

Alban Berg – Wozzeck (2014)

Written by bluesever
Sunday, 06 April 2014 16:22 -

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1. Act I 2. Act II 3. Act III Wozzeck - Thomas Hampson Drum Major - Simon O'Neill
Andres - RUSSELL THOMAS Captain - PETER HOARE Doctor - CLIVE BAYLEY 1st
apprentice - RICHARD BERNSTEIN 2nd apprentice - MARK SCHOWALTER Marie -
DEBORAH VOIGT Margret - TAMARA MUMFORD Fool - PHILIPPE CASTAGNER A soldier -
DANIEL CLARK SMITH Townsman - RAYMOND APARENTADO The Metropolitan Opera
Children's Chorus The Metropolitan Opera Chorus The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra Donald
Palumbo - choirmaster James Levine – conductor Metropolitan Opera, 22.3.2014

After missing the first two performances in the Metropolitan Opera's revival of Berg's "Wozzeck" because of bronchitis, the baritone Thomas Hampson sang on Thursday night, his debut in the title role. As he had made clear in interviews and in posts on his Facebook page, Mr. Hampson is excited to be taking on this "challenging genius opera," as he called it.

On Thursday he won a deserved ovation for his anguished, haunted portrayal of Wozzeck, an oppressed soldier in a German garrison town who struggles to support Marie, his common-law wife, and their young son, slowly losing his grip on reality. Some patches of leathery sound in Mr. Hampson's singing suggested that he is still grappling with the remnants of his illness. Still, Berg wrote the role to emphasize dramatic intensity; certain passages call for quasi-spoken delivery, a kind of Sprechstimme. In bouts of rage, Wozzeck shouts his outbursts.

Mr. Hampson probably did a little more shouting and barking than he wanted to, ideally. But in the wrenching moments when the role calls for burnished, lyrical singing, he drew upon the innate richness of his voice and shaped phrases poignantly, even if his sound lacked a little heft this night.

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He has called “Wozzeck” the “opera Mahler never wrote.” At his best here, Mr. Hampson, a renowned Mahler singer, brought that composer’s expressiveness to his portrayal.

The baritone Matthias Goerne, who stepped into this gripping 1997 production by Mark Lamos on short notice for Mr. Hampson when this run opened on March 6, was a stocky, bedraggled, everyman Wozzeck. With his tall, distinguished physique, Mr. Hampson might seem the wrong body type for the role, but he used his imposing stature to dramatic effect. This Wozzeck, with hollowed eyes and hobbled gait, seemed to be sinking under the pressure of poverty and the manipulation of his sneering superiors. Still, now and then a gleam of dignity, even charisma, came through, underlining the character’s tragedy. If only this Wozzeck had been given a break or two, a decent job, his life might have turned out differently.

The rest of the strong cast was the same as on opening night. If anything, with Mr. Hampson back, everyone seemed more confident, especially the soprano Deborah Voigt, who has been singing Marie for the first time in this run at the Met; she gives a vulnerable, intense portrayal of a role that suits her well. James Levine, conducting an opera he reveres, again drew a shattering performance from the great Met Orchestra. ---Anthony Tommasini, nytimes.com

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