with Opera Hamilton in *L'Elisir d'Amore*.

James Patterson as the Prince's advisor assumes the fairy godmother role in the sense that he enables Angelina (*Cenerentola*) to attend the Prince's party as a femme fatale, free of her usual matronly servant's attire. Patterson's vocal

consistency was welcome in light of weak performances from both Carroll Freeman and Franco Federici.

As the Prince, Freeman lacked the agility that Rossini's melodies require. Strained passages and an unpredictable upper range detracted from his confident and effective stage presence. Equally uncertain were the entrances and intonation of Don Magnifico, the stepfather, played by Franco Federici.

When things seemed to come together, Federici produced a full rich sound that had just the right touch of dramatic flair. The stepfather's role would have been more fully developed if his aria near the end of the first act had not been cut.

Canadian mezzo-soprano Linda Maguire sang this lead role in a traditional setting earlier this fall with Ottawa's Opera Lyra. There is no doubt that her voice and appearance lend themselves beautifully to this character.

Maguire superbly and convincingly delivered Cinderella's transformation from plain unornamented melodies to detailed exhibitions of exquisite fluidity.

The delicate intricacies of Rossini's music demand precise rhythms and a certain lightness to get through the mass of notes.

Roberto Paternostro, guest conductor from Vienna, chose safe tempos that were comfortable for the Hamilton Philharmonic, but loose ensembles often resulted in a tug-of-war to keep things together.

The *Questo è un nodo avviluppato* ("this is a snarled knot") sextet near the end of the second act illustrated Joshua Major's clever staging, with the singers intertwining and breaking apart in varying groups, successfully acting out the text of Rossini's delicious fugue.

Paternostro's classical and understated approach was tasteful, but when all is sung and done, Rossini's operas rest on the merits of the singing. In this respect, Linda Maguire certainly held the performance together.

Prepared lecture for Opera Hamilton Guild COC field trip — January 24, 1993
"The COC Production of Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*"

While children and adults of today are probably familiar with the popular Grimm fairy tale *Hänsel und Gretel*, the modern electronic age has fostered a high-tech environment, void of gingerbread houses, for most youngsters. It is this perspective, that of the child in today's society, that underlies choreographer and director Ross Perry's interpretation of Humperdinck's opera for the Canadian Opera Company.

To augment the fairly simple action on stage, Perry incorporates eight extras dressed as life-sized teddybears and, as an antithesis, another eight extras in the guise of little red devils. The clumsy and lovable teddybears appeal to audiences of all ages and can be viewed as good spirits of the children's minds. The devils, however, double as the witch's accomplices and, as bad spirits, they develop the complexity of the plot, thus enriching the visual as well as dramatic elements. Perry's choreography is outstanding. The devils are lean and taught and their motions mesh well with the character of the music. Not a single moment of this production fails to express the mood of Humperdinck's rich score in visually energetic ways.

The pinnacle of these culminating artistic forces is displayed in the dance number that takes place when Hänsel and Gretel have fallen asleep in the forest—a marvellous reinterpretation of the guardian angels in Humperdinck's manuscript.

Beni Montresor's sets reveal his extraordinary talent as a children's book illustrator. When Montresor originally designed the sets for Houston Grand Opera's Christmas 1988 performance, the company was looking for a production that could parallel the ongoing success of the "Nutcracker" ballet. Montresor's use of strong, clear colours and large silhouette props resembling jigsaw puzzle pieces offers a multitude of reflective and lighting possibilities within his mirrored box set.

Notice that all of the human characters are dressed in white except for the witch, whose black garb is fashionably accessorised with red and white striped hose. Montresor's use of opposites is very symbolic, and it may be worth considering that white is the summation of all colours.

Montresor couples his seemingly simplistic visual design with small doses of hyperbole. The modernistic and technological approach translates into basketball-sized electric light-up berries in the forest for the children to gather. More spectacular, however, is the light-up Legoland castle, in lieu of the traditional gingerbread house, and the larger-than-life white luminous candies that lure the children into the witch's spell. Once again colour and shape are strong artistic influences in this production.

The Canadian Opera Company had originally hoped to develop a completely new production when they had programmed *Hänsel und Gretel* for the current season. Facing the same budget situations as most North American opera companies, they then chose to work with an existing production. The casting had already been completed by the time of this change. For the original plan of a new production, a tenor had already been chosen for the character of the witch.

The role was originally written for either a mezzo-soprano or a tenor. The Met's first production of *Hänsel und Gretel* opted for a tenor. The vocal line is rewritten an octave lower in this case and lends a different impression to the character. Stephen Cole brings to life a rather burlesque witch that is definitely a little out of the ordinary. Gretel, played by Kim Barber, has just the right breadth of voice to sing the role of a young boy, but her actions and mannerisms are the clincher for her convincing portrayal. Another prominent Canadian in this cast is Allan Monk as the father, whose controlled projection and rich voice are well-suited for the role.

The COC's orchestra has an augmented bass section to capture some of the darker and heavier moments of the score. Joel Quarrington, known to most HPO audiences, even turns up in the double basses. Humperdinck's music demonstrates

some Wagnerian elements: even when the excitement seems to be primarily visual, keep your ears open to the wonderful music. Conductor Stuart Bedford evokes some exquisite mood painting from the orchestra that is each and every bit as delicious as the feast for the eyes.

As an opera that has enjoyed much success, it is easy to see why *Hänsel und Gretel* was programmed for both the Met's first Saturday matinée broadcast on Christmas Day in 1931 and Covent Garden's first complete BBC opera broadcast from a European house.

Pelléas et Mélisande (Debussy)

The Netherlands Opera, Het Muziektheater — June 1, 1993

Rodney King, the L.A. riots, the homeless—innocent victims subject to brutal violence. Is Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* similarly violated in the hands of Peter Sellars and Simon Rattle?

For the opening of this year's Holland Festival in a production by the Netherlands Opera, Peter Sellars has not shied away from a complete reinterpretation. Debussy's only opera has long been realized with many semi-translucent screens and smoke machines, in an attempt to capture that one-step-away-from-realism feeling of the turn-of-the-century symbolist movement. Even more so than with the Mozart/Da Ponte operas, Sellars has rooted his vision so firmly in modern times that he seems to answer too many of the dangling questions in the Maeterlinck libretto. Sellars' truthfulness grafts a particular, imported sadness onto Debussy's ethereal framework.

Likewise, Rattle seems to have read the score with a magnifying glass, but with a different outcome: one that worked well, underpinning Sellars's dark and complex reading. Rattle excavated the subtle yet potent rhythmic energy and haunting bass lines, thus relegating the elusive floating surface harmonies to the background.

Together with Sellars's overlay of modern commentary and the ultra-modern, austere sets of George Tsybin, this *Pelléas* belongs as much to 1902 as a conventional production belongs to 1993.

Maeterlinck's play retells a familiar story in a seemingly skeletal, fragmented and simplistic manner. Certain details, such as who these characters were before the curtain is drawn, are not as important as sketching the archetypal figures of a love triangle. As Mélisande, the epitome of youth and naïveté, is awakened to the romantic senses by her brother-in-law Pelléas, the personalities evolve to reveal their inability to truly grasp life in the fullest. These characters, along with the other members of King Arkel's family, do not really develop, but become a hint more complex with each turn.

Sellars snatched away the beguiling symbolism of the forest (with backward-reaching hints of Dante) and imported a completely new focus for the opening image. Crouched low to the ground with a pistol wrenched into his mouth, Golaud wrestled with the ugly act of self-termination. The oppressive misery is suddenly diluted by the discovery of a lost young woman, Mélisande, whom he marries. It is the brutal anger, confusion and jealousy that develops and ferments in Golaud's bowels that ultimately drives this entire production as infidelity creeps into each scene.

Golaud is realized as a law enforcer, his holster perhaps but one sign of self-defence in a brutal society. His invisible band of men are put on stage as a group of policemen, undoubtedly the Los Angeles police force. During an orchestral interlude, this entourage of silent force harassed extras clad as homeless characters who have sought refuge under King Arkel's "house". But violence is only intimated in this pantomime. Random savagery is later manifested in Golaud's futile struggle to achieve mundane happiness.

The aging King Arkel is confined to an electronic wheelchair, embodying his physical weakness and dependency on his caretakers. Sellars' Arkel echoes the aging Amfortas of Wagner's *Parsifal*. Unable to pass along his powers and estate to

Golaud and Pelléas, Arkel is a helpless bystander to the festering wounds plaguing his family. Mélisande, to whom he has become endeared, is being destroyed right in front of him. When Arkel is finally awakened to the sensibilities of his children, but ill-equipped to help, his pain is wrought with irony.

Robert Lloyd's powerful and vocally strong Arkel reminds us that his authority, however inactive, is trapped inside a degenerating human body. It is perhaps crude and gratuitous to explore his misdirected human qualities through a scene in which he is caressed and kissed by the black woman who feeds and bathes him. But this is only a background pantomime while Mélisande searches for her lost wedding ring.

The frightened waif in *Mélisande* never completely disappears. Elise Ross's unchanging characterization hardly translated the growing complexities revealed in her words. Verging on harshness in the tender scene in which Pelléas is enraptured by Mélisande's hair, the potential for passion was never fully realized vocally.

Rich reassurance in Felicity Palmer's Geneviève reinforced the stoic strength of the matriarchal figure. Her upper-middle class updated June Cleaver look suited the preppy Beaver image that skipped into the picture as the purposeless Pelléas. While Pelléas is merely a catalytic figure, Philip Langridge sang the role admirably with careful consideration of Sellars' master plan. Yniold, played by Gaële le Roi, captured the very essence of the frightened puppet-like child.

There is yet another character whose position on stage is Sellars' invention. Pelléas's father lies dying in a hospital bed for most of the opera until, at the end, his recovery liberates Pelléas to leave the estate. It is true that the father's illness circumstantially enables Pelléas and Mélisande to meet. But focusing on the dying father with television screens placed around the stage while Pelléas and Mélisande are together is yet another background vignette which suggests that Sellars does not completely trust the score at hand.

Rattle does not overlook the particularly sensual harmonies that encircle the fleeting moments of happiness and passion between Pelléas and Mélisande. Never, however, do we see or hear the tiny threads of love that exist between Debussy's Golaud and Mélisande. Could we believe Golaud ruthlessly pushing his pregnant wife around if we felt that he loved her in any way? As the music grabs our ears and shakes them, Sellars explores the loveless core of Golaud in an associative way, through battery, violence and wife-abuse.

King Arkel's domain emerges from a massive grey cliff-like setting within which George Tsypin created a collection of rooms in the cut-away framework of an ultra-modern home. The effect of peering into the most private corners of a troubled family facilitates the ancillary sub-structure not inherent in the original play. In this sense, a dense and difficult plot is suggested from a seemingly barren text which offers the loosest of connections. While the result provokes the mind with contemporary social implications, Sellars has virtually determined the associative paths which we should take without a chance to wander through the alternatives. There are no unanswered questions. There are answers to questions that Debussy and Maeterlinck likely did not even consider.

The Cave (Steve Reich and Beryl Korot)

Holland Festival, Amsterdam — June 3, 1993

While the musicians and singers on stage reminded us that we were really at a concert, after five or ten minutes, Steve Reich's *The Cave* made us feel as if we were actually seated in a large classroom.

The History of Western Religion 101

Classes commence June 3, Beurs van Berlage

Term I — Extended lectures examining historical aspects of the story of Abraham and his descendants and the origins of Jewish and Muslim beliefs (required readings: selected chapters from Genesis, documented interviews from West Jerusalem). Term II — A re-examination of Term I material from a Muslim perspective (required readings: selections from the Koran, documented interviews from East Jerusalem).

Steve Reich's *The Cave* brings together an extensive amount of historical information in what he categorizes as a documentary music theatre work. Ignoring the documentary or factual element in this presentation is all but impossible. Four vocalists manned generic computer work-stations located on each of the three levels of a metal pyramid-like structure. The percussive clicking of the singers typing at the keyboards created an uneasy tension as selected historical texts simultaneously appeared on three large video screens in German, French and English.

Commentaries from dozens of interviewees alternated with the visual barrage of words, providing moments of mental reprieve. Close-ups of tiny fragments from the interview film footage—an earring or a patch of wallpaper—were isolated and translated into geometric patterns on all five screens. Quite interesting is Reich's use of natural vocal inflection in the spoken text clips as the core generating source for the vocal and instrumental music throughout.

Imitating both the pitch and rhythm of the natural rise and fall of the human voice, the 13 instrumentalists (a string quartet, oboe, saxophone and percussion) highlighted the very musical nature of everyday speech. This complementary dimension of the personal accounts is manipulated by Reich using trademark minimalist techniques. Selected words and phrases of the interviewees are repeated both on video and in sound with a rap-like effect. Has Reich been rapping all along?

Focusing on idiosyncratic vocal inflections calls attention to the differences between the religious perspectives explored by Reich and co-creator Beryl Korot. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the second act, in which Islamic chant assumes

a key musical function. The vocal quartet is relegated to a merely instrumental capacity; in the first act, dressed as newscasters, they sang several verses of Genesis text in random intervallic patterns. But a reduction in the vocal parts is not the only change in the second act: the work-stations are gone, Islamic archway decorations have been added, the singers, no longer in business suits, don free-flowing garments.

Critical differences between the Jewish and Muslim interpretations of the Abraham story fuelled circular momentum with every identifiable similarity in the accounts. Abraham's sons, Ishmael and Isaac, are at the centre of each sphere which only truly intersect at one place—the cave which Abraham purchased for Sarah's burial, and the place where Abraham's two sons united to bury their father. Perhaps this is why modern video material from Macphelah (El Khalil in Act II) is the ultimate visual image in each of the first two acts.

Term III — A brief survey of the relevance of the story of Abraham to modern society (required readings: additional selected chapters from Genesis, documented interviews from New York City).

Act III confronts the entire story from a decidedly modern American standpoint. "You can see Lillian Gish playing the part of Hagar...From *Moby Dick*—call me Ishmael!...It has no particular meaning to me". Suddenly encountering the possibility that Abraham has no significant meaning for today's society somehow brings the religious questioning to a head. In a way, it seemed to beg an answer from each member of the audience. Obviously it is a question with which Reich, himself, is still wrestling. Unfortunately, the overriding didactic aspects that often obscured the musically interesting moments provoked yet another question: when is the mid-term?

N.B. All interviews are available in Mr. Reich's programme notes. Class attendance is mandatory due to the intensive use of supporting video material.

Les Troyens (Berlioz)

The Holland Festival/VARA-Matinée, The Concertgebouw — June 5, 1993

The problems plaguing the première of Berlioz's *Les Troyens* in Paris have not diminished over 130 years. The exigencies of 1863 which forced Berlioz to divide his epic drama into two individually full-size operas, *La Prise de Troie* and *Les Troyens à Carthage*, still prevent *Les Troyens* from being mounted on many stages. The Holland Festival/VARA-Matinée co-production at the Concertgebouw (June 5) opted for a concert performance of the entire work. Despite what seemed like a grab-bag of vocalists and some last minute cast changes, the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra under Edo de Waart gave convincing testimony that perhaps *Les Troyens* is best experienced this way—in concert.

Berlioz drew from far more than just a story or libretto from Virgil's *Aeneid*. On one level, we follow Aeneas's travels from Troy to Carthage, and the women whose hearts he breaks along his way towards Rome, his destiny. Closer to the soul of *Les Troyens*, Berlioz's music captures the essence of musical prose and comprises the dramatic kernel that is needed to thread together his potent little vignettes, with the help of some deductive reasoning along the way. Mirroring the structure and approach with which Berlioz developed his dramatic choral symphony, *Roméo et Juliette*, it is clear that Berlioz's compositional style and orchestration embody both a narrative function and an emotional one. With a traditional gargantuan Trojan horse on stage, our attention might be superficially diverted from savouring the exquisite meandering melodies along with the quadruple bassoons and trombones that often demand and deserve the spotlight.

