

CHANDOS

CHANDOS

LIVE RECORDING

MacMillan
the sacrifice
premiere recording

Lisa Milne *soprano*

Sarah Tynan *soprano*

Peter Hoare *tenor*

Leigh Melrose *baritone*

Christopher Purves *baritone*

Orchestra and Chorus of Welsh National Opera

Anthony Negus

A BBC recording

A black and white portrait of a man with short, dark hair and a light beard. He is wearing a dark blazer over a light-colored shirt. He is standing in a narrow space, possibly a hallway, with a large white pillar on the left and a wall with a window on the right. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows.

James MacMillan

James MacMillan (b. 1959)

The Sacrifice

(2005–06)

premiere recording

Opera in Three Acts

Libretto by Michael Symmons Roberts

Based on a story from *The Mabinogion*

Megan, left, and Sian with the three dressers, Act I, Scene 2





© Catherine Ashmore

'The Birds' at the wedding celebrations, Act I, Scene 4

Act I

- | | | | |
|---|-----------|------|---------|
| 1 | Prelude – | 3:44 | [p. 54] |
|---|-----------|------|---------|

Scene 1

- | | | | |
|---|---|------|---------|
| 2 | Sian: 'I should not be here. Not tonight' –
with <i>Evan</i> | 5:20 | [p. 54] |
| 3 | Sian: 'The guests are laying out their clothes' –
with <i>Evan</i> | 2:37 | [p. 54] |
| 4 | Interlude. Andante – | 2:01 | [p. 55] |

Scene 2

- | | | | |
|---|--|------|---------|
| 5 | General: 'How is the dress, Megan?' –
with <i>Sian, Megan</i> | 6:43 | [p. 55] |
| 6 | Evan: 'Excuse me, Sir' –
with <i>General, Megan</i> | 2:14 | [p. 56] |
| 7 | Interlude. Andante – | 1:29 | [p. 57] |

	Time	Page
Scene 3		
8 Megan: 'Queen of the blossom' – with <i>Mal, Sian</i>	6:56	[p. 57]
9 Interlude [Passacaglia] –	3:57	[p. 59]
Scene 4		
10 Chorus: 'God bless us all!' –	4:50	[p. 59]
11 The Birds: 'The moon became a man today' –	1:57	[p. 59]
12 General: 'As father I could burst with pride' – with <i>All</i>	3:04	[p. 60]
13 Mal: 'I toast my wife. My wife! Ye gods!' – with <i>All, Sian</i>	4:44	[p. 60]
14 Mal: 'Get him!' – with <i>Chorus, Sian, General</i>	1:12	[p. 61]
15 Evan: 'Why bring a knife to a wedding?' with <i>The Birds</i>	4:05	[p. 61]
	TT 55:01	

Act II**43:10****Scene 1**

- | | | | |
|---|--|------|---------|
| 1 | Sian: 'Again, Megan' –
with <i>Megan</i> | 4:43 | [p. 62] |
| 2 | Mal: 'A question for you – whose is this?' –
with <i>Sian</i> | 7:49 | [p. 62] |
| 3 | Interlude – | 2:51 | [p. 64] |

Scene 2

- | | | | |
|---|---|-------|---------|
| 4 | Evan: 'So he's found the coat...' –
with <i>Sian</i> | 10:08 | [p. 64] |
| 5 | Interlude – | 4:59 | [p. 65] |

Scene 3

- | | | | |
|---|--|------|---------|
| 6 | Guests: 'Hail the king, long live the boy king!' –
with <i>The Birds, Megan</i> | 3:55 | [p. 65] |
| 7 | Mal: 'Thank you, Megan, a fitting gift for a nephew' – | 4:53 | [p. 66] |
| 8 | Mal: 'Come, the man who wounded me!' –
with <i>Guests, Evan, General</i> | 3:49 | [p. 67] |

		Time	Page
	Act III	32:44	
	Scene 1		
9	Chorus: 'Give this our son your peace eternal, O Lord' – with <i>General, Mal, Mal's Men</i>	4:43	[p. 68]
10	Sian: 'I thought my hands were heaven-blessed' – with <i>General</i>	4:10	[p. 69]
11	Interlude –	2:19	[p. 69]
	Scene 2		
12	General: 'Thanks, Megan, you make a good thief' – with <i>Megan</i>	7:24	[p. 69]
13	Interlude –	1:42	[p. 70]
	Scene 3		
14	General: 'Mal! Mal! Mal!' – with <i>Mal, Sian</i>	3:57	[p. 70]
15	Mal: 'I cannot say I haven't dreamt a thousand times of killing him' with <i>Guests, Sian, Megan</i>	8:25	[p. 71]
		TT 76:05	

MacMillan: The Sacrifice

With reverent hands I uphold tradition, hoping
patiently for the fruitful new, expecting the works
of genius of our time. Where are the works that
touch the hearts of people; that reflect their soul?

Thus declares La Roche, the theatre director in Strauss's last opera, *Capriccio*. Every age asks the same question, even if ours seems especially querulous about the state of new opera, and impatient for more than a handful of musical stage works which will stand the test of time. So, is *The Sacrifice* one of them?

Writing purely from personal experience, as a music lover too young to have witnessed premieres of any of Britten's operas, I can say that the unquenchable excitement of being present at a great new, or newish, work capable of reaching out to the wider music theatre audience has only come to me four times: with Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* at Drury Lane in 1981, the perhaps more rarefied case of Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* in its first English National Opera production, the UK premiere of Adams's *Nixon in China* at the 1988 Edinburgh Festival, and, most recently, with *The Sacrifice* when Welsh National Opera brought Katie Mitchell's literally stunning production to London's Sadler's Wells for one unforgettable performance.

Many who were lucky enough to be present had felt the same about MacMillan's first, blazingly

theatrical and confrontational full-length opera, *Inés de Castro*, in 1996. *The Sacrifice* has the special virtue of telling a timeless story through resonant words and music, a story rooted in myth but located in the present or the near future, and thus speaking to our riven times without special pleading (which is where several works dealing with the Iraq war, for instance, have fallen down). 'The story *The Sacrifice* tells is very clear', MacMillan told Simon Rees in WNO's 2007 programme:

and has been made clearer during the production rehearsals in which we have concentrated on the narrative and thrust of the story. Thanks to the clarity of Michael Symmons Roberts's text, there is no confusion in the tale. Michael changed his style of writing from his usual poetic style in preparing the libretto, and this has affected the way Katie Mitchell, the director, and her team are interpreting both the music and the text.

Symmons Roberts, a distinguished poet in his own right, had already collaborated with MacMillan on several works, not least the tone poem for chorus and orchestra *The Birds of Rhiannon* – which links mythically to *The Sacrifice* – and the unique childbirth cantata *Quickening* (CHSA 5072). Once the long-standing commission from WNO's then General Director Anthony Freud had been

confirmed, poet and composer holed up, one cold December week, in a house on Skye, as Symmons Roberts describes it,

to do some groundwork on plot, subject, character... On one particular afternoon, more by accident than by design, we watched [Britten's] *The Turn of the Screw* back to back with Strauss's *Elektra*. Myfanwy Piper's subtle, understated text was in astonishing contrast to Hofmannsthal's superheated expressionist outpouring.

Daringly, they developed a work that represented the best of both worlds, though 'Jimmy's preference, and mine,' adds Symmons Roberts, 'was to strive towards something of the intensity of *Elektra*'. If you listen carefully to the tension-fraught investiture scene of Act II, you may even detect one of Strauss's most emotional family themes rearing up briefly, but repeatedly, in the middle of a climactic, heartfelt speech. But in broader terms, the parallels are apt. Both Strauss / Hofmannsthal and MacMillan / Symmons Roberts take as their theme the shattering effect on intense family ties of a seemingly intractable blood feud. It is the toughest fibre of Greek myth, and of the Welsh *Mabinogion* saga in which the composer and the poet found 'The Tale of Branwen, daughter of Llyr', from the Second Branch, most germane to their purposes. Symmons Roberts expands:

Rooted in the oldest myths from the oral traditions of these islands, the Branwen story is about the long-standing enmity between the islands of Britain and island of Ireland, and the attempt

to broker a peace deal by arranging a marriage between members of both sides. All four of us [the poet, composer, director Katie Mitchell, and designer Vicki Mortimer] felt that the story had real power and potential, but we were equally certain that we didn't want to do a faithful retelling of a myth set in the ancient past. We came up with a structure that would use the basic elements of the *Mabinogion* story as foundation stones on which to build a drama set in modern Britain.

Or, indeed, in modern anywhere. While the original score gives the chorus of clan members Welsh ceremonial texts to declaim – these are sung in English in this performance – and MacMillan's familiar Celtic thumbprints, derived from his days in a folk band, are all over the music, the crowd also toasts the bride and groom in the Act I 'ceilidh' with shouts of 'shalom' and 'salaam'. In Act III the ritual opens up to embrace the Latin Requiem Mass and Easter Hymn, and in so doing evokes parallels (as does *Quickening*) with Britten's *War Requiem* – and much more successfully, in this writer's opinion, than the battle scene of another contemporary opera composer who said he did not want to write bad imitation Britten and ended up producing exactly that.

MacMillan's intense collaborative work with Katie Mitchell, and his specific request for two of Britain's most remarkable singing actors, Lisa Milne and Christopher Purves, echoes the highest-level teamwork in two other operatic premieres of recent years, those of Turnage's *The Silver Tassie* and

Adès's *The Tempest*. Arguably, though, MacMillan has reaped greater rewards in his conscious attempt to write more of a 'singer's opera' than Turnage, and achieved a greater stylistic integration of the most beautiful set pieces than many of us find in *The Tempest*.

'I love melody, I love theme', declares MacMillan, and whilst this credo still antagonises certain journalistic members of a putative 'new music police', it does not entail any compromise of artistic vision. Sure enough, out of the prelude's far-flung minor triads and sighing glissandi soon emerges a plaintive melody for violins and flute. It stands, as its engagement in the ensuing scene makes explicit, for the soon-to-be-lost love of Sian and Evan, and already in this scene's painful exchange between soprano and baritone, MacMillan makes good his undertaking to 'have characterised the principal parts according to their nature, both in lyrical style and in vocal character'. In Scene 2, prefaced by the first of many orchestral interludes which amplify the characters' inner feelings, the slightly Bergian rumblings – *Lulu's* Schigolch, perhaps – that set up the General, Sian's crushed and compromised father, are offset by the airy music of Sian's otherworldly sister Megan and her memorable apostrophe to the queenly bride-to-be.

Suppressed violence brings the brass to the fore in introducing Mal, the enemy Sian must marry to end the cycle of violence; but just as she is characterised as a strong and loving personality, no sacrificial cipher, the tenor role has complexity

as we see Mal reaching out with a tenderness that Sian cannot, at this stage, accept. The next interlude is a passacaglia, a series of variations on a tense theme repeated in the bass. MacMillan is clearly indebted to the precedent of a climactic interlude in Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, which in turn inspired Britten at the heart of darkness in *Peter Grimes*. Yet each passacaglia has a different dramatic motivation; this one tells us that the wedding ceilidh, itself made slightly threatening by the anvil strokes between the bodhrán-governed reels and the prophetic songs of Megan and the harmony group The Birds of Rhiannon, will end in violence. When Evan arrives and pulls out a knife, the mood reverts to sectarianism and a fierce contrast between the General's plea for peace (note that the General, too, takes on Sian's love-theme, very briefly) and Evan's brooding, reptilian solo, the scene promising greater violence to come.

This performance of Act II may well vindicate MacMillan's ambitious wish to emulate the violence and tenderness of *Elektra*. Regret as we may the absence of a film crew to capture the visual results of Mitchell's searingly theatrical engagement and the look of Vicki Mortimer's war-torn hotel rooms, the sound alone is enough to convey the dramatic coups of the staging. After the folksong intermezzo in which Megan prepares another ambiguous tribute, now for the investiture of Mal and Sian's eldest son, the twin poles of tenderness and violence reach their first peaks. Symmons Roberts

allows poetry its head in the dreamlike love duet for Sian and the increasingly desperate Evan – tenderly underlined by horn quartet and divided strings, hovering between E major and C sharp minor in a way that never allows the lyricism to become too soft-edged. Then the second ritual of the action, very different from the first, promises greater optimism and culminates in a magnificent oratorical solo for the tenor, projecting yet another dimension of the character of Mal. Euphoric peace is destroyed in a moment that represents one of opera's most shattering inspirations: an embodiment of Kafka's dictum that art should be like the pickaxe through the ice of the soul – do not read the synopsis if you have not seen or heard the opera and want to experience the full impact it first had in the theatre.

Catharses of sorts can only be achieved in the third act. MacMillan turns to his most heartfelt *a cappella* choral writing for the requiem, and follows this with a spare and deeply moving solo for Sian. In the second scene the tenderness between the General and his other, more fragile daughter relieves some of the anguish. The musical climax then arrives, and in the ultimate reconciliation MacMillan once more stakes an enormous amount on the effect of grand opera *cum* requiem. Again, as in the questioning bells and boys' choir after the peace in Britten's musical setting of Wilfred Owen's words 'Let us sleep now' in the *War Requiem*, we are not to be let off the hook so easily. Against the uneasy truce of strings, the tattoo of metal bar, anvil and timpani rings out

its threat. Is the darker potential of 'a man was born, a child was dead' about to be realised anew? As in so many great works of drama and literature, the question is unanswered.

The score – takes us through it.

© 2010 David Nice

Synopsis

All the action takes place in a large war-damaged hotel close to the frontline of a civil conflict.

ACT I

Scene 1

Hotel bedroom – the night before Sian's wedding to Mal

Sian meets her lover, Evan, and she kisses him goodbye. Evan wants her to leave with him across the border but she insists that their relationship has to come to an end. Evan cannot bear the thought of Sian marrying the enemy, Mal.

Scene 2

Hotel bedroom – shortly before the wedding

The General, Sian's father, waits while bridesmaids dress Sian in the bathroom, and while Megan, her sister, makes up a song for the bride which she calls a 'white song'. Sian comes in wearing her wedding dress and the General, who has been Mal's enemy, tells her that although he has longed for peace, it was never at the price of his daughter. He says that she can still back down from the

marriage if she wants to, but she refuses, saying that the marriage will put an end to the feud.

Evan comes to announce that the bridegroom's party has arrived. The General asks Evan to take a photograph of him with his daughter and thanks them both for sacrificing their relationship so that Sian's marriage to Mal can go ahead.

Scene 3

As in Scene 2

Megan is looking at a wedding bouquet, still singing her 'white song', when Mal comes in looking for Sian. Sian returns to help Megan dress. She is startled to see Mal, who then proposes to her: she has said 'yes' to him in a letter but he wants to hear her say it to his face. Megan, whose singing irritates Mal, warns Sian against him. Sian confirms to Mal that she will marry him.

Scene 4

Hotel ballroom

The guests at the wedding reception sing praises of the bride and groom. A three-girl band, The Birds, sing a ballad of the moon hunting the sun for his bride. The General makes a speech, and drinks a toast to Mal and Sian. Mal replies with a toast to his wife, confirming that war is over. Suddenly Evan pulls a knife and wounds Mal in the arm. The men in Mal's party call for revenge. Mal's men reluctantly give Evan up to the General's men, who lead him away. The wedding guests all leave, while The Birds tend to Sian.

ACT II

Scene 1

Seven years later

The same ballroom – the evening before

Gwyn's Investiture

Mal and Sian now have two sons, Gwyn and Elis. The boys interrupt when Sian is trying to help Megan practice a song that she will sing with The Birds at the Investiture. Mal comes in with Evan's coat, declaring that it proves that Evan is in the hotel. Mal is furious with Sian and her father for sheltering Evan, who has been released from prison. The boys play with Evan's coat and Mal grabs it off them. Mal accuses Sian of betraying him with Evan, and strikes her. He is immediately remorseful, but Sian ignores him and leaves.

Scene 2

Hotel bedroom – the night before Gwyn's Investiture

Evan has stolen into Sian and Mal's room and tells Sian that they can escape together. His car is outside the hotel. He sees the bruise where Mal hit her. They express their love but Sian confirms that she is staying with her husband.

