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*Le sacre du printemps* (review)

Sabra Statham

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There are various ways to interpret this production. Each act begins with archive film footage from World Wars I and II and Vietnam with focus placed on orphaned or abandoned children. This suggests a socio-critical reading, wherein "the realism in the first act, where child labour is another ingredient, is striking and stands in sharp relief from the following scenes, which should be seen more as the children's dream visions" (Göran Forsling, review of *Hänsel und Gretel* [DVD]. MusicWeb International, [http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2009/Feb09/Humperdinck\\_Hansel\\_101321.htm](http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2009/Feb09/Humperdinck_Hansel_101321.htm) [accessed 18 November 2009]). It is a dream, however, from which, the children never awaken. This suggests a darker reading of Felsenstein's production, one in which Hansel and Gretel die at the end of the second act, and the angels they sing of actually arrive to take them to heaven. They are next revealed in a child's paradise (i.e., Christmas) with kind and loving parents, games and dolls

and gingerbread; they never return to the home they were so desperate to get away from.

Admirers of the Fassbaender/Gruberova movie or the Schäfer/Coote Met production may be disappointed. Cornelia Marschall shines as Gretel, with light and flexible tone, but Sabine Noack (Hansel) and Alexandra Petersamer (Mother) sound at times labored and shrill. Ludmil Kuntschew (Father/Witch) has the weakest voice but makes up for it in energy and expression. The production quality is excellent, capturing the rich, warm sound of the Anhaltische Philharmonie Dessau. Sets and staging are both haunting and vibrant; relationships between the characters are natural and believable. The production is self-contained and coherent; easily enjoyable and relevant for children and adults.

HEATHER STROHSCHNEIN  
Bowling Green State University

**Igor Stravinsky.** *Le sacre du printemps*. DVD. Henrik Schaefer / Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and Leipziger Ballet. Choreographed by Uwe Scholtz. Stuttgart: Medici Arts, 2008, 2003. 2055728. \$28.98.

When Uwe Scholtz died in 2004 at the age of forty-six, he left behind over 100 choreographies. Labeled a *Wunderkind* by German critics, Scholtz assumed the role of artistic director and chief choreographer of the Zurich ballet at the age of twenty-six and, four years later, went to Leipzig where he quickly earned international fame reinterpreting classics like *Coppélia* and choreographing such musical masterpieces as Mozart's "Great Mass," Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, and Bruckner's Symphony No. 8. Among his greatest accomplishments is his choreography of Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*, one of many of his ballets now available on DVD.

*Le sacre du printemps* is a triple feature DVD. It includes two versions of the ballet and a documentary. The first version for piano four-hands, composed by Stravinsky himself, and danced by solo male Giovanni Di Palma, is, at the least, riveting. Scholtz was responsible for the lighting, costuming, stage and set design as well as the choreography. The backdrop of the stage is used for projecting film. A few shots of a young

boy practicing his steps and a few from *Swan Lake* make it clear that this interpretation of *Le sacre* is Scholtz's autobiography. The film shots "interact" with the dancer on the stage in scenes that move from contemplative to disturbing. The viewer may or may not like the imagery some of which is graphic, but it is guaranteed to compel the mind and impress the senses. For me, the best part of this performance was not the dancing but the music. I had the intimate sense that I was hearing it the same way Stravinsky himself, who composed at the piano, might have heard his own music.

The second ballet on the DVD is the orchestral version of *Le sacre*. This performance is more traditional but no less impressive. Scholtz's habit of setting each musical gesture to a sympathetic movement in his dancers turns out to be surprisingly neoclassic, reminiscent of Nijinsky's use of eurythmics in the 1913 premiere by the Ballets russes. Scholtz employs a large number of dancers. The body movements and orientation of the dancers mirror the polyphonic lines and inner voices in the orches-

tration. The choreography reveals a uniquely intimate understanding of the music.

The last feature on this DVD is the documentary "Soulscapes." This short film provides insight into the life and career of the choreographer and features interviews, studio scenes, and production highlights in-

cluding Bruckner's Symphony No. 8 and Haydn's *Creation*.

This is an excellent DVD. The artistic content is superior and the camera and sound work is good.

SABRA STATHAM

*Virginia Foundation for the Humanities*

**Harrison Birtwistle.** *The Minotaur*. DVD. Antonio Pappano / The Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, The Royal Opera Chorus. Recorded live at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden 25 and 30 April and 3 May 2008. With John Tomlinson, Johan Reuter, Christine Rice, Andrew Watts, Philip Langridge. [England]: Opus Arte, 2008. OA 1000 D. \$45.98.

A bull's head. A long horizontal strip of sand. Waves undulating on a full stage-size screen. Ariadne sifting sand. A blue line signifies the horizon. A black-sailed ship. Theseus arrives with the Innocents. Below: a labyrinth, a bullring with jeering crowd and Innocents, the Minotaur, the Keres. These are the images of this production. The opera begins with the orchestra playing dark, deep, dissonant sustained sounds with occasional interjections from a single instrument or from the percussion section while images of Ariadne or Theseus or the Minotaur fade in and out of the projected ocean waves.

The main characters are Ariadne, the Minotaur, and Theseus. An alto saxophone accompanies Ariadne's vocal lines by quietly continuing them, interspersing its own line between her phrases. Even when she is not on stage Ariadne is vocally present in all but the last scene. Her opening line, "The moon's an eye that cannot blink," reveals a young woman who accepts her role as keeper of her half-brother, the Minotaur, but who also wants to leave this island and her fate there. At times she appears fearful, other times devious in order to achieve her desired departure. Her vocal lines are often high repeated notes which end with a huge descending leap symbolizing despair.

The Minotaur is half-man, half-beast who is imprisoned in the labyrinth; who slaughters the Innocents sent over from Athens every seven years to fulfill the curse's bargain, and who dreams while transformed as a human with questions and desires,

singing with words—no longer inarticulate grunts. In his dreams the Minotaur sees images of Ariadne and someone he does not recognize: Theseus who will later slay him. He also sees his reflection: a speaking Minotaur 2 who forecasts the future. To represent the half bull visually, a wire bull's head with horns, eyes on the side and large nose reveal the man inside. When the Minotaur is confronted with Theseus, he exclaims "It . . . was . . . you" (in my dreams). "Now I can speak . . . now I am almost human; now is the right time to die."

Theseus is upright, resolute: "I choose myself." He arrives with the Innocents to kill the Minotaur. Ariadne, seeing a way off the island with Theseus, first stalls him with a game of chance; later she consults the Oracle to help Theseus find his way back from the labyrinth after killing the Minotaur. He rejects Ariadne until she promises to find a way for him to return from the labyrinth. Theseus' vocal lines are often doubled by horn, English horn, or clarinet; the changing color implies inconstancy.

The opera is in two parts: part one ends with the death of the Innocents in the labyrinth; part two ends with the death of the Minotaur (named Asterios). Other characters appear in part two when Ariadne consults the Oracle, sacrifices a dove, waits for Hierus to interpret the utterances of the Snake Priestess, a countertenor raised high above the stage wearing a long flowing skirt, an outlandish corset, and inflatable breasts. Hierus is clothed in a more conventional skullcap and robe. Theseus' descent into the