Cassandra, as a major figure and the tragic heroine of the first act, is largely a Berlioz invention. For this demanding role, Karan Armstrong stepped in for a reportedly struggling Sharon Sweet just one week before the performance. But even Armstrong lost many battles on stage—with the orchestra and the Greeks.

Armstrong's vocal weakness was also noticeable against the robust lower range of Gilles Cachemaille's Chorèbe, who yearned for a stronger counterpart. The Radio Philharmonic Orchestra and chorus claimed a succession of triumphs as the Trojan people celebrated, unaware of imminent dangers, in full majestic fashion with bells, chimes, timpani and trademark Berlioz trombones, stirring the blood of everyone within earshot. Even the first-act pantomime depicting the tragedy that has befallen Hector's widow and son, was not diluted in concert. On the contrary, the thick, sorrowful clarinet melody carried more weight and pain in its notes than a mimetic counterpart could express.

The binding character of the two operas, *Aeneas*, was sung by American tenor Chris Merritt. Adopting the poor French pronunciation surrounding him added insult to a particularly nasal rendition. But the opening of Act II, as *Aeneas* is awakened by the sound of fighting, brought further orchestral glories in massive climaxes. Off-stage horns added a theatrical element by their visual absence as well as titillating the ear in their contrast with the foreshadowing of the on-stage horns. Also off-stage was the voice of Jan-Hendrik Rootering's shadow of Hector whose pre-recorded performance was projected with an eerie echoing quality.

The second opera and last three acts served individual vocal riches surpassing those of the first half. Ludmila Schemtschuk's Queen Dido seized the very commanding nature of her long majestic lines albeit in a tongue hardly resembling that of Berlioz's France. Fabulous bassoons and flutes carried the regal procession forth almost single-handedly until the trombones preceding the arrival of Dido's assistant, Narbal, changed the atmosphere entirely. The Trojan people rising to arms against yet another invasion seemed to rise above the stage as trombones, tuba and gong brought the tension to a frenzied peak.

The penultimate fourth act exposed an entirely different musical style, the more classical forms of recitative and aria that offer diversity and relaxation within this mammoth enterprise. The passionate music ensconcing Dido and *Aeneas* segued

into the last act and the beautifully naïve song of Robert Chafin's Hylas. The reprieve ended, however, as Dido's contemplation of death revealed the gamut of human emotions that Berlioz had woven into his music.

Containing more allusion to action than real action, *Les Troyens* possesses an internal energy more akin to an oratorio than an opera. Flexibility of the human imagination revels in Berlioz's conflation of poetry and music. While orchestrally more convincing than vocally, the emotional ebb and tide of aural delicacies brought *Les Troyens* to life in the Concertgebouw in a realization which encourages future concert performances. Berlioz's epic drama not only stands the intense musical spotlight but invites it.

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (Wagner)

Théâtre de la Monnaie, Brussels — June 8, 1993

That the Théâtre de la Monnaie could not predict political developments in Germany when they revived their 1985 production of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* in June of 1993, is without a doubt. Horrifying violence springing from recent neo-Nazi risings has rudely reawakened public sensitivities to the potential dangers of xenophobia. The production changes in an opera proclaiming the supremacy of German song in the strongest nationalistic spirit are of seemingly minute importance when cast against the monumental changes witnessed in Germany during the last few weeks, let alone the last eight years.

Another blow to 125 years of production history was Hitler's tainting of Nuremberg, the historical home of the Mastersingers. The publicly disclosed associations of the humiliated character Beckmesser with Eduard Hanslick, a critic of Jewish descent whose initial admiration of Wagner evolved into intense rivalry, is but one of the many underlying elements in *Die Meistersinger* which cannot be ignored

but can certainly be left innocently undeveloped. Director Kurt Horres's most timely fortune lies in his exploration of the inherent comedy and historical aspects of Wagner's popular opera while steering fairly clear from magnifying its anti-Semitic components.

The essence of nationalism and supremacy of the German aesthetic, woven throughout Wagner's text, is cleverly realized in the sets of Andreas Reinhardt. A full-stage painted scrim depicting Christ after the crucifixion establishes the initial community church scene but is soon transformed into the setting for the *Mastersingers*. Fifteen feet above the stage, a panel of the painted scrim is removed to expose the gathering place for the *Mastersingers*. Listening to the sentimental outpouring of the untrained singer from what moments before had been the eyes of Christ lends an uncanny sense of judgement to the whole ordeal. It is this first act which establishes the intricately hierarchic structure of relationships that remains unchanged throughout the opera. The image of Sachs, intrigued by the imagination and courage of Walther, looking down at Beckmesser, the crude record-keeper of errors, reinforces the dichotomy of these two characters and the aesthetic values they represent. It is this conflict, enhanced by the outer dressing of a love story, that Wagner serves in the most traditional of musical dressing.

José van Dam, as Sachs, lacked the powerful vocal riches that would have complemented his sensitive and sympathetic portrayal of the sage cobbler. Complicating this aspect were the overzealous rhythmic crudities of Antonio Pappano's conducting. Methodically bullying his way through the first two acts, long and potentially beautiful melodic lines never materialized.

Flutes and oboes rudely intruded on Sachs's evocation of the joys of spring in the second act. These problems of balance within the orchestra extended into the broader realization. Margaret Jane Wray (Eva) and to a lesser degree Roberto Saccà (David, Sachs's apprentice) strained to be heard. Dale Duesing, as Beckmesser, conquered this problem exceptionally, delivering a superb performance on all

accounts. His nervous, impish antics never lost the sense of timing that separates successful comedy from succumbing to the ridiculous. Ironically, Beckmesser's character can be found at the heart of the better moments in this entire production. Before stealing what he is tricked into thinking is a song by Sachs, Beckmesser's hysterical attempt to woo Eva (actually her nurse Magdalena in disguise) develops an overriding comical air that spills over into the well-known riot scene. Townspeople rabble with caricaturists in this Schopenhauerian illusion, free from any real elements of violence.

The orchestra and Pappano finally redeemed their belligerence by revealing the exquisite melodic tapestry in the final act of Wagner's score. The vocal highlights of the trio and ensuing quintet in Sachs's home, however, took a concurrent turn for the worse, adopting the choppy disjointed style demonstrated earlier by the orchestra. Only the final celebratory scene in the festive meadow managed to draw all of the positive forces together. Literally bridging the gap between the grassy meadow and the community, the entire audience became a part of the final song competition.

Decorations adorning even the balcony levels expanded the stage to include the entire theatre. Complete with confetti, the procession of guilds marched down the theatre aisles with the bakers distributing bread amongst the audience. Exquisite theatrical details such as dangling feet of onlooking children through an opening in the ceiling paralleled the anticipation built into the long orchestral prelude. The eventual triumph of love, rooted in the German tradition of song, came together in a satisfying conclusion—a triumph of successful theatre over potentially discordant undercurrents.

Roméo et Juliette (Berlioz)

Netherlands Opera/Rotterdam Philharmonic, Rotterdam — June 22, 1993

Perceived through Berlioz's magnifying glass, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* no longer brims with tragedy. The story remains as a framework, but the focus shifts to explore smaller details. Condensed fragments of tragedy embrace a poetical spirit balancing the amorous and imaginative vignettes. As a particularly unique perspective, realized in layers of soloistic writing, *Roméo et Juliette* was an excellent choice for celebrating the Rotterdam Philharmonic's 75th anniversary. Simon Rattle's grasp of the dramatic elements translated into a keenly sensitive performance—barely breathing pianissimos and luxurious melodies.

Berlioz's dramatic choral symphony has operatic tendencies, particularly in the use of narrative to outline the basic story. Narrative, for both the soloists and choruses, is reserved largely for the two outer sections framing the symphonic core. But Berlioz's rereading is more of a drama about a drama than a musical retelling of Shakespeare. Even the two key protagonists are missing; the tenor and contralto soloists are not the young lovers Romeo and Juliet, but narrators whose singular appearances at the onset set the stage for the ensuing musical drama.

Elise Ross's perfunctory realization of the contralto role was thankfully outshone by the driving energy in tenor John Aler's paraphrase of Mercutio's Queen Mab speech. Even more vocally powerful and dramatically inspired was Jean-Philippe Courtis's Friar Laurence. Only appearing in the finale, Courtis's powerful conclusion of the story befit the grand choral and orchestral culmination.

The symphony nested within, while bound by the larger dramatic structure, emerges as a stream of poignant musical snapshots. A shifting spotlight revealed exceptionally rich and secure wind passages as a counterpart to the swelling passion in the violins. The Queen Mab scherzo, extremely demanding in the fine filigree work of the string parts, occasionally compensated enthusiastic energy with precision. A

variant of the Shakespeare play, popular during Berlioz's time, included scenes depicting a brief awakening for Juliet and an ensuing funeral.

A variant of the play, popular in Berlioz's time, stimulated the inclusion of a funeral scene for Juliet followed by her brief, dream-like reawakening. These additions, or reconsiderations of Shakespeare, provided Berlioz with the material which resulted in some of the most poignant and virtuosic musical moments in the whole work. While some performances do not include these passages, Rattle opted for a full reading which enabled the richness of the Netherlands Opera chorus to be heard in full as well as the exquisite bassoon and clarinet writing from the reawakening scene.

As a strange amalgamation of opera and symphony, *Roméo et Juliette* hovers between the *Symphonie fantastique* and *Les Troyens*. While compared to the Shakespearean drama, Berlioz's realization of the story seems disjointed and out of proportion, it is precisely this perspective which lends itself to the delicate yet intense musical interpretation. As a showcase for both choir and instrumentalists in its entirety, it is certainly a vehicle for embracing each individual moment in which the Rotterdam Philharmonic had good reason for celebration.

Aïda (Verdi)

RAI Centre, Amsterdam — June 24, 1993

Deception and trickery—not just in Verdi's *Aïda*. The artistic sham behind the production billed as "the opera spectacular" sent the audience running away from the stage.

People who had paid up to 200 guilders gladly moved to the least expensive seats moments after the performance started. The massive stage and seating area had been so poorly designed that people sitting on ground level could not see anything in

the central area of the stage. Once the rear risers filled up, some people even moved their chairs to the sides so they could stand on them and hopefully catch a glimpse. This initial disorder was only a harbinger of the comedy of errors that unfolded.

Vision problems on the more intimate level were hardly remedied by rows of suspended video cubes. Just like watching television, the audience was shown what the naked eye could not perceive—and more. Pans of the audience, close-ups of dramatically insignificant moments and focusing on the wrong singers were just some of the completely unprofessional technical flaws. Even two potentially musically rewarding moments, Aïda's and Radames' significant arias in the last act, could not materialize unscathed. Audio crackles and even complete sound failures destroyed any semblance of artistic continuity.

The soloists must have trained at the Carol Burnett academy for aging Nora Desmonds without the assistance of a clever make-up artist. A "cast of over a thousand" is a misleading name for a collection of extras performing ridiculous primary school gymnastics routines. Even more absurd was the interpolation of unrelated ballet routines. The orchestra, from Prague and the Bolshoi, seemed to be the only part of this conglomerate somewhat interested in delivering Verdi. More often than not, solos and grand fortissimos were obscured by technical inadequacies—but at least we could see Giuseppe Raffa, the conductor. A high podium, white jacket and massive head of hair ensured this.

Four hundred angry customers received a full rebate after a near-violent reaction developed during the intermission. Organizers of this abomination must hardly feel the pinch of 60,000 guilders with a nightly intake of well over a million. Do not be conned into thinking that this has anything to do with opera. If you only want to see the elephants, the zoo is a better bet for anything longer than 30 seconds.

Antigone (Ton de Leeuw)

Holland Festival, Westergasfabriek, Amsterdam — June 25, 1993

Antigone entombed alive and Creon unjudged for his harsh decisions. This is how Ton de Leeuw interrupts Sophocles' drama to draw his eponymous opera to a close. In fifty-five minutes, this one-sided reinterpretation presents the conflict between familial love and obedience to the democratic state, but without a satisfying resolution. As it stands, Creon's displacement of reason by the unjudged supremacy of the political state remains omnipotent. There is no justice for poor Antigone.

Ton de Leeuw's extraction and isolation of the more tragic and conflicting elements does, however, undergo a somewhat sympathetic development—both in de Leeuw's music and in André Engel's staging. The Radio Chamber Orchestra under Reinbert de Leeuw embraced a keenly sensual musicality in its sensitive interpretation. Combined with the commanding security and dramatic strength of mezzo-soprano Martine Mahé, the bold and brazen youth evolved into a passionate full-blooded woman. Antigone's centrality is even further accentuated by the fact that she is the only solo role.

The over-bearing authority of King Creon, who has denied proper burial rites for Antigone's brother Polynice, is embodied in an all-male chorus. We never see the King, himself. Threatening dominance is manifested in the homogenous chorus in both musical and non-musical ways. Crisp, impeccably-fitted suits cement the strength of the image, overshadowing the dull and impoverished attire of the mixed choir, the common folk. Deep and ominous monophonic chanting booms in glaring contrast to heterogenous polyphony. Power reigns over reason.

There is a distinct reference to the 1920s—zoot suits, fedoras, wa-wa trumpets and walking-bass piano style recall the senseless violence of gangster movies. What is superficially entertaining becomes incongruous aside a tragic text and classical framework. Also incorporated are ancient sounds and de Leeuw's affinity for modal

writing, particularly in the vocal parts. The mixed choir assumes a tripartite role: the commentator function of the Greek chorus as well as the identities of Antigone's sister and betrothed, Ismene and Haemon.

Conflict in the imagery and vocal parts plays a minor role in de Leeuw's instrumental writing. The treble range of instruments is forgone for a strong emphasis on rich, lower sounds. There are no sharp edges in tone or extreme dichotomy in the texture. Incredibly rich melodies on the cello, saxophone, clarinet and oboe weave through blunt and persistent pulses realized by the piano and percussion. Organically spinning around predominant tones, de Leeuw's orchestration is emotionally integrated into the larger work but remains largely subservient to the vocal parts and even more so to the drama.

Death-tolling cowbells, trumpet calls paralleling Antigone's final judgement and percussive mimicry of the locking of the tomb somehow cheapen the dramatically concise and intricate beauty of de Leeuw's vocal writing.

Void of strong colours and light, the gas-plant-cum-theatre provides a suitably non-descript framework. Faint hints of light creep through the opaque exterior windows of the original building as the tension between the two choruses builds to a confrontation. Crudely accentuating the menacing virility of the Minotaur that finally leads Antigone to her death chamber, an intensely focused tunnel of light reaches out to the victim and bride of the underworld. This progression from darkness to a blinding light is both highly effective in the transformed gas plant and a theatrically dramatic complement to Creon's domination.

A quasi-exotic location creates hype. Hype intensifies the critical demands of the audience. *Antigone* could buckle under the pressure that its position as the culminating music theatre work of the 1993 Holland Festival commands. Some refinements solidifying the dramatic integrity with the musical expression could reinforce de Leeuw's particularly isolated exploration of the tragic Antigone instead of nipping away at its very foundation.

Munich Opera Festival, Bavarian State Opera

De Volkskrant — July 23, 1993

"Fire, Virus, Reform"

The fire that damaged the curtain of the Munich Opera last Tuesday during a dress rehearsal of *La Traviata*—200,000 DM went up in smoke—must be considered by some Bavarian operagoers as a warning from above. The Munich Opera is haunted by the virus of innovation and reform.