Scene 3

Hotel ballroom – the Investiture

The people of each tribe hail Gwyn as the boy king. Megan sings with The Birds, then Mal gives a speech, calling on Gwyn to step up for his people to see. He then calls on Evan, the man who wounded him, to come forward as a friend. Evan comes

forward to embrace Mal, but then draws a gun, pointing it first at Mal, then at Gwyn and shoots him. The guests seize Evan and drag him away. Mal and Sian cry for their dead child and the General, the boy's grandfather, pleads for the healing of such wounds.

ACT III

Scene 1

Three days later

Hotel ballroom – Gwyn's funeral

The people sing a Requiem Mass. The General tries to comfort Mal but Mal sets light to their flag of union. His men call for vengeance. The General tries to comfort Sian, but she turns her back on him.

Scene 2

Hotel bedroom – the night after the funeral

Megan brings Evan's clothes to the General. He thanks her for stealing them for him and changes into them. Megan asks her father what he is doing, and he starts to tell her an old story of a wounded king whose suffering blighted his land. Megan gets upset, so he comforts her by singing her 'white song' to her. He leaves and Megan tidies his clothes.

Scene 3

Hotel ballroom – the night after the funeral

Mal hears someone calling his name. The General comes in dressed in Evan's clothes. Mal challenges him, taking him for Evan, and shoots

him dead. Sian, hearing the shot, arrives and sees that Mal has killed her father. She reveals the victim's identity to Mal. The hotel guests hear the commotion and come down to see what has happened. Sian declares that enough blood has been shed. Megan brings Elis for Sian to look after. Sian leaves and Megan sings a song over her father's body.

© 2010 Michael Symmons Roberts

The baritone **Christopher Purves** studied English at King's College Cambridge before performing and recording with the rock and roll group Harvey and the Wallbangers. Among others, he has sung Melisso (*Alcina*) at Bayerische Staatsoper, Ford (*Falstaff*) and the title roles in *Wozzeck* and *Don Giovanni* at Welsh National Opera, Cecil (*Maria Stuarda*) at the Edinburgh International Festival, Sharpless (Anthony Minghella's *Madam Butterfly*) and Tonio (*Pagliacci*) at English National Opera, Marco (Richard Jones's *Gianni Schicchi*) for The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Balstrode (*Peter Grimes*) at Opera North, and the title role in *Falstaff* at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, in addition to being a soloist in Nono's *Al gran sole carico d'amore* at the Salzburg Festival. In concert he has appeared in Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus* in Nuremberg and *Saul* at the Covent Garden and La Chaise Dieu festivals with the Gabrieli Consort, Handel's *Messiah* with the Academy of Ancient Music, Handel and Haydn Society, The Sixteen, and Orchestra of the Age

of Enlightenment, *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo* with the Orquesta Nacional d'España, Britten's *War Requiem* and Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* with the Ulster Orchestra, Haydn's *Nelson* Mass with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, and *Samson* at the BBC Proms. For Chandos, Christopher Purves has recorded Don Fernando (*Fidelio*), Count Ribbing (*A Masked Ball*), Gottardo (*The Thieving Magpie*) and the title role in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, all in the Opera in English series.

The Scottish soprano **Lisa Milne** MBE studied at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. She has appeared as Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*) and Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) at The Metropolitan Opera, New York, Pamina, Marzelline (*Fidelio*), Micaëla (*Carmen*) and the title roles in *Rodelinda* and *Theodora* at Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Countess Almaviva (*The Marriage of Figaro*), the title role in *Alcina*, and Anne Trulove (*The Rake's Progress*), among many others, at English National Opera, and the title role in *Semele*, Adele (*Die Fledermaus*), Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*), Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*), Susanna, Ilia (*Idomeneo*), and Despina (*Così fan tutte*) for Scottish Opera. Committed to new music, she has given the world premiere performances of James MacMillan's *Parthenogenesis* and Simon Holt's *Sunrise Yellow Noise* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and Joseph Phipps's *The Canticle of the Rose* at the Wigmore Hall, London, among others. She has performed with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under James Levine, Berlin Philharmonic

Orchestra under Sir Simon Rattle, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra under Valery Gergiev, Dresden Staatskapelle under Robin Ticciati, Budapest Festival Orchestra under Ivan Fischer, and Mahler Chamber Orchestra under Daniel Harding. Further, she has appeared as a recitalist at the Aix-en-Provence, Edinburgh International and City of London festivals, the Oxford Lieder Festival, Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels, Schumannfest Düsseldorf, and as a regular guest at the Wigmore Hall. Lisa Milne was awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 2005.

The tenor **Peter Hoare** studied percussion at the Huddersfield School of Music before commencing his professional singing career in 1992. He has sung, among others, Bacchus (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), Captain (*Wozzeck*), Witch (*Hänsel und Gretel*), Tichon (*Kat'á Kabanová*), and Prince Golitsin (*Khovanshchina*) at Welsh National Opera, Tichon also at the Grand Théâtre de Genève, Goro (*Madama Butterfly*) and Don Basilio (*Le nozze di Figaro*) for The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Sellem (*The Rake's Progress*) at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, Šapkin (*From the House of the Dead*) at the Wiener Festwochen, Holland Festival, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence and The Metropolitan Opera, New York, Desportes (Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten*) at the Ruhrtriennale, New National Theatre in Tokyo and Lincoln Center in New York, as well as being a soloist in Nono's *Al gran sole carico d'amore* at the Salzburg Festival. In concert he

has been heard in Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Weill's *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* at the Edinburgh International Festival, and Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* at Opera North. His discography includes, for Chandos, the role of Tichon (*Katya Kabanova*) in the Opera in English series.

A graduate of St John's College, Cambridge and the Royal Academy of Music, the baritone **Leigh Melrose** has sung, among others, Demetrius (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels, Figaro (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) at New York City Opera, Silvio (*Pagliacci*) for Welsh National Opera, the bass-baritone parts in Britten's *Death in Venice* at the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona, Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) and Marcello (*La bohème*) for Opera Zuid, Sid (*Albert Herring*) at the Salzburger Landestheater, Opéra Comique in Paris and Opéra de Rouen, and Ned Keene (*Peter Grimes*), Papageno, Count Almaviva (*The Marriage of Figaro*), Rodolfo (Leoncavallo's *La bohème*), and Junius (*The Rape of Lucretia*) for English National Opera. In the contemporary field he has given the world premiere of Johannes Kalitzke's *Die Besessenen* at the Theater an der Wien and Elliott Carter's *On Conversing with Paradise* at the Aldeburgh Festival under Oliver Knussen, among others, and has also sung Punch (Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*) in Porto, Xenakis's *Ais* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Proms and Berlin Festival, and *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* by Peter

Maxwell Davies at the composer's St Magnus Festival, Orkney, in Edinburgh and Inverness.

Born in London, the soprano **Sarah Tynan** studied at the Royal Northern College of Music and Royal Academy of Music. At English National Opera, where she was a Company Principal until 2007, she has sung, among others, Tytania (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Susanna (*The Marriage of Figaro*), Woodbird (*Siegfried*), Iphis (*Jephtha*), Dalinda (*Ariodante*), Atalanta (*Xerxes*), Sister Constance (*The Carmelites*), Yum-Yum (*The Mikado*), Gianetta (*The Gondoliers*), Bella (*The Midsummer Marriage*), Pretty Polly (*Punch and Judy*), Governess (*The Turn of the Screw*), and Sophie (*Der Rosenkavalier*). Her roles at Welsh National Opera have included Iphis, Melanto and Fortune (both in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*), and Megan (James MacMillan's *The Sacrifice*). She has further sung Susanna at Cincinnati Opera, Iris (*Semele*) at Théâtre royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, and Dalinda at Opera de Oviedo. In concert she has performed *Messiah* with the Hallé Orchestra and Servilia (*La clemenza di Tito*) with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment under Edward Gardner in London and New York; in her debut at the Salzburg Festival she was a soloist in Nono's *Al gran sole carico d'amore*. For Chandos Sarah Tynan has recorded the Dew Fairy (*Hansel and Gretel*), Barbarina (*The Marriage of Figaro*), Sister Constance (*The Carmelites*), Second Woman (*Dido and Aeneas*) and Monique (Maconchy's *The Sofa*).

Firmly based in the Welsh tradition of choral societies, as well as drawing on the strong vocal culture both inside and outside Wales, the **Chorus of Welsh National Opera** began as a professional body in 1968, working with the company's famed Voluntary Chorus which was made up of amateur singers who had gathered together in 1943 to form the nucleus of what became Welsh National Opera, and which was disbanded in 1973. The success of the chorus in early productions of *Cavalleria rusticana*, *Pagliacci*, *Faust*, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, and, especially, *Nabucco* put the company firmly on the operatic map. In the early days, many roles were cast from within the Chorus, a tradition which remains to this day. The operatic and concert work of the Chorus has won wide praise, not only in the traditional repertoire but also in twentieth-century works such as Janáček's *From the House of the Dead* and Tippett's *A Midsummer Marriage*. It has made numerous recordings under conductors such as Sir Reginald Goodall, Sir Georg Solti, Richard Bonynghe, Sir Charles Mackerras, Riccardo Chailly, and Carlo Rizzi. In 1997 the Chorus of Welsh National Opera appeared at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris, in performances of Beethoven's *Leonore* and *Fidelio*. Most members of the chorus have active concert and operatic careers as soloists.

Founded in 1970, the **Orchestra of Welsh National Opera** has earned high praise as much for its distinction in a wide-ranging operatic repertoire,

extending from Monteverdi through Handel and Mozart to Wagner, Janáček, Maxwell Davies and MacMillan, as for its concert work and large portfolio of recordings. Former Music Directors include Richard Armstrong (1973–86), Sir Charles Mackerras (1987–92, now Conductor Emeritus), Carlo Rizzi (1992–2001 and 2004–07) and Tugan Sokhiev (2002–04), who were succeeded in autumn 2009 by Lothar Koenigs. The opera company's home since 2004 has been the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff Bay. In addition to undertaking extensive operatic tours throughout the UK and abroad, the Orchestra has over recent years achieved a very strong profile on the concert platform. It has featured in many symphonic concerts in Cardiff, made several visits to the BBC Proms, and given concerts at major Welsh and English venues and festivals. The Orchestra of Welsh National Opera has taken part with distinction in the biennial BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition since its inception.

Anthony Negus studied at the Royal College of Music, Christ Church, Oxford and London Opera Centre. Between 1970 and 1974 he was a member of the music staff in Wuppertal and Hamburg and musical assistant at Bayreuth. He joined Welsh National Opera in 1976. A Wagner enthusiast since his youth, he assisted Sir Reginald Goodall in productions of *Die Walküre*, *Tristan und Isolde*, and *Parsifal* and conducted performances of *Fidelio*, *The Greek Passion*, *Das Rheingold*, *Siegfried*,

Götterdämmerung, and *Parsifal*. Assisting Sir Charles Mackerras from 1987, he conducted all Mozart's operas from *Idomeneo* to *La clemenza di Tito*. *Elektra*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and *Die Frau ohne Schatten* also feature in his repertoire, as does *Tristan und Isolde*. In 1992 he assisted Pierre Boulez in a production of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and more recently has conducted *Leonore*, *Kát'a Kabanová*, *Khovanshchina*, *Il trovatore*, *Wozzeck*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, and *Parsifal*. For the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama he has conducted *Albert Herring*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, and *Suor Angelica*, among

others. Between 2000 and 2004 he conducted the shortened City of Birmingham Touring Opera's *Ring Cycle*, with Sir Donald McIntyre as Wotan, for Longborough Festival Opera, and also for the Opera Theater of Pittsburgh, directed by Jonathan Eaton. He then launched a projected cycle of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at Longborough with *Das Rheingold* (2007 – 08), directed by Alan Privett. Recently Anthony Negus has conducted excerpts of *Fidelio* in concert and Act I of *Die Walküre* at Longborough, and assisted Vladimir Jurowski in a production of *Tristan und Isolde* at Glyndebourne Festival Opera.

The General toasts the newly wedded couple, Act I, Scene 4



Evan attacks Mal during the wedding celebrations, Act I, Scene 4



© Catherine Ashmore

MacMillan: The Sacrifice

Voll Pietät hüte ich das Alte, harre geduldig des
fruchtbaren Neuen, erwarte die genialischen
Werke unserer Zeit. Wo sind die Werke, die zum
Herzen des Volkes sprechen, die seine Seele
widerspiegeln?

Die zeitlose Klage des Theaterdirektors La Roche in *Capriccio*, der letzten Oper von Strauss, scheint in unserer Ära mit ihrer Verdrossenheit über die Entwicklung der modernen Oper, ihrer ungeduldigen Forderung nach mehr als nur einer Handvoll musikalischer Bühnenwerke von Bestand, besonderen Nachhall zu finden. Gehört vielleicht *The Sacrifice* zu diesen Ausnahmewerken?

Aus rein persönlicher Erfahrung – als ein Musikliebhaber, der zu jung ist, um eine Britten-Oper in der Uraufführung erlebt zu haben – muss ich bekennen, dass mir die maßlose Aufregung, die mit dem Erlebnis eines großen neuen oder relativ neuen, auf ein breiteres Publikum wirkenden Werkes einhergeht, nur bei vier Gelegenheiten zuteil geworden ist: Ich meine Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* am Theatre Royal Drury Lane in London 1981, Ligetis vielleicht etwas exklusivere Oper *Le Grand Macabre* in ihrer ersten Inszenierung an der English National Opera, die britische Erstaufführung von Adams' *Nixon in China* bei den Edinburgher Festspielen 1988 und zuletzt *The Sacrifice*, als die Welsh National Opera mit ihrer buchstäblich

schockierenden Inszenierung von Katie Mitchell für nur eine unvergessliche Londoner Aufführung am Sadler's Wells gastierte.

Viele von denen, die sich glücklich schätzen konnten, diesen Abend zu erleben, waren 1996 von der ersten abendfüllenden Oper MacMillans, der ungemein bühnenwirksamen und provokativen *Inés de Castro*, ähnlich angesprochen worden. Das Besondere an *The Sacrifice* ist, dass hier mit nachwirkenden verbalen und musikalischen Mitteln eine zeitlose Geschichte erzählt wird – eine Geschichte, die im Mythos wurzelt, aber in der Gegenwart oder der nahen Zukunft spielt und somit unsere zerrissene Welt herausfordert, ohne Partei zu ergreifen (woran es vielen Werken, die sich beispielsweise mit dem Irak-Krieg auseinandersetzen, hapert). "Was *The Sacrifice* zu sagen hat, ist sehr deutlich", erläuterte MacMillan im Jahr 2007 in einem Gespräch mit Simon Rees für das WNO-Programmheft,

und ist im Laufe der Proben, in denen wir uns auf die Erzählung und die Aussage der Geschichte konzentriert haben, noch weiter verdeutlicht worden. Der Klarheit des Textes von Michael Symmons Roberts ist zu verdanken, dass keine Verwirrung entsteht. Michael hat bei der Erarbeitung des Librettos von der für ihn typischen Poesie stilistisch Abstand genommen, und dies

wiederum hat sich darauf ausgewirkt, wie Katie Mitchell, die Regisseurin, und ihr Team sowohl die Musik als auch den Text interpretiert haben.

Symmons Roberts, ein eigenständiger Lyriker von Rang, hatte auch schon bei anderen Werken mit MacMillan zusammengearbeitet, nicht zuletzt an der Tondichtung für Chor und Orchester *The Birds of Rhiannon* – die vom Mythos her mit *The Sacrifice* verknüpft ist – und der ungewöhnlichen Kantate *Quickening* (CHSA 5072) über die menschliche Geburt. Nachdem der bereits vor geraumer Zeit von dem damaligen WNO-Intendanten Anthony Freud erteilte Kompositionsauftrag bestätigt worden war, suchten Dichter und Komponist in einer bitterkalten Dezemberwoche Zuflucht auf der schottischen Insel Skye, um – wie Symmons Roberts es beschrieb –

einige Grundlagen im Hinblick auf Handlung, Thematik und Charakter zu erarbeiten ... Eines Nachmittags sahen wir uns [Brittens] *The Turn of the Screw* und, mehr Zufall als Absicht, gleich danach Strauss' *Elektra* an. Der subtile, dezente Text von Myfanwy Piper stand in verblüffendem Kontrast zu den überhitzten expressionistischen Ausbrüchen Hofmannsthals.

