

## **The Royal Opera's 2008/2009 Season:** Bill Kenny previews a feature packed year

No less than 24 operas all told, make a particularly busy season for The Royal Opera during 2008/9. There are eight new productions, Antonio Pappano conducts concerts of both Verdi's *Requiem* and Britten's *War Requiem* and there is a summer Italian revival season. A great deal is also going on in the Linbury Studio Theatre as well as with OperaGenesis and the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme. The Royal Opera's collaboration with the graduate orchestra the Southbank Sinfonia develops too.

### **New Productions**

2008/09 will be Antonio Pappano's seventh Season as Music Director of The Royal Opera. He will conduct five productions this year : *Don Giovanni*, *La fanciulla del West*, *Les contes d'Hofmann*, *Lulu*, *La traviata* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. In addition, he will conduct the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House and The Royal Opera Chorus, in concert performances of Britten's *War Requiem* and Verdi's *Requiem* at both the Royal Opera House and in Birmingham.

The new productions in the 2008/09 Season are *La Calisto*, *Matilde di Shabran*, *Hänsel und Gretel*, *Die tote Stadt*, *Der Fliegende Holländer*, *Dido and Aeneas/Acis and Galatea* and *Lulu*.

This is the first time that The Royal Opera has ever staged a work by Francesco Cavalli. *La Calisto* is directed by David Alden and led by Sally Matthews, a former Young Artist, and conducted by Ivor Bolton with the soloists of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Continuo Ensemble.

Juan Diego Flórez became an international sensation overnight when he took over the role of Corradino at the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro in 1996. He returns to this role in the rarely heard opera, *Matilde di Shabran*, conducted by Carlo Rizzi with Aleksandra Kurzak in the title role.

*Hänsel und Gretel* was last seen in Covent Garden in 1937 so this new production is long overdue. Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier direct two exceptional casts with conductors Colin Davis and Robin Ticciati sharing the performances.

For the first time ever on a British stage, Korngold's *Die tote Stadt*, from 1920, will be making its belated debut at the Royal Opera House. One of the major operatic hits of its time, it swept the operatic world within a few years with the exception of Britain. Willy Decker's outstanding production is the perfect setting for this sumptuous score.

*Der Fliegende Holländer* sees the return of Bryn Terfel to star in this new production of the first of Wagner's great operas. With Tim Albery directing, conductor Marc Albrecht makes his Covent Garden debut following performances of the work at the Bayreuth Festival.

In a unique programme, celebrating anniversaries of Purcell and Handel, both The Royal Opera and The Royal Ballet are brought together in two Baroque masterpieces, *Dido and Aeneas* and *Acis and Galatea*. Wayne McGregor, Resident Choreographer of The Royal Ballet, directs both works with Baroque specialist Christopher Hogwood conducting the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and two outstanding casts.

Following the intensely powerful new production of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* conducted by Antonio Pappano in 2002, Pappano now reintroduces Covent Garden audiences to Berg's other great opera, *Lulu*. Christof Loy directs this new production.

Hugely popular when they first opened, both *L'elisir d'amore* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia* are revived for the first time for the Season end, with Diana Damrau and Giuseppe Filianoti leading the cast for *L'elisir* and Simon Keenlyside, Joyce DiDonato, and Juan Diego Flórez, making a starring trio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.

Other Royal Opera audience favourites are *La traviata* with Renée Fleming, Thomas Hampson and Joseph Calleja, *Un ballo in maschera*, with Ramón Vargas and Carlos Alvarez, and *Tosca* with Deborah Voigt, Marcelo Giordani and Bryn Terfel.

## **OperaGenesis**

The contemporary opera development work of ROH2's OperaGenesis, in association with the Genesis Foundation, continues in 2008/09, with more than 20 projects at different stages of evolution, and new teams joining the programme. Current artists include Joseph Phibbs, Ed Hughes, Yuko Katori and Arlene Sierra.

The world premiere of *Varjak Paw*, by Julian Philips and Kit Hesketh Harvey, will be seen at the Linbury Studio Theatre in September. The first link up with transatlantic colleagues at American Opera Projects will be the workshop showing of Tarik O'Regan and Tom Phillip's opera *Heart of Darkness* in the Linbury in August. Will Todd and Ben Dunwell's political opera *EDSA* will be showcased in September, and Elena Langer and Tim Hopkins' multi-media video opera *Les Noces* will be shown in the Clore Studio Upstairs in February 2009.

The first results of the ten composers on the OperaGenesis' innovative *VOX – composing for the voice* course, led by Dominic Muldowney, will be seen in work at the Guardian/London Sinfonietta festival in January 2009 to launch the Sinfonietta's new home at Kings Cross.

The first ever project from the very first intake of the OperaGenesis programme, Jean-Philippe Calvin's opera *The Bald Soprano* (seen at the Linbury in November 2006), receives its world premiere in Paris in May 2009. Misato Mochizuki's opera *The Bakery Attacks* is scheduled to be premiered at Lucerne, Linz and Vienna towards the end of the 2008/09 season.

## **Bill Kenny**

Full details of the opera productions for the season are available from The Royal Opera's [web site](#).