The house has high aspirations. A revolution has taken place among the conservative rulers of artistic life in the Bavarian capital: the Munich National Theatre, the number one German temple of opera tradition, is getting a facelift, a new identity.

So the Munich Opera Festival, the shop window of the house, will get its facelift too. Every summer, the Munich Opera shows the best of its repertoire combined with new productions—completing a German and Austrian festival triangle of which the other angles are called Bayreuth and Salzburg.

A new identity, a new corporate *Erscheinung*. This was the bilingual slogan that Peter Jonas exclaimed when he handed over his credentials to the state of Bavaria. Jonas, taken away by Munich from the English National Opera in London, is the successor of the Munich chief conductor and general director Wolfgang Sawallisch, whose new destination is Philadelphia.

Peter Jonas is a champion of experimental opera. Almost neighbouring the somewhat old-fashioned Royal Opera, the ENO, led by Peter Jonas, was a house of controversial productions (e.g. Verdi's *Rigoletto* in Mafia-land). Jonas wants to transform the Bavarian National Theatre, the distinguished state opera with its rooms and passageways of white and icy blue, into a workshop of "increased risks and dangers", into a temple of "adventure for the heart and for the mind".

Before last Tuesday's fire—the result of a displaced 8000-watt spotlight—the hottest opera news in Munich came from the courts of law. The Bavarian government is involved in a legal contest with well-known German companies like Krupp, Siemens and Bobach. The issue at stake is who will pay for the multi-million dollar damage the National Theatre has suffered since 1988, when the theatre machinery was completely renovated: the Bavarian taxpayer? Or the consortium *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Nationaltheater* (the Krupp-Siemens-Bobach coalition "Argenth")? Even more tangible than the proposal for artistic renewal was the daunting microbe that held the Munich Opera in its spell for five years. The house has only recently recovered from its grasp.

The National Theatre has been closed for two entire seasons. During a nine-month shutdown starting in August of 1988, the old machinery was entirely replaced. The price was high: 33 million DM of taxpayers' money. 50,000 litres of Quintolubric pulsed through the veins of the new hydraulic system. Traces of water, however, remained in the ten kilometres of pipework. The mixture of water and Quintolubric proved a perfect breeding ground for bacteria.

Clogs and plugged filters caused untimely problems soon after the reopening of the house. Set changes took a hopeless amount of time or couldn't be carried out at all. Diagnosis: paralysis. The convalescing theatre has since been deprived of its beloved opera for yet another eleven months—a disaster by Munich standards.

Mechanical difficulties were only one symptom of a greater malady afflicting Bavaria's National Opera. As its joints were seizing up, artistic director Wolfgang Sawallisch came under increasing attack from the press for his conservative and often elitist approach. Sawallisch departed for Philadelphia after 22 years of faithful service and strong box office records. Peter Jonas will spearhead a revamped production team that includes chief conductor Peter Schneider.

Jonas officially assumes artistic directorship in September, but meanwhile, the Opera of Munich has opened its doors wide for the 1993 Opera Festival. The regular

three and a half week season has been extended by two weeks to incorporate parts of the "lost season" into the usual highlights and revivals. The programme is the fruit of Wolfgang Sawallisch's intendency.

Nevertheless, this 1993 festival foreshadows the new era in various respects. At the front of the fleet is *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. This work, impregnated with sex and violence, instigated a witch hunt in Moscow in 1936, conducted against its creator Dmitri Shostakovich under the *Pravda* slogan "chaos instead of music". Directing the first Munich stage production is Volker Schlöndorff, the film director who achieved world fame with his German movie *Die Blechtrommel (The Tin Drum)*.

The new production of Richard Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten* also belongs to a chapter of "innovation", in a way. Along with Wagner, Mozart and Verdi, Strauss is at the head of the Munich wish list or Wünscheliste—if we may call the iron repertory by its Bavarian name. *Die Frau*, a highly demanding work with its elaborate cast, composed by Munich's own hero, was cast this time in the mould of Japanese Kabuki theatre.

Strauss and the Munich National Theatre have been inextricably bound since the '60s. It is not surprising that the first real opera house in Japan chose *Die Frau ohne Schatten* with which to open its doors in Nagoya in November of 1992—in co-production with the Munich Opera under the baton of Wolfgang Sawallisch.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal's libretto contains many fairy tale elements with a vague Asian scent. It was seemingly the ideal material for a hybrid of Kabuki theatre and European opera, directed by the Japanese star actor Enosuke Ichikawa and designed in a mystical stylized realm by Setsu Asakura and Tomio Mohri.

Die Frau ohne Schatten straddles an unknown, fantastical realm and the mortal world. The mythical Empress (in her animal form of a gazelle, she was hunted, bewitched and transformed into a female form) lacks the human privilege of "fertility", the ability to cast a shadow. Attended by her nurse, she descends to the human world in order to buy a shadow from a mortal. It is an emergency, for only a

shadow will give her the powers to rescue the Emperor from the threatening fate of petrification. On earth, the Empress finds a woman married to a dyer named Barak, a mundane middle-aged man. The woman exchanges her shadow for beauty and good luck with younger candidates. The scheme involves deception all around, but in the final agony, wisdom and love flourish.

The potential insight of subtle Kabuki gestures and ornate Japanese costumes would seem to offer overreaching opportunities for dramatic development of a highly complex plot. In reality, the adoptive framework proved to be an exquisite shell that many of the cast found awkward and foreign. The singers moved about the stage with almost visible aversion.

Bass Jan-Hendrik Rootering, albeit in a minor role (the Messenger), was the most convincing. Vocally dramatic and secure, soprano Janis Martin (Barak's wife) conveyed some sense of inner struggle between tempting material pleasures and moral strength. Her "dyer", Alan Titus, dissolved into nothingness, restricted from counterbalancing his earthly wife by conductor Horst Stein's limp tempi. Stein's rhythmic ambiguities stripped the score of dramatic consequence. Tremendously powerful climaxes in the interludes were isolated fragments, as Stein struggled to capture the ethereal chamber-like music of the mystical world.

Most serious, however, were the problems inherent to the adopted gestures. Ichikawa probably anticipated that the audience would comprehend only a minute portion of the formalized and endlessly-refined Kabuki body language. What gestures actually materialized seemed rather distilled—mostly a crude exchange of nods and hand gestures among the emperor, the empress and the nurse. The lower human realm was indeed down-to-earth, lacking any sense of style. Flesh-and-blood singers displayed the time-honoured tradition of simply standing there and singing.

According to press director Ulrike Hessler, the majority of Munich operagoers are a little too old—between 45 and 55. They are not resistant, however, to "new initiatives" such as *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* which opened the Munich Festival.

Shostakovich's long-neglected opera, loosely based on a story by Leskov, contains sober explorations of the boredom of everyday life in Stalinist Russia. A brilliantly satirical tangent provides an entertaining perspective of the police force of the time. The protagonist, Katarina Ismailova, finds excitement through infidelity, but happens to murder her father-in-law and husband along the way. Violence hovers over the surface from beginning to end.

Director Volker Schlöndorff accentuated the erotic frankness of the text by placing the second act in a bath house. Sweaty, half-naked "labourers" fondled and grabbed the obese cook; four grotesque creatures intimated copulation in pantomime; suspended on the side, for over half the opera, is Katarina's unmade bed. Peter Schneider's direction was more than adequate with a careful balance of satire. Commanding performances by Hildegard Behrens (Katarina) and Donald MacIntyre (her father-in-law, Boris) were supported by a competent cast and superb house chorus.

For the time being, the Munich Opera will not suffer from neglect. Many wanting subscriptions for the next season will have to be patient, in line on waiting lists. "To create a climate in which opera is considered one of life's essentials—high on the totem pole of life's priorities", as Peter Jonas puts it, is something like stating the obvious in Munich.

"To stimulate challenge" (point two) and (point three) "to bring back today's composers into the theatre" are different chapters. Peter Jonas has already taken steps to expand the repertoire with German pieces of post-avantgarde signature. The first new opera in the upcoming season is *Sansibar*, commissioned from Eckehard Mayer. In 1995 it will be Hans-Jürgen von Bose's turn, preceding Hans Werner Henze ("a new piece on a classical theme"), Manfred Trojahn (on a Shakespearean theme) and Aribert Reimann.

New productions of the forthcoming season include Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust* and Handel's *Giulio Cesare* (Peter Jonas: "The *Wünscheliste* must also include

baroque works"). There will also be new productions of old favourites such as Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera* (directed by Tom Cairns), Wagner's *Tannhäuser* (co-produced with the beloved ENO and American director David Alden) and Mozart's *Così fan tutte*—the last, a micro-production, staged in a small baroque theatre, with the Munich creative partnership of Dieter Dorn and Jürgen Rose.

That the Mozart tradition of the Munich Opera is maintained for the mature was evidenced by the casual *Figaro* in the 1993 Festival. This dusty repertoire production dates from 1966. Every opportunity for the audience to interrupt the performance with hearty applause was seized. The everyman Figaro could, at any moment, have donned *Lederhosen* and swung a good pint of Bavarian beer. This was only a placebo for a plagued public. With injuries like *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, Jonas could be calling for a doctor in the house.

The Munich Opera Festival continues until the middle of August with *La Traviata*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Die Walküre* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

Katherine Syer is a Canadian music critic.

Zémire et Azor (Grétry), Drottningholm Court Theatre, Stockholm

Haagsche Courant — August 10, 1993

"Theatrical illusions in Drottningholm"

The transformation of a beast into a prince by the love of a young girl is both a timeless and enchanting tale. *Zémire et Azor*, Grétry's opera that incorporates Marmontel's popular story, is a tapestry of illusions that in its contemporary rediscovery reveals much more than the seemingly simple challenges between art and nature. When *Zémire* first appeared on the stage of the Swedish Drottningholm court theatre in 1779, Gustav III had procured an era of cultural riches. The busy theatrical season echoed the fantastical summers of his youth spent in the baroque gardens and

Chinese palace of Drottningholm, the "Queen's Island". While only fragments of the scenery remain from this historical performance, the reawakening of this work evokes an illusion far grander than even Grétry could have imagined—the recreation of 1779 and the splendour that once was Drottningholm.

Since 1922, the Drottningholm court theatre has enjoyed a growing reputation for its historically informed performances of 18th-century theatre, opera and ballet. Artistic director Elisabeth Söderström captures the focus of this summer's festival in what she calls "Perspectives on Mozart". Joseph Haydn's *La Fedeltà Premiata*, Martín y Soler's *Una cosa rara* and a ballet pantomime, *Figaro*, modelled after Beaumarchais, are some of the productions intended to evoke the essence of the Mozartian age. For those wishing to embrace this spirit of time travel, there is an old steam boat that meanders its way from Stockholm through a myriad of islands to the royal shore. But this is only the first step. Turning the last corner and glimpsing the manicured palatial gardens, *Zémire* awaits, in itself a "Perspective on Drottningholm".

Where this production truly comes to life for the modern audience is in John Cox's subtle use of the dancers throughout, provoking the imagination. The opening scene in which *Zémire's* father, Sander, and his aid Ali are shipwrecked is clearly conveyed through the music and words. From a visual perspective, 18th-century court operas often used contemporary dress and generic salon settings, regardless of the plot and setting at hand. Here Cox, without disturbing this practice, employed the dancers as spirits that would fleetingly spill out of the wings and then disappear just as quickly when the tempestuous music had subsided.

The stage machinery, dating from 1776—a conglomeration of human-operated wheels, pulleys and ropes hidden from the eye of the beholder—is the invisible master of illusions. Complete stage sets are achieved in just a few seconds. One blink and a rococo salon has been transformed into the foreboding mystical gardens of Azor. Proscenium arches and ceiling sections of painted canvas unfold with a graceful

speed, precluding the need to ever close the main curtain and disrupt the dramatic flow. The theatre stage itself is over twenty metres deep and offered delightful opportunities to separate *Zémire* from first seeing the disfigured Azor by truncating the stage with a series of drops. The famous "magic mirror" of the third act, in which Azor allows *Zémire* to perceive her family, took full advantage of this technique, thus inviting the development of several levels of reality.

Period wigs and costumes are as much a part of the orchestra at Drottningholm as are the authentic instruments. Styled locks do not seem out of place on this season's orchestra—three-quarters of them are women. This was probably not the case in 1779 but can hardly be considered a flaw. A particularly vivacious orchestral rendering under Louis Langrée more than compensated for occasionally unequitable vocal performances. The simple and delightful Grétry tunes never lacked inspiration and extremely clean entries lent a superbly professional air. The soft-edged woodwinds were enhanced by a particularly fine first bassoonist (Andrew Schwartz) whose vitality and precision infused each melodic line.

Neither Beauty (Anna Eklund) nor the Beast (Bengt-Ola Morgny) captured the vocal limelight that was to rest almost solely on Carl Johan Falkman's Sander. The rich and dramatically expressive baritone never lost touch with the underlying message hailing fine art.

Historical accounts do not indicate the perfection or flaws of the original *Zémire* at Drottningholm, but it certainly was not without variance in performance quality. What was then new and all the rage, however, is now old. The softly-lit theatre filled with the music of Grétry does much of the work in recreating the sense of another era simply through its preserved state. As a succession of illusions extending from the theatrical realization to the underlying dramatic message of *Zémire*, the merits of this performance rest largely on the illusion of stepping into the playground of Gustav III and enjoying an evening from 1779.

Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Théâtre de l'Archevêché

Haagsche Courant — August 30, 1993

"Ideal integration of music and theatre"

When tourism and the arts face off against each other, the consequences are not always simple. Summer music festivals across Europe have had to battle with constricting economic forces. For more remote festivals like Aix-en-Provence, increased competition jacks up the stakes for luring travelling melomanes. Festivals in cities like Amsterdam, Berlin, Munich and Vienna can at least count on a large portion of their audience from their respective urban homes.

This is not the case for the small city tucked away in the south of France. Over two-thirds of the audience at Aix comes from other regions in France or other countries. The cost of a ticket to the opera is only the beginning.

Louis Erlo, intendant of the Festival since 1981, confidently describes the festival as having a very specialized focus: rediscovering lesser known operas. With three opera productions at the hub of the season, solo recitals and instrumental concerts flesh out the programme to over 40 musical events in the last two and a half weeks of July.

By steering programming choices beyond the boundaries of the iron repertory, Erlo is collaborating to preserve the specific elite atmosphere of the festival. For many music lovers, it is a shared curiosity in the unique that motivates nothing short of a pilgrimage to Aix.

What once was avant-garde, however, has become more of a "sure thing" by modern programming standards. The novelty of producing Mozart operas (indeed a novelty when the festival was founded in 1948) is now standard fare—this year there was a reprise of last season's *Don Giovanni*. The lesser-known offerings, Weber's *Euryanthe* and Händel's *Orlando*, were far less routine and also far riskier. *Euryanthe* was a failure. *Orlando* was a triumph.

Repertoire choices are not the only risk in Aix. A poor gamble with *Mother Nature* prevented rehearsals in the outdoor theatre for eight days preceding the première of *Euryanthe*. The mistral winds, however, cannot be blamed for what translated into wholly divergent musical and theatrical goals. Jeffrey Tate's understated and subtle exploration of Weber's score with the English Chamber Orchestra formed an alien foundation for Hans-Peter Cloos's rigid and static perspective of good pitted against evil. Despite excellent vocal performances by Karen Huffstodt, Andreas Schmidt and Elizabeth Meyer-Topsoe, their successes could have only superseded the utterly tedious staging with a concert performance. Based on a medieval story full of wagers on love and deception, supernatural elements are woven throughout, pitting desire against death. The somewhat disjointed libretto is eclipsed by the emotive score with its far-reaching hints of the Wagnerian style and a vault of musico-dramatic inspiration for a staging of any worth. In this realization, the many layers of tension, passion and deception lay buried in the score.

