

# LIONEL FRIEND



## Thoughts from the Podium - October 2011 Lionel Friend, conductor

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**THIS YEAR BEGAN** for me with a joyful return to the Birmingham Conservatoire to rehearse and conduct a production of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*. What a remarkably original and delightful score this is! Although there are thoughtful, even sinister and dark moments, like certain other masterpieces (Beethoven's *Fidelio* comes to mind) it comes to a conclusion with a glorious acceptance of life, a thrilling embrace of nature in all its aspects.

And in the midst of rehearsing for the opera, I conducted a symphony concert with students that included Debussy's amazing orchestral work *La mer*; and at the Wigmore Hall Patricia Routledge narrated *Peter and the Wolf* with concentration and fun, backed by the brilliant Nash Ensemble.

In April I spent a fascinating couple of hours with an aspiring conductor. He conducted two pianists who were encouraged to follow him as rigorously as the most unforgiving orchestra! We discussed the ins and outs of pieces by Brahms and Wagner, exchanging ideas about tempo, sound, phrasing - the matters that matter to every performing musician.

**THE TALES OF HOFFMANN** by Offenbach is not a work I had ever expected to be invited to conduct, but any chance to work in Australia has to be looked at seriously! West Australian Opera mounted a captivating production in July and we rehearsed for it in June: it was fascinating to discover and explore a style of music entirely new to me. It's always stimulating to meet new singers, a new director and together we had a wonderful time. The West Australian Symphony Orchestra took as much interest in this as they had previously with me in Wagner, and played superbly. Rehearsals with them are relaxed

yet concentrated, a perfect combination.

*...Lionel Friend's perfect musical pacing. He allowed the singers time when needed, yet kept things moving, and he elicited a refined lightness from the orchestra.*

*The Australian*

*For its part the WA Symphony Orchestra, under the capable baton of Lionel Friend, also contributed much by way of a forceful, rhetorically astute interpretation of Offenbach's score.*

*The West Australian*

**GETTING TO KNOW** a whole new opera takes time and study, and I am now looking slowly at Penderecki's *The Devils of Loudun* as there are plans for me to conduct a new production of this staggering and challenging work in Copenhagen in 2013. Much of the music is notated in a non-traditional manner, and I must work out with considerable care what the composer intends to hear and also how to explain it to the singers and orchestra. Penderecki, still composing in his late seventies, lives in his native Poland, and I look forward to visiting him to discuss the opera that he wrote more than 40 years ago.

**ALSO ON MY MUSIC DESK** is *Parsifal*. I last conducted this haunting, absorbing masterpiece 25 years ago at English National Opera in the wake of the great Reginald Goodall. It was always an inspiration to work with him, and daunting to follow his footsteps into the pit. Now I have the chance to think about this remarkable piece again: what does it mean?

how should it sound? There is no shortage of writings from essays to full-length books that deal exclusively with Wagner's last opus.

**THESE TWO OPERAS** are going to be highlights of the next two seasons for me, and I am also looking forward to working this season with students at the Royal Academy of Music, Royal College of Music, Guildhall School of Music as well as returning to the Birmingham Conservatoire for a programme of contemporary music in November and again in February for a most interesting project: we shall be recording

brief excerpts from some early works by Benjamin Britten that will be available to listen to on the Britten website.

In January I shall spend ten days in Los Angeles, returning there to conduct a concert with the orchestra at the University of Southern California. We shall be playing Tchaikovsky, Gershwin and the world premiere of a piece by American composer Frederick Lesemann. This student orchestra is tremendously talented; my previous visits there have been very exciting.

## Upcoming projects

### November 18, 2011

Birmingham Conservatoire Thallein Ensemble  
Birtwistle, Firsova, Henze, Holloway

### January 26, 2012

University of Southern California, Los Angeles, Symphony Orchestra  
Lesemann (world premiere) Gershwin, Tchaikovsky

### February 20 - 24, 2012

Birmingham Conservatoire Symphony Orchestra  
Britten

### March 13, 2012

Nash Ensemble, Wigmore Hall, London  
Colin Matthews, Jonathan Harvey

### March 31, April 1, 2012

Cardiff - lectures on *Parsifal* and Mahler's 8th Symphony

### May 17, 18, 2012

Royal Academy of Music, London  
Opera Scenes

### November 19, 2012

St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh  
accompany Wagner recital, Sir John Tomlinson

### February 12 - March 26, 2013

Royal Danish Opera, Copenhagen  
The Devils of Loudun

### August 2013

Edinburgh Festival  
The Devils of Loudun

### late 2013

Warsaw  
The Devils of Loudun

### May - June 2014

Royal Danish Opera, Copenhagen  
*Parsifal*



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## Lionel Friend management

Robert Gilder & Company  
91 Great Russell Street  
London WC1B 3PS  
United Kingdom

Phone: +44 20 7580 7758

Fax: +44 20 7580 7739