

Reviews for Ligeti's *Mysteries of the Macabre* / *Le Grand Macabre*

"Virtuosity, tempered with zaniness, drives "Mysteries of the Macabre," Elgar Howarth's arrangement of Gepopo's arias from "Le Grande Macabre." Ms. Hannigan, Mr. Rattle and the players had fun with it: in one section Ms. Hannigan pushed Mr. Rattle away and conducted the orchestra; he stood aside for a minute then kicked her (literally) out of his space.

Elsewhere in the work, the orchestra is asked to vocalize — a modest demand, compared with sections of the Violin Concerto, where some of the players had to stand up and perform on ocarinas and what looked like pennywhistles. Amid all this Ms. Hannigan's pinpoint vocalizations and fluid acting conveyed Ligeti's parody of a secret-police chief with scalpel-edge sharpness."

New York Times Dec 20, 2010

"Sir Simon Rattle was literally kicked off the stage last night. The deviant kicker was a drunken crack-addled woman with a fright wig and absurdly high-heels. She booted Sir Simon in the derrière, and insanely kidnapped the whole ACJW Ensemble, simultaneously screaming nonsense at her players and trying to conduct herself.

Then again, maybe Sir Simon deserved such treatment. After all, in the preceding piece he had been serenaded by no less than four ocarinas!! What serious conductor would permit such noises?

I don't know the answer. But I know composer György Ligeti, would have loved it.

And when Barbara Hannigan is the soprano, and the screams erupt from the above-high-C non-stop cadenzas of *Le Grand Macabre*, and the whole thing is the farce of geniuses...that is good enough for an extraordinary Sunday evening.

...Back to Barbara Hannigan. The fright-wig, the heels, the drunken, doddering, the undressing were nothing compared to her machine-gun delivery, her mad, astounding, adventures in a spectrum which only a dog could hear! This was—without any critical comment—one of the great experiences of music."

ConcertoNet.com December 20, 2010

"But even more riotous behavior was in store, in a memorable *Mysteries of the Macabre* with soprano Barbara Hannigan. This short suite, arranged by Elgar Howarth from Ligeti's opera, *Le Grand Macabre*, recaps the three dazzling arias for Gepopo, the Chief of the Secret Police. Hannigan was one of the stars of last spring's monumental success, a concert version of the opera also with Gilbert and the Philharmonic, but terrific as it was, it seemed tame compared to the *melée* we witnessed here.

Entering while slinking along a side wall in a floor-length black leather trench coat and a black Louise Brooks-style wig, Hannigan eventually flung the coat to the floor to reveal a lace-up patent leather dress, capped with enormous matching knee-high boots. At one point, she kicked Rattle in the derriere, knocking him off the podium, and began conducting the ensemble herself, before the conductor, mock-disgusted, booted her off to regain the helm. Other memorable antics included Rattle stopping in midstream, faking exasperation and storming into the midst of the players, and a percussionist rhythmically tearing up a poster of pop heartthrob Justin Bieber. The audience roared at the conclusion, as Hannigan lowered her legs in a pretzel-shaped bow, and Rattle casually retrieved her leather coat from the floor."

MusicWeb International, Jan 7, 2010

"Barbara Hannigan was extraordinary in the stratospheric, rapid-fire vocalism of Gepopo."

Wall Street Journal May 29, 2010

"The soprano Barbara Hannigan deftly dispatched the coloratura leaps and runs of the punishing part of Gepopo, the chief of the secret police, while bringing demonic zaniness to her portrayal."

New York Times May 29, 2010

„Kukuridu! Kikeriki!“ So gurgelte die als Ledervamp garnierte Barbara Hannigan in drei Arien aus Ligetis Oper „Le grand Macabre“. Sie flötete, prustete, schoss Koloraturen in spitzeste Höhen, eine hochvirtuose überdrehte Partie, einmalig komisch."

with the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Sir Simon Rattle

Kölnische Rundschau 31 March 2010

"Eigentlich ist sie eine Blondine, die kanadische Koloratursopranistin Barbara Hannigan, aber diesmal kam sie mit schwarzer Mireille-Mathieu-Frisur. Und nicht nur das: Mit strengem bodenlangem Ledermantel und einem scharfen Supermini samt Netzstrümpfen sah die Sängerin nicht gerade aus wie eine Diva in Robe, die man sich im Großen Festspielhaus bei einem Karwochenkonzert der Salzburger Osterfestspiele erwartet. Allerdings wird man sich wohl auch in diesem ernsthaft-seriösen Rahmen einmal gut unterhalten dürfen nach Wagners Weltuntergangsvision der „Götterdämmerung“ oder Bachs erbaulicher, christlicher „Matthäuspassion“. Am Dienstag jedenfalls hatte das Publikum im Großen Festspielhaus für kurze Zeit auch köstliche Unterhaltung, wofür György Ligetis Arien aus seiner bizarren Totentanz-Oper „Le Grand Macabre“ sorgten, die in Barbara Hannigan eine nahezu ideale Singdarstellerin fanden.