In *Orlando*, however, William Christie's meticulous guidance of Les Arts Florissants and director Robert Carsen's clever insightfulness merged together in an ideal integration of music and theatre. As with Handel's later work, *Alcina*, the story finds its source in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.

The dominant mental state of Orlando hovers around the fringes of madness as the tormented knight is confused by his shifting sense of allegiance and duty for battle (and the potential glories of campaigns) and his unrequited love for Angelica.

British soprano Felicity Palmer's Orlando was extraordinarily characterized with seemingly natural masculine mannerisms (the part was originally a castrato role) and an ample and flexible lower range. Under Dutch bass Harry van der Kamp's magic spell of Zoroastro, Palmer explored the thread-bare regions of lucidity without traversing into the absurd.

The directorial vision captured the essence of baroque style, music as drama, while stepping outside tradition with occasional contemporary references. Robert

Carsen's exploration and extension of the *opera seria* characters was wholly compatible and highly stimulating in its focus on theatrical motion and gesture—a unique infusion of realism not often found in baroque opera.

Pelléas et Mélisande (Debussy), Netherlands Opera, Amsterdam
Opera Canada — Fall 1993

British conductor Simon Rattle and American director Peter Sellars were teamed for the Netherlands Opera opening performance of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* on June 1. Sellars thrust the introspective Maeterlinck play into the harsh violence of 1993. Rattle paralleled this dark exploration by unearthing the rhythmic vitality and rich undercurrents of this multi-layered score. George Tsypin's ultra-modern set revealed a cut-away perspective of the rooms in King Arkel's home. Each room became a smaller stage within the larger framework for Sellars' concurrently explored vignettes centring around each character. Robert Lloyd as Arkel wrestled his mental and physical battles from an electronic wheelchair. The dichotomy of his two sons was augmented by the pistol-packing policeman image of Willard White's Golaud and his carefree younger sibling Pelléas, sung by Philip Langridge.

Theatrical elements did not infringe negatively on vocal quality, as White's threateningly powerful bass voice proved. Mezzo-soprano Felicity Palmer commanded a superbly matriarchal Geneviève, and Gaële le Roi's Yniold was equally convincing. Elise Ross's waif-like Mélisande evoked as much sympathy, however, as her vocal frailties. Sellars' fingerprint was most noticeable in his use of extras—policemen bullying homeless people scratched at the memories of the L.A. riots. The Rotterdam Philharmonic maintained a wildly roving and slightly

mysterious energy throughout. Sellars, however, avoided the mysterious and the mystical, preferring to give strong personal answers to even unasked questions.

Carmen (Bizet), Canadian Opera Company, Toronto

The Hamilton Spectator — October 1, 1993

"Stilwell's *Carmen* pillar of strength"

The Canadian Opera Company has opened its season with opera's biggest box-office blockbuster, Bizet's *Carmen*.

Director François Racine created what are, in effect, two productions to match his two casts, rather than a single show into which the different singers could step as easily as change costumes.

Appearances alone suggest that the two *Carmens*, Katherine Ciesinski and Jean Stilwell, could offer very different strengths to the title role.

After seeing and hearing Stilwell's sensually crafted Maddalena in the COC's *Rigoletto* last season, we opted for the Stilwell cats that opened last Saturday evening at the O'Keefe Centre in Toronto. This cast is overwhelmingly dominated by one element and that is Stilwell herself.

Stilwell's performance steps beyond that of the hip-gyrating queen. This *Carmen* is a pillar of strength for not only the women that she works with at the cigarette factory, but for her fellow gypsy smugglers as well.

Fully aware that her destiny is death at the hands of her lover Don Jose, Stilwell's *Carmen* embraces this path with conviction and pride.

Those who are attracted by her strength and vigour are destined to remain peripheral, and in many ways the cast around Stilwell does just that.

Fabio Armiliato is a rather stiff Don Jose, and there is no wonder that *Carmen* tires so easily of this tenor. Christiane Riel, as the peasant girl Micaëla, matches

Armiliato's one-dimensionality, but displays a fantastically secure voice that is absolutely brilliant in the upper ranges.

How does Escamillo, the bullfighter, get the girl? Bass-baritone Charles Austin turned from a slow warming-up in the "Toreador Song" to histrionics in the best sense to lure the seductress.

Russell Braun, Sally Dibblee and Pamela MacDonald delivered satisfying performances in supporting roles, striking superb balances between vocal and dramatic strengths.

After raving successes at this summer's Edinburgh Festival, the COC orchestra sounded as if they had just the right blend of holiday and workout.

Conductor David Lloyd-Jones moulded delicate and meticulous solo passages into clean chamber ensembles with refreshing tempi and an electric dynamism.

Crispness, however, did not preclude richness, as evidenced by the thrilling orchestral climax paralleling the growing shadow of a broken, demented man towering over his victim in the final confrontation.

Carmen continues until Oct. 9. Call 416-872-2262 for performance details.

Le nozze di Figaro (Mozart)

Canadian Opera Company, The Elgin Theatre, Toronto — November 1, 1993

In pooling a creative team for his first opera, Robin Philips has drawn from a well of personal experience as much as from his theatre career at Stratford and, more recently, Edmonton's Citadel. It is precisely this resultant intimacy that fuses well the musical delicacies with comical intrigue in the Canadian Opera Company's new production of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* at the Elgin Theatre.

Beaumarchais' cloak of mockery of political and legal systems forms a surprisingly timeless framework. Mozart's librettist, Da Ponte, cleverly unravelled

this rather complicated plot in a series of dramatic intrigues conducive to Mozart's endearing solos and rich ensembles. Philips has channelled the energy of his production into a decidedly textual focus, transforming the considerable amount of recitative into a musical play of sorts. Seen through Philips' glasses, this *Figaro* continually revolves around Count Almaviva, with his unharnessed libido, and the convoluted and delightfully mischievous efforts to make him mend his ways.

The eve of the French Revolution is no longer inextricably tied to the potency of Beaumarchais' comic and dramatic whirlwind. Philips' setting of Edwardian England preserves the essential referential flavouring of 1786 with a hint of contemporary relevance. Parallels in social discord and inequality of the sexes between these two periods suggest this update to be wholly apposite for transporting Mozart's opera through time. Indeed, it lends itself well to restrained yet elegant visual details, while saving centre stage for the portrayal of more human features.

Set designer Morris Ertman cleverly captures the strength and grandeur of the Count's gothic manor with muslin of the creamiest ivory; towering walls and corners delineated with charcoal grey. Breaking open the rear stage for a terrace replete with an exquisitely laden dining table, the Count's quarters could ironically be mistaken for those of Don Giovanni. Completely crossing the threshold into the garden for the final act, elegance and simplicity challenge the clear unfolding of pranks but nevertheless achieve a continuity in subtle design.

Louise Guinand's soft lighting warms the seemingly two-dimensional set as if a pop-up book scene has been brought to life. Delicately balancing the restrained use of colour are Ann Curtis's costumes of dusty burnished apricot, mauve and blue. The eye is enticed by the luxurious fabrics and textures which, like the set, unobtrusively complement the real drama at hand.

Philips' approach requires a strong and inter-dependent ensemble, of which he has both. Credibility of the sometimes tenuous plot is supported by visual casting successes. Delightfully balanced comedy as with Marcia Swanston's plotting

Marcellina and Peter Strummer's slippery Dr. Bartolo offer just the right hint of levity.

The *buffo* of Mozart's opera evolves in Philips' distinctively hands-on approach for expressing desire—to spouse, betrothed or otherwise. The vulgar and profane, however, are carefully and tastefully avoided throughout, with each fondle, glance and step emerging from a synergy of emotional and musical stimuli. Even as a pantomime, stripped of music and text, the specific and telling gestures are highly effective in their story-telling ability.

Soprano Alison Hagley finely tuned her natural ebullience as Zerlina in last season's *Don Giovanni* to a capricious point. Clear and brilliant throughout the comic passages, Hagley's *Deh vieni* of the fourth and final act pours forth Susanna's wealth of love for Figaro in swollen, passionate lower tones, completely befuddling the eavesdropping and misled Figaro. Bass Gerald Finley firmly grasps the role of Figaro with a commandingly secure bottom range. Likewise, Dwayne Croft's Count Almaviva is consistently satisfactory.

Less consistency developed from the pairing of Charlotte Hellekant's Cherubino and Wendy Nielson's Countess. Hellekant captures the essence of adolescent emotional turmoil on the tenuous brink of orgasm in both *Non so più cosa son* and *Voi, che sapete*. Nielson, however, existed throughout as a portrait of despair and longing. Albeit an exquisite and beautiful image, *Porgi amor* and *Dove sono* never quite seemed to escape the trappings of a picture frame.

Conductor Richard Bradshaw's tempi often seemed to hover indecisively, often not quite meshing with the fiery moments on stage. A cleaner sound and, towards the end, a more spirited pace might have wed the finer attributes of Philips' fresh stage reinterpretation and Mozart's poignant and seemingly tireless music.

Die Zauberflöte (Mozart), Canadian Opera Company

The Hamilton Spectator — November 20, 1993

"Fine music in Magic Flute"

The Canadian Opera Company's co-production of Mozart's *Magic Flute* seems, at best, to be a very confused production. This fairy tale opera in which boy meets girl with some twists, becomes a labyrinth of dangling ideas in producer Martha Clarke's collaboration with set and costume designer Robert Israel.

Fortunately, underneath the overburdened symbolism, some fine music-making on stage and in the pit reminds us why this seemingly far-fetched opera plot retains its popularity.

Clarke's pastiche of loosely connected images unfolds in what could be an earthquake-damaged hotel room. Cock-eyed angles normalize as we cross from the world of evil into good in the second act, but the barren room on-stage retains a towering wardrobe in the corner. The wardrobe cleverly solves what can be awkward entrances and exits into mystical lands. From its doors the Queen of the Night and three little spirits make their entrance, while later, the young lovers Tamino and Pamina pass through to the other side to tackle the initiation trials by water and fire.

Compounding the visual oddities are the costumes which, while possibly trying to say something about the personalities inside, do not mesh. Clarke adds her own creation, a dancer named in the programme as *deus ex machina*, who drifts in and out of scenes with little added value save his ability to manage a live boa constrictor in the opening scene.

Lighting director James Ingalls' surreal play on shadows with floodlights and spotlights throws another curve on the perspective while managing to focus on some fabulous singing amidst a strong supporting cast. Alongside Reinhard Hagen's commanding Sarastro and Valerie Gonzalez's vivid Papagena, soprano Rebecca

Caine's Pamina and tenor Michael Schade's Tamino transcend the visual packaging to achieve convincing characterizations with delightfully rich and youthful voices.

The Magic Flute continues at the Elgin Theatre until December 5.

Kát'a Kabanová (Janáček), Canadian Opera Company, Toronto — January 15, 1994
accepted for publication in *Hudební Rozhledy*, Prague

When Brian Dickie stepped down as general director of the Canadian Opera Company (COC) last November, he left some of the most intriguing creative plans in his COC career to be realized without him. Difficult financial times and awkward relations amongst the administration have been cited as causes for his departure. Richard Bradshaw, chief conductor of the COC, who joined the company alongside Dickie in 1989, has since assumed the general directorship. The rocky behind-the-scenes picture is not readily apparent to COC audiences still glimpsing the vibrant echoes of Dickie's fingerprint.

The recent première of the COC's new production of Leoš Janáček's *Kát'a Kabanová* (January 15) reflects Dickie's striving for quality on all production levels with only one major change occurring since his absence. American soprano Nancy Gustafson, who has earned international success in the title role, also happens to be Dickie's wife and understandably stepped aside, replaced by Stephanie Sundine, another American soprano, who sang in the COC's earlier production of *The Makropoulos Case*. What made this new production artistically interesting was not simply the well-balanced and capable cast, but the man guiding and moulding the vocal talent—director Robert Carsen.

Carsen's international successes are wildly varied. He has directed mega-productions such as *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show* for EuroDisney in Paris as well as many operas on many prominent European stages. Carsen's COC directing debut

with the 1992 world première of Canadian composer Harry Somers' *Mario and the Magician* undoubtedly established his particular style of moulding strong symbolic elements with introspective clarity and a noted respect for the musical score.

Carsen's undertaking of Handel's *Orlando* at the 1993 Aix-en-Provence Festival once again reaffirmed his unifying symbolic approach and struck a strong working relationship with British mezzo-soprano Felicity Palmer, who commandeered a riveting performance as Orlando. Joining the *Kát'a Kabanová* cast as Kabanicha, Palmer delivered vocally and dramatically the most satisfying performance in the entire production. Palmer's combined study of the matriarchal figure of Geneviève in the 1993 Holland Festival production of *Pelléas et Mélisande* and the rich psychological tapestry found in the Orlando figure merged powerfully in her menacing and stoic Kabanicha.

The cast was successfully rounded out with Miroslav Kopp's sensitive yet constrained Tichon, Clifton Forbis's Boris with a whisper of passion and Cornelis Ophthof's slightly ridiculous Dikoy. Jane Gilbert and Benoit Boutet as Varvara and Vanya reinforced their pivotal roles with luscious young voices. Palmer stood alone in her consummate ability to conquer various stage positions and deliver an equally superb performance throughout. Carsen's demands for effective stage positioning perhaps suffered due to the limitations of only three weeks' rehearsal.

Patrick Kinmonth's set, masterful in its simplicity, was framed entirely by what seemed like a rough-hewn pine crate turned on its side, potent in its constricting pressures. With only a doorway on each side, curious and foreboding shadow-play shifted the focus from individual characters to the larger societal gatherings. As *Kát'a's* guilt becomes more destructive and the characters seek refuge from the storm, beams from the ceiling hang askew in a state of decay. Kinmonth oscillated between various hues of blue and green in both the mottled mildew patina on the wooden walls and in his costumes, both sea colours calling to the story's omnipresent Volga.

Sundine's Kát'a oscillated in ever-widening swings as her actions and guilt became increasingly at odds, culminating in a strong and electrifying third-act monologue. Carsen's gradual buildup to this dramatic apex took clever advantage of many minor moments. From the opening scene, with the modernistic Vanya extolling the virtues of the Volga while peering through the lens of a camera perched atop a tripod, to the closing scene with Kabanicha standing alone to bear the burden of Kát'a's suicide, small but compelling details reveal Carsen's intimate knowledge of the entire score. Carsen's and Kinmonth's setting of choice brought the opera slightly forward in time to 1911. In a day when opera houses seem plagued by *enfant terrible* directors who distort time frames with reckless abandon while bypassing the musical material at hand, Carsen has proved that these extremes are not necessary for crafting a satisfying and fresh production.

Popera Encore, Opera Hamilton, Hamilton — January 22, 1994
accepted for publication in *Opera Canada*

Popera Encore, Opera Hamilton's annual concert production, opened January 22, featuring the return of internationally renowned baritone Sherrill Milnes.

Sharing the stage with a trio of promising singers, Milnes's performance revealed the distinction of a consummate recording and international stage career. With each decisive entrance onto the stage, Milnes's subtle yet firmly controlled gestures sculpted powerful characterizations. Rich and puissant vocal renderings of "O vin dissipe la tristesse" (*Hamlet*), "Eri tu" (*Un Ballo*), and "Credo in un Dio crudel" (*Otello*) delineated Milnes's introspective and convincing vignettes from mere vocal showcases.