Das Ergebnis war eine gewagte Verschmelzung der besten Aspekte beider Werke, obwohl "Jimmy und auch ich" – so Symmons Roberts – "eigentlich etwas in der Intensität von *Elektra* anstreben wollten". Hört man in der spannungsgeladenen Einsetzungsszene im II. Akt genau hin, macht sich sogar inmitten einer erhebend inbrünstigen

Ansprache kurz, aber wiederholt eines der gefühlvollsten Familienthemen von Strauss bemerkbar. Generell sind die Parallelen treffend. Sowohl für Strauss / Hofmannsthal als auch für MacMillan / Symmons Roberts liegt das Hauptthema in den erschütternden Konsequenzen, die sich für engste Familien aus einer schier unüberwindlichen Blutfehde ergeben. Dies ist der stärkste Faden, der die griechische Mythologie durchzieht und eben auch den walisischen Sagenschatz *Mabinogion*, in dessen zweitem Zweig Komponist und Dichter mit "Branwen, Tochter des Llyr" die für ihre Absichten am besten geeignete Erzählung fanden. Symmons Roberts bemerkt dazu:

Die Geschichte von Branwen wurzelt in den ältesten Mythen der mündlich gepflegten Erzählkultur dieser Inseln. Im Mittelpunkt steht die seit langem währende Feindschaft zwischen den Inselreichen Irland und Britannien, die nun durch eine Vernunftehe friedlich beigelegt werden soll. Alle vier [der Dichter, der Komponist, die Regisseurin Katie Mitchell und die Bühnenbildnerin Vicki Mortimer] erkannten wir die starke Aussagekraft und das Potenzial der Geschichte, waren uns aber auch mit Gewissheit einig, dass wir nicht einfach nur einen uralten Mythos getreu nacherzählen wollten. Wir entwickelten eine Struktur, die es uns erlaubte, die Hauptelemente der *Mabinogion*-Geschichte als Grundsteine für den Aufbau eines Dramas im modernen Großbritannien einzusetzen.

Wenn nicht sogar im modernen Irgendwo. Während die Originalpartitur dem Chor der Clanmitglieder walisische Zeremonialtexte zuweist (in der vorliegenden Aufnahme werden sie in englischer Sprache gesungen) und die Musik von den vertrauten keltischen Akzenten MacMillans geprägt wird, die er seiner Zeit in einer Folkband verdankt, trinkt die Menge im Ceilidh des I. Aktes auch mit "Shalom" und "Salaam" auf das traute Paar. Im III. Akt greift das Ritual zudem die lateinische Totenmesse und den Oster-Hymnus auf, wobei sich (ebenso wie im Fall von *Quickening*) Parallelen zu Britten's *War Requiem* aufdrängen – und dies nach meiner bescheidenen Meinung mit weitaus größerem Erfolg als in der Schlachtszene eines anderen Opernkomponisten unserer Zeit, der erklärte, keinen Britten-Abklatsch schreiben zu wollen, und letztlich doch genau das tat.

MacMillans intensive Zusammenarbeit mit Katie Mitchell und sein spezifischer Wunsch, mit Lisa Milne und Christopher Purves zwei der bemerkenswertesten Sänger-Schauspieler Großbritanniens zu verpflichten, erinnert an die überragende Teamarbeit bei zwei anderen Opernpremierer der jüngsten Zeit: Turnages *The Silver Tassie* und *The Tempest* von Adès. Allerdings ist MacMillan bei seinem gezielten Versuch, eine "Oper für Sänger" zu schreiben, wohl mehr Erfolg beschieden als Turnage, und verglichen mit *The Tempest* sind hier die schönsten Szenen stilistisch einfach besser integriert.

"Ich liebe die Melodie, ich liebe das Thema", erklärt MacMillan, und während dieses Bekenntnis immer noch einige Journalisten unter den selbsterklärten Hütern der Neuen Musik verärgern dürfte, bedeutet dies keinen Abstrich an der künstlerischen Vision. So tritt aus den weit entfernten Molldreiklängen und seufzenden Glissandi des Präludiums schon bald eine klagende Melodie für Violinen und Flöte hervor. Sie symbolisiert, wie ihre Behandlung in der folgenden Szene verdeutlichtet, die bald aufzuopfernde Liebe zwischen Sian und Evan, und bereits im schmerzlichen Dialog von Sopranistin und Bariton in dieser Szene erfüllt MacMillan sein Versprechen, "die Hauptrollen wesensmäßig zu charakterisieren, sowohl vom lyrischen Stil her als auch im Hinblick auf die vokale Eigenschaft". Der 2. Szene geht das erste von vielen Orchesterzwischenstücken voraus, in denen die Gefühle der Protagonisten verstärkt zum Ausdruck gebracht werden. Grollende, an Berg – Schigolch in *Lulu* vielleicht – erinnernde Klänge bereiten uns auf den General vor, Sians niedergeschmetterten und kompromittierten Vater; im Gegensatz dazu steht die luftige Musik von Sians weltentrückter Schwester Megan und deren unvergessliche Apostrophe an die zukünftige Braut und Königin.

Mit verhaltener Gewalt markieren die Blechbläser den Auftritt von Mal – dem Todfeind, den Sian heiraten muss, um den Teufelskreis der gegenseitigen Vernichtung zu brechen; doch ebenso, wie sie, das Opferlamm, als starke,

liebevolle Persönlichkeit gezeichnet wird, ist auch Mal ein Mann von komplexem Charakter, wie deutlich wird, wenn er Sian mit einer Zärtlichkeit gegenübertritt, die sie in diesem Stadium nicht hinnehmen kann. Das nächste Zwischenspiel ist eine Passacaglia, eine Reihe von Variationen über ein angespanntes, als Ostinato im Bass ständig wiederkehrendes Thema. Eindeutig ist MacMillan hier dem dramatischen Zwischenspiel in Schostakowitschs *Lady Macbeth von Mzensk* verpflichtet, wie es vor ihm auch schon Britten im Herzen der Finsternis von *Peter Grimes* war. Dennoch ist jede dieser Passacaglien auf ihre eigene Weise dramatisch gerechtfertigt. MacMillan teilt uns mit, dass der Hochzeits-Ceilidh (durch die Amboss-Schläge zwischen den von Bodhráns getriebenen Reels und den prophetischen Liedern Megans und der Harmoniegruppe The Birds of Rhiannon selbst bereits bedrohlich akzentuiert) in Gewalt enden wird. Als Evan erscheint und sein Messer zieht, schlägt die Stimmung sektiererisch um, und es bildet sich ein scharfer Kontrast zwischen dem Friedensappell des Generals (interessanterweise greift auch dieser kurz das Liebesthema Sians auf) und dem grüblerischen, kaltblütigen Solo Evans. Die Gewalt, so viel wird deutlich, hat ihren Höhepunkt noch nicht erreicht

Diese Aufführung des II. Akts könnte MacMillan in seinem ehrgeizigen Wunsch, die Gewalt und Zärtlichkeit von *Elektra* nachzuempfinden, durchaus Recht geben. Mag es auch zu bedauern

sein, dass kein Filmteam präsent war, um den visuellen Eindruck der schonungslosen Bühneneffekte Mitchells und den Anblick der vom Krieg gezeichneten Hotelzimmer Vicki Mortimers festzuhalten, so vermag es doch alleine schon das Klangbild, die dramatischen Coups der Inszenierung wirkungsvoll zu vermitteln. Nach dem folkloristischen Intermezzo, in dem Megan eine weitere doppelbödiges Hommage vorbereitet – diesmal für die Einsetzung des ältesten Sohnes von Mal und Sian – finden die Gegenpole von Zärtlichkeit und Gewalt ihr erstes Extrem. Symmons Roberts lässt in dem traumhaften Liebesduett von Sian und dem immer verzweifelter werdenden Evan der Poesie freien Lauf – sanft untermalt von einem Hornquartett und geteilten Streichern, deren Schweben zwischen E-Dur und cis-Moll nie zulässt, dass die Lyrik zu schwammig wird. Danach verspricht das zweite, ganz anders geartete Ritual der Zeremonie größere Zukunftshoffnung; es gipfelt in einem herrlichen oratorischen Tenorsolo, das Mal von einer weiteren völlig neuen Seite zeigt. Die euphorische Friedensstimmung findet durch eine der betäubendsten Inspirationen der Oper ein jähes Ende, wenn MacMillan von Kafka den Gedanken übernimmt, dass die Kunst sein muss "wie eine Axt, die das Eis der Seele spaltet". Wenn Sie die Oper noch nicht gesehen oder gehört haben und die volle Schlagkraft der Uraufführung nacherleben möchten, lesen Sie die Handlungsbeschreibung nicht.

Eine gewisse Katharsis ist nur im III. Akt möglich. MacMillan setzt das Requiem als inbrünstigen A-cappella-Gesang und lässt diesem ein einfaches, tief bewegendes Solo von Sian folgen. In der 2. Szene wird die Qual durch die Zärtlichkeit zwischen dem General und seiner anderen, fragileren Tochter ein wenig gemildert. Dies führt zum musikalischen Höhepunkt, und in der endgültigen Versöhnung vertraut MacMillan einmal mehr aus tiefstem Herzen auf die Kraft der Verbindung von großer Oper und Totenmesse. Ähnlich wie bei den zweifelnden Glocken und Knabenchorstimmen in Britten's *War Requiem* nach dem Frieden, der Wilfred Owens Worten "Let us sleep now" folgt, können wir uns der Situation nicht ohne weiteres entziehen. Vor dem Hintergrund einer brüchigen Harmonie der Streicher stellt der Zapfenstreich von Metallstange, Amboss und Pauken seine Drohung in den Raum. Wird sich das finstere Potenzial von "a man was born, a child was dead" abermals erfüllen? Wie in so vielen großen Werken der Bühnen- und Literaturgeschichte bleibt diese Frage unbeantwortet.

Überlassen wir uns der Partitur.

© 2010 David Nice

Übersetzung: Andreas Klatt

Die Handlung

Schauplatz der Handlung ist ein großes Hotel, das in Nähe der Front eines Bürgerkrieges liegt und dessen Spuren zeigt.

I. AKT

1. Szene

Hotelzimmer – am Abend vor der Hochzeit von Sian und Mal

Sian nimmt leidenschaftlich Abschied von ihrem Geliebten Evan. Er möchte, dass sie mit ihm über die Grenze flieht, doch sie besteht darauf, dass ihre Beziehung beendet ist. Für Evan ist der Gedanke, dass sie seinen Kriegsfeind Mal heiraten wird, unerträglich.

2. Szene

Hotelzimmer – kurz vor der Hochzeit

Der General wartet, während die Brautjungfern im Badezimmer seiner Tochter Sian beim Ankleiden helfen; unterdessen singt Megan ein eigenes Lied für ihre Schwester, das sie das "weiße Lied" nennt. Sian kehrt in ihrem Brautkleid in das Zimmer zurück, und der seit langem mit Mal verfeindete General gesteht ihr, dass er zwar den Frieden ersehnt hat, dies jedoch nie auf Kosten seiner Tochter – es steht ihr immer noch frei, von der Heirat abzusehen. Sie lehnt ab und erklärt, dass durch diese Verbindung der Konflikt beendet wird.

Evan kommt hinzu und verkündet, dass der Bräutigam mit seiner Gesellschaft eingetroffen ist. Der General bittet Evan, ihn mit seiner Tochter zu fotografieren, und dankt beiden dafür, dass sie ihre Beziehung aufopfern, um die Hochzeit von Sian und Mal zu ermöglichen.

3. Szene

Wie in der 2. Szene

Megan, immer noch in ihr "weißes Lied" versunken, betrachtet einen Hochzeitsstrauß, als Mal auf der Suche nach Sian den Raum betritt. Sian kehrt zurück, um Megan beim Ankleiden zu helfen, und ist von der Anwesenheit Mals überrascht. Obwohl sie bereits in einem Brief in die Ehe eingewilligt hat, stellt er ihr den Heiratsantrag noch einmal, um ihre Antwort persönlich zu hören. Megan, die Mal mit ihrem Gesang irritiert, rät Sian von der Verbindung ab. Sian bestätigt Mal, dass sie ihn heiraten wird.

4. Szene

Im Ballsaal des Hotels

Die Hochzeitsgäste singen Lieder auf das Brautpaar. Die drei Birds, eine Girlgroup, singen in einer Ballade über den Mond, der die Sonne verfolgt, um sie zu seiner Braut zu machen. Der General hält eine Rede und bringt einen Toast auf Mal und Sian aus. Mal bedankt sich mit einem Trinkspruch auf seine Frau und bestätigt, dass der Krieg beendet ist. Plötzlich zieht Evan ein Messer und verwundet Mal am Arm. Die Männer auf Seiten Mals verlangen Rache. Widerstrebend überlassen sie Evan den Leuten des Generals, die ihn abführen. Während die Hochzeitsgäste gehen, kümmern sich The Birds um Sian.

II. AKT

1. Szene

Sieben Jahre später

Im selben Ballsaal – am Abend vor der Einsetzung Gwyns

Mal und Sian haben inzwischen zwei Söhne, Gwyn und Elis. Die Jungen unterbrechen Sian, als sie Megan beim Einstudieren eines Liedes hilft, das diese mit The Birds zur Einsetzung singen wird. Mal kommt mit Evans Mantel hinzu und erklärt, dies sei der Beweis für die Anwesenheit Evans im Hotel. Evan ist unlängst aus der Haft entlassen worden, und Sian, so glaubt Mal wutentbrannt, hat ihm gemeinsam mit ihrem Vater Schutz geboten. Die Jungen spielen mit Evans Mantel, doch Mal bringt ihn wieder an sich. Mal beschuldigt Sian, ihn mit Evan betrogen zu haben, und schlägt sie. Obwohl er sein Handeln sofort bereut, nimmt Sian davon keine Notiz und verlässt ihn.

2. Szene

Hotelzimmer – am Abend vor der Einsetzung Gwyns

Evan hat sich in das Zimmer von Sian und Mal geschlichen und drängt seine alte Liebe, gemeinsam mit ihm die Flucht zu ergreifen. Sein Auto steht vor dem Hotel. Er bemerkt, dass Mal sie geschlagen hat. Beide gestehen sich ihre gegenseitige Zuneigung, doch Sian beharrt darauf, ihrem Mann treu zu bleiben.

3. Szene

Im Ballsaal des Hotels – die Einsetzung

Beide Seiten jubeln dem jungen König Gwyn zu. Megan singt mit The Birds. Mal hält eine Rede und bittet Gwyn, sich zu ihm zu stellen, damit ihn sein Volk sehen kann. Dann ruft er Evan – den Mann, der ihn verwundet hat – als Freund zu sich. Doch

kaum hat sich Evan umarmen lassen, da zieht er eine Pistole. Er richtet die Waffe auf Mal, bevor er sich Gwyn zuwendet und den jungen König erschießt. Die Gäste fassen Evan und zerren ihn fort. Mal und Sian bejammern ihr totes Kind, und der General, sein Großvater, verzweifelt angesichts solcher Wunden.

III. AKT

1. Szene

Drei Tage später

Im Ballsaal des Hotels – Gwyns Beisetzung

Die Anwesenden singen eine Totenmesse. Der General versucht, Mal zuzureden, doch dieser setzt die Fahne der gerade geschlossenen Union in Brand. Seine Leute verlangen Rache. Der General versucht, Sian zu trösten, doch sie wendet sich von ihm ab.

2. Szene

Hotelzimmer – am Abend nach der Beisetzung

Megan bringt dem General die Kleider Evans. Er bedankt sich für die Entwendung und zieht die Sachen an. Megan bittet ihren Vater um eine Erklärung, und er erzählt ihr eine alte Geschichte über einen verwundeten König, dessen Land unter seinem Schicksal litt. Megan ist beunruhigt, so dass er sie mit ihrem "weißen Lied" tröstet. Er verlässt Megan, die seine Kleidung aufräumt.

3. Szene

Im Ballsaal des Hotels – am Abend nach der Beisetzung

Mal hört jemandem nach ihm rufen. Der General erscheint, als Evan verkleidet. Mal stellt ihn zur Rede und erschießt den vermeintlichen Todfeind. Sian, die den Schuss gehört hat und herbei geeilt ist, erkennt, dass Mal ihren Vater getötet hat, und klärt ihn über seinen Irrtum auf. Die Unruhe lockt auch die Hotelgäste an. Sian erklärt, dass genug Blut vergossen worden ist. Megan bringt Elis, damit Sian sich um ihn kümmern kann. Sian geht, und Megan singt über dem Leichnam ihres Vaters ein Lied.

