

Highgate Opera Circle

2023/24 Season Review



We were very pleased to welcome back Robert Lloyd to open the new season in October with a fascinating insight into some of the difficulties of presenting Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Is it a comedy or tragedy, does Donna Anna as well as Donna Elvira still love him, and should we treat him as a likeable rogue or a villain?

In our joint evening with HGO in November, Geoff Hunt introduced us to Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* based on the Grimm story. This proved to be a revelation with some glorious, as well as powerful, almost Wagnerian style, music reflecting the fears of children being lost in the forest. Fortunately, there was a happy ending. HGO's subsequent run of performances at Jackson's Lane theatre proved to be a great success.

Bill English presented a very successful pre-Christmas evening in December on Verdi's comic masterpiece *Falstaff*. Tito Gobbi's peerless interpretation was much admired, as was Renato Bruson in a performance from Covent Garden. The most historic performance was Ambrogio Maestri at the Teatro Verdi in Busetto in 2001, the 100th anniversary of the composer's death.

In January Barry Mellor presented the tragic love story of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, highlighting the role of Geishas, and the interplay between the Japanese and American cultures. He also showed some of the greatest interpreters of the role in three different recordings. I expect many of you will have now seen recent performances from Covent Garden.

In February Geoff Hunt presented Verdi's *The Force of Destiny*. As well as the famous overture, with its haunting destiny motive running through the opera, it contained some of late Verdi's finest music, including uplifting choruses, poignant arias, powerful duets and ending with a stunning final trio. He also showed some of its greatest interpreters. A very successful evening.

In March we were especially pleased to welcome Dame Emma Kirkby and HGO to join us in presenting an evening on Purcell, and his finest work for the stage *The Fairy Queen*. Geoff Hunt introduced us to the composer, the historical background, as well as comparing different styles of performances. HGO's Director and Music Director described the approach to their forthcoming new production, and three of HGO's singers performed arias for us as well as courageously subjecting themselves to Master classes with Dame Emma herself, which was fascinating. A great evening much enjoyed by a packed Victoria Hall.



Geoff Hunt