Tenor Eduardo Villa settled into some sensitive and potent moments in "Forse la soglia attinse" (*Un Ballo*) and in the popular "Dio che nell'alma infondere" (*Don*

Carlo) duet with Milnes. Not quite a Delila or a Carmen, mezzo-soprano Corina Circa's Opera Hamilton debut pooled her vocal strengths for "O don fatale" (*Don Carlo*). Bulgarian soprano Zvetelina Dimitrova, riveted to the stage with intense conviction, quickly emerged as an unexpected powerhouse with "O rendetemi la speme" (*I Puritani*) and "Ritorno vincitor" (*Aida*) for an impressive North American debut.

Conductor Daniel Lipton and the Hamilton Philharmonic also took the opportunity to revel in the intense dramatics, taking centre stage with the overtures from *Norma* and *Luisa Miller*. Milnes's apposite encore yielded the only light-hearted musical moment of the evening—Don Giovanni's "Champagne Aria".

Cavalleria Rusticana/I Pagliacci (Mascagni/Leoncavallo), Opera Hamilton, Hamilton Opera Canada — Spring 1994

Opera Hamilton's production of Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* played the neglected sibling to Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* (November 27) in what is usually a comfortable pairing. Despite the plot parallels of infidelity and murderous revenge, director Francesco Privitera's attempts to explore realism and human drama in both operas achieved drastically different ends.

Tragedy transformed into unintended comedy in *Cav'* with tenor Aldo Filistad's vociferating Turiddu capping off the cast of fragmented characters. Barbara Dever's passionately suffering Santuzza evolved from her vocal riches, notably in the lower ranges, to stand alone amidst diffused direction. Uneven balance between the male and female choruses detracted from potentially emotive moments. Overtly gaudy and crude blood-red lighting diverted attention away from Mascagni's gorgeous orchestral workings in the symphonic intermezzo.

What did not quite congeal in *Cav'* cemented *Pag'*. Wally Coburg's minimalist Tri-Cities Opera sets drew sumptuously on colour as the intertwined lives of the players mounted the stage of this play within a play. The surprising strengths of *Pag'* did not, however, lie in the pathos of the betrayed Canio, a flat character and reedy realization by Giuseppe Vendittelli.

Allan Monk, the only cross-over between casts, stepped out of a two-dimensional Alfio to become the vocal and theatrical ringleader of the evening as Toneo/Taddeo, the pitifully disfigured clown of the troupe of players. Three physically and vocally vibrant roles enhanced the momentum and cohesive dramatic texture. Sharri Saunder's Nedda opposite her lover John Fanning's Silvio combined visually convincing and sensitive portrayals with keen musicianship, as did Gordon Gietz's magnificent Beppe.

Conductor Daniel Lipton's elastic and intuitive direction guided complementary orchestral vivacity from the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra, confirming the artistic and musical convergence in this dynamic *Pag'*.

Nosferatu (Randolph Peters), Canadian Opera Company, Toronto
Hudební Rozhledy, Prague — March 1994

Since 1987, Toronto's Canadian Opera Company (COC) has presented eleven world premières. While most have been small chamber works, these initiatives mark a strong turning point in the growing interest of opera audiences nationwide. With ten active opera companies from coast to coast operating on the *stagione* system, the COC's 1993-4 season is the most extensive, with nearly seventy performances of eight productions. The core of nationwide programming largely consists of conservative international repertoire. Aside from the adventurous workshops and

festivals undertaken at the Banff Fine Arts Centre in Alberta, contemporary projects and commissions are still a rarity.

For the première of the newly-commissioned *Nosferatu* by Canadian composer Randolph Peters, the COC decided to use the DuMaurier Theatre on Toronto's Harbourfront. Nervous about the withdrawal of some of the government funding and audience response to a new opera, opting for the 300-seat venue has become a bittersweet decision due to the great number of people unable to buy tickets. The moderate \$300,000 (CDN) cost of producing *Nosferatu* has almost been met by a variety of governmental Arts Councils as well as a special grant from OPERA America. The project, initiated by the COC, is the fruit of the conviction and insight fuelling their composer-in-residence programme and Ensemble Studio programmes.

Born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Peters was a graduate student at Indiana University when one of his professors contacted Richard Bradshaw, chief conductor of the COC, about the talented young composer. Soon after, Peters was appointed COC composer-in-residence, and the *Nosferatu* project was initiated in collaboration with Toronto-born Thom Sokoloski, who has produced many of Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer's ritualistic operas. Sokoloski's story expands the vampire legend known popularly from Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, *Dracula*, to incorporate elements from 15th-century Transylvania, when Vlad the Impaler was also known as a protector of his people. Sokoloski's synthesis forms a story rich in allusions to modern political power struggles.

In Sokoloski's original plot, *Nosferatu*'s daughter Camilla is tormented by nightmares about a past which she does not understand. With only a pendant from her dead mother, Camilla embarks on a journey to a city named Demeter, where the townspeople are celebrating the building of a huge money-making dam. An older woman, Nzbana, recognizes the pendant and offers to lead Camilla to its source. Nzbana is also the leader of a group of people who live in the Village of Shame, a group destined to become homeless by the building of the dam. As a link to the three

societies presented in the opera, Nzbana must also appease Nosferatu, the protector of the Village of Shame, with human sacrifices. The ensuing mental battle that Camilla endures when she realizes the horrible identity of her father forces her to make a decision between real life and eternal life through death. In choosing to live, she must kill Nosferatu, which in turn condemns the people he protects. There is no simple solution to her dilemma. Camilla's closing monologue reveals the knowledge that her decision has caused great pain to others.

Following a creative fracture in 1992, Marilyn Gronsdal Powell, an assistant director with the Ensemble Studio, stepped in as both librettist and producer. *Nosferatu's* première on December 8, presented its nine scenes in two acts in English lasting just under two hours. The cast of twelve was accompanied by a sub-set of seventeen musicians from the COC's youthful and vibrant resident orchestra, convincingly conducted by Bradshaw. Peters' instrumentation features a core of strings (without viola) which, along with a piano, play nearly throughout. The additional wind and brass instruments are employed as splashes of intensely coloured pigment, often drawing attention to particular characters on stage. Definite tonal references and melodic injections alternate with haunting string oscillations and more atmospheric kinds of background music.

The influences of Peters' ethnomusicological studies in Central Asia and Africa are recognizable in this score, as with his several film scores and commissions for the Winnipeg Symphony and Kronos Quartet. In a recent interview, Peters, aged 34, reflected on his compositional development which also marks his first opera: "I used to have a film style and a concert style, but I've found that over time I've been able to merge the two. Now I put more of an 'edge' in my film music, and my concert music has a more harmonic and lyrical flow." His instrumental style is neither elusive to the listener nor overtly programmatic.

Peters' vocal writing is reminiscent of Alban Berg's, with each role musically defined and distinct, keenly aware of the vocal timbres in different ranges. Canadian

soprano Sally Dibblee pierced Camilla's broadly-arching lines of open intervals with confident precision. Her final closing monologue, which incorporates the Klezmer-like melodies and vocal floridity associated with the character Nzbana, is a demanding and powerful psychological study—worthy as a separate concert piece. Mezzo-soprano Marcia Swanston's Nzbana, a counterpart of extremes to Camilla, offered aurally spicy interjections. The surprise of Nosferatu as a tenor, and not a deeper vocal range often associated with evil figures, did not diminish the horrifying power exuded by Barry Busse, whose looming figure evoked an image of vicious power.

Set and costume designer Peter Horne's challenge of a limited budget and an unusually sterile performing space would have benefitted from a proper curtain for dramatic continuity during scene changes. Despite Horne's creative use of props such as ladders, which draw attention to the several layers of society, as well as a suspended disc that is at one moment Camilla's bed and later a large luminous moon looking down upon Nosferatu's pillage in an ethereal forest, the bareness sometimes leaves the characters and plot unsupported. With radio broadcast commitments and interest for future performances in both Canada and Germany, these minor concerns can hopefully be rethought in what is otherwise an exciting and worthy Canadian project.

B — Instrumental and Orchestral Music; Profiles

Jeffrey Siegel, Convocation Hall, McMaster University

"Head", *The Silhouette* — October 22, 1992

"Regal Siegel"

For the piano enthusiasts who braved Mother Nature last Sunday evening to attend the concert in Convocation Hall, a rare treat awaited.

Jeffrey Siegel, the New York pianist, introduced an old piece with a relatively new twist. Schumann's Fantasy in C is a composition that has been a regular feature of concert programmes for over a century and a half. While conducting research in Budapest, McMaster professor Dr. Alan Walker discovered the authentic manuscript of this work.

Music that Schumann had originally intended to end this piece was included in this document but has never appeared in the published editions of the Fantasy. It was this alternative ending that Mr. Siegel offered in his performance.

The audience was prepared for this surprise and all three movements were delivered in a convincing manner. This is no small feat considering the technical demands and pianistic acrobatics that are demanded by the emotionally gripping music.

The balance of the Sunday evening programme included the Haydn Sonata in C minor and Prokofiev's Sonata No.8. Siegel's personal style seems well suited to the romantic repertoire, but the Haydn came a little on the heavy side.

The Prokofiev selection is another of those gargantuan and daunting pieces that can truly showcase great pianistic style. Combined with Siegel's ability to highlight

gorgeous melodies hidden amongst a more contemporary tapestry of sounds, the Prokofiev left the audience clapping for more.

And what they got was the second movement of Schumann's Sonata in F sharp minor. The encore provided a beautiful lyrical moment of reflection for the overwhelming programme.

Siegel is at home in various music arenas including the recording studios where he is well-known for his rendition of the complete piano music of George Gershwin. He is also gaining increasing exposure as a conductor but still maintains an active career as an international soloist.

The concert had been dedicated to donors of the Music Department and Convocation Hall renovations.

The Celebrity Concert Series at McMaster offers fabulous concerts for less than ticket prices in Toronto (a mere \$6 per student). Programs are usually designed to please everyone from the serious music fanatic to the student seeking a little highbrow at the right price.

Casting all the pretence aside, you can just sit back and let the music take you away from the everyday drudgery.

The next little slice of heaven will feature Raphael Sommer, the British cellist, with McMaster Artist-in-Residence Valerie Tryon on Sunday, Nov. 1 at 8:00 pm.

Advance tickets are available by calling the Music Department at ext. 4445.

Akira Endo Profile

"Head", *The Silhouette* — January 14, 1993

"Philharmonic phil-phlop"

There's a new penguin coming to town! He walks, he talks and can he shake a mean stick.

No—it is not Danny Devito. The Hamilton Philharmonic's conductor Victor Feldbrill will officially pass the baton to Maestro Akira Endo after the close of this season.

In the meantime, Maestro Endo was in town last week to guest conduct what will soon be his hometown team. Catching up with him after a dress rehearsal, I was pleasantly surprised to find a pretty cool dude kicking back in his jeans and west coast sweatshirt.

Akira Endo is a businessman of the '90s whose product is music. His principles are strongly rooted in the basics of smart business and he is prepared to back everything he says with personal involvement and a broad beaming ear-to-ear smile.

So how will Maestro Endo address the "four P's" of marketing to ensure future successes for music-making in Hamilton?

Place. Hamilton Place is a fabulous venue for performers and audience alike. Acoustically speaking, it is top notch for everything from Beethoven to the Beastie Boys. No complaints with this locale (OK, maybe parking).

Price. Just shop around and you will soon realize that HPO prices are competitive. If that doesn't satisfy the student budget, just wait until 7:00 pm on the night of a concert and the ticket price is cut in half.

Promotion. The regular media advertising vehicles will always be the focus but Maestro Endo has some perceptive enthusiasm that will have some long term pay-offs. Who goes to the symphony?

The demographic profile is pretty diverse but the "blue rinse" crowd is definitely the big winner. As you slide along the time axis, a critical problem evolves. If the yuppies and baby boomers are going back to church and taking their kids, will they also return to the concert hall?

Maestro Endo has been intensively involved in education throughout his career. While currently the chairman of the instrumental music department at the

University of Miami (which wraps up this spring), he has been motivating students about music right from junior school classes up.

Live music is much more enjoyable if you have some clue what it is all about and Maestro Endo is more than willing to relate the wonderful mysteries and powers of music to people of all ages.

And finally, Endo's fourth "P" is *product*. The Hamilton Philharmonic is in its third decade of existence. Most Hamiltonians are familiar with Maestro Boris Brott, who was at the helm for most of those years.

Right through the '80s, creative programming and new projects enhanced the growing reputation of a well-recognized Canadian orchestra just a stone throw from the formidable Toronto scene.

Hamilton music fans could enjoy diverse music concerts of excellent calibre right at home. Boris's era came to pass and Victor Feldbrill continued to maintain the well-established standards.

Maestro Endo's musical efforts will have a flip side that can only benefit the "total package" required to draw in the crowds. Later this summer Maestro Endo will make Hamilton his permanent residence. Although he will continue to guest conduct south of the border and abroad, he is serious about the move and plans to apply for Canadian citizenship.

As with the head of any company, Maestro Endo realizes the importance of being visible and available to his consumers. He has already been wined and dined by eager community members and he makes it quite clear that he likes parties.

Maestro Endo is quick to recognize the excellent ensemble feeling that the orchestra has developed over the years. He also admits, however, that some of the programming has become stale and that some revamping is necessary to remain in the running for the consumer's entertainment dollar.

Currently, the orchestra has an average of four rehearsals for each performance and then it is all over. After the hard work and practice, Endo believes

that the performers would enjoy playing a concert more than once. Audience development could allow for multiple performances.

Endo's track record with the Louisville Symphony reveals his predilection for contemporary music and last Tuesday's concert was no exception.

Between relatively standard selections by Elgar and Brahms (both of which he conducted without a score), a work composed by Michael Colgrass was included that featured HPO clarinetist Stephen Pierre.

Colgrass was on hand before the concert to talk about his piece, which incorporates non-traditional techniques such as electronic recordings and the soloist moving around the stage throughout the performance.

Audiences seem to shy away from entire evenings of new and sometimes difficult to understand pieces, but introduced into familiar surroundings, Maestro Endo feels they may be more appealing to the casual listener.

There is plenty of good modern Canadian music waiting to be performed and recognition of national creativity can be a rewarding experience for all.

A fifth and important 'P' should be added to this list to expand upon what Akira Endo is all about.

People are both the makers of music and those who enjoy it. Maestro Endo's message is derived from a lifetime of experience. Endo identified four main channels of inquiry in the course of learning: science, philosophy, religion, and the creative arts.

No matter which channel an individual pursues most intensely, exploration of the creative arts facilitates the personal expression of emotion. Creativity can be found in all corners of a community. All you have to do is observe and absorb your surroundings. The Hamilton Philharmonic offers just one of many opportunities to embrace the creative spirit.

Maestro Endo's ideology has the right ingredients for a successful tenure. To see him in action before next season, catch his return on February 2, for another exciting and diverse programme.

Marina Mdivani, Convocation Hall, McMaster University

"Head", *The Silhouette* — February 18, 1993

"Soviet pianist graces Mac"

MMMMMMGREAT!!

Posters announcing two performances and a lecture by Russian pianist Marina Mdivani piqued the curiosity of students and community members alike.

For those fortunate enough to attend the first concert last Sunday night at Convocation Hall, Ms. Mdivani shared her wealth of experience and talent in an unabashed and sensitive exhibition of technical prowess.

The mysterious aura surrounding her image largely stems from the creative oppression she endured under the communist regime.

