

# 50th Anniversary Celebration

The Britten Theatre, Royal College of Music, October 2015



(Top L-R) Nikola Hillebrand, Duncan Rock, Marie Arnet, Simon Lepper (Bottom L-R) The Senior Warden Mr Andrew Morris, The Immediate Pastmaster Sir Anthony Cleaver, Louise Alder, The Master Mrs Kathleen Duncan, Lyuba Petrova, Kate Royal, The Junior Warden Alderman Sir Roger Gifford



(L-R) Gus Christie, Lady Christie, Ryland Davies, The Master



(L-R) Duncan Williams, Simon Lepper, Duncan Rock, Marie Arnet, Lyuba Petrova, Kate Royal, Louise Alder, Nikola Hillebrand, Compère Ryland Davies

Photos: Chris Christodoulou

Since 1965 the Musicians' Company has funded the John Christie Award, made annually by Glyndebourne to a promising young singer to fund private study. The winners' list features some of the great artists appearing at Glyndebourne over this period, several of whom performed in this gala concert; there was such excellence in depth, both in Lieder and Opera, with outstanding accompaniment by Simon Lepper and Duncan Williams.

First, Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* arranged for wind octet by Johann Wendt (1745-1801), the augmented Catalana Quintet playing with flair, agility and elegance. This introduced the singers in more *Figaro* – Kate Royal (winner in 2004) whose rich soprano expressed real melancholy over her count's infidelity. Louise Alder (2014) joined her in the magical 'letter' duet, the voices a perfect match as they probed the meanings of '...in the little grove ...he'll certainly understand'.

In Lieder, current winner Nikola Hillebrand gave a passionate reading of four songs from Schumann's *Myrthen*. Two songs from a rarely heard Swedish composer Emil Sjögren (1853-1918) followed; sung powerfully by Swedish soprano Marie Arnet (2001). Our heart strings were then rung by Russian-American soprano Lyuba Petrova (2003) in 'O Quante volte' from Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*. As the evening's compère, Ryland Davies (1965), said: "this was singing naked – there is no hiding place" in this bel canto aria. The first half ended with the well-known Jewel song from Gounod's

*Faust*, sung beautifully by Marie Arnet (2001).

With the second half came the 20th Century. A ravishing performance of the Prelude to Richard Strauss's *Capriccio*, performed by the RCM String Sextet, brought out the score's delicate threads of yearning. Strauss's song *Morgen*, showed Kate Royal at home in Lieder as in Opera. Acting with voice and body, the darkness was palpable in her next song, Mahler's *Um Mitternacht*. Louise Alder demonstrated versatility in an aria from Carl Millöcker's (1842-1899) operetta *Die Dubarry*, full of freshness and *Gemütlichkeit*, followed by three English songs by Frank Bridge, exhibiting simplicity of art concealing art.

The only male singer, Duncan Rock (2010), gave an outstanding rendering of Britten's 'Look through the port' from *Billy Budd*, encapsulating the melancholy and vision that Billy is feeling as he is about to be hanged; a tribute to E.M. Forster's libretto as much as to Britten's music. Lyuba Petrova showed she was a master in Baroque opera as well as bel canto; her performance of an aria from Handel's *Giulio Cesare* was magisterial. Operetta concluded the concert – an aria from Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*, sung with great panache by Nikola Hillebrand.

An outstanding evening with both Lady and Gus Christie present; long may future winners of the John Christie Award continue to delight!

Liveryman PROFESSOR JAMES CRABBE