© 2010 Michael Symmons Roberts

Übersetzung: Andreas Klatt

Der Bariton **Christopher Purves** war Chorstipendiat am King's College Cambridge, wo er Anglistik studierte. Anschließend trat er vier Jahre lang mit der Rockgruppe Harvey and the Wallbangers auf. Er blickt zurück auf Rollen wie Melisso (*Alcina*) an der Bayerischen Staatsoper, Ford (*Falstaff*) und die Titelrollen in *Wozzeck* und *Don Giovanni* an der Welsh National Opera, Cecil (*Maria Stuarda*) beim Edinburgh International Festival, Sharpless (Anthony Minghella's *Madama Butterfly*) und Tonio (*Pagliacci*) an der English National Opera, Marco (Richard Jones' *Gianni Schicchi*) an der Royal Opera Covent Garden, Balstrode (*Peter Grimes*) an der Opera North, die Titelrolle von *Falstaff* an der Glyndebourne Festival Opera sowie seine Mitwirkung als Solist in Nonos *Al gran sole carico d'amore* bei den Salzburger Festspielen.

Konzertante Höhepunkte waren Händels *Judas Maccabaeus* in Nürnberg sowie *Saul* bei den Covent Garden und La Chaise Dieu Festivals mit dem Gabrieli Consort, Händels *Messiah* mit der Academy of Ancient Music, Handel and Haydn Society, The Sixteen und dem Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, *Acis, Galatea e Polifemo* mit dem Orquesta Nacional d'España, Britten's *War Requiem* und Haydns *Die Schöpfung* mit dem Ulster Orchestra, Haydns *Nelson-Messe* mit dem Scottish Chamber Orchestra und *Samson* bei den BBC Proms. Für Chandos hat Christopher Purves in der Reihe Opera in English die Rollen von Don Fernando (*Fidelio*), Graf Ribbing (*Un ballo in maschera*), Gottardo (*La gazza ladra*) und die Titelrolle in *Le Nozze di Figaro* aufgenommen.

Die schottische Sopranistin **Lisa Milne** MBE studierte an der Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. Zu den Höhepunkten ihrer Karriere gehören unter anderem Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*) und Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) an der Metropolitan Opera New York; Pamina, Marzelline (*Fidelio*), Micaëla (*Carmen*) und die Titelrollen in *Rodelinda* und *Theodora* an der Glyndebourne Festival Opera; Gräfin Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*), die Titelrolle in *Alcina* sowie – neben vielen anderen Partien – Anne Trulove (*The Rake's Progress*) an der English National Opera; und die Titelrolle in *Semele*, Adele (*Die Fledermaus*), Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*), Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*), Susanna, Ilia (*Idomeneo*) und Despina (*Così fan*

tutte) an der Scottish Opera. Als engagierte Interpretin neuer Musik hat sie beispielsweise an den Uraufführungen von James MacMillans *Parthenogenesis* und Simon Holts *Sunrise Yellow Noise* mit dem City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra sowie *The Canticale of the Rose* von Joseph Phipps in der Wigmore Hall London mitgewirkt. Sie ist mit dem Boston Symphony Orchestra unter der Leitung von James Levine aufgetreten, den Berliner Philharmonikern unter Sir Simon Rattle, den Rotterdamer Philharmonikern unter Valeri Gergijew, der Staatskapelle Dresden unter Robin Ticciati, dem Budapest Festival Orchestra unter Ivan Fischer und dem Mahler Chamber Orchestra unter Daniel Harding. Solokonzerte hat sie außerdem bei den Festspielen von Aix-en-Provence, Edinburgh und der City of London, dem Oxford Lieder Festival, Palais des Beaux Arts Brüssel und Schumannfest Düsseldorf gegeben, während sie regelmäßig in der Wigmore Hall gastiert. Im Jahr 2005 wurde Lisa Milne der britische Verdienstorden MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) verliehen.

Der Tenor **Peter Hoare** studierte Schlagwerk an der Huddersfield School of Music, bevor er sich 1992 einer professionellen Gesangskarriere zuwandte. Zu seinen Rollen gehören Bacchus (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), Hauptmann (*Wozzeck*), Hexe (*Hänsel und Gretel*), Tichon (*Kat'á Kabanová*) und Prinz Golitsin (*Chowanschtschina*) an der Welsh National Opera; Tichon am Grand Théâtre de Genève; Goro (*Madama*

Butterfly) und Don Basilio (*Le nozze di Figaro*) an der Royal Opera Covent Garden; Sellem (*The Rake's Progress*) am Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris; Šapkin (*Aus einem Totenhaus*) bei den Wiener Festwochen, beim Holland Festival und Festival d'Aix-en-Provence sowie an der Metropolitan Opera New York; Desportes (Zimmermanns *Die Soldaten*) bei der Ruhrtriennale, am New National Theatre Tokio und Lincoln Center New York; sowie die solistische Mitwirkung an Nonos *Al gran sole carico d'amore* bei den Salzburger Festspielen. Konzertante Auftritte hatte er in *Roméo et Juliette* von Berlioz mit den Berliner Philharmonikern, Weills *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* beim Edinburgh International Festival und Mahlers *Das Lied von der Erde* an der Opera North. Für Chandos hat er in der Reihe Opera in English die Rolle von Tichon (*Kat'á Kabanová*) aufgenommen.

Seit seinem Studium am St. John's College Cambridge und an der Royal Academy of Music hat der Bariton **Leigh Melrose** zahlreiche Rollen verkörpert, unter anderem Demetrius (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) am Théâtre de la Monnaie Brüssel, Figaro (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) an der New York City Opera, Silvio (*Pagliacci*) an der Welsh National Opera, die Bassbariton-Partien in Britten's *Death in Venice* am Gran Teatre del Liceu Barcelona, Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) und Marcello (*La bohème*) an der Opera Zuid (Niederlande), Sid (*Albert Herring*) am Salzburger Landestheater, an der Opéra Comique Paris und Opéra de Rouen

sowie Ned Keene (*Peter Grimes*), Papageno, Graf Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Rodolfo (Leoncavallos *La bohème*) und Junius (*The Rape of Lucretia*) an der English National Opera. Im Bereich der neuen Musik hat er unter anderem an der Uraufführung von Johannes Kalitzkes *Die Besessenen* am Theater an der Wien und Elliott Carters *On Conversing with Paradise* beim Aldeburgh Festival unter Oliver Knussen mitgewirkt; außerdem hat er Punch (Birtwistles *Punch and Judy*) in Porto, Xenakis' *Ais* mit dem BBC Symphony Orchestra bei den Proms und beim Berlin Festival sowie *The Martyrdom of St. Magnus* von Peter Maxwell Davies im Rahmen des vom Komponisten veranstalteten St. Magnus Festival auf den Orkney-Inseln, in Edinburgh und in Inverness gesungen

Die Sopranistin **Sarah Tynan** wurde in London geboren und studierte am Royal Northern College of Music und an der Royal Academy of Music. An der English National Opera, wo sie bis 2007 als Hauptdarstellerin wirkte, hat sie unter anderem Tytania (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Waldvogel (*Siegfried*), Iphis (*Jephtha*), Dalinda (*Ariodante*), Atalanta (*Serse*), Schwester Constance (*Dialogues des Carmélites*), Yum-Yum (*The Mikado*), Gianetta (*The Gondoliers*), Bella (*The Midsummer Marriage*), Pretty Polly (*Punch and Judy*), Governess (*The Turn of the Screw*) und Sophie (*Der Rosenkavalier*) gesungen; an der Welsh National Opera kennt man sie als Iphis, Melanto und Fortuna (beide in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*) sowie

Megan (James MacMillans *The Sacrifice*). Weitere Rollen waren Susanna an der Cincinnati Opera, Iris (*Semele*) am Théâtre royal de la Monnaie Brüssel und Dalinda an der Opera de Oviedo. Konzertant ist sie in *Messiah* mit dem Hallé Orchestra und als Servilia (*La clemenza di Tito*) mit dem Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment unter Edward Gardner in London und New York aufgetreten. Bei den Salzburger Festspielen debütierte sie solistisch in Nonos *Al gran sole carico d'amore*. Für Chandos hat Sarah Tynan das Taumännchen (*Hänsel und Gretel*), Barbarina (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Schwester Constance (*Dialogues des Carmélites*), Second Woman (*Dido and Aeneas*) und Monique (Maconchys *The Sofa*) aufgenommen.

Der **Chorus of Welsh National Opera** ist fest in der walisischen Tradition von Chorgesellschaften verwurzelt und orientiert sich an der lebhaften Gesangskultur innerhalb und außerhalb des Fürstentums. Der Chor begann 1968 als Berufsensemble und arbeitete zunächst mit dem berühmten Voluntary Chorus der WNO zusammen, einer Gruppe von Laiensängern, die 1943 zusammengefunden hatten und den Kern der späteren Welsh National Opera bildeten. 1973 wurde der Voluntary Chorus vom Chorus of Welsh National Opera abgelöst. Der Erfolg des Chors in frühen Inszenierungen von *Cavalleria rusticana*, *Pagliacci*, *Faust*, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* und insbesondere *Nabucco* untermauerte das Renommee der Operngesellschaft. In der

Anfangszeit wurden viele Rollen aus den Reihen des Chors besetzt – eine Tradition, an der man auch heute noch festhält. Die Opern- und Konzerttätigkeit des Chors hat breite Anerkennung gefunden, nicht nur im traditionellen Repertoire, sondern auch mit Werken des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts, wie Janáčeks *Aus einem Totenhaus* und Tippetts *A Midsummer Marriage*. Der Chor hat zahlreiche Schallplatten aufgenommen, unter der Leitung von Dirigenten wie Sir Reginald Goodall, Sir Georg Solti, Richard Bonyng, Sir Charles Mackerras, Riccardo Chailly und Carlo Rizzi. 1997 sang der Chorus of Welsh National Opera am Théâtre des Champs-Élysées Paris in Aufführungen von Beethovens *Leonore* und *Fidelio*. Die meisten Chormitglieder verfolgen als Konzert- und Opernsänger auch rege Solokarrieren.

Das 1970 gegründete **Orchestra of Welsh National Opera** hat nicht nur mit seinem bemerkenswert breit gefächerten Opernrepertoire, das von Monteverdi über Händel und Mozart bis zu Wagner, Janáček, Maxwell Davies und MacMillan reicht, sondern auch durch seine Konzerttätigkeit und seine umfangreiche Diskographie hohe Anerkennung gefunden. In der Tradition früherer Musikdirektoren wie Richard Armstrong (1973–1986), Sir Charles Mackerras (1987–1992 und nun Ehrendirigent), Carlo Rizzi (1992–2001 und 2004–2007) sowie Tugan Sochiew (2002–2004) führt seit Herbst 2009 Lothar Koenigs den Taktstock. Die Operngesellschaft ist seit 2004 im Wales Millennium Centre an der Bucht

von Cardiff beheimatet. Neben seinen ausgedehnten in- und ausländischen Operntourneen hat sich das Orchester in jüngsten Jahren auch konzertant stark profiliert. Es hat zahlreiche Sinfoniekonzerte in Cardiff gegeben, ist verschiedentlich bei den BBC Proms aufgetreten und in berühmten Konzertsälen und bei Festivals in Wales und England zu Gast gewesen. Seit Einrichtung des internationalen Sängerwettbewerbs BBC Cardiff Singer of the World ist das Orchestra of Welsh National Opera mit Erfolg an der alle zwei Jahre ausgetragenen Veranstaltung beteiligt.

Anthony Negus studierte am Royal College of Music, Christ Church Oxford und London Opera Centre. In den Jahren 1970–1974 wirkte und assistierte er in Wuppertal, Hamburg und Bayreuth. Der Welsh National Opera trat er 1976 bei. Als langjähriger, schon in seiner Jugend begeisterter Wagner-Liebhaber assistierte er Sir Reginald Goodall bei Inszenierungen von *Die Walküre*, *Tristan und Isolde* und *Parsifal* und dirigierte Aufführungen von *Fidelio*, *Die griechische Passion*, *Das Rheingold*, *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung* und *Parsifal*. Als

Assistent von Sir Charles Mackerras dirigierte er ab 1987 sämtliche Mozart-Opern, von *Idomeneo* bis *La clemenza di Tito*. *Elektra*, *Ariadne auf Naxos* und *Die Frau ohne Schatten* gehören ebenso zu seinem Repertoire wie *Tristan und Isolde*. 1992 assistierte er Pierre Boulez bei einer Inszenierung von *Pelléas et Mélisande*, und in neuerer Zeit hat er *Leonore*, *Kát'a Kabanová*, *Chowanschtschina*, *Il trovatore*, *Wozzeck*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Le nozze di Figaro* und *Parsifal* dirigiert. Für das Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama hat er unter anderem Aufführungen von *Albert Herring*, *Le nozze di Figaro* und *Suor Angelica* geleitet. In der Zeit von 2000 bis 2004 dirigierte er die gekürzte *Ring*-Inszenierung der City of Birmingham Touring Opera, mit Sir Donald McIntyre als Wotan, für die Longborough Festival Opera sowie das Opera Theater of Pittsburgh unter der Regie von Jonathan Eaton. Danach begann er mit *Das Rheingold* (2007/08) unter der Regie von Alan Privett ein *Ring*-Projekt in Longborough. Unlängst hat Anthony Negus konzertante Auszüge aus *Fidelio* und Akt I der *Walküre* in Longborough dirigiert und Wladimir Jurowski bei einer Inszenierung von *Tristan und Isolde* an der Glyndebourne Festival Opera assistiert.

Evan and Sian, Act II, Scene 2



Sian holding the body of Gwyn, watched by Mal, Act II, Scene 3



MacMillan: The Sacrifice

Plein de pitié, je préserve l'ancien, espérant avec
patience un nouveau fructueux, attendant l'œuvre
de génie de notre temps! Où sont les œuvres
qui parlent aux cœurs des peuples, qui reflètent
leurs âmes?

Ainsi parle le directeur de théâtre La Roche dans
le dernier opéra de Richard Strauss, *Capriccio*.
Chaque époque pose la même question, même si la
nôtre semble particulièrement grincheuse à propos
de l'état de l'opéra nouveau, et impatiente pour
plus d'une poignée d'œuvres musicales scéniques
qui survivront à l'épreuve du temps. *The Sacrifice*
est-elle l'une d'entre elles?

Écrivant purement du point de vue de mon
expérience personnelle, en tant que mélomane
trop jeune pour avoir assisté à la création
d'un opéra de Britten, je peux affirmer que
l'exaltation irréprensible d'être présent lors de la
représentation d'une grande œuvre nouvelle, ou
assez nouvelle, capable d'atteindre un plus large
public de théâtre lyrique, ne m'a été donnée que
quatre fois: avec *Sweeney Todd* de Sondheim au
Drury Lane en 1981, le cas peut-être plus raréfié
du *Grand Macabre* de Ligeti lors de sa première
production à l'English National Opera, la création
en Grande-Bretagne de *Nixon in China* de Adams au
Festival d'Édimbourg en 1988, et très récemment
avec *The Sacrifice* quand le Welsh National Opera

est venu présenter la production littéralement
stupéfiante de Katie Mitchell au Sadler's Wells de
Londres pour une représentation inoubliable.

Beaucoup de ceux qui eurent la chance d'être
présents en 1996 eurent la même sensation avec
le premier opéra de MacMillan, *Inés de Castro*,
éblouissant sur le plan théâtral et provocateur.
The Sacrifice possède la vertu particulière de
raconter une histoire éternelle à travers une
musique et un texte résonants, une histoire ancrée
dans le mythe, mais située dans le présent ou le
futur proche, et ainsi capable de parler à notre
époque déchirée sans faire aucune plaidoirie
particulière (un piège dans lequel sont tombées
plusieurs œuvres traitant de la guerre en Iraq, par
exemple). "L'histoire que *The Sacrifice* raconte est
très claire", déclare MacMillan à Simon Rees dans le
programme du Welsh National Opera en 2007:

et a été rendu plus claire pendant les répétitions
de la production dans laquelle nous nous sommes
concentrés sur la narration et la portée de
l'histoire. Grâce à la clarté du texte de Michael
Symmons Roberts, il n'y a aucune confusion
dans le récit. Michael s'est départi de son style
d'écriture poétique habituel en préparant le livret,
et cela a affecté la manière dont Katie Mitchell, le
metteur en scène, et son équipe interprètent la
musique et le texte.