As principal solo pianist for the Moscow Philharmonic for over twenty-five years, she was forbidden to perform or record for Western audiences.

Soviet cultural commissars uncomfortable with Ms. Mdivani's individuality in programming and personality stifled the very lifeblood that had brought her North American recognition thirty years ago.

After her success at the prestigious Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow in 1962, Ms. Mdivani performed an eight-week North American tour that culminated in a well-received Carnegie Hall recital.

Her gifts were not to be shared outside the iron curtain again for decades.

The thrill of opening this vault of unknown wonders was embodied in the realization of works by Paul Hindemith and Alexander Skryabin. Both of these composers experimented with new musical languages to express their creativity.

This individuality is closely paralleled in Ms. Mdivani's own life. Hindemith's unwillingness to adopt a conventional Wagnerian style of composition forced him to leave his native Germany at the onset of WWII for the United States.

Although Skryabin did not completely abandon Moscow, he spent a period in Paris which significantly affected his musical fingerprint. The magnetism of nationalistic forces challenged by constraining political doctrines has created the plight of many artists.

Ms. Mdivani's only spoken words at the concert expressed her gratitude to the Hamilton community for enabling her to emigrate with her son in 1991.

Hindemith's *Ludus Tonalis* ("Play of Tones"), a collection of twenty-five short pieces of varying character, comprised almost a full hour of music. The quiet, mature figure at the piano seemed to draw on an endless reservoir of internal strength, undertaking each piece with renewed vigour.

Phenomenal stamina fuelled Ms. Mdivani's musical presentation of Hindemith's musical language. For those who found this work a little difficult to grasp, as with much 20th-century music, some of the more lyrical numbers satisfied the aural palates.

A veritable dim sum of musical offerings encompassed the gamut of emotions, rhythms and technical demands.

The ensuing collection of Skryabin Preludes and Etudes was like icing on the cake with its sugary sounds, infusing early 20th-century modernism with Chopinesque undercurrents.

Of particular note was Ms. Mdivani's ability to convincingly evoke drastically different moods—one of the preludes is often referred to as a greeting to the morning sun whereas another is marked "bellicose" or "savagely".

The audience, which almost filled the hall, did not cease their applause until Ms. Mdivani graciously provided an encore. Humorously punctuating the end of the performance with a remarkably brief but dynamic Skryabin piece, Ms. Mdivani added a sense of levity to her poignant performance.

Ms. Mdivani has recently garnered a significant position in McGill's Music Faculty but Hamilton will hopefully have the pleasure of future return performances.

The Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra, Great Hall, Hamilton Place

"Head", *The Silhouette* — March 4, 1993

"Classical musicians are rare beasts: An assortment of endearing oddballs"

Tuesday nights are tough to plan. You know that movie that you really want to see, but not for full price...

Mahler made me do it.

I knew that the Hamilton Philharmonic was performing the *Songs of a Wayfarer*, sung by Keith McMillan. Sure, there was the huge Schubert "Great" Symphony and a number called *Celebration*, but I went for the Mahler.

Music can pump you up, bring you down, soothe an aching heart or just simply fill a void of silence. Mahler wrote this song cycle when he was twenty-three about his unrequited love for a singer at the opera house where he was music director.

Imagine a *fin-de-siècle*, psychological, Viennese "Achey, Breakey Heart" if you will. McMillan's vocal rendering was shaped and defined with great care.

For someone unfamiliar with these songs, his expressive nature guided and enhanced the listener through a valley of emotions—the third song opens with "I have a gleaming knife in my breast" following a number about a joyous walk through a

park. It would have helped to have a translation of the German text in the programme notes to truly feel the link between the words and music.

I was satiated, but only the shorter half of the programme was over. Modern eclectic programming trends of Canadian orchestras (the Canadian content and "a-little-bit-for-everyone attitude") offer a diverse sampling of sounds along with the chance to reach beyond the recording efforts of faceless musicians.

Sometimes I do not understand how some people think of "serious" music as user-*un*friendly. If you want to wear jeans and still sit near the front, nobody is going to arrest you—the seat is paid for. So feel free to drift and wander as the music gives you a return ticket to "Escapia—the mini-vacation".

The added bonus of the visual aspect of live performance can provide fabulous entertainment if you are the wandering mind sort. The opening short work by Prévost was the perfect time for me to do some people-watching whereas the Schubert let you see them sweat.

For example, principal trumpet player Larry Larson sits beside Mary Jay, another trumpet player who happens to be very pregnant and just happens to be his wife. They have the neatest, subtle hand and foot signals to convey "Great Job" or "Right On" after one of them plays a solo. Y&R substitute perhaps?

I think viola players belong to some secret club where all they do is pat each other on the back. Viola players hardly ever get to stand up at the end of a piece. They are always there but they never get to do anything really wild.

Cellists seem to unearth the heart-wrenching sadness in every melody while the conductor tries to keep them quiet. Double Bass players get brownie points for just lugging their instruments to the concert hall. Violinists should never get paid by the note but I love watching them during a workout.

The woodwind instruments have the best and worst of it wrapped up in the fact that their penetrating frequencies carry across the strings. Every delicious

melody can be heard (along with the tiniest of mistakes). No mercy for the horn players either.

Percussionists are a breed completely unto themselves. Do they have nightmares about crashing the cymbals in the wrong spot? I bet triangle envy is not a huge problem.

The only person who doesn't have to face the audience bounces a stick around and, for all we know, he's just making faces at the players to pass the time.

There is a lot more to Schubert than people-watching. Poor guy, he kept trying to bust a move in Vienna but Beethoven was all over town. Old alternative stuff in a way.

I kept hearing a little tune near the end that reminded me of the end of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, but the heavens never opened up to pour forth a chorus of thousands. Who wrote it first, Beethoven or Schubert? But then again, lifting tunes is another story.

The Pražák Quartet, Convocation Hall, McMaster University

"Head", *The Silhouette* — March 25, 1993

"Impressive end to classical season"

The Pražák Quartet from Prague not only wrapped up this year's Celebrity Concert Series last Sunday evening in Convocation Hall, but also took the opportunity to feature McMaster's own cellist, Zdenek Konicek.

Joining the quartet for the last and largest work on the programme, Konicek filled out the group to play Schubert's Quintet in C major.

It was certainly clear that the quartet's sensitive and intuitive sense of ensemble was somewhat disturbed by an additional performer.

A rather unsettled opening with occasional intonation problem in the violins did not set a welcome stage for their guest cellist. It was not until the *andante sostenuto* of the *Scherzo* that both Michal Kanka and Konicek offered elegant solo lines amidst a tastefully restrained and secure background.

The last movement also presented some technically secure moments that were not as burdened with errors and sloppiness heard in the first two movements.

In programming Josef Suk's *Meditation on an old Bohemian Chorale*, the quartet was reaching back a full century into their heritage. Suk's own performance career was strongly tied to the Czech Quartet, which, like the Pražák group, emerged as a group of students linked to the Prague Conservatory.

Clarity of line, unified expression and emotion enhanced a technically superb interpretation of this nationalistic work.

The passion and tension grew climactically to embrace the spirit of the inspirational text "Do not let us perish, us or those yet to come".

The conviction with which all four players developed their individual parts into a powerful unified force gripped the audience's attention right up to the concluding release, which recalled the serenity of the opening measures.

It was very clear from the onset of Mozart's "Dissonant" String Quartet in C that Kanka would maximize the solo virtuosity of the already significant cello part.

Steady tone and a compassionate interpretation certainly encouraged the listener to seek out Kanka's line from amongst those of the other players. Some rich melodies were featured by Josef Kluson on viola. Unfortunately, competent individual performances by violinists Vaclav Remes and Vlastimil Holec were often marred with tuning problems and poor balance.

Despite the unique compositional aspects of this Mozart quartet, the overall interpretation was often a little too "meaty". A similar heaviness tainted the Schubert quintet with the best balance, interpretation and overall performance being achieved in the Suk *Meditation*.

A definitely positive message reached out from each programme in the form of next season's Celebrity Concerts announcement. The recent growth in the Convocation Hall audiences suggest rising interest in the concerts offered by McMaster's Music Department.

Reflecting back on this year's offerings reveals a certain eclecticism that contained several treasures—Marina Mdivani and L'Ensemble Arion spring to mind.

The 1993–4 season continues this trend while including some prominent names that you might not expect to play this particular venue. The Chamber Orchestra of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music will kick off in September with the Canadian percussion ensemble Nexus and jazz musicians Oliver Jones and Dave Young highlighting the spring concerts.

Do not be disappointed by the rising popularity of these concerts. Get your calendar ready for the fall dates (call McMaster ext. 4445 for more details).

McMaster Chamber Orchestra, Convocation Hall, McMaster University

"Head", *The Silhouette* — April 1, 1993

"Chamber Orchestra cooks up a storm"

By Jove, I think they've got it!

The McMaster Chamber Orchestra's last concert of the season showed that with the right ingredients, a thoroughly enjoyable evening of music would shower forth.

Conductor Keith Kinder was more at ease than during previous concerts, which was no doubt due to his confidence in the orchestra.

Kinder's programming has often resulted in somewhat bizarre offerings which have left me scratching my head.

The selections in last Sunday's concert were not only well-suited to the Convocation Hall setting but more importantly to the performers themselves.

A welcome addition in the form of percussionist John Brownell expanded the traditional orchestral sounds to include roto-toms, xylophone, vibraphone, and timbali amidst other aural delights.

Thomas Legrady's *Divertissement for strings and percussion* was originally written for McMaster percussion instructor Roger Flock and the Hamilton-based Sir Ernest MacMillan String Ensemble.

Legrady's work, along with the ensuing *Concerto pour batterie et petit orchestre*, by Milhaud featured Brownell on no fewer than sixteen different percussion instruments.

The Spanish flavour and Hungarian folk elements that pervade the *Divertissement* provided an excellent framework for the rhythmic and percussive spotlights.

Milhaud's jazzy seasonings were perhaps even more suitable to the percussive bursts. Despite Brownell's sound technique and virtuosity, I think that the orchestra ought to be recognized for its performance in both these works.

Difficult and complex rhythms presented little difficulty as evidenced by the strong coherent pulse. The colourful and diverse moods seemed to emerge organically with a conviction shared by all.

Jumping back a couple of centuries, Handel's *Concerto Grosso*, Op.6 No.1, featured McMaster students Michael van Dongen and Katherine Tinkler (violin) with David Macdonald (cello). It was off to the races in the ultimate *Allegro*, but the previous four movements showed just how tight the string players can be.

Delicate solos wove in and out of the string ensemble with a sense of balance that added an element of beauty to the entire work. Dr. William Renwick on harpsichord added just the right hint of baroque flavour to an otherwise modern collection of instruments.

Some of the excellent string playing in the Handel selection would have enhanced the opening Mozart Overture to *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* but—hey! A little rhythm, some snappy passages and four dudes on percussion—what more can you ask for?

The final work on the programme, Sibelius's incidental music to *Balshazzar's Feast*, was a tad anti-climactic for the last work of the season. What it lacked in terms of the grand finale finish, it certainly made up for in the woodwind passages.

Fabulous flute solos by Jennifer Averink, clarinet solos by Brian O'Connor and Tonya Castle and oboe solos played by Islay-May Renwick added just the right amount of eastern spice and exoticism.

What pulled the whole concert together was the confidence level of the orchestra that has not previously seemed as strong.

The programme as a whole provided soloistic moments for almost every member of the orchestra and instead of a string of bloopers, the audience was presented with some fine musical moments that came together in a well-rounded package.

Damn it—I think they were having a good time!

Boris Brott Profile

Submitted to *Hamilton This Month* — April 1993

Los Angeles, Jerusalem, Montreal, Vancouver, Hamilton—A month in the life of Boris Brott devours more frequent flier points as he approaches the "half-century club" than ever before. Driven by a seemingly endless reservoir of energy, only one thing seems to keep his feet firmly rooted in Hamilton for more than a fleeting moment—the Boris Brott Summer Music Festival. Now entering its sixth year, the

festival offers a veritable potpourri of music-making in the height of summer, when our resident orchestras and opera company enjoy a well-deserved performance hiatus.

Considering Maestro Brott's tenure as principal conductor of the Hamilton Philharmonic for over two decades, it hardly seems unusual that he would continue to contribute to the tapestry of Hamilton's cultural life. The flip side of this scenario, however, is that an organized festival can take place anywhere. With ongoing conducting contracts just outside of Los Angeles and Montreal alongside numerous guest conducting positions, there must be a fairly strong emotional tie that keeps him coming back. Sitting amidst thousands of scores, Brott is quick to explain. "Hamilton is both a small town and a big town at the same time, with its wonderful scenic beauty and accessible location. For visitors and Hamiltonians alike who stay in town for the summer, the summer festival is a natural extension of the musical activity in the community. I've lived in Hamilton for over 25 years and the festival allows me the opportunity to share my commitment to Hamilton and most importantly, to put something back."

Brott's idea of reinvestment extends much further than the casual onlooker may realize. Weeks of auditioning young promising musicians across Canada in the spring reaches fruition in the Technics Academy Orchestra that forms the resident group of musicians for the festival. The 55 musicians that come together work in a mentorship atmosphere include some of the best musicians in Canadian orchestras today. For Brott, the Academy represents an integral component of the festival. In a surprisingly serious tone he explains: "the Academy provides a realistic experience for young people coming into the business. Over 75 per cent of our apprentices have secured positions in established symphonies and orchestras. One of the things that I find the most heart-warming is the phone calls from youngsters wanting to return. We sometimes have apprentices come back for a second season, but what we are really trying to do is give them a hand in taking the next step."

The thousands of people who attend the festival's performances certainly enjoy the realization of many months of planning and hard work. Behind the scenes, Brott pulls off nothing short of a one-man show that continues to develop the right connections to pull all the forces together. When it comes to creative brainstorming, Brott's year-round devotion to the festival is in many ways the cornerstone to its ongoing existence. Times are tough, yet this year the festival's season will keep the orchestra going for six weeks—up two weeks from last year. Brott's tremendous musical experience often plays second fiddle to the quality that has perhaps developed into his most successful attribute—enthusiasm, Enthusiasm, ENTHUSIASM. The positive aura that pervades his every word, action and wave of the baton reinforces his belief that music should be enjoyable from both sides of the conductor's podium.

One of the festival's most effective ingredients is its ability to offer a diverse buffet ranging from traditional jazz to combination literary-orchestral evenings. Commencing near the end of June, this year's festival will also revisit successes from past seasons. The DuMaurier Jazz evenings will welcome Peter Appleyard with other performers including Cleo Lane and John Dankworth. The lunchtime series at the Royal Connaught Hotel takes the guise of "Bach's Lunches". Pianists Angela Cheng and Valerie Tryon will join the Academy for a Mozart concerto play-off. One new slant in the programming is a strong vocal line-up including internationally renowned bass, Louis Quilico, and an evening of celebrated opera favourites. Elmer Isler will bring his singers together for an evening of grand Mozart choruses. Something for everyone, and then some!

The festival team and the many volunteers who make six glorious weeks of music in Hamilton a reality know well the whirlwind of enthusiasm that fuels Brott. It's contagious. Lest we ever forget, Brott may not physically spend many days of the calendar here in town, but Hamilton is still his home. The possibility of three consecutive meals at home is probably equally relished by Brott and his wife Ardyth and their three children (not to mention their new puppy Oscar). The gears never

stop churning, however, and Brott's vision for the future of the summer festival in Hamilton is full of wonderful ideas. Seeking unprecedented long-term funding commitments reinforces this vision. We're glad you're back, Boris.

The Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Convocation Hall, McMaster University

The Hamilton Spectator — September 20, 1993

"Busy tour for Scottish musicians"

Two weeks before heading back to the books, 28 students from Glasgow's Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama boarded a plane for Toronto for not your average field trip.

The Academy Chamber Orchestra, teaming up with the University of Toronto MacMillan Singers, performed at the University of Guelph on Friday, followed by a concert at U of T on Saturday, before opening the McMaster Celebrity Series yesterday.

The strings alone undertook the largest instrumental work of the programme, Scotsman Thomas Wilson's *St. Kentigern Suite*. Commissioned in 1986 for the 850th anniversary of the Glasgow Cathedral, Wilson explored the life of this shadowy saint through a series of symbols. At the onset, a frenzied chaos built of oscillating layers on the brink of white noise eventually peeled away, exposing a reflective melancholic core. This mysterious yet beautiful sadness set the tone for the subsequent four sections, with haunting solos by concertmistress Karen Graves and cellist Alison McGillivray.

Philip Ledger, both principal of the academy and conductor of its orchestra, showed masterfully long-sighted vision in this sometimes ethereal work. Ledger took a decidedly bold and brisk approach to the concert's opening in which Purcell's

Chaconne tested the strength of Convocation Hall's old leaded glass windows while firmly establishing the confidence of the young musicians.

The Symphony No.4 by Thomas Arne, which followed, welcomed the horns and oboes. Intricate duets highlighted their technical agility in an abundance of beautifully crafted turns and trills during the *Moderato*.

Oboist Andrew Dickie, one of the Academy students, took centre stage for a real solo in an Arthur Benjamin arrangement of a Concerto for Oboe and Strings based on four keyboard sonatas by Cimarosa. Lacing even the most demanding passages with the flair of true musicianship, Dickie saved his creamiest tones for the second movement *Siciliana*. Ledger and the orchestra attained a sensitive counterbalance throughout.

Mozart's *Litaniae Laurentanae* was an ambitious undertaking for the second half of the programme. Ledger kept the orchestra delicately in check against the chorus of 31 plus a quartet of soloists. Yet Convocation Hall suddenly shrank to a fraction of its size when all the forces came together in the opening *Kyrie*. A more appropriate balance, however, was attained in the *Salus informorum* section.

But then there was the *Agnus dei*. Soprano Celia James, an Academy student currently on exchange at U of T, leapt from the adequate into the sublime. Soaring from glorious melodies in the heavens back down to earth, James exuded a professionalism and confidence transforming this simple finale into one of joyful celebration.

The Borodin Trio, Chamber Music Hamilton, Ravenscliffe Drive

The Hamilton Spectator — October 22, 1993

"Russian trio in magical balance"

The centenary of Tchaikovsky's death echoed, once more, that he was not a happy man.

The Borodin Trio planned their Chamber Music Hamilton concert very carefully last night, at the home of Dr. Ezio and Helen Cappadocia.

The illustrious Russian trio, now on staff at Indiana University, undertook two substantial works: Tchaikovsky's Piano Trio in A minor, Op.50 and Beethoven's "Archduke" Trio in B flat, Op.97.

There is nothing standard about Tchaikovsky's only trio. What strikes the heart and the ear is the despair that runs through every turbulent outburst.

Celebrating the centenary of Tchaikovsky's death is re-opening the wounds that this deeply unhappy man buried beneath the surface of his seemingly more joyous works such as the popular Nutcracker Ballet.

Pianist Luba Edlina tore through the *allegro giusto* of the opening movement with a vengeance so overwhelming that the violin and cello seemed to struggle to cut through the raving torrents.

Finally staking their ground in the Variation movement, an exquisite pizzicato dialogue between Laszlo Varga's cello and Rostislav Dubinsky's violin formed the most intricate foreground for the balanced piano filigree work that wove the melodies together.

A whirlpool of intensity devours each subsequent variation, with the ninth, the *andante flebile ma non tanto*, beautifully magnified in the coda of the final variation for an overwhelming conclusion.

Beethoven's Trio revealed that, indeed, these musicians attain a mysterious and magical balance when the piano steps out of the limelight, allowing Dubinsky and Varga to dance with ease.

Cutting the initial intensity of the *allegro moderato* was an exquisitely precise string pizzicato duet against a flourish of trills.

Stepping out again in another direction, the murky fugue evolved with a steadiness and confidence of tone that carried the listener up with each step.

The final two movements, however, maintained the tempestuous fervour without infusing any breath for levity.

At a fever pitch, Edlina's technical mastery showed hairline faults in its concrete fortress, with the strings weakening under the momentum. The turbidity, perhaps, was more appropriate in the first half of the programme.

In this monumental undertaking of such a challenging programme, there is no doubt that every phrase was infused with the personal flavour and experience of the Borodin Trio. No passage emerged uncrafted.

The Hamilton Philharmonic, Great Hall, Hamilton Place

The Hamilton Spectator — November 8, 1993

"A boom, dancing, colour are hits at Sundae series"

Kicking off with a boom took on a flavourful twist for the Hamilton Philharmonic's new Sundae Series at Hamilton Place.

Conductor Clyde Mitchell's programme, entitled "Rhythm Around the World", featured a colourful melange of well-known classics and interactive pieces. Parents and children alike were even invited to help create one piece, *Opera Boom*, by stamping their feet, clicking their fingers and hissing to a grand explosive bang.

Glenn Buhr's *Akasha* warmed up the audience with the HPO before welcoming the featured ensemble, Répercussion, which includes Aldo Mazza, Chantal Simard, Luc Langlois and Robert Lepine. Also joining the four percussionists for exotic and invigorating numbers like "Mia Beleko" and "Abodan" and "Digba" was Dancer Delphine Pan Deoué.

Pulsing Ivory Coast rhythms played on traditional drums accompanied Deoué's dancing, which spun from the demonic to the hypnotic. At one point, she had a chain of little children from the audience weaving around the stage, while those still near their seats bobbed to and fro in the aisles.

A complete about-face followed with Rossini's Overture to the *Barber of Seville*. As each popular melody emerged, the orchestra seemed to crank up the energy level. No doubt Bugs Bunny helped to make this a hit for children big and small. Perhaps the back curtain lighting designs could have been more inventive as an attention-grabber right from the beginning.

Aldo Mazza's synthesis of orchestral and percussive sounds set the jumping beans in motion once again in his spirited Latin American-type number titled *Sundance*. Vibraphones, marimbas and a unique bass metallophone alternated in Caribbean delight. Couched in a bed of mellow, soothing strings, *Sundance* seemed a subtle reminder to visit a travel agent soon.

Laliberté's *Opera Boom* was the ideal seventh-inning stretch to prepare for Shchedrin's arrangement of Bizet's *Carmen*. Narrated with flair by gypsy-clad Leslie, the fateful story of Carmen wove together popular numbers like the "Habanera" and "Toreador Song". Schedrin's dispersion of vocal melodies rested largely in the strings with inconsistent success. The percussive focus, however, added a vibrant dimension which echoed the military and dance rhythms uniting both story and music.

Répercussion transformed Mozart's "Turkish" March into a comic delight for marimba. Alternating in expertly choreographed pairs, the hilarity gained steam right

up to the end with what seemed like Mozart in the magical hands of the Four Stooges.

Valerie Tryon/Ken Gee/Peter Gannon Profile

Submitted to the "Weekend Section", *The Hamilton Spectator* — November 1993

The physical difference between a concert grand piano and an electronic keyboard is something like jumping from a small car to a snowboard. A snowboard may not have airbags, but for concert pianist Valerie Tryon, her first foray in electronic music does have a safety net of sorts for her musical feats—not that she needs one.

When Dr. Peter Gannon, founder of PG Music, brainstormed ideas for a new computer software program that would play popular piano classics, he could have simply used sampled sound. His first and highly successful music-making program launched in 1989, "Band in a Box", operates on this basic principle. As a fun tool for composing your own jazz tunes, the creativity source is the person at the computer keyboard who selects different variables which are then merged with sampled sound and improvisation techniques.

Gannon's new program, "The Pianist", enhances computer-generated sound by incorporating the innate talent and musicianship of two local creative wellsprings—namely Valerie Tryon and Ken Gee. Tryon recorded over 200 popular favorites from Bach to Debussy that form the core of the program. Sure you can just listen to the fourteen hours of pianistic delights as background music for a dinner party or while you are working on some other computer program, but "The Pianist" offers much more to whet the appetite.

Unlike a straight compact disc recording, menus designed for windows on Mac and IBM systems (as well as Atari) offer a multitude of options. You can tailor each

performance by adjusting terms such as speed and pitch. The sound quality depends largely on the midi system hooked up to your computer, but a basic soundblaster card will get everything running. Accompanying the music is a data bank which provides interesting and witty information about the composers, along with pictures, and hundreds of trivia questions that enable adults and children alike to learn more about the music they enjoy.

Sandwiched between trivia questions about Italian musical terminology something pops up like, "Which composer had the *house-gig* for 25 years as Kapellmeister at the Court of Prince Esterházy?" or "What was a major life-style problem that contributed to Mussorgsky's early demise?" The biographical notes for each composer in the program tell you that the first answer is Haydn. As for poor old Mussorgsky, vodka, champagne, anything so long as it was booze seems to have led to his downfall.

If you think you are on the ball, you can try your luck at "name that tune", and you may even be surprised to find it as addictive as Tetris. Hamilton personality Richard Gale helped to compose these entertaining puzzlers that reinforce Gannon's own philosophy of music as a hobby; it has to be fun.

Tryon and Gee collaborated at Gee's studio, which shares office space with his typesetting business, Artset, in Hamilton. The grand piano in the front room is where you would expect to see Tryon, an epitome of elegance, but the room beyond is where the real work for the project began.

To capture Tryon's spirit of interpretation, her playing was recorded in 'real time' via a Roland synthesizer with keys that look and feel like an acoustic piano. For Tryon, who usually performs on the grandest of grands, playing on an electronic keyboard took a little getting used to. "It's weird. There's nothing out in front of me. It's like wearing no clothes," proclaims Tryon.

Even Tryon admits that her performances are not completely flawless. So what if she makes a mistake? "Ken just rubs it out," is the matter-of-fact reply. Gee

has come to know Tryon's playing style intimately and regards her own idiosyncrasies with admiration. In preparing the midi files for each song, Gee works on a program that looks like a player-piano roll lined up with an on-screen keyboard mimic. Series of lines and dots representing keystrokes pass by on a timeline as the music plays. But Gee is much more of a creative counterpart to Tryon than merely the corrector of tiny errors, and he has painted himself into the picture as the pianist for four of the songs recorded.

Gee's role in the project is difficult to sum up in one title, because he seems to have contributed to everything from repertoire selection to screen layout. Like Gannon, Gee straddles the realms of music and business, having continued to teach piano since his days in music at McMaster. With several of the teaching organizations thrilled at the release of computer-enhanced learning tools, Gee identifies how *The Pianist* can be an excellent teaching device: "The Pianist appeals to the music novice as well as to someone with a more technical background. You can learn at your own pace in a fun and non-threatening way."

All of the songs are classified by difficulty. Without hesitating, Gee complied to a personal request for *Islamey* by the Russian composer Balakirev (one of the two most difficult works in the lot). *Islamey* may not be overly well-known, but it is certainly a showstopper. While each key on an on-screen keyboard is marked by a blue dot as it is played in the music, you can almost imagine Tryon's fingers, with blue fingernail polish, flying over the keys in an increasingly spectacular light show. Delicate phrasing and subtle flirting with the keyboard during the most demanding of passages reminds you that this is really "Valerie in a Box".

Despite tough times, PG music has grown at an amazing rate due to the market success realized by programmes such as "Band in a Box" and, since March, "The Pianist". Each customer is invited to send in a consumer feedback card which accompanies the program. Beyond the positive comments were significant requests for more pieces, and noticeably absent composers such as Schubert are at the top of

the list. Gannon has not shied away from the growing interest and Tryon and Gee are currently completing a second volume. Gannon is also developing projects for rag-time and New Orleans style piano that would incorporate other fantastic pianists.

What originally started as a hobby for Gannon has evolved into a company employing eight full-time staff and three computer programmers. Currently outselling the competition ten to one, Gannon can still remember the early days when he did not know if there was anyone out there to buy his product. But when all of a sudden the phone started to ring, "Everyone including Billy-Bob in Alabama called and said *Get me a Band in a Box.*"

In many ways Gannon represents his own best consumer, and with over 25,000 names in his client database, there seem to be plenty of other thirty-five-year-olds with divergent musical tastes. Although the software business has been good to Gannon, he still runs his medical practice in Dundas part-time and forecasts status quo for that part of his life.

In talking business, however, Gannon tosses out unexpected statements mixed with casual enthusiasm. "For most countries, exporting is no problem and in fact free trade has been very good for the software business, and so is the GST" (for which they are reimbursed). He attributes the attractiveness of the program to the fun potential. "Code-based software has given us good tools to work with, but content-based software is the second wave. Everything is already done, and you can actually have fun."

Gannon always puts himself in the shoes of the consumer and as a result, guarantees and quality control are as important for him as the product itself. The Pianist retails for \$39 and is distributed nationally by Roland Canada. Locally, PG programs are available at their own offices on Hess Street South and in music shops like Reggie's on John Street.

Trio Canada, Convocation Hall, McMaster University

The Hamilton Spectator — November 29, 1993

"Expanded Trio pays tribute to a friend: Death of violinist Rudolph Kalup inspires reflective repertoire"

Trio Canada extends its name to include "and friends" when other artists join the core group of Marta Hidy, Zdenek Konicek and Valerie Tryon.

One such friend and a strong member of the McMaster musical community since the 1960's was violinist Rudolph Kalup, who passed away suddenly last week.

Dedicating its Convocation Hall concert yesterday afternoon to Kalup, Trio Canada opened with an addition to the program played by Hidy, Konicek, violinist Sonia Vizante and violist Mark Childs.

The second movement of Dvořák's "American" String Quartet in F major offered pensive reflection in its long melancholic melodies and a touching tribute to the group's dear friend.

Trio Canada's programme encompassing Haydn's Trio in G major, H.XV, No.25, and Brahms' Piano Quintet in F minor included a substitution in the programme: Joaquin Turina's Piano Trio for Montréal-native Michel Perrault's Trio. Even with the alteration, the common thread of folk music in the programme was preserved, albeit with a Spanish instead of a French touch.

Haydn's Trio in G major is well-known for its popular "Gypsy Rondo" finale.

The momentum and flair of this last movement comes somewhat as a surprise after the first two movements.

Haydn's focus on the violin in both the *Andante* and *Poco adagio cantabile* enabled Hidy to highlight the dirge-like melodies with a somewhat wider vibrato and more romantic sound than might be expected—perhaps the tribute to Kalup was still too fresh in our minds and ears.

The two larger works by Turina and Brahms evolved as not only contrasting styles but contrasting levels of performance finesse.

Trio Canada recently performed Turina's Piano Trio at McMaster's Art Gallery, and the refreshingly light and sweetly nostalgic folk melodies had a natural flow that comes from familiarity.

At times, however, this comfort with the music lapsed into a distanced and detached rendering.

The most satisfying music of the concert came to the fore when Tryon's Debussyian subcurrents of energy emerged to mingle easily with Hidy's broadly arching lines and Konicek's confident accompaniment.

Bringing the tally of artists together for Brahms' quintet, soulfulness and spontaneity were bartered for with good intonation and technical mastery—two elements which fluctuated throughout each movement.

Rhythmic vitality in the opening *Allegro non troppo* led into a vividly organic thematic unfolding in the *Andante*.

