

EDO—again

Review

Another year, which really began last summer when several orchestra members staggered, exhausted, off a late flight from Berlin (where we had played *Mahler One* in the Konzerthaus) with the November concert already looming on the horizon. But it began even earlier, when two orchestra members met at a Prom; the programme included Schubert's *Great C Major* Symphony, and both spoke as one; 'We must play that!'. And last November we did, the orchestra cheerfully disregarding the risks of RSI in the hectic finale (described as 'a matchless poem of speed'). How would so polyglot a band cope with quintessential Englishness, as in Vaughan Williams' overture *The Wasps*? The orchestra lapped it up as it did Dvorak's *Cello Concerto*. A rehearsal memory is a cello front-desk sisterhood of GP and anaesthetist; each knew that concerto well, taking it in turns to play the solo part to help us work on the piece. And then, Verona — hot and humid in summer; we played in the Teatro Filharmonico, all marble and red plush. We managed the disciplined brash swagger of Verdi's *Nabucco* overture; we were suitably reticent as we accompanied Mendelssohn's *Violin Concerto*, and the rehearsals of Dvorak's *New World* stretched us to our limit. Some of us, almost, dismissed its familiarity (a concert hall cliché!) but that familiarity masked true greatness, and we were on the edge of our seats with bated breath in that aching loneliness at the slow movement's end, where solo violin and cello play into each other's hearts. And so to London, to the Duke's Hall at the Royal Academy of Music, described by a violin-playing ophthalmologist from Germany as the orchestra's London home. There we play Shostakovich's *Festive Overture*; Brahms *First Piano Concerto*, and Sibelius's *Fifth Symphony* after the usual hectic rehearsal weekend. Next summer? Poznan. Our programme? Beethoven Nine, no less.

Michael Lasserson

The European Doctors Orchestra's next concert is on Sunday 9 November at 3pm in the Duke's Hall at the Royal Academy of Music, Marylebone Road, London NW1.

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CHINESE ACROBATIC SWAN LAKE THE LOWRY THEATRE, MANCHESTER

It has to be admitted, we were not quite sure what to expect in going to see the *Chinese Acrobatic Swan Lake*. After all, Chinese acrobatics and *Swan Lake*, one of the more classical ballets, have an oxymoronic flavour when put together. However, we were in for an outstanding evening of entertainment. Think more Cirque-du-Soleil than the Moscow State Ballet. Fans of classical ballet may well take exception to the storyline, which is only loosely related to the original, but in our opinion this was more than compensated for by the marvellous costumes and incredible acrobatic stunts.

The opening of the show with a large, boat-sized plastic swan gliding across the stage was not a promising start. The glossy programme informed us that the beautiful girl wandering by the lake is captured by an eagle who casts an evil spell on her, transforming her into a Swan Princess. In the next scene we see the Prince who has a vision of the Swan Princess and her misfortune in a dream and vows to travel across the world in order to search for her. This journey across the world represents an

opportunity for stunning acrobatic feats: pole climbing, rolling wheels, juggling, and trapeze artistes performed in glorious, technicolour set pieces (although there is a rather dodgy camel in the background of one piece). The tradition of Chinese acrobatic acts, according to the programme, is that the music follows the stunt. Acrobatic *Swan Lake* however is set to Tchaikovsky's music and must match itself to Tchaikovsky's rhythms and melodies. Thus the acrobatic movements were re-designed to fit the music, posing difficult challenges for the performers and something totally original for the audience.

The show's star attractions were undoubtedly the husband and wife team Wei Baohua, playing the Prince, and Wu Zhengdan, playing the Swan Princess. As part of their amazing, balletic, acrobatic routine Wu Zhengdan pirouettes on her pointes balancing alternately on her husband's outstretched arm or on the top of his head! This is surely taking 'to have and to hold' to a whole new level!

The show was punctuated by comedy moments too, including four of the Prince's male attendants dressed in tutus, and our favourite, the *Swan Lake*'s signature quartet of female swans replaced by a cheeky comic routine with four male hand-balancing frogs. The Prince is lured to the evil Black Eagle's cave, which provides another opportunity for amazing acrobatic set pieces, including trampolines, unicycles, ball tricks, and astounding, surely physically impossible, wince-inducing acts of contortion. Finally, the Prince and the Swan Princess are reunited, the evil Black Eagle is vanquished and, unlike *Swan Lake* the ballet, everyone lives happily ever after, culminating in a colourful wedding scene in the best fairytale tradition. As a family show with wide appeal, this is to be recommended, but perhaps not for classical purists.

Joanne Protheroe and Julie Ruta

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