Symmons Roberts, un poète distingué à part entière, avait déjà collaboré avec MacMillan pour plusieurs œuvres, en particulier le poème symphonique pour chœur et orchestre *The Birds of Rhiannon* – qui conduit à *The Sacrifice* sur le plan du mythe – et la cantate pour la naissance d'un enfant *Quickening* (CHSA 5072). Une fois confirmée la commande de longue date du directeur général du Welsh National Opera, Anthony Freud, le poète et le compositeur se sont terrés pendant une froide semaine de décembre sur l'île de Skye, comme Symmons Roberts le décrit:

pour faire les ébauches préparatoires de l'action,
du sujet, des personnages... Un certain après-midi,
plus par hasard que par dessein, nous avons
regardé l'un après l'autre *The Turn of the Screw*
[de Britten] et *Elektra* de Strauss. Le texte subtil et
discret de Myfanwy Piper présentait un contraste
saisissant avec le débordement expressionniste
surchauffé de Hofmannsthal.

De manière audacieuse, ils développèrent une œuvre qui représente le meilleur des deux mondes, quoique "la préférence de Jimmy, et la mienne," ajoute Symmons Roberts, "était de chercher à obtenir quelque chose de l'intensité d'*Elektra*". Si vous écoutez attentivement la scène tendue de l'investiture de l'Acte II, vous pouvez même déceler l'un des thèmes de famille les plus chargés d'émotions de Strauss s'élever brièvement, mais de manière répétée, au milieu d'un discours crucial venant du cœur. Mais en termes plus généraux, les parallèles sont appropriés. Strauss/Hofmannsthal

et MacMillan/Symmons Roberts prennent pour thème l'effet dévastateur sur des liens familiaux intenses d'une querelle sanglante apparemment impossible à apaiser. C'est la fibre la plus dure du mythe grec, et celle de la saga galloise du *Mabinogion* dans laquelle le compositeur et le poète ont trouvé "The Tale of Branwen, daughter of Llyr" (L'Histoire de Branwen, fille de Llyr), de la Deuxième Branche, très appropriée à leurs objectifs. Symmons Roberts explique:

Enracinée dans les mythes les plus anciens des traditions orales de ces îles, l'histoire de Branwen traite de l'hostilité de longue date entre les îles de Grande-Bretagne et l'île de l'Irlande, et la tentative de négocier la paix en arrangeant un mariage entre des membres des deux côtés. Tous les quatre [le poète, le compositeur, le metteur en scène Katie Mitchell, et la décoratrice Vicki Mortimer] nous avons eu le sentiment que l'histoire possédait une puissance et un potentiel réels, tout en étant également certains de ne pas vouloir reproduire de manière fidèle un mythe situé dans un passé lointain. Nous sommes parvenus à une structure qui utiliserait les éléments de base de l'histoire du *Mabinogion* comme fondations sur lesquelles construire un drame se déroulant dans la Grande-Bretagne moderne.

Ou, en effet, dans n'importe quel lieu à l'époque moderne. Tandis que la partition originale donne au chœur des membres du clan des textes cérémoniels à déclamer en gallois – chantés ici en anglais – et que les empreintes celtiques familières

de MacMillan, dérivant de l'époque où il jouait dans un groupe folklorique, apparaissent dans la musique de part en part, la foule porte également un toast aux jeunes mariés pendant le "ceilidh"¹ de l'Acte I avec les exclamations "shalom" et "salaam". À l'Acte III, le rituel s'élargit pour embrasser la messe de requiem en latin et l'hymne de Pâques, et ainsi évoque des parallèles (comme le fait *Quickening*) avec le *War Requiem* de Britten – et de manière bien plus réussie, selon l'auteur de ces lignes, que la scène de bataille d'un autre compositeur d'opéra contemporain qui, déclarant n'avoir pas voulu écrire une mauvaise imitation de Britten, a produit exactement cela.

L'intense travail de collaboration entre MacMillan et Katie Mitchell, et sa demande spécifique de deux des plus remarquables chanteurs acteurs britanniques, Lisa Milne et Christopher Purves, fait écho au travail d'équipe du plus haut niveau de deux autres créations d'opéras récentes, *The Silver Tassie* de Turnage et *The Tempest* d'Adès. Toutefois, MacMillan a probablement recueilli de plus grandes récompenses avec sa tentative consciente d'écrire davantage un "opéra pour chanteur" que Turnage, obtenant ainsi une plus grande homogénéité stylistique des plus belles pages que celles que beaucoup d'entre nous trouvent dans *The Tempest*.

"J'adore les mélodies, j'adore les thèmes", affirme MacMillan, et tandis que ce credo éveille

encore l'hostilité de certains des journalistes d'une putative "police de la nouvelle musique", il n'implique aucun compromis artistique. Et ainsi, à partir des lointains accords parfaits mineurs et des glissandos soupirant du prélude s'élève bientôt une mélodie plaintive pour violons et flûte. Elle représente, comme son engagement dans la scène suivante rend explicite, l'amour que Sian et Evan vont bientôt perdre, et déjà dans l'échange douloureux de cette scène entre soprano et baryton, MacMillan tire parti de son intention de "caractériser les parties principales selon leur nature, à la fois sur le plan du style lyrique et sur celui du caractère vocal". Dans la Scène 2, introduite par le premier des nombreux interludes orchestraux qui amplifient les sentiments intérieurs des personnages, les murmures légèrement bergiens – peut-être Schigolch de *Lulu* – qui mettent en scène le Général, le père accablé et compromis de Sian, sont compensés par la musique insouciant de Megan, la sœur de Sian qui n'a pas les pieds sur terre, et sa mémorable apostrophe à la royale future mariée.

Une violence réprimée porte les cuivres au premier plan en introduisant Mal, l'ennemi que Sian doit épouser afin de mettre fin au cycle de violence; mais de la même manière qu'elle est caractérisée comme étant une personnalité forte et aimante, et non pas un pantin offert en sacrifice, le rôle du ténor révèle une complexité tandis que l'on voit Mal tenter d'atteindre une tendresse que Sian, à ce moment, ne peut accepter. L'interlude suivant

est une passacaille, une série de variations sur un thème tendu répété à la basse. MacMillan est clairement redevable à l'interlude crucial entendu dans la *Lady Macbeth du District de Mtsensk* de Chostakovitch, qui à son tour devait inspirer Britten au cœur des ténèbres de *Peter Grimes*. Cependant, chaque passacaille a une motivation dramatique différente; celle-ci nous dit que le "ceilidh" du mariage, lui-même rendu quelque peu menaçant par les coups d'enclume entendus entre les danses dominées par le bodhrán² et entre les chansons prophétiques de Megan et des Birds of Rhiannon, le groupe qui chante en harmonie, se terminera dans la violence. Quand Evan arrive et sort un couteau, le climat retourne au sectarisme et un violent contraste entre l'appel à la paix du Général (notez que le Général, lui aussi, reprend un bref instant le thème d'amour de Sian) et le solo maussade et reptilien d'Evan, la scène promettant une plus grande violence à venir.

L'interprétation de l'Acte II enregistrée ici pourrait bien justifier le souhait ambitieux de MacMillan d'imiter la violence et la tendresse d'*Elektra*. Même si l'on peut regretter l'absence d'une équipe de tournage pour capturer le résultat visuel de l'engagement intensément théâtral de Mitchell et l'aspect des chambres de l'hôtel endommagé par la guerre de Vicki Mortimer, le son à lui seul est suffisant pour évoquer les coups

de maître dramatiques de la mise en scène. Après l'intermezzo de la chanson folklorique dans laquelle Megan prépare un autre hommage ambigu, destiné ici à l'investiture du fils aîné de Mal et de Sian, les pôles jumeaux de la tendresse et de la violence parviennent à leurs premiers points culminants. Symmons Roberts permet à la poésie de s'élever dans le duo d'amour onirique confié à Sian et à Evan qui est de plus en plus désespéré – tendrement souligné par un quatuor de cors et les cordes divisées, oscillant entre mi majeur et ut dièse mineur d'une manière qui empêche constamment le lyrisme de devenir trop doux. Ensuite, le second rituel de l'action, très différent du premier, promet un plus grand optimisme et culmine dans un solo au caractère oratoire magnifique pour le ténor, mettant de nouveau en évidence une dimension supplémentaire du personnage de Mal. La paix euphorique est détruite en un instant qui représente l'une des inspirations les plus bouleversantes de l'opéra: une incarnation de la phrase célèbre de Kafka selon laquelle l'art devrait être comme la pioche à travers la glace de l'âme – si vous voulez faire l'expérience de tout l'impact qu'il eut la première fois au théâtre, ne lisez pas l'argument si vous n'avez pas vu ou entendu l'opéra.

Une sorte de catharsis n'est possible à obtenir que dans le troisième acte. MacMillan se tourne vers son écriture chorale *a cappella* la plus touchante pour le requiem, qu'il fait suivre d'un solo pour Sian dépouillé et profondément poignant. Dans la deuxième scène, la tendresse entre le

Général et son autre fille plus fragile atténue quelque peu l'angoisse. Le point culminant de la musique se produit alors, et dans la réconciliation ultime MacMillan une fois de plus mise énormément sur l'effet grand opéra avec requiem. De nouveau, comme avec les cloches interrogatrices et le chœur de garçons entendus après la paix dans la mise en musique de Britten des paroles de Wilfred Owen "Let us sleep now" (Laissez-nous dormir maintenant) dans le *War Requiem*, le compositeur ne nous laisse pas filer si facilement. Contre la trêve difficile des cordes, le roulement de la barre de métal, de l'enclume et des timbales fait retentir sa menace. Le potentiel plus sombre de "a man was born, a child was dead" (un homme est né, un enfant est mort) est-il sur le point de se réaliser de nouveau? Comme dans tant de grandes œuvres dramatiques et littéraires, la question demeure sans réponse.

La partition – nous y conduit.

© 2010 David Nice

Traduction: Francis Marchal

Argument

L'action se déroule entièrement dans un grand hôtel endommagé par la guerre et situé près de la ligne de combat d'un conflit civil.

ACTE I

Scène 1

Une chambre de l'hôtel – la nuit précédant le mariage de Sian avec Mal

Sian rencontre son amant, Evan, et lui dit au revoir en l'embrassant. Evan veut qu'elle vienne avec lui et traverse la frontière, mais elle déclare fermement que leur relation doit prendre fin. Evan ne peut supporter l'idée que Sian épouse l'ennemi, Mal.

Scène 2

Une chambre de l'hôtel – peu avant le mariage

Le Général, le père de Sian, attend pendant que les demoiselles d'honneur habillent Sian dans la salle de bains, et pendant que Megan, sa sœur, invente une chanson pour la mariée, et lui donne le nom de "chanson blanche". Sian entre vêtue de sa robe de mariée et le Général, qui a été l'ennemi de Mal, déclare que bien qu'il souhaite la paix depuis longtemps, cela n'a jamais été au prix de sa fille. Il lui dit qu'elle peut changer d'avis si elle le désire, mais elle refuse en répondant que ce mariage mettra fin au conflit.

Evan entre et annonce que le groupe des invités du futur marié est arrivé. Le Général demande à Evan de prendre une photo de lui avec sa fille et les remercie tous les deux d'avoir sacrifié leur relation afin de permettre le mariage entre Sian et Mal.

Scène 3

Comme dans la Scène 2

Megan contemple un bouquet de mariage, tout en continuant de chanter sa "chanson blanche", quand Mal entre à la recherche de Sian. Sian revient pour aider Megan à s'habiller. Elle sursaute à la vue de Mal, qui lui fait alors sa demande en

mariage: elle lui a répondu "oui" dans une lettre, mais il veut l'entendre le lui dire face à face. Megan, dont le chant irrite Mal, met en garde Sian contre lui. Sian confirme qu'elle épousera Mal.

Scène 4

La salle de bal de l'hôtel

Les invités de la réception du mariage chantent les louanges des nouveaux époux. Un groupe de trois filles, Les Oiseaux, chante une ballade qui parle de la lune chassant le soleil pour sa future épouse. Le Général donne un discours, et porte un toast à Mal et à Sian. Mal répond par un toast à sa femme, confirmant que la guerre est terminée. Soudain, Evan sort un couteau et blesse Mal au bras. Les hommes du groupe de Mal demandent vengeance. Les hommes de Mal remettent à contrecœur Evan aux hommes du Général, qui l'emmènent. Tous les invités s'en vont tandis que Les Oiseaux s'occupent de Sian.

ACTE II

Scène 1

Sept ans plus tard

La même salle de bal – le soir précédant

l'Investiture de Gwyn

Mal et Sian ont maintenant deux fils, Gwyn et Elis. Les garçons interrompent quand Sian essaye d'aider Megan à apprendre une chanson qu'elle chantera avec Les Oiseaux lors de l'Investiture. Mal entre avec le manteau d'Evan, déclarant qu'il est la preuve de la présence d'Evan dans l'hôtel. Mal est

furieux contre Sian et son père car ils protègent Evan, qui a été libéré de prison. Les garçons jouent avec le manteau d'Evan et Mal le leur arrache des mains. Mal accuse Sian de le trahir avec Evan, et la frappe. Il est immédiatement pris de remords, mais Sian l'ignore et sort.

Scène 2

Une chambre de l'hôtel – la nuit précédant

l'Investiture de Gwyn

Evan s'est introduit dans la chambre de Sian et Mal et dit à Sian qu'ils peuvent s'échapper ensemble. Sa voiture est en bas de l'hôtel. Il voit le bleu à l'endroit où Mal l'a frappée. Ils expriment leur amour, mais Sian confirme qu'elle restera avec son mari.

Scène 3

La salle de bal de l'hôtel – l'Investiture

Les membres de chaque tribu saluent Gwyn comme enfant roi. Megan chante avec Les Oiseaux, puis Mal prononce un discours, demandant à Gwyn de s'avancer pour que son peuple puisse le voir. Il appelle ensuite Evan, l'homme qui l'a blessé, et lui demande de s'avancer comme un ami. Evan s'approche et embrasse Mal, mais sort un revolver qu'il dirige d'abord contre Mal, puis contre Gwyn qu'il tue. Les invités s'emparent d'Evan et l'emmènent. Mal et Sian pleurent leur enfant mort, et le Général, le grand-père du garçon, plaide pour que de telles blessures puissent être guéries.

ACTE III

Scène 1

Trois jours plus tard

La salle de bal de l'hôtel – les funérailles de Gwyn

Les gens chantent une messe de requiem. Le Général tente de reconforter Mal, mais celui-ci met le feu au drapeau de l'union. Ses hommes demandent vengeance. Le Général tente de reconforter Sian, mais elle lui tourne le dos.

Scène 2

Une chambre de l'hôtel – la nuit suivant les funérailles

Megan apporte au Général les habits d'Evan. Il la remercie de les avoir volés pour lui, et les revêt. Megan lui demande ce qu'il est en train de faire, et il commence à lui raconter la vieille histoire d'un roi blessé dont la souffrance eut pour effet de briser son pays. Megan est très affectée, et il la reconforte en lui chantant sa "Chanson blanche". Il sort et Megan range ses habits.

Scène 3

La salle de bal de l'hôtel – la nuit suivant les funérailles

Mal entend quelqu'un l'appeler. Le Général entre revêtu des habits d'Evan. Mal lui lance un défi, le prenant pour Evan, et le tue. Alertée par le coup de feu, Sian entre et découvre que Mal vient de tuer son père. Elle révèle à Mal l'identité de la victime. Les invités de l'hôtel, ayant entendu le fracas, descendent pour voir ce qui s'est passé. Sian

déclare que suffisamment de sang a été versé. Megan amène Elis pour que Sian s'occupe de lui. Sian sort et Megan chante une chanson sur le corps de son père.