Increasing unsteadiness and a diffused vision could not, however, detract from the rich Czárdás elements of the final movement.

Due to the recent passing of Kalup, Trio Canada's dedication of this concert was not widely known and was, unfortunately, shared with a rather small audience.

SECTION IV: PROGRAMME NOTES

L'Ensemble Arion

Convocation Hall, McMaster University — January 17, 1993

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Trio Sonata in G major
(arr. of BWV 525)

William Lawes (1602-1645)

Sonata in G minor, for violin,
viola da gamba and continuo

John Jenkins (1592-1678)

Fantasia in D minor for violin,
viola da gamba and continuo

Jean Baptiste Quentin 'le jeune'
(fl. 1718-c.1750)

Sonata in A minor
(*Sonates...*, Opus 15, No.3 Paris, s.d.)

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764)

Troisième Pièce en concert
(*Pièces de clavecin en concerts*, Paris, 1741)

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767)

Quartet No. 6, in E minor
(*Nouveaux quatuors*, Paris, 1738)

J.S. Bach's six trio sonatas for two manuals and pedals were composed in Leipzig in the mid 1720's for the musical and technical education of his son Wilhelm Friedemann. The Trio Sonata in G major adapts the first of these organ works for consort performance. As with the other trio sonatas, the quick outside movements contrast the slow middle one. This collection of trio sonatas forms a companion work to the six violin sonatas which also explore the three-part form. During this period, Bach began to publish more of his keyboard compositions and his popularity spread alongside his growing interest in secular music.

While the end of the golden age in English music coincided with the end of the reign of James I, the courts of Charles I and Charles II did host some important contributions to musical life. Thomas Tomkins (1572-1656) is probably the best known composer of this period and his compositions carried on the tradition of English polyphonic church music. Among some of the lesser known composers whose work is historically significant, both William Lawes and John Jenkins produced many bold examples of viol fantasies based on traditional English forms. Lawes's Sonata in G minor is a fairly typical example of his use of stylised dances for the airs which resulted in tuneful and rhythmically exciting sections in which the violin figures prominently. The preceding fantasia shows the remarkable independence of the keyboard part in a solo interlude. Lawes infused his own romantic temperament into the traditional fantasia structure to expand the breadth of musical development.

As demonstrated by the Fantasia in D minor, John Jenkins' exploration of the viol fantasia exhibits a lyrical inventiveness and sonority. A violinist of high reputation, Jean Baptiste Quentin 'le jeune' composed much chamber music for violin, trio sonatas and quartet sonatas. His predilection for the violin is apparent in the Sonata in A minor. This work, dating from after 1729, also reveals unusually rich harmonies and melodic creativity.

Already well-recognized as a theoretician and keyboard composer, 1745 marked a turning point for Jean-Philippe Rameau. His appointment as a French royal chamber music composer coincided with the onset of a fruitful period of operatic compositions. These dramatic works are perhaps his most significant achievements. In the four years prior to this turning point, however, Rameau focused solely on four collections of chamber music that featured the harpsichord. The *Troisième Pièce en Concert* is a subset of the total sixteen movements written during this period. Rameau felt that the harpsichord part played without the violin (or flute) or viol was musically satisfying on its own. The string parts demonstrate a certain interdependence when heard together in the trio format. The whimsical nature of the

eponymous "La La Poplinière" reveals a variety of moods which may have found their inspiration in the character of Rameau's patron. Separating two of Rameau's most lively tambourins, "La Timide" incorporates some wonderful dissonances and passages of running thirds that lend a unique character—particularly in the A minor passages.

In 1702, Georg Philipp Telemann founded the Collegium Musicum in Leipzig. This bourgeois concert enterprise drew on the Leipzig University student musicians as well as amateur and professional forces. Every Friday, concerts of solo and ensemble instrumental music as well as vocal chamber music were offered at the Zimmermannische Kaffee-Haus. Direction of the concerts passed from Telemann to his successors in the music director post at the Neukirche. J.S.Bach assumed organizational and artistic leadership in 1729. This environment fostered the flute quartets of Telemann, whose prolific output contains over fifty quartets. The sixth flute quartet of the *Nouveaux quatuors* reveals his recognizable style of clear periodic structure, clarity and fluidity.

Marina Mdivani

Convocation Hall, McMaster University — February 14, 1993

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)

Ludus Tonalis

Alexander Skryabin (1872-1915)

Preludes Op.2 No.2,
Op.11 Nos. 15 and 21, Op.15 No.5,
Op.33 No.3, Op.67 No.1

Etudes Op.8 No.5, Op.42 Nos. 4 and 5

Paul Hindemith (1895–1963), the *enfant terrible* of post-World War I Germany, gradually adopted a less aggressive and deliberately provocative approach by the mid 1920s. During this period, he was also developing a theoretical method that represented his personal concept of an expanded tonality. His individuality and reluctance to espouse a Wagnerian style of composition did not meet with approval from the Nazi regime. After publishing his *Craft of Musical Composition* (1939), he moved to the United States where he taught at Yale University for thirteen years before returning to Europe.

Hindemith first applied his new theory to the three sonatas that he wrote in 1936. The *Ludus Tonalis* ("Play of Tones"), subtitled "Studies in counterpoint, tonal and technical organization and piano playing", is the most brilliant and systematic application of Hindemith's approach. Comprised of twenty-five short pieces, it starts with a *Praeludium* in C and ends with a *Postludium* which represents the musical material of the opening in reverse. In between, twelve *Fugues* separated by eleven *Interludes* explore the Hindemithian principle of hierarchical affinity to a tone. In this sense, all notes of the scale are ranked according to their relationship to the note C (in this case). As such, the fugues have in rank order the keynotes C, G, F, A, E, E flat, A flat, D, B flat, D flat, B, and F sharp. Also of importance in the fugues is the intervallic relationship formed between each keynote and the note C. Stylistically the pieces are quite varied; the fugues demonstrate strict contrapuntal techniques while the interludes are quite seductive and free in form. Hindemith's intention for this work to be a 20th century parallel to J.S.Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* is thus realized in a multitude of ways.

When Alexander Skryabin (1872–1915) had finished his studies under Safonov, Taneyev and Arensky at the Moscow Conservatory, he toured abroad as a pianist. In 1898 he returned to the Conservatory as a teacher and spent most of the rest of his lifetime in Moscow. Skryabin's work as a composer represented the progressive musical trend in Russia at the beginning of this century. The pianism of Skryabin is

strongly influenced by the music of Chopin but harmonically, he proceeded to develop a highly chromatic style in the Liszt-Wagnerian tradition. His later works demonstrate a highly individual vocabulary that evolved during a very mystic and theosophic period of his life. The preludes and etudes that Ms. Mdivani has included in her programme highlight the enigmatic and aphoristic qualities of his shorter works that in some ways foreshadow the early piano pieces of Schönberg.

The opening Prelude Op.2, No.2 is now often referred to as "a greeting to the morning sun." Nos.15 and 21 are very lyrical and sensitive selections from the Opus 11 collection, for which Skryabin received 500 rubles and the Glinka Prize. Together with Opus 15, many of these pieces can be heard as musical postcards or travel preludes that capture Skryabin's adventures of the time. Prelude Op.15 No.5 was written during two weeks that he spent in Heidelberg in the summer of 1895. He wrote to Natalya, his sweetheart at the time, "I have found here what I have long searched for—monuments and ruins of past epochs. This interests me more than anything else."

The Prelude Op.33, No.3 in C major steps outside the usual category of the preludes. Marked "bellicose", or "savagely", it is a chordal exercise punctuated by shifting metres. Prelude Op.67, No. 1, written a few years before Skryabin's death, is indicative of his mature style. He had, by this time, abandoned the traditional use of key signatures. Irregular rhythmic groupings and a demand for sensitive pedalling to bind the rich sonorities over an extended keyboard range explored new facets in modern pianism.

Again in 1898, Skryabin was awarded the Glinka Prize. His Twelve Etudes, Opus 8, quickly gained popularity. No.5 in E major is a particular favourite exploring a wide keyboard range via chords and octaves. The etudes of Opus 42 (1903) are devoid of obscurity, revealing a lyrical, clear emotion. No.4 is a singing *Andante* of sweet, translucently flowing sentiment. No.5, marked *Affanato* (breathlessly) is perhaps Skryabin's largest and gloomiest etude.

The Pražák Quartet

Convocation Hall, McMaster University — March 21, 1993

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

String Quartet in C Major
K.465 "Dissonant"

Josef Suk (1874-1935)

Meditation on an Old Bohemian Chorale, Op.35

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

String Quartet in C Major
Op. posth. 163, D.956

The six quartets of Mozart, published in 1785, are fine examples of the intricacy and sophistication attained in string quartet composition during the 1780's in Vienna. Mozart dedicated this set to Haydn, whose quartets of 1781 had supplied him with important sources of ideas for his own works. Haydn's reaction, upon hearing the last three of the quartets, is documented in a letter written by Mozart's father to whom the dedicatee stated: "Before God and as an honest man I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me in person or by name. He has taste, and, what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition". Nonetheless, the Quartet in C major which concludes the collection, has been the topic of much debate due to its atypical introduction.

The chiasm of the first twenty-two measures, an *Adagio* introduction, encouraged the nickname of 'Dissonance' which is commonly used in reference to this quartet. Contemporary critics were convinced that Mozart had released a manuscript full of "errors" which some 19th-century editors went so far as to correct. More modern analyses of this work recognize the advanced compositional function of the introduction to this generally "sunny" quartet in C major which incorporates a tonal structure considered adventurous for the period.

The *Allegro* of the first movement presents thematic material that is developed throughout the entire quartet. The *Andante cantabile* starts with a gently flowing

melody in F major that gives way to a series of long-drawn suspensions reminiscent of the "dissonant" introduction. The Minuet returns to C major with much of its passages written in unison. The Trio recalls the opening eerie sonorities with the cello breaking out near the end with a version of the violin tune. The vivacious finale meanders to the remote key of E flat via D, to A flat via G and then slowly winds back to C for a tidy conclusion. Mozart was permitted to progress to the second degree of freemason upon completion of this detail-oriented and complex quartet on January 14, 1785.

The Pražák Quartet's link with the music and life of Josef Suk extends far beyond their Czechoslovakian nationality. One hundred years ago, Suk and the other members of the newly formed Czech Quartet played its first concert in Vienna. As with the Pražák Quartet, Suk and his colleagues came together while studying at the Prague Conservatory. Suk's performance career of more than 4000 concerts with the quartet prior to his retirement in 1933 is a significant achievement in light of his compositional output and academic responsibilities at the Prague Conservatory during this period. As a composer, Suk produced much instrumental music but surprisingly little chamber music. Also arranged for string orchestra, the *Meditation on an old Bohemian Chorale 'St. Wenceslas'* reflects Suk's nationalistic style that was undoubtedly Czech although in most of his music there is little reliance on traditional folk melodies. The spirit of the text from the original chorale is the essence of Suk's work. The passion and tension inherent to the interplay of the four parts grow climactically, embracing the third part of the hymn "Do not let us perish, us or those yet to come". The ensuing release concludes this short work with a pensive yet satiated spirit that faintly echoes the serenity of the opening measures.

When Schubert turned to the string quintet in the last year of his life, he chose to include a second cello, unlike the string quintets of Mozart and Beethoven, which include a second viola. This combination allowed Schubert to highlight the contrasting first violin with the second cello against a background trio. Although

Schubert never heard this work performed before the end of his brief life, the String Quintet in C is often acknowledged as the greatest of his chamber works. Substantial in size, its rich sonorities, intensity and lyricism share the ability of Mozart's Quartet in C, K.465, to evoke a sense of yearning pathos from the key of C major. The violin's opening melody in C minor casts an immediate shadow across the music. This first movement also explores the full bass section of the quintet with a heartfelt theme sung by the two cellos. The ensuing *Adagio* provides great contrast in its simplicity and peacefulness. Astonishingly, the boisterous *Scherzo* in C major is followed by a Trio that explores the "doubtful" key of D flat major - a key which even reemerges in the last bars of the cheerful Allegretto. The overall brightness of this music is certainly enhanced by Schubert's occasional forays into darker regions.

Trio Canada

Convocation Hall, McMaster University — November 28, 1993

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Trio in G Major, H.XV, No.25

Michel Perrault (b.1925)

Trio

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Piano Quintet in F Minor, Op.34

When Prince Nikolaus Esterházy died in 1790, his court orchestra was disbanded and his kapellmeister Joseph Haydn (who had served him in Eisenstadt for nearly 25 years) was free to pursue his musical interests abroad. It was this freedom which enabled Haydn to accept the impresario J.P. Salomon's invitations to London, (1791-2 and 1794-5) which resulted in his last twelve symphonies—arguably the greatest he wrote. But there is also an aspect of Haydn's chamber music in which England may claim her share: the trios for piano, violin and cello.

The prevailing concept of the piano trio, in the latter half of the 18th-century, was a kind of piano sonata with string accompaniment. Because the piano, or more accurately the fortepiano, was predominantly a woman's instrument, piano part-writing was essentially intimate and domestic in character. Haydn's approach to the piano trio digressed significantly from his early trio sonatas, in which the keyboard merely supplied the *basso continuo*.

Haydn's Trio in G major also reveals the emancipation of the violin from its humble role of an accompanying instrument. In the *Andante* movement, a curious but charming hybrid of double-variation and rondo, the violin comes to the fore in both the third variation and even more so in the minor variation which modulates from G minor to B flat major. Continuing with an independent part in the *Poco adagio*, the *cantabile* of this middle section has an almost romantic expressiveness. The familiarity of this trio rests largely in the 'Gypsy Rondo' finale where, as in his D major piano concerto, Haydn found inspiration in traditional folk-tunes.

"I'm a classicist living in the wrong period. I like a folk-tune and the harmony that goes with it." These words, while not those of Haydn, who indeed was an integral member of the classical period, intimate how Michel Perrault views his own compositional style. For Perrault, who was born in Montréal, Québec folk music has played an important role in his compositional career. His Trio is characterized by folk-like melodies in a light polyphonic texture.

Following studies with Nadia Boulanger and Arthur Honegger at the École Normale de Musique in Paris during the mid 1940's, Perrault returned to Montréal as timpanist for the Montreal Symphony orchestra and as composer and conductor for the CBC. Broadening his musical horizons as musical director of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, Perrault has also founded a jazz organization and the Minute Opera Company along with his own music publishing house. Following a ten year hiatus from composing, Perrault's works from the last fifteen years reflect his search and aim for, in his words, a "natural ecological purity".

Brahms's Piano Quintet in F minor, Op.34 evolved into its ultimate form of piano and string quartet after first trying life as a Schubertian quintet with two cellos. Advice from two musical friends, Joseph Joachim and Clara Schumann, helped steer Brahms away from this initial configuration as well as the subsequent two-piano arrangement which still occasionally emerges in performance repertoire.

As with his piano quartets up to this point, Brahms explores a wealth of thematic material in the opening *Allegro non troppo*. The haunting D flat-C motive which pervades this first movement recurs throughout the subsequent three sections. The coda expands the initial string theme in ever-widening intervals finally coming to rest on a long-sustained chord. The ensuing *Andante* counterbalances the turbidity of the previous movement with a gentle reverie. Alternating rhythmic variation and syncopation augments the sense of contrast and originality in the *Scherzo*. As in the Trio, the D flat-C motive revealed in the opening movement permeates the work throughout and indeed is strongly evident in the introduction to the *Allegro non troppo finale*. The Czárdás rhythm and gypsy elements of this last movement add, as with the Haydn trio, a distinctive flavour and momentum which Brahms explores when writing in this idiom.

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