

La Scena **15^e ANNÉE** **Musicale** th YEAR

www.scena.org

Juin 2011 June vol 16.9



Prix d'EUROPE **100** *ans years*



CD DÉCOUVERTE
DISCOVERY CD
TRIO DI COLORE



Guides des festivals de musique classique et des arts

» NEW BRANDENBURG CONCERTOS » MET OPERA WINNER PHILIPPE SLY
» GABRIEL THIBAudeau » RIMOUSKI : VILLE MUSICALE » LEPAGE'S DIE WALKÜRE
» ET BEAUCOUP PLUS!



DIE WALKÜRE

PHOTOS Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera

THE MET LIVE in HD

by JOSEPH K. SO

This Met in HD, *Die Walküre*, the second installment of the Lepage Ring, reinforces my original impressions of *Das Rheingold* from last fall—the complex technology conceived for this production is a double-edged sword. To be sure, it is taking the Met out of its historically dominant mode of representational productions into a more cutting edge style typical of 21st century opera stagings. The massive set, nicknamed “The Machine,” is remarkably adaptable, capable of generating many stunning visual effects. But it comes with a price.

What appears realistic in the theatre doesn't always stand up to close scrutiny. For example, the close-ups of the tree trunk in the middle of Hunding's hut, while realistic in the theatre, reveal images projected directly onto the singers' bodies. There are the occasional ill-judged effects, like the phony “primitive people” projections during Siegmund's storytelling. The addition of leather straps for the valkyries to ride the “piano keys” appears ridiculous up close.

In the live theatre, a computer glitch on Saturday led to a 40-minute delay. However, the creative team is to be commended for making the set work for the soloists—the physical



awkwardness of the singers negotiating the treacherous set in *Rheingold* is absent in *Walküre*—it helps to put Fricka on a motorized ram-chariot! More problematic is a lack of interpretation in Lepage's vision of the Ring—it simply does not speak to the deeper meanings of the work. For all its visual wizardry, this Ring so far is interpretively neutral, even absent. Maybe this is just fine for the more conservative members of the Met audience, but it goes against the current trend in staging.

No such reservation exists musically as the performance on May 14 was terrific, with an outstanding cast led by the resplendent Wälsung Twins of Jonas Kaufmann and Eva Maria Westbroek. Bryn Terfel was a mellifluous Wotan and dramatically more interesting than in *Rheingold*. Stephanie Blythe's mezzo rang out powerfully as Fricka. Deborah Voigt was a sympathetic if metallic-sounding Brünnhilde. James Levine, looking frail, was sluggish in the quieter moments, but he rose to the occasion in the big climaxes. It whets one's appetite for the third and fourth installments due next season. **LSM**

LEPAGE GIVES THE MET A MACHINE-MADE *DIE WALKÜRE*

by PAUL E. ROBINSON

WATCHING ROBERT LEPAGE'S *DIE WALKÜRE* LIVE IN HD, I was often enraptured by the words and the music and moved to tears on several occasions. It was a great performance, no doubt about it, with some of the finest Wagnerian singing and conducting one could ever hope to hear. And Lepage, the stage director, deserves much credit for the power of the experience.

However, Lepage's overall vision, including the sets and projections, was disappointing and, under the circumstances, obscenely expensive. Peter Gelb must have lost his mind the day he agreed to fund a new Ring cycle based on a 45-ton machine prone to malfunctioning.

But worse than that, “The Machine,” as it is fondly called at the Met, has yet to give us anything of artistic merit that is worth the great amount of time and money spent on it.

el SISTEMA

A Cure for the Symphonic Crisis?

by JONATHAN GOVIAS

We keep hearing from orchestras how their industry is in crisis, but 2011 might be the year they really mean it. The Detroit Symphony just endured a very ugly labour dispute in its efforts to adjust to a new market reality, the orchestras of Philadelphia and Louisville are restructuring under the protection of the courts, and the Syracuse, Honolulu and New Mexico Symphonies are in liquidation. Even if the music stands and pianos aren't auctioned off, the survivors' outcome is almost certainly assured: musicians will take massive pay cuts, and administrators will promise to do everything they were doing before to generate revenue, only better, and with fewer staff.

There are plenty of reasons on offer for the situation, all of which translate to the same thing: times are tough and orchestras are low on the list of things to care about. It's not hard to see why. When orchestras aren't defending their existence through abstractions or intangibles, such as “improving the quality of life,” they usually talk about their larger economic impact—a position that can be largely self-defeating when advocating the meaning and relevance of art. As for relevance, it's a word orchestras typically define within the narrow confines of programming, playing music that has some tenuous, artificial correlation with current events, or the use of technology in the concert hall.

In summary, the current relationship between audiences and orchestras is transactional. One pays, one plays, and as a result audiences are no more emotionally invested in orchestras than they are in their grocers. But viable alternative models for community engagement do exist. Thirty-five years ago, Venezuela boasted two professional orchestras, neither worthy of any international attention. There are now over thirty active professional ensembles in a nation whose population and GDP are smaller than Canada's. This professional industry was born and grew to maturity under the leadership of *El Sistema*, and graduated to full autonomy about 20 years ago. Today it continues to benefit from the highly educated, appreciative audience that its parent continues to develop. This is not surprising: the primary indicator of whether a person will come to a symphony concert is not whether the local orchestra showed up once a year at her school to perform—it's whether she played an instrument herself.

In Venezuela orchestras are relevant beyond the intrinsic value of their art because their performances represent human and social achievements of an immediate, visible and deeply personal nature to musicians and audiences alike. It is a relevance desperately needed by symphonies in North America. Orchestras should be leading the *el Sistema* movement, as much for their own benefit as for that of their communities. A symphony as centrepiece, as focal point, as catalyst for a larger *participatory* community in music is a far more compelling and viable vision for the future than a tailcoat under the auctioneer's hammer.

Jonathan Govias is a distinguished conductor, consultant and educator for *el Sistema* programs on four continents. For enhanced content, please visit www.jonathangovias.com