

THE BALD PRIMA-DONNA (LA CANTATRICE CHAUVE)

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TETE A TETE OPERA FESTIVAL - music /percussion JEAN-PHILIPPE CALVIN
live electronics STEFAN TIEDJE director BILL BANKES-JONES décor TIM
MEACOCK with ALISON BELL mrs smith soprano, JEREMY H WILLIAMS mr
smith baritone, RACHEL NICHOLS mrs martin soprano, DANIEL NORMAN mr
martin tenor

Though this was our starter with dinner to follow, the work itself is a main course for me. The music adds to the play which satirises conformity and sends up independent thought, while playing with language and its accuracy as a main means of communication plus the devastating logic applied to understanding the confused world we live in. It starts out with an attempt on the part of both couples, the Smiths and the Martins, to communicate and ends up in complete chaos in which words and sounds are used at random into which the characters collapse. The Smiths are prudish and anti-intellectual yet interchange with their friends the Martins since the Martins speak as robots following the status quo in formula. Both couples are positive that they know their world by heart and have no need to communicate. However, the Smiths are in trouble as they can't figure out who is who in the family since they are all named Bobby Watson. Mr Martin tries to work out if he knows Mrs Martin. After he proves through logic they are married, the maid says they are strangers. When both couples sit down to talk they have nothing to say. Their logic doesn't seem to apply. It is only after the Fire Chief arrives with a bagful of stories that the couples start talking, using words and sounds at random, which collapses them into utter chaos. Both couples are fine performers with extremely appealing voices which add so much to the play as an opera. The vocal sounds and singing are so clear and counter the nonsense words marvellously. The music is a perfect match to the words in its definition and its style. This is an opera that truly represents the world we live in and is done with comedy that strikes even closer to the bone. It is sung in English or French which is a natural piece for the Bouffes du Nord Theatre in its style, content, and quality. Bill Bankes-Jones has so cleverly directed the pieces and given fascinating insight with this *workshop* exposure to an appreciative audience.