

Jean-Philippe Calvin – *La Cantatrice Chauve* (The bald-headed Prima Donna)

Tête à Tête Opera Festival
Riverside Studios, London W6
16 August 2007

Following a highly enjoyable visit to earlier performances at this Festival, Musical Pointers was tempted back to sample more of these appetising tasters of cutting edge opera.

Our evening began with extracts from Jean Philippe Calvin's *La Cantatrice Chauve* (the Bald Prima Donna), a work which is already headed for an impressive line-up of venues in Aix en Provence, Paris and Vienna.

The libretto is drawn from Eugene Ionesco's first play, a step back in time for older members of the audience to those heady days, more than half a century ago, when "Theatre of the Absurd" was emerging as an exciting and entertaining new movement. Ionesco was fascinated by the absurdity of language and in this play he creates two cloned couples, whose conversations drift through a series of non sequiturs.

Under the direction of Bill Bankes-Jones and with Tim Meacock's surrealist designs, the couples alternately took their places in the matching armchairs and it migrated comfortably to a musical setting. The cast of four (Alison Bell and Jeremy Huw Williams as the Smiths and Rachel Nichols and Daniel Norman as the Martins) really entered into the spirit of the piece and caught the sense of banality to perfection.

The play is written as a loop with a "da capo" instruction to repeat the dialogue with the speakers to be reversed. Live Electronics were introduced for the repeat to punctuate and accentuate the randomness of the words, and on an audience show of hands, was voted the stronger version.

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