

October 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 – Podcast Transcript

## Wozzeck

### **Julian Johnson (City of Dreams Series Consultant)**

Hello and welcome to the Royal Festival Hall, I'm here today to find out more about the production of Berg's *Wozzeck* with the Philharmonia Orchestra. As you can see behind me the stage is being set complete with video projection on a huge screen behind the orchestra. I'm going to go back stage and meet some of the people involved find out more about this production

*Wozzeck* is that rare thing, a 20<sup>th</sup> century operatic classic, it might seem like an unlikely one, after all a story about a man who slides into madness, ends up murdering the women he loves and drowning himself by accident, doesn't seem like it would be a big hit with the audience, and yet it has been a central part of the repertoire for a century. This is less an opera about a man who goes mad, but one who is driven mad by the society around him.

Berg saw the play *Wozzeck* in 1914 just as the first world war was beginning, was completely bowled over by it, and stumbled out of the theatre saying "someone should set this to music".

### **Alexandre Barrière (Staging)**

We know this is not a full production of course, it is what you call in this country 'semi-staged' performance - the orchestra is on stage. It's a very big orchestra with a tavern band. It's conceived to work with a video, Jean-Baptiste Barrière, my father, did many opera video projects of this kind, but for the first time he wanted to have a stage part in it. In *Wozzeck* the music is the action, it was necessary here to have something else, so, something minimalistic of course, but still necessary. There is such a physical importance of action in this opera.

### **Simon Keenlyside (Wozzeck)**

I think the mistake that people make with many great operas with some eponymous hero or anti-hero is that they get a bit stuck on the fact its called *Wozzeck*, or stuck that's its called *Don Giovanni (Mozart)*, or stuck that its called *Billy Budd (Britten)* where in fact the real message of these things is in the balance of power between extremes. He has been bully and pushed and abused for years, and you have to ask yourself, at wont point would you crack under such a life, and if you were cracked would you break inwards or outwards and if you broke outwards, would you break the person closest to you or the person who was hurting you?

**Jean-Baptiste Barrière** (Video Direction)

We're trying to be very respectful, we're not trying at any moment to go against the music, we are really trying to serve the music, for me the music is always first. What we are doing with the image is to go through the mental landscape that *Wozzeck* is crossing. To help us in defining that we have been studying and very much using the structure of expressionist painting, so all this is providing us some very strong colour material and we are basically diving in to it.

**Jullian Johnson**

*Wozzeck* is a modern tragedy, the story of the poor individual foot soldier, put upon by everyone around him, let down by everybody; it's about his decline into madness and eventually murder and his own death. What I've seen today is that this is a wonderfully powerful production that really gets inside *Wozzeck's* head. I can't wait to see it on Thursday.