Wie ein Spuk sprang Barbara Hannigan in ihrem Domina-Outfit auf die Bühne und setzte sich in Szene, im wahrsten Sinn. Mit enormer Stimmgewalt und fabelhafter Geschmeidigkeit meisterte sie irrwitzige Intervalle und höchste Höhen zum dadaistischen Text, warf den Mantel von sich, schubste Simon Rattle vom Pult und dirigierte selbst, auch der Maestro war ins Geschehen „szenisch“ eingebunden: „Weiß irgendjemand, was da vor sich geht?“, fragte er nach einem simulierten Wutausbruch ins erheiterte Publikum, das diesmal nach Ligeti jubelte, nachdem Barbara Hannigan bis zur letzten Luftreserve die sinnfreien Textsilben in den Saal geschleudert hatte.“
with the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Sir Simon Rattle
Salzburger Nachrichten 31 March 2010

Dazwischen erschien die fabulöse Koloratursopranistin Barbara Hannigan in Ledermantel, Netzstrümpfen und einer Lackkorsage für Ligetis „Mysteries of the Macabre“, drei wahnwitzige Arien aus dessen Oper gewordenem Altherrenwitz „Le grand Macabre“. Die Kanadierin gurrte, schrie, funkelte und vertrieb Simon Rattle, um sich selbst im Dirigieren zu versuchen.
with the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Sir Simon Rattle
Abendzeitung, Salzburg 30 March 2010

"The piece that raised this concert to an unforgettable climax was *Mysteries of the Macabre*, an arrangement of three soprano arias from György Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* made by Elgar Howarth, who conducted the opera's premiere in 1978. Dressed in dark wig, leather coat, fishnets and PVC, like a cross between Berg's Lulu and Madonna, Barbara Hannigan both sang and directed in a tour de force of performance and vocal brilliance. It was just as well that it finished the evening: nothing played afterwards could have lived up to it."
Guardian, London Dec 2, 2010
Performance with Britten Sinfonia, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London

"The soprano enters, dressed in a short black leather dress, fishnet stockings and platform heels. With barely time for applause, she throws herself headlong into a stream of nonsense text, flinging out top notes as high as a kettle whistle while conducting the orchestra and behaving like a woman possessed. It is quite a tour de force.
This could only be one composer. Gyorgy Ligeti's opera *Le Grand Macabre* has been delighting and scandalising audiences since its premiere in 1978 and three of its short arias were subsequently arranged by Elgar Howarth to form a nine-minute concert piece called *Mysteries of the Macabre*. The Canadian soprano Barbara Hannigan has made it her own. And how: strutting the stage in her titillating outfit, she embodies the sadomasochistic spirit of the opera to perfection, whipping herself and the orchestra into a near frenzy of musical extremism. It is no surprise that she is being sought after to perform this virtuoso miniature around the world. In the refined world of the concert hall, it explodes like a stink bomb – doubtless just what Ligeti had in mind."
The Financial Times, London Dec 2, 2010
Performance with Britten Sinfonia

"*Mysteries of the Macabre* was performed here by the fearless soprano Barbara Hannigan. Wearing fishnet tights, spike heels and a leather trenchcoat, Ms Hannigan was a demonic presence. But even scarier was her uncanny ability to toss off the hysterical coloratura flights and nonsensical words... Ms Hannigan, Mr de Leeuw and the players were brought back for five bows by the audience."
New York Times 01-17-06
United States

"To call Barbara Hannigan a soprano is like calling Robin Williams a public speaker; the term doesn't begin to cover her fearless verve or elasticity...the 8 minute theatrical tour-de-force left her spent and the audience roaring. Who said the avant-garde can't be fun?"
New York Newsday 01-16-06
United States

"The chamber orchestra served as accompaniment to one of the best vocal performances on a New York stage in quite some time...This is singing as an extreme sport, and Ms Hannigan was nothing short of electrifying."
New York Sun 01-16-06
United States

