

OPERA NEWS

IN REVIEW > INTERNATIONAL
AUGUST 2019 — VOL. 84, NO. 2

Der Junge Lord

MUNICH

Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz

5/23/19



Ann-Katrin Naidu and Maximilian Mayer in *Der Junge Lord* at the Gärtnerplatz
© Christian POGO Zach

COMPOSER HANS WERNER HENZE (1926–2012) based his opera *Der Junge Lord* (The Young Lord) on “The Ape as Man,” a parable by German author Wilhelm Hauff (1802–27). Since its world premiere at Deutsche Oper Berlin, in 1965, the opera has enjoyed considerable success and many productions. The story concerns an eccentric English lord, Sir Edgar, who moves to the German provincial town of Hülisdorf-Gotha. When Sir Edgar is maligned by the townspeople because he refuses to accept their sycophantic invitations, he takes his revenge by presenting his nephew, the young Lord Barrat, to the enchanted populace, who are then scandalized when the “nephew” turns out to be an ape borrowed from the circus. The new production of *Der Junge Lord* at Munich’s Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz, seen at its premiere on May 23, showed the importance of casting from strength when dealing with twentieth-century music. The company allowed this well-composed work, setting a lucid text, to glow by using nearly the entire ensemble, even casting stars in minor roles. *Der Junge Lord* has not only humor but biting satirical elements that are still relevant today. Veteran Brigitte Fassbaender staged the opera with her usual eye for detail, delivering an un-provocative production, in which the pseudo-morality of the town’s haughty dwellers, complete with undertones of bigotry and prejudice, remained harmlessly amusing rather than pointedly socio-critical. That said, Fassbaender’s staging

was charming, with the exception of several tasteless, pointless sight gags. Video projections by Raphael Kurig and Thomas Mahnecke, which showed kaleidoscopic views of this eighteenth-century town, were positive additions to the general atmosphere. The costumes of Dietrich von Grebmer were more confusing than elucidating, ranging from original-era to modern dress and varying from outrageous to authentic.

Christoph Filler, made up to look like Alice Cooper, was a mellifluous secretary to the silent Sir Edgar, played by Dieter Fernengel. Soprano Mária Celeng, despite overemphasizing some of her high notes, was a charmingly naïve Luise. Lucian Krasznecc lent his supple tenor to Luise's suitor Wilhelm. Tenor Maximilian Mayer was completely convincing as Lord Barrat, sounding wonderful in the vocally demanding, high-lying part and acting the ape dressed in gentleman's clothing to perfection. Veteran Ann-Katrin Naidu was perfectly cast as the conceited Baroness Grünwiesel. Costumed like Madame de Pompadour and singing with extreme clarity, Naidu nearly stole the show. Soprano supreme Jennifer O'Loughlin, coming off a triumph here in the title role of Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*, invested Frau Hasentreffer with vocal glimmer and noble, tongue-in-cheek charm; the enormously talented mezzo-soprano Anna-Katharina Tonauer brought her gorgeous voice and infectious personality to Frau von Hufnagel. Coloratura specialist Ilia Staple was a superb Ida. The city's mayor was sung with resonance by Levente Páll. Tenor Juan Carlos Falcón (Professor von Mucker, costumed like Sherlock Holmes), bass Holger Ohlmann (Economy Minister Scharf) and Liviu Holender (a pompous Justice Minister Hasentreffer) rounded out the splendidly cast city dignitaries. As the role requires, Bonita Hyman was an over-the-top Begonia. Both the chorus and children's chorus (prepared by Felix Meybier) were outstanding. Conductor Anthony Bramall, in complete control from the first measure, led a first-rate Gärtnerplatz Orchestra. The ovations at the final curtain were well deserved. —*Jeffrey A. Leipsic*