© 2010 Michael Symmons Roberts

Traduction: Francis Marchal

Le baryton **Christopher Purves** a étudié l'anglais au King's College de Cambridge avant de se produire et d'enregistrer avec le groupe de musique rock "Harvey and the Wallbangers". Il a interprété des rôles tels que Melisso (*Alcina*) au Bayerische Staatsoper, Ford (*Falstaff*) et le rôle titre dans *Wozzeck* et *Don Giovanni* au Welsh National Opera, Cecil (*Maria Stuarda*) au Festival international d'Édimbourg, Sharpless (*Madama Butterfly* dans la mise en scène d'Anthony Minghella) et Tonio (*Pagliacci*) à l'English National Opera, Marco (*Gianni Schicchi* dans la mise en scène de Richard Jones) au Royal Opera de Covent Garden, Balstrode (*Peter Grimes*) à l'Opera North, le rôle titre dans *Falstaff* au Festival de Glyndebourne. Il a également chanté en soliste dans *Al gran sole carico d'amore* de Nono au Festival de Salzbourg. En concert, il s'est produit dans *Judas Maccabaeus* de Haendel à Nuremberg et dans *Saul* au Festival de Covent Garden et au Festival de La Chaise Dieu avec le Gabrieli Consort, dans le *Messiah* de Haendel avec l'Academy of Ancient Music, la Handel and Haydn Society, l'ensemble The Sixteen, et l'Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment; dans *Acì, Galatea e Polifemo* avec

l'Orquesta Nacional d'España, dans le *War Requiem* de Britten et *Die Schöpfung* de Haydn avec l'Ulster Orchestra, la *Messe de Nelson* de Haydn avec le Scottish Chamber Orchestra, et *Samson* aux BBC Proms de Londres. Pour Chandos, Christopher Purves a enregistré les rôles de Don Fernando (*Fidelio*), du Comte Ribbing (*Un ballo in maschera*), celui de Gottardo (*La gazza ladra*) et le rôle titre dans *Le nozze di Figaro*, tous dans la série "Opera in English".

La soprano écossaise **Lisa Milne** a étudié à la Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. Elle s'est produite dans les rôles de Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*) et Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) au Metropolitan Opera de New York; Pamina, Marzelline (*Fidelio*), Micaëla (*Carmen*) et les rôles titres dans *Rodelinda* et *Theodora* au Festival de Glyndebourne; la Comtesse Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*), le rôle titre dans *Alcina* et Anne Trulove (*The Rake's Progress*), parmi beaucoup d'autres, à l'English National Opera; le rôle titre dans *Semele*, Adele (*Die Fledermaus*), Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*), Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*), Susanna, Ilia (*Idomeneo*) et Despina (*Così fan tutte*) au Scottish Opera. Défenseur de la musique de notre temps, elle a donné entre autres les créations mondiale de *Parthenogenesis* de James MacMillan et de *Sunrise Yellow Noise* de Simon Holt avec le City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, et de *The Canticle of the Rose* de Joseph Phipps au Wigmore Hall de Londres. Elle s'est produite avec le Boston Symphony Orchestra sous

la direction de James Levine, avec l'Orchestre philharmonique de Berlin sous la direction de Sir Simon Rattle, avec l'Orchestre philharmonique de Rotterdam sous la direction de Valery Gergiev, avec la Dresden Staatskapelle sous la direction de Robin Ticciati, avec le Budapest Festival Orchestra sous la direction de Ivan Fischer, et avec l'Orchestre de chambre Mahler sous la direction de Daniel Harding. Elle a donné des récitals à Aix-en-Provence, au Festival international d'Édimbourg, au City of London Festival, à l'Oxford Lieder Festival, au Palais des Beaux Arts de Bruxelles, dans le cadre de la Schumannfest de Düsseldorf, et comme invitée régulière au Wigmore Hall. Lisa Milne a été nommée membre de l'ordre de l'empire britannique (MBE) en 2005.

Le ténor **Peter Hoare** a d'abord étudié la percussion à la Huddersfield School of Music avant de commencer sa carrière de chanteur professionnel en 1992. Il a incarné des rôles tels que Bacchus (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), le Capitaine (*Wozzeck*), la Sorcière (*Hänsel und Gretel*), Tikhon (*Kat'á Kabanová*) et le Prince Galitzine (*La Khovantchina*) au Welsh National Opera; Tikhon au Grand Théâtre de Genève; Goro (*Madama Butterfly*) et Don Basilio (*Le nozze di Figaro*) au Royal Opera de Covent Garden; Sellem (*The Rake's Progress*) au Théâtre des Champs-Élysées à Paris; Šapkin (*La Maison des morts*) pendant les Wiener Festwochen, au Festival de Hollande, au Festival d'Aix-en-Provence et au Metropolitan Opera de New York; Desportes

(*Die Soldaten* de Zimmermann) à la Ruhrtriennale, au Nouveau Théâtre national de Tokyo et au Lincoln Center de New York; il a chanté en soliste dans *Al gran sole carico d'amore* de Luigi Nono au Festival de Salzbourg. En concert, Peter Hoare s'est produit dans *Roméo et Juliette* de Berlioz avec l'Orchestre philharmonique de Berlin, dans *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* de Weill au Festival international d'Édimbourg, et dans *Das Lied von der Erde* de Mahler à l'Opera North. Sa discographie inclut, pour Chandos, le rôle de Tikhon (*Kat'á Kabanová*) dans la série "Opera in English".

Diplômé du St John's College de Cambridge et de la Royal Academy of Music de Londres, le baryton **Leigh Melrose** a incarné des rôles tels que Demetrius (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) au Théâtre de la Monnaie de Bruxelles, Figaro (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) au New York City Opera, Silvio (*Pagliacci*) au Welsh National Opera, les parties de basse-baryton dans *Death in Venice* de Britten au Gran Teatre del Liceu de Barcelone, Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) et Marcello (*La bohème*) à l'Opera Zuid, Sid (*Albert Herring*) au Salzburger Landestheater, à l'Opéra Comique de Paris et à l'Opéra de Rouen, Ned Keene (*Peter Grimes*), Papageno, le Comte Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Rodolfo (*La bohème* de Leoncavallo) et Junius (*The Rape of Lucretia*) à l'English National Opera. Dans le domaine de la musique contemporaine, il a pris part à la création mondiale de *Die Besessenen* de Johannes Kalitzke au Theater an der Wien et

de *On Conversing with Paradise* d'Elliott Carter au Festival d'Aldeburgh sous la direction de Oliver Knussen, entre autres, et a chanté Punch (*Punch and Judy* de Birtwistle) à Porto, Ais de Iannis Xenakis avec le BBC Symphony Orchestra aux BBC Proms de Londres et au Festival de Berlin, et *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* de Peter Maxwell Davies dans le cadre du festival de St Magnus organisé à Orkney par le compositeur, à Édimbourg et à Inverness.

Née à Londres, la soprano **Sarah Tynan** a étudié au Royal Northern College of Music de Manchester et à la Royal Academy of Music de Londres. À l'English National Opera, où elle a été "Company Principal" jusqu'en 2007, elle a chanté des rôles tels que Tytania (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), l'Oiseau de la forêt (*Siegfried*), Iphis (*Jephtha*), Dalinda (*Ariodante*), Atalanta (*Serse*), Sœur Constance (*Dialogues des Carmélites*), Yum-Yum (*The Mikado*), Gianetta (*The Gondoliers*), Bella (*The Midsummer Marriage*), Pretty Polly (*Punch and Judy*), la Gouvernante (*The Turn of the Screw*) et Sophie (*Der Rosenkavalier*); au Welsh National Opera elle a incarné les rôles de Iphis, de Melanto et Fortune (dans *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*), et de Megan (*The Sacrifice* de James MacMillan). Elle a chanté Susanna au Cincinnati Opera, Iris (*Semele*) au Théâtre royal de la Monnaie à Bruxelles, Dalinda à l'Opéra d'Oviedo. En concert, elle s'est produite dans le *Messiah* de Haendel avec le Hallé Orchestra et Servilia (*La clemenza di Tito*) avec l'Orchestra of

the Age of Enlightenment sous la direction d'Edward Gardner à Londres et à New York; pour ses débuts au Festival de Salzbourg, elle a chanté en soliste dans *Al gran sole carico d'amore* de Luigi Nono. Pour Chandos Sarah Tynan a enregistré le rôle de la Fée Rosée (*Hänsel und Gretel*), Barbarina (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Sœur Constance (*Dialogues des Carmélites*), la Deuxième Dame (*Dido and Aeneas*) et Monique (dans *The Sofa* d'Elizabeth Maconchy).

Fermement ancré dans la tradition des sociétés chorales galloises, et puisant également dans les fortes cultures vocales de l'intérieur comme de l'extérieur du Pays de Galles, le **Chœur du Welsh National Opera** est un ensemble professionnel depuis 1968, travaillant avec le fameux Voluntary Chorus de la compagnie, constitué d'amateurs qui se réunissaient depuis 1943 pour former le noyau de ce qui allait devenir le Welsh National Opera, et qui se dispersa en 1973. Le succès du Chœur dans les premières productions de *Cavalleria rusticana*, *Pagliacci*, *Faust*, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, et tout spécialement *Nabucco*, plaça fermement l'ensemble dans le milieu de l'opéra. Au début, de nombreux rôles étaient attribués à des membres du Chœur, une tradition qui demeure vivante aujourd'hui. Les prestations du Chœur à l'opéra et au concert lui ont valu de nombreux éloges, non seulement dans le répertoire traditionnel, mais également dans des œuvres du vingtième siècle telles que *La Maison des morts* de Janáček et *A Midsummer Marriage* de Tippett. Le Chœur a

réalisé de nombreux enregistrements sous la direction de chefs tels que Sir Reginald Goodall, Sir Georg Solti, Richard Bonyng, Sir Charles Mackerras, Riccardo Chailly et Carlo Rizzi. En 1997, le Chœur du Welsh National Opera s'est produit au Théâtre des Champs-Élysées à Paris dans des exécutions de *Leonore* et *Fidelio* de Beethoven. La plupart des membres du Chœur mènent des carrières actives au concert, à l'opéra et comme solistes.

Fondé en 1970, l'**Orchestre du Welsh National Opera** a reçu de nombreuses louanges pour la qualité de ses prestations dans un très large répertoire allant de Monteverdi, Haendel, Mozart, Wagner, Janáček, jusqu'à Peter Maxwell Davies et James MacMillan, ainsi que pour ses concerts et ses nombreux enregistrements. Parmi ses anciens directeurs musicaux figurent Richard Armstrong (1973 – 1986), Sir Charles Mackerras (1987 – 1992, maintenant chef émérite), Carlo Rizzi (1992 – 2001 et 2004 – 2007) et Tugan Sokhiev (2002 – 2004), auxquels a succédé Lothar Koenigs à l'automne 2009. Depuis 2004, le Welsh National Opera est basé au Wales Millennium Centre situé près de la baie de Cardiff. Outre ses importantes tournées d'opéras en Grande-Bretagne et à l'étranger, l'Orchestre a acquis ces dernières années une très haute réputation sur les scènes de salles de concert. Il a ainsi donné de nombreux concerts symphoniques à Cardiff, plusieurs fois aux BBC Proms de Londres, et dans les salles et les festivals importants au Pays

de Galles et en Angleterre. L'Orchestre du Welsh National Opera participe avec distinction au biennal "BBC Cardiff Singer of the World" depuis la fondation de ce concours.

Anthony Negus a fait ses études au Royal College of Music de Londres, au Christ Church College d'Oxford et au London Opera Centre. Entre 1970 et 1974 il a été membre du personnel musical à Wuppertal et à Hambourg, et assistant musical à Bayreuth. Il est entré au Welsh National Opera en 1976. Wagnérien enthousiaste depuis sa jeunesse, il a été l'assistant de Sir Reginald Goodall pour les productions de *Die Walküre*, *Tristan und Isolde* et *Parsifal*, et a dirigé des représentations de *Fidelio*, *La Passion grecque* de Martinů, *Das Rheingold*, *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung* et *Parsifal*. Assistant de Sir Charles Mackerras depuis 1987, il a dirigé tous les opéras de Mozart allant d'*Idomeneo* à *La clemenza di Tito*. *Elektra*, *Ariadne auf Naxos* et *Die Frau ohne Schatten* figurent également à son

répertoire, ainsi que *Tristan und Isolde*. En 1992, il a été l'assistant de Pierre Boulez pour une production de *Pelléas et Mélisande*, et plus récemment a dirigé *Leonore*, *Kát'a Kabanová*, *La Khovantchina*, *Il trovatore*, *Wozzeck*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Le nozze di Figaro* et *Parsifal*. Au Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama il a entre autres dirigé *Albert Herring*, *Le nozze di Figaro* et *Suor Angelica*. Entre 2000 et 2004, il a dirigé le cycle abrégé du *Ring des Nibelungen* du City of Birmingham Touring Opera, avec Sir Donald McIntyre dans le rôle de Wotan, au Longborough Festival Opera et à l'Opera Theater de Pittsburgh, mis en scène par Jonathan Eaton. Il a ensuite lancé le projet d'un cycle de *Der Ring des Nibelungen* pour le Festival de Longborough avec *Das Rheingold* (2007 – 2008), mis en scène par Alan Privett. Récemment, Anthony Negus a dirigé des extraits de *Fidelio* en concert et l'Acte I de *Die Walküre* à Longborough, et assisté Vladimir Jurowski pour une production de *Tristan und Isolde* au Festival de Glyndebourne.



© Clive Barda / ArenaPal

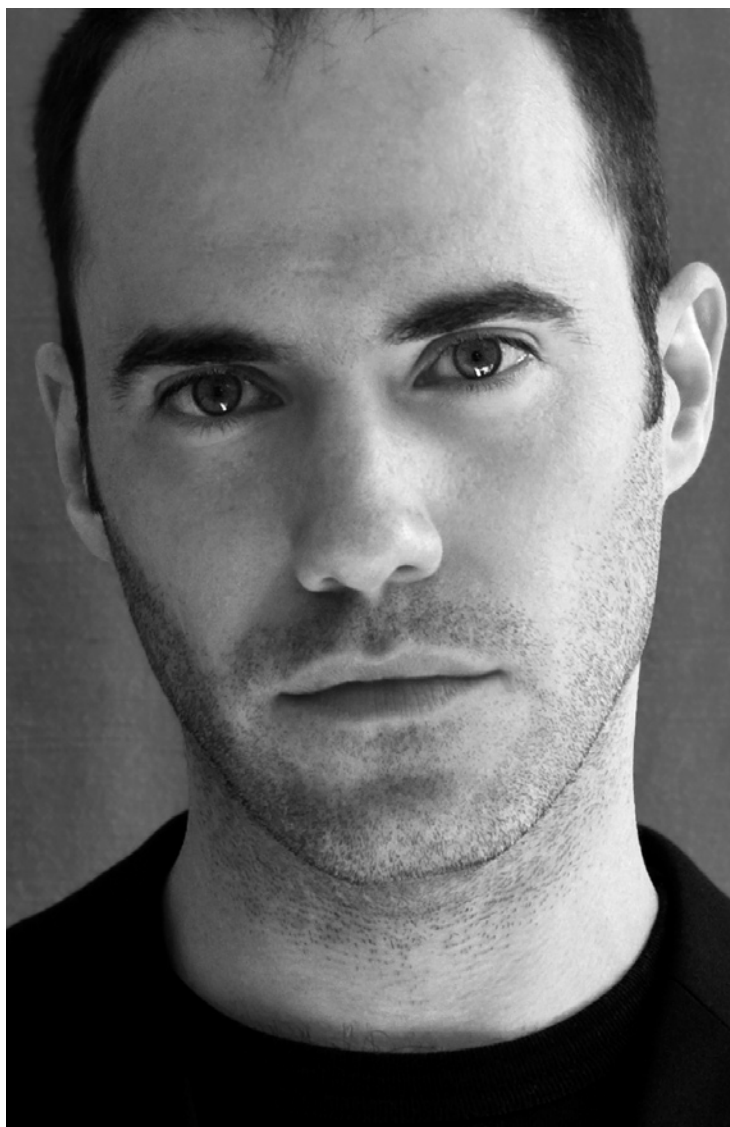
Christopher Purves



Lisa Milne



Peter Hoare



Leigh Melrose



Sarah Tynan



© Brian Tarr

Chorus of Welsh National Opera



Orchestra of Welsh National Opera



Sian over the body of the General, Act III, Scene 3



Sian holding Elis, Act III, Scene 3

Act I

1 Prelude

Scene 1

Wasteland / Derelict ballroom of hotel: The night before the wedding

(It is dark. We can just make out two figures – Sian, carrying a torch, is making her way towards Evan across the rubble. Evan is wearing military uniform.)

Sian

2 I should not be here. Not tonight.

Evan

My Sian, I know you don't mean that.

(He leans in, as if to kiss her. She backs off, then kisses him – a peck on the cheek – after which she turns away, as if to leave.)

