

Scottish Opera Orchestra up in arms at part-time offer

SUSAN NICKALLS

Members of the Scottish Opera Orchestra are to respond to a Musicians' Union ballot on proposals by Scottish Opera management to halve their working hours and salaries. This anticipates cuts of up to 10% next year from the company's £8.6m annual budget in the wake of the government's comprehensive spending review due to be announced in late October/early November.

Proposals include an offer to the 54 orchestral members of 26 weeks guaranteed work a year as a minimum which could be increased. Scottish Opera's general director Alex Reedijk maintained the orchestra is under-utilised with rehearsals and performances accounting for around 40% of the musicians' time. He

said he considered other potential models, including the possibility of a freelance orchestra, before deciding on the part-time option.

'We felt this particular move protected the orchestra the most as it kept them together as an ensemble as well as protected the high standards of the orchestral players. We didn't want to go to anything as abrupt as a transition from 52 weeks to everyone freelance. We want to protect the best of what we have and pay the musicians fairly for the work they do.'

However, many see such a move as tantamount to declaring Scottish Opera a part-time company. Former chief executive of the Scottish Arts Council Graham Berry said more money should be given to the opera company if it is to remain full-time although he believes there needs to be more flexibility in the contracts of musicians in all the full-time

orchestras. The Scottish Chamber Orchestra already maintains an excellent freelance orchestra, but the members of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra are all on full-time contracts.

Scottish Opera's current proposals follow the axing of its full-time chorus in 2004 and ironically come after a time of relative stability in the company. At the moment it presents five fully-staged operas a year, including one coproduction with the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, but Mr Reedijk admitted this may have to change. 'There's lots of scenario planning as to what X and Y might look like in the context of what everyone is talking about. We're still planning ahead very strongly on the basis that we've got a model A but also a model B which is slightly smaller than model A.'

Furore over electric cadenzas at Presteigne

CLARE STEVENS

Violinist Thomas Gould ruffled a few feathers at the Presteigne Festival, Powys, on 31 August when he chose to play his own jazz cadenzas on an electric violin, amplified and multi-tracked, to Mozart's violin concerto in D K218 in the festival's final concert. Two members of the audience in St Andrew's Church walked out towards the end of the first cadenza, banging the door loudly behind them, and there was another noisy exit in the slow movement cadenza. Some audience members greeted Mr Gould's innovations with delight, but many were angered by what they felt was an insult to the music. The incident created a major talking point for the rest of the evening and indeed for the rest of the week in the shops and wine bars of Presteigne.

Mr Gould, who graduated from the Royal Academy of Music in 2006, combines solo and recital work with orchestra leading and directing; he is currently leader of the Aurora Orchestra and acting leader of the Britten Sinfonia. He also has a keen interest in jazz and has performed at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club with pianist Gwilym Simcock and saxophonist Tim Garland. The night before his controversial Mozart performance he had wowed festival guests and locals with an impromptu extended jamming session in the No 46 Wine Bar with country-and-western guitarist Dave Luck, who was appearing in his regular slot.

Three years ago Mr Gould premiered American composer Nico Muhly's *Seeing is Believing* for electric violin and chamber orchestra; this piece uses a looping pedal, and he introduced a similar technique in Presteigne. He began the concerto on his usual 1754

Gennaro Gagliano instrument and switched to his John Jordan six-string electric violin for the cadenzas. Mozart did not provide written cadenzas for the K218 concerto, which he wrote as a 19-year-old in 1775. George Vass, artistic director of the Presteigne Festival, told CM that when Mr Gould asked if he could do something a bit different with them for the festival finale he was happy to agree. 'I'd seen his performance of the Muhly piece on YouTube and guessed he might do something similar. We are a contemporary music festival; if Tom can't try something new here, where can he? As one of our festival artists he had performed fantastically for us all weekend; I had no problem with letting him go off-piste a bit in the finale.'

However, many listeners felt that the improvised cadenzas were out of scale and did not gel with Mr Gould's very straight performance of the rest of the concerto. Academic and critic Stephen Walsh later wrote on the website Artsdesk that 'for several excruciating minutes [Gould] reimagined himself as a busker at the Monument tube station interchange'. Others felt that the experiment did a disservice to soloist Clare McCaldin's fine delivery of Hugh Wood's new song cycle *Beginnings*, which followed.

As artists and audience mingled at the interval, the violinist was forced to deal directly with some of the negative reactions, which took him completely by surprise. 'I've never experienced a night like this,' he said afterwards. George Vass, meanwhile, was keen to underline the success of the festival, which achieved 84% ticket sales with several concerts sold out, and included 12 world premieres and the launch of a major education project.

www.presteignefestival.com



Electrical fault?
Thomas Gould