"The performance of Barbara Hannigan was frankly overwhelming, in *Mysteries of the Macabre*, a work based on three arias from Ligeti's absurd opera *Le Grand Macabre*. Dressed in a long black leather coat, boots, and a black wig, Hannigan fired a virtuoso barrage of notes into the hall...what a concert!"
Trouw 11-2000
The Netherlands

"The Canadian soprano Barbara Hannigan delivered a captivating display of three arias from the opera *Le Grand Macabre*. She presented Ligeti's nonsense monologue in an overwhelming performance: impudent, witty, moving, and always perfectly coordinated with the ensemble. It was a totally astonishing achievement, that was given its deserved cheers."
Kolner Stadt-Anzeiger 27-10-03
Germany

"In a black leather outfit, soprano Barbara Hannigan, setting afire a breathtaking fireworks display of technique and tempo, went to the extremes of human expression, and doused the orchestra with boiling hot emotion."
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 8-5-2002
Germany

"*Mysteries of the Macabre* functioned as a flamboyant ending, an excerpt from Ligeti's opera *Le Grand Macabre*, in which soprano Barbara Hannigan, dressed up in a long black coat and matching wig, her voice achieving the most staggering gymnastic feats, in a faultlessly choreographed combination with the crazy somersaults of the ensemble."
de Volkskrant 26-05-03
The Netherlands

"On y distingue tout particulièrement la soprano Barbara Hannigan, qui non seulement chante toutes les notes du rôle impossible de Gepopo, le chef de la police, mais le fait en enchaînant roulades et galipettes tout en restant toujours musicale."
Le Figaro France, March 2009

"The countertenor Brian Asawa was in splendid form as the sissified Prince Go-Go, and Barbara Hannigan excelled as Venus and as Gepopo, the chief of the secret police, whose warnings about Nekrotzar are obscured by barrages of sparkling coloratura."
New York Times April 8 2009

"De opera werd gezongen in het Engels; Ligeti liet de uitvoerenden daarin vrij. Chris Merritt steelt de show als een fantastisch krijsende Piet the Pot. Werner van Mechelen speelt en zingt een opvallende Nekrotzar en de Canadees/Nederlandse Barbara Hannigan triomfeerde in haar schier onzingbare paraderol van Gepopo."
Trouw Netherlands, March 2009

"Et mention toute spéciale pour Vénus puis Le chef de la police secrète (Barbara Hannigan), brillamment cataclysmique ou déesse suave, qui, même seconds rôles, apporte une fraîche énergie, limpidité vocale, au lourd ensemble des ivrognes, nymphomanes, et fantoches..."
ResMusica March 2009

"De cast is in goede doen. Werner Van Mechelen vertolkt Nekrotzar met een ongewone sereniteit, als het type van de droeve August. Aan het andere eind van het spectrum vind je Barbara Hannigan als Gepopo, de chef van de geheime politie. Op scène is ze de zenuwpees. Als ze zingt, klinkt ze als een stemacrobate die onwaarschijnlijke nonsens kan uitkramen op de allerhoogste noten."
De Standaard Belgium, March 26, 2009

"Qu'elle personifie Vénus ou Gepopo, le chef de la police secrète, Barbara Hannigan est formidable, musicienne exceptionnelle qui affronte avec désinvolture les vocalises les plus escarpées, actrice non moins remarquable à la silhouette de sirène."
Les Echos France March 26, 2009

"Zum Fürchten komisch die Koloratursopranistin Barbara Hannigan als Oberscherge Gepopo und als flatterhafte Venus - eine vokal wie darstellerisch brillante Doppelleistung."
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung March 2009

"Glanzpunkt der Produktion ist aber die kanadische Sopranistin Barbara Hannigan, welche die halsbrecherischen Koloraturen des Geheimdienstchefs Gepopo bis ins Letzte ausreizt."
Neue Züricher Zeitung March 2009

"...la formidable colorature Barbara Hannigan, Vénus sexy à la chevelure rose, ou Gepopo, le chef de la police secrète, affrontant, à la limite de la transe, des vocalises de folie."
Le Monde March 2009

"Die amerikanische Sopranistin Barbara Hannigan als Venus und Chef der Geheimpolizei schwebt und springt durch Breughelland wie ein Zeichentrick-Proteus und legt dabei sicher, präzise und leicht die irrwitzigsten Solopassagen hin."
Deutschland Radio, March 25, 2009