Is this the way we say goodbye?

My Sian! Will you not meet my eyes?

Sian, look at me.

Sian

You said one kiss,
that's all.

Evan

Is that the sum of us?
A brush of lips in darkness? Here.
Come.

Sian

O love, you make this harder
than I feared.

Evan

No, let me show you.
Meet my eyes, the rest will follow.
(They kiss, this time fully and with passion. Then Sian pulls away and turns to leave.)
Sian!

Sian

Evan. Be strong. It's over.

Evan

Run with me across the border.

Sian

I will not run. This is my home.
Our love ends as I leave this room.

Evan

Don't do it! You'll destroy us both.

(She stops in her tracks.)

Sian

3 The guests are laying out their clothes,
tables are set, my dress is made,
and you say...

Evan

Tonight that bastard
will taste you in his mouth, smell you
on his fingertips. How can you?

Sian

Don't, don't.

Evan

He cuts our children's throats.
Our blood; our race, our nation's blood
is on his hands. His just reward
would be a bullet or a blade.
Instead he gets you in his bed.

Sian

I did not want this. I wanted...

Evan

What did you want? A wedding gift?
If you leave me, I've nothing left.
(She pauses. Then she slowly turns her back and leaves him.)
I'll be woven as a dark thread
in the silk sheets of your new bed.

4 Interlude

Scene 2

*Hotel room: Morning of wedding day
(The General is sitting on the bed as Megan flits excitedly between the bedroom and adjoining bathroom where Sian is getting into her dress.)*

General

- 5 How is the dress, Megan? How does your sister look, Megan? Like a princess?

Sian *(from off-stage)*

Queen, please! Princess days are over.

General

Yes! Not my princess any more.

Megan

Queen of the night sun,
Queen of the blossom,
Queen of the salt beach,
Queen of the blind fish.

Sian *(from off-stage)*

Megan!

(Megan goes through. The General hangs his head.)

General

Queen of the night sun,
Queen of the blossom,
Queen of the salt beach,
Queen of the blind fish.

Megan *(as she returns to the bedroom)*

Queen of the new snows,
Queen of the barn-owls.

General

Megan! What crazy song is that?

Megan

I've made a white song for the bride.
Do you like it?

General (*impatient, looking at the bathroom door*)

How is that dress?

(Sian with her three dressers steps out of the bathroom in her wedding dress. Her father breaks down as he sees her.)

O Sian, can you go through with this?

Megan (*overlapping the others*)

Queen of the night sun,
Queen of the blossom,
Queen of the salt beach,
Queen of the blind fish.

Sian

My course is set, my cloth is cut,
my heart is settled. Mal is not
a bad man.

General

That man does not deserve a wife
like you. I both rejoice and grieve.

Sian (*turning to go back into the bathroom*)

I'll take this off, or it will crease.

General

Wait! Sian, you know you have a choice.
I have longed for peace, but never
at the price of my own daughter.
My princess, you can still back down.

Sian

Not your princess anymore. I told you. Queen!
One day a child of Mal's and mine...

General

I pray you will be blessed with sons.

Sian

...will put an end to this blood feud
by mixing in his heart both bloods.

(A knock at the door. Megan opens it. Evan steps in, still – as ever – in uniform. He salutes the General, and then sees Sian. He tries to hide his feelings, but is stunned by the vision.)

Evan

6 Excuse me, Sir. The other side,
the bridegroom's party has arrived.

General

And the man himself?

Evan

He's here too.

General

Good news. Thanks for letting me know.

Megan (*overlapping the previous dialogue*)

Queen of the new snow,
Queen of the night sun,
Queen of the bright sand...

(Disturbed by the news Evan brings, Megan leaves the room.)

(Evan stares at Sian. The General takes a small camera from his pocket, and hands it to Evan.)

General

Take a picture of us, Evan,
take a long last look at your Sian.
I know how deep this cuts you both,
I know what you feel you have lost,
but if this wedding brings us peace,
if we make work for the midwives,
if we keep the undertakers
thin and poor, if we can wake up
to hope, then this great sacrifice
will win a prize beyond all price.

(Evan slowly, reluctantly, takes the camera, and the General poses with Sian. Evan takes a flash photograph, then puts the camera down and leaves the room.)

7 Interlude

Scene 3

*Hotel room: Afternoon of wedding day
(The room is empty. Megan enters. She is alone in the room, singing to herself rather anxiously, as if to comfort herself. She is arranging her and Sian's clothes for the wedding.)*

Megan

- 8** Queen of the blossom,
Queen of the barn-owls,
Queen of the cave-fish...
(There is a knock on the door. Megan stops singing, but doesn't answer. After a moment, the door opens, and Mal walks in.)
She's not here.

(She looks nervous, backing away from him.)

Please leave us alone.

Mal

Not much of a welcome, Megan.
I must see Sian, before it starts.

(Megan turns her back on him, and sings to comfort herself.)

Megan

Queen of the new snow...

Mal

I will wait.

Megan

Queen of the night sun...

Mal

Where is Sian?

Megan

Queen of the bright sand...

Mal

What's that song?

Megan

Queen of the blossom...

Mal

Just how long?

Megan

Queen of the barn-owls...

(Sian bursts out of the adjoining room, in her underwear, sees Mal and grabs a towel to cover herself up.)

Sian

Mal!

Mal

Sian, I'm sorry...

Sian

This is wrong.

Mal

So sorry to catch you...

Sian

Bad luck...

Mal

I had to catch you...

Sian

It's bad luck...

Mal

I had no choice.

Sian

What couldn't wait?

Mal

Sit down, please. Give me a minute.

(Sian sits down on the bed. Megan is still singing quietly, to one side. As soon as Sian sits down, Mal kneels in front of her.)

Will you consent to be my wife?

(No response. Sian is taken aback.)

I asked you, would you be my wife?

Sian *(amazed)*

What do you think we're doing here?

What do you think this dress is for?

(She takes the dress down from its hanger, and holds it in front of herself.)

Mal

You said 'yes' in a letter,
no doubt said 'yes' to your father,
you promised to do your duty,
but you never said 'yes' to me.

Sian

Mal, this is absurd!

Mal

You know me
as the man who made your daddy
walk with sticks, the same man whose name
forced boys onto the streets with guns,
who brought your city to its knees.
Believe me, Sian, all enemies
are born equal, your father casts
the same shadow across my heart.

(Megan's singing – which has been almost inaudible – gets louder, more intrusive, as if in a deliberate attempt to break the mood.)

Sian

Please, Mal, I need to get ready.

Mal *(exasperated)*

Can't you stop that cacophony?

(Sian gets up and puts an arm around Megan, quietening her down.)

Sian

Within an hour I'll wear your ring;
our two lives will be one, nothing
but death will break my marriage vows.
I hope the same is true of yours.

Megan

Sian, don't go with him! Don't do it!

Mal

Can't you get her to be quiet!

Megan

Don't go with him! He frightens me!

(Megan falls silent. There is a pause, as Sian collects herself. She takes Mal's hand, and looks him in the eyes.)

Sian

Yes, we will marry. Now leave me.

(Slowly, reluctantly, Mal leaves. Sian stays to put her dress on, with Megan's help.)

9 Interlude

Scene 4

Hotel ballroom: Wedding reception

(Wedding guests – Chorus – are dancing, drinking, talking; visible press and media presence; moves into music by three-girl band – 'The Birds')

Chorus

(The following lines can be sung interlaced, or in any order.)

- 10 God bless us all!
Rejoice in the peace of this place!
Shalom! / Salaam!
Hail, O Queen, O Highness!
Hail, O King, O Highness!
Sing to the heavens!
We'll raise the roof!

(The three-girl band – 'The Birds' – entertains the guests.)

The Birds *(with Chorus picking up and echoing phrases)*

- 11 The moon became a man today,
And hunts the streets alone,
He's longing for a wife, they say,
A bride of flesh and bone.

The sun will hide her face away,
For fear he'll take her hand,

And make her wear all night, all day,
His silver wedding band.

He'll hunt her in the morning light,
He'll hunt all afternoon,
He'll find her on the brink of night
And sun will marry moon.

(As the song ends, there's a bang on the table, calling the attention of the guests. The General, who is seated at a high table with Mal and Sian, stands up to make his speech.)

General *(with Chorus)*

- 12 As father I could burst with pride:
My daughter is a queen tonight.
(murmurs of agreement and approval from the guests, including shouts of 'Hail, O Queen, O Highness!')
As father-in-law, welcome son,
(gestures to Mal)
two great tribes woven into one.
(more murmurs, including shouts of 'Hail, O King, O Highness!')
As soldier, I have longed for peace:
Let their love be our armistice!
(applause and cheers from the floor, including shouts of 'Shalom!'/'Salaam!')
I am a wounded war-horse, yes,
(waving a stick)
but bear no bruise of bitterness.
(applause, plus shouts of 'Sing to the heavens!' and 'God bless us all!')

So raise your glasses now, to seal
the union of Sian and Mal!

All

To Sian and Mal!

(Everyone drinks a toast. Mal stands up next, looking slightly the worse for drink.)

Mal *(with Chorus)*

- 13 I toast my wife. My wife! Ye gods!
I never thought I'd say those words!
(laughter, plus reflection/echo of 'Hail, O Queen, O Highness!')
Now widows, mothers, dry your tears.
This is our day, but also yours!
(cries of 'This is the day!')
Did any of you dream of this?
The war is over, now rejoice!
(cries of 'Love will save us. Can love save us?')
Our weapons have been beaten flat,
and from cold steel gold rings were cut!
(He holds up her hand in his, to cheers and shouts of 'Hi!'/'Shalom!'/'Salaam!')
So here's to you, my bride, my Sian,
the future is in your sweet hands!

All

To Sian!

(echoes of 'Hail, O Queen, O Highness!')
(They drink, and repeat the toast. As the toast is raised, Evan rushes up to the high table, pulls a knife, and lunges at Mal. He wounds Mal, slicing his arm.)

Sian (*rushes over to try to help Mal*)
Mal! Mal! My husband! Does he bleed?

(But the bride and groom's tribes close around Mal and Sian, pulling them apart, dividing the Chorus / Guests into two along sectarian lines, in a tense stand-off.)

Mal
14 Get him!

(Some of Mal's men seize Evan, pinning him down with knives.)

Chorus (Mal's Men)
Cut for cut! Blade for blade!

Sian
What good will come of lynching him?

Chorus (Mal's Men)
Cut for cut! Blade for blade!

Chorus (Sian's Side)
No good can come of lynching him.

Chorus (Mal's Men)
Cut for cut! Blade for blade!

General
Stop! Silence! He is one of mine,
it falls to me to deal with him.

(Slowly, Mal's men relinquish Evan to the General's men. As they do so, Evan delivers a chilling threat, a warning.)

Evan
15 Why bring a knife to a wedding?
To cut the grapes, to slice the meat,
To crack the nuts, to peel the fruit,
To skin the fowl, to gut the fish,
To scrape the plate, to strip the flesh,
To heal the wound, to draw the sting.
Ravens, patience, you'll get your kill.
Jackals, bide your time, blood will spill.

(As Evan is led away, the Chorus picks up on his ominous last couplet, echoing the words, until 'The Birds' strike up with their song again. However, the party and the peace are shattered, and the guests gradually leave, until only 'The Birds' remain.)

The Birds
The moon became a man today,
And hunts the streets alone,
He's longing for a wife, they say,
A bride of flesh and bone.

The sun will hide her face away,
For fear he'll take her hand,
And make her wear, all night, all day,
His silver wedding band.

He'll hunt her in the morning light,
He'll hunt all afternoon,
He'll find her on the brink of night
And sun will marry moon.

COMPACT DISC TWO

Act II
Scene 1

Seven years later. The same hotel ballroom, the evening before Gwyn's investiture
(Sian is at the harp, with Megan standing next to her as Sian teaches her a song to sing at the party. Sian's two sons are around the harp too, looking increasingly bored.)

Sian

1 Again, Megan.

Megan

All the way through?

Sian

All the way through.
(The boys moan loudly.)
Off now, boys, go.

(The boys run out of the room.)

Megan

His face and hands were lily-white,
His lips had never tasted night...

Sian

Not to me, pretend Gwyn's still here,
sing for the boy, not his mother...

Megan

His face and hands were lily-white,
His lips had never tasted night,

His voice was yet to break with fear,
His eyes were salt and diamond clear,
Yet when the gold crown kissed his head,
A man was born, a child was dead...

(Mal bursts into the room.)

Mal

2 A question for you – whose is this?
(He holds up a khaki trench-coat – Evan's.)
Found in the lobby, left by a guest.
One of my men? No way. It smacks
too much of battledress. It takes
a lack of taste to wear fatigues
to celebrate an armistice.
What tactless bastard would wear this?

(During Mal's speech, the boys – Gwyn and Elis – come back into the room in costumes, aping regal rituals, like coronation and knighting.)

Sian

Calm down, Mal, watch your language, please!

(She gestures to the boys. Mal throws the coat down on the floor, and tears off his shirt to reveal his wounded arm, scarred and numb, a useless limb.)

Mal

A clue. The psychopath who gave
me this, who should be in his grave,
is here tonight in this hotel.

Sian

That man – Evan – has been to jail,
he's served his punishment...

*(The boys start to play with the discarded coat.
Gwyn tries it on, as a kingly robe. Megan cowers in
the corner of the room.)*

Mal

Whose side
are you on, Sian? That bastard's blade
was meant to cut my throat, and yet
he's underneath this roof tonight!

Sian

My father is a generous man.
If he has forgiven Evan,
so should we...

Mal

Why should I forgive?
You have a duty as my wife,
a duty to demand justice,
my enemies are also yours.

Sian

Justice has already been done.
Tomorrow both tribes crown our son.

*(Mal explodes with anger, tearing Evan's coat off
Gwyn's back.)*

Mal

So you let him mock his father,
play games with his investiture,

wearing that psychopath's old coat.
A king? Your blood makes him unfit.

*(Sian gathers up the boys and Megan and gently
ushers them out of the room.)*

Sian

You must let it go, for Gwyn's sake.
For seven years this bitterness
has burnt your tongue. A warrior
needs to know when war is over.

Mal

Don't go lecture me on bitterness,
this arm gives me no choice but peace,
your father's right-hand-man made sure
of that...

Sian

My father was as shocked
as you were when Evan, Evan...

Mal

Evan, Evan. That name trips so
sweetly off your tongue, I know you
spend your nights with me rehearsing
his name, not mine, remembering
his touch under my hands, his breath,
his voice coming out of my mouth.
Here.

(He throws the coat at her.)

I smell his sweat.

(She ignores the coat, which falls to the floor.)

Take his coat.

(She doesn't.)

Pick up the coat and smell his sweat.
(*She doesn't.*)
Sian, tell me the rumours are lies.
(*Sian remains silent. Mal goes to her, and touches her face, gently but desperately.*)
For God's sake! Are you mine? Or his?
(*Mal cracks, and hits her hard across the face. Sian falls to the ground, and grabs Evan's coat for comfort. Mal is immediately full of remorse, but it's too late.*)
Oh forgive me! Sian, forgive me!
Oh Sian, don't tell the children, please.

(*He helps her up, but Sian will not look at him. Sian shrugs him off, and leaves the room without a backward glance. Mal is alone for a moment, then Gwyn comes back in alone, approaches his father and lays his head against him.*)

Mal (*embracing his son*)
You've no need to be sorry, boy.
Sleep now. Tomorrow is your day.

(*They leave together.*)

3 Interlude

Scene 2

Sian and Mal's hotel room: Night before investiture (Sian is alone in her hotel room, lying on her bed in semi-darkness, using Evan's coat as a blanket. There's a knock, but no reply. The door opens, and the light is switched on. Evan is standing in the doorway.)

Evan

4 So he's found the coat...

Sian (*shocked, sitting up*)

He'll kill you
if he finds you here, he'll kill you!

Evan (*shuts the door behind him*)
O Sian, what has he done to you?

Sian

He's not a bad man. Evan, go.
He could walk in any minute.

Evan (*taking a soft pack from his pocket*)
He has hit you, I can see it.
(*She doesn't deny it. He takes two cigarettes out of the packet, lights them, and hands her one.*)
My car is outside the hotel.

Sian

You know it is impossible.

Evan (*sits on the bed, next to her*)
This life, this sacrifice you make,
you chose it, and it's yours to break.
(*He reaches across and touches her cheek, where Mal hit her.*)

Skin is border country. Ever
kept in exile from each other,
this is where we meet, the edgelands,
the dusklands, this our common ground.
Your heart is my homeland. Rivers,

mountains, stars and canyons, deserts.
My soul is aching to return,
my Xanadu, my Samarkand.

Sian

Skin is border country. Ever
kept in exile from each other,
this is where we meet, the edgelands,
the dusklands, this our common ground.
Your heart is my homeland. Rivers,
mountains, stars and canyons, deserts.
My soul is aching to return,
my Xanadu, my Samarkand.

*(He takes both their cigarettes and puts them in a
bedside ashtray. They fall into each other's arms,
until Sian pushes him away.)*

Sian

I hear him coming! You must go.

Evan

I hear nothing. Does he scare you?

*(She gets off the bed. She hands him his coat and
opens the door.)*

Sian

Please, Evan, you should not have come.
Mal is my husband, Gwyn our son.

Evan

You think that we can conjure peace
by breeding with our enemies?

*(She holds the door, and he reluctantly leaves. She
shuts it behind him.)*

5 Interlude

Scene 3

Hotel ballroom: Investiture

*(A big ceremony in full media glare. Scene opens
with a dramatic ritual in which Gwyn walks through
an arch of guns raised by men in paramilitary
uniforms – Mal's tribe on one side, the General's on
the other. Evan is visible in the General's row. The
people of each tribe stand behind their side of the
arch – in civilian clothes – and throw flowers over
and into the path of Gwyn.)*

Guests

6 Hail the king, long live the boy king!

*(As Gwyn reaches the end of the arch his parents –
Mal from his side, Sian from hers – embrace him.
Mal – also in military regalia – takes his jacket off
and puts it on the boy.)
God save us all!*

*(It's too big for him, and the sleeves hang down. As
the jacket goes on, the guns are fired, and cheering
starts. The two tribes break into one, and a party
starts, with music again by 'The Birds'. They sing the
song Megan was rehearsing in Act II, Scene 1.)*

The Birds

His face and hands were lily-white,
His lips had never tasted night,
His voice was yet to break with fear,

His eyes were salt and diamond clear,
Yet when the gold crown kissed his head,
A man was born, a child was dead...

(The Guests' talk is not random ad-libbing, but a patchwork of the following phrases.)

Guests

Scrub the blood off our streets, our walls.
No more black armbands, no more veils.
Build a new home from broken stones.
Guns lock with rust, knives blunt as bones.
Let fires of war devour themselves.
Let birdsong drown the cries of wolves.

(Megan climbs up on stage with 'The Birds', and takes the microphone to sing the song from Act II, Scene 1. The crowd stops talking to listen to her. When she's sung her chorus she steps down, to applause. Mal steps up to the microphone.)

Megan

His face and hands were lily-white,
His lips had never tasted night,
His voice was yet to break with fear,
His eyes were salt and diamond clear,
Yet when the gold crown kissed his head,
A man was born, a child was dead...

Mal

- 7 Thank you, Megan, a fitting gift
for a nephew, my son, our chief!
(cheers from audience – 'Hail the king, long live the boy king!')

Step up, Gwyn, and let your people
take a look at you – a simple
child yesterday, a mighty
king today! Come here, stand with me!
(Gwyn shyly gets up to stand next to his father. The crowd cheers and applauds – 'No more black armbands! No more veils!')
Seven years ago, to the night,
this boy, this man, my son, broke out
into a world of blood and fear.
I was the proudest of fathers.
That night I showed him the night sky.
The garden was gasping, sultry.
Under my feet, I could feel cracks
in the baked earth. In my arm's crook
lay my new boy, his amber eyes
the brightest in the universe.
To set his course I showed him first
the Pole Star, Pisces the twin fish,
Taurus, Leo, and Orion –
his ancestor, his destiny –
a warrior to end all wars.
As we looked up, heavenly waters
broke, and rain fell on our parched land.
At once the baby in my arms
began to unfurl like a bloom,
as if the world had made him welcome.
Then rain unlocked the scent of grass,
and fireflies mapped the trees with stars.
This boy born as a fist, clenched hard,
became an open palm, a hand
of welcome, trust, a hand of peace.
In him, our hope, our future lies.

(By the end of his speech, Mal is close to tears, and the crowd is moved too, warmly applauding. The atmosphere is intense and emotional.)

In him, our hope, our future lies.

What can I do? How can I prove
that through my son forgiveness, love
and justice will prevail? As Gwyn's
father, I'll lead the way for him.

Come!

(He opens his arms.)

8 Come, the man who wounded me!
My friend! I have no enemy!

*(A grand gesture. Mal waits – with arms
outstretched – to embrace Evan, and the crowd, by
a combination of will and subtle force, urges Evan
to the front to embrace Mal. As they urge him, they
repeat Mal's words as a rallying cry.)*

Guests

Come, the man! Come, the man!
Come, friend! Come, friend!

*(Evan reaches the front, where Mal is waiting.
With great reluctance, urged on by the crowd, he
embraces Mal, but almost immediately recoils –
disgusted and disturbed. He staggers back away
from the embrace, and draws a gun. He points it at
Mal, who slowly raises his hands. The guests are
stunned. After several agonising seconds, Evan
sings.)*

Evan

Ravens, patience, you'll get your kill.
Jackals, bide your time, blood will spill.

Mal *(forcefully, as if willing Evan to make it true)*
I have no enemy!

Guests *(low chanting, as if in prayer)*

Scrub the blood off our streets, our walls.
No more black armbands, no more veils.

Evan

In him your hope, your future lies.
(He swings the gun off Mal to point at Gwyn.)
So be it. Here, that future dies.

*(He pulls the trigger. Gwyn falls dead.)
(Sian and Mal, desperate with panic and grief, crowd
around the body of their son, crying 'Gwyn! Gwyn!
My son! My son!')*
*(Evan is seized by guests and dragged away.)
(The room is cleared, and the General is left alone.)*

General

Our boy! My boy! My God!
What blaze, what force, what freeze,
what sacrifice can bring this to an end,
can mend, salt, salve,
can cauterise this wound?

Act III

Scene 1

Hotel ballroom. Gwyn's wake, three days after

Gwyn's murder

(All are dressed in black, preparing for another big public occasion – the funeral of Gwyn. The Chorus is singing words from the requiem mass, as the undertakers prepare to close the lid of the coffin, concluding the lying in state, ready to carry it out of the hotel to church.)

Chorus

- 9 Give this our son your peace eternal, O Lord,
and let your light, your love, your glory shine on
him.

(Mal and the General are present but in separate parts of the room. Sian, Megan and Elis are absent. Mal moves towards the open coffin of his son, and the undertakers hang back to let him pay his last respects. As he looks into the coffin, Mal breaks down. The General reaches across to comfort Mal, putting a hand on his shoulder, but Mal shrugs it off.)

General

I beg you, Mal...

Mal

Leave me alone.

General

I'm grieving too, Mal – my grandson...

Mal

Get out of my sight!

General

Hear me, Mal!

Do not let one madman's betrayal
tear up this flag of peace we've sewn.

(He picks up the flag draped over Gwyn's body, which is made up of the patterns of both sides' tribal flags, in evidence earlier at the wedding, etc.)

Not a conquest, but a fusion
of your cross and ours, our colours
mixed inseparably with yours.

(Mal snatches the flag from the General, takes out a lighter and sets light to the flag, dropping it on the floor between them. Mal's men come out of the Chorus, singing, and stand behind Mal. Old battle lines are being reinforced.)

Mal's Men

Paint their blood on our streets, our walls.
Give them black armbands, give them veils.
Unlock the guns, whet knives with stones.
Build new homes from their shattered bones.
Let fires of war devour their souls.
Let wolfsongs drown the cries of fools.

(Suddenly, in a big entrance reminiscent of the earlier wedding dress scene, Sian comes into the ballroom in full black dress, flanked by Megan on one side, and young Elis on the other. Irrevocably split from his wife and her family, Mal gestures to the undertakers to finish their work, whilst he and

his entourage turn away from Sian and leave the ballroom. The undertakers close the coffin and carry Gwyn out as Sian watches, numb with grief. As the coffin leaves, the General moves over to Sian, embracing her, but she doesn't respond. She allows herself to be embraced, as if in a trance, but seems oblivious.)

Sian

- 10 I thought my hands were heaven-blessed,
I thought my touch could tame the beast.
Now Gwyn is dead, and hope is lost,
our towns are silent, lands laid waste,
for Gwyn is dead, and death is first
and last, and now our blood is cursed.
My Gwyn is dead. My son. My best.
My life is gone. My love now lost.

General

Forgive me, Sian, forgive me, for...
(She turns her back on him and walks away.)
Forgive me please, my daughter...

(Sian does not turn back or hesitate, but leaves the room. Elis runs after her. Megan is left to comfort her father.)

11 Interlude

Scene 2

Hotel room: Night after funeral
(The General is alone, sitting on the bed. The door opens and Megan comes in, carrying Evan's clothes, including the coat we saw earlier. She hands the

clothes to the General, who begins to change into them.)

General

- 12 Thanks, Megan, you make a good thief.

Megan *(innocently)*

What are you doing, Dad?

General *(resigned)*

Believe
me, I have no choice but this one.

Megan

But these clothes, what are you doing?

General *(as if telling her a childhood story)*

You know the story of a king,
a wounded god, whose suffering
blighted his people and his land.
If only he could heal his wound
then king and land would live again.
But that king did not seek healing,
he spent his days reading the skies
for signs of hope and victory.
He called down thunder on a man,
the warlord who had wounded him,
his mirror image, shadow self,
his partner in this dance of death.
Rich pastures became cemeteries.
One king's triumphs were massacres
for the other. One king's curses
were the other king's liturgies.
And then one day the wounded king...

(He tails off, unwilling to tell her the end of the story.)

Megan

What did he do?

General

...the wounded king...

Megan

What did the king do?

General

...the wounded king
became the wound, and its healing.

Megan

What happened? I don't understand!

General

It's a long story. Never mind.

(He has finished dressing, and as he puts on the coat, we see that he looks like Evan.)

Megan

I don't like it. Put your old clothes
on, take those off. I don't like those.

(He holds and kisses Megan, trying to calm her down.)

General

Queen of the night sun,
Queen of the blossom,

Queen of the salt beach,
Queen of the blind fish.

(The General leaves the room, as Megan nervously tidies his old discarded clothes, then once alone she picks up the song.)

Megan

Queen of the barn-owls,
Queen of the new snow,
Queen of the night sun,
Queen of the blind fish.

13 Interlude

Scene 3

Wasteland / Derelict part of hotel. The night after funeral

(Mal steps nervously into the derelict space. He peers into the darkness. Increasingly nervous, Mal pulls a gun.)

General

14 Mal! Mal! Mal!

Mal

I got your message. Who is it?

Show yourself! Come into the light.

(Silence. Nothing moves in the shadows.)

Why have you called me here? Are you
playing games? Enough. I must go.

(Mal turns to leave, but as he does so, the General steps out of the shadows into the light, wearing Evan's clothes, looking just like Evan.)

How dare you stand in front of me?
How dare you stand? No enemy
of mine has mocked me like you have.
No man can kill my son, and live.
*(Mal raises his gun and points it at the General, who
does not flinch or attempt to defend himself.)*
What? No apology? No shame?

General

I'm sorry...

Mal

Too late. Out of time. Die!

*(Mal pulls the trigger, and the General falls dead to
the floor. The shot alerts Sian, who rushes in, and
sees the body.)*

Sian

What have you done?

Mal

He's paid the price.

(Sian goes over to the body, and turns it over.)

Sian

This isn't who you think it is.

Mal

He didn't dare meet my eye.

Sian

It isn't who you think it is.

Mal

It's justice. I've settled the score.

Sian

No, Mal, you have killed my father.

*(Mal rushes over to look at the body. When he sees
who it is, he falls to his knees.)*

Mal

15 I cannot say I haven't dreamt
a thousand times of killing him,
but not now.

*(Sian gets up, and strokes Mal's hair like a mother
comforting a child. Chorus members – hotel / funeral
guests – begin to come into the room, softly singing /
chanting...)*

Guests

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
grant him eternal rest.

Sian

Evan must see this.

*(The crowd shifts, and some of Mal's paramilitaries
drag Evan into the room, throwing him in front of
Sian and the General's body. Evan has clearly been
brutally beaten, and as he sees the General, he
becomes distraught. Mal turns his back on Evan.)*
Look. All of you, look. Feast your eyes.
For generations yet to come,
this man, these clothes, this broken room
will be a sacred history.

Children will learn by rote this day,
this date. The world will know the hour.
At this moment every year
all work will stop. The streets
will fill with dancers. Doors and gates
will welcome strangers on that day,
no house will need a lock or key.
Doctors will treat old age again,
acts of God. Our bullets and guns
will grow dull on museum trays.
This future must begin today.
A great king has laid down his life
between our battle-lines. Enough.
It's in our hands to break the feud.
Enough sacrifice. Enough blood.

*(As Sian is singing, more and more Chorus members
come in, and begin to walk up to the General's
body, leaving tokens, coats, scarves, jewellery on*

*and by the body. The Chorus picks up on Sian's last
words, repeating 'Enough sacrifice. Enough blood'
as a prayer, a resolution, a commitment. At the very
end of the scene, Megan comes in, leading Elis by
the hand, singing a haunting, slow reprise of her
song to Gwyn, this time for Elis. The crowd parts,
aware that now Gwyn is dead Elis is the boy who
will lead them into the future. Elis walks slowly to
his grandfather's body, and puts his own coat on it,
then his mother – Sian – picks him up and comforts
him. She sits him on her knee.)*

Megan

His face and hands were lily-white,
His lips had never tasted night,
His voice was yet to break with fear,
His eyes were salt and diamond clear,
Yet when the gold crown kissed his head,
A man was born, a child was dead...

Michael Symmons Roberts (b. 1963)

© 2006 Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd

Reproduced by permission

2007 Welsh National Opera production

Director Katie Mitchell

Set designer Vicki Mortimer

Costume designer Miriam Buether

Lighting designer Paule Constable

Movement director Struan Leslie

Staff directors Robin Tebbutt and Benjamin Davis

Production partner Liverpool Culture Company

Supported by the WNO *Partnership* and the Friends of WNO

Commissioned by Welsh National Opera with funding provided by the Peter Moores Foundation, The Performing Rights Society Foundation, The Britten-Pears Foundation, Arts Council England, the late Mr Bryan Davies, and by a generous gift from Peter and Veronica Lofthouse

Production also supported by the Leche Trust

Released by arrangement with BBC Music



Recording producer Rebecca Warner

Sound engineer Mike Frost

Assistant engineer Simon Smith

Editor Mike Frost

Mastering Jonathan Cooper

A & R administrator Mary McCarthy

Recording venue Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff; 6 October 2007 (live)

Front cover 'Bullet hole through a window', photograph © Mark Owen/Arcangel Images

Back cover Photograph of Anthony Negus © Brian Tarr

Design and typesetting Cassidy Rayne Creative (www.cassidyrayne.co.uk)

Booklet editor Finn S. Gundersen

Copyright Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd

© 2010 BBC

© 2010 Chandos Records Ltd

Chandos Records Ltd, Colchester, Essex CO2 8HX, England

Printed in the EU • Country of origin UK

The BBC wordmark and the BBC logo are trade marks of the British Broadcasting Corporation and are used under licence from BBC Worldwide.

BBC logo © BBC 1996



Michael Symmons Roberts

You can now purchase Chandos CDs or download MP3s online at our website: www.chandos.net

For requests to license tracks from this CD or any other Chandos discs please find application forms on the Chandos website or contact the Finance Director, Chandos Records Ltd, direct at the address below or via e-mail at srevill@chandos.net.

Chandos Records Ltd, Chandos House, 1 Commerce Park, Commerce Way, Colchester, Essex CO2 8HX, UK.
E-mail: enquiries@chandos.net Telephone: + 44 (0)1206 225 200 Fax: + 44 (0)1206 225 201

A black and white photograph of a man with short, light-colored hair and a beard, wearing a dark overcoat and a patterned scarf. He is leaning on a white metal railing with his right hand. The background consists of bare trees and a fence, suggesting a park or outdoor setting. The lighting is soft, and the overall mood is contemplative.

James MacMillan