

## A Glyndebourne Summer Part 1 **Going back**



Credit: Sam Stephenson

As Glyndebourne booking gets underway, rehearsals now begin in earnest for this year's festival. Tenor Christopher Gillett sets the scene, leading us through his preparations for *Der Rosenkavalier*. It's the first time he's sung there for over 20 years. How will he master the tongue-twisting role of Valzacchi, an Italian intriguer singing in rapid-fire German? Keep reading...



In the next few weeks I'm going to Glyndebourne to start rehearsing Richard Strauss ([/uk/learn/composers/richard-strauss](http://uk/learn/composers/richard-strauss))'s *Der Rosenkavalier*. Sometimes that keeps me up at night. This is because of two things: a) it's Glyndebourne and b) it's *Der Rosenkavalier*.

I haven't worked for Glyndebourne in over 20 years, the last time being when I sang on the tour. That was before they built the spiffy new opera house, and I've only been back there a couple of times since, to see *Lulu* and *Giulio Cesare*. On neither occasion did I wear a dinner jacket, not really out of any contrariness but simply because I don't own one and I was bugged if I was going to shell out and buy one just for a night at the opera. I remember wearing a rather loud summer suit that I'd bought on sale, its very low price owing to the fact that the arms appeared to have been sewn on the wrong way round. No one seemed to mind, except my arms, which the suit was systematically trying to pull out their sockets.

In 1983 I was in the chorus at Glynditz, as it's commonly known in the profession, the name Glynditz being a neat amalgam of Glyndebourne and Colditz (as if I really needed to spell that out). We don't call it that because they treat you like prisoners of war, but because once you're there for the summer it's almost impossible to escape. Set in the middle of the Sussex Downs, Glynditz has a campus feel to it. You can't simply potter off to a greasy spoon for lunch or catch a movie on a free afternoon. Instead you must entertain yourself within the confines of the estate, by wandering around the lake, playing some tennis or gambolling with a flock of sheep. Well, that's what we used to do. Now, they probably spend all day playing *Angry Birds* on their iPads.

I'm anxious about going back because it will feel familiar yet strange, like going back to your old school after a very long absence. Things won't be where they used to be. I'll probably regress into a pubescent version of myself, all spots, hormones and bad attitude. I wonder if everything will seem much smaller than I remember it. It was always sunny in 1983 – I have the photos to prove it. How can it possibly live up to my memories?

And it's *Der Rosenkavalier*, a proper opera. I don't often get to do operas that people might have actually heard of. My meat and two veg is the weirder stuff that, when asked what I'm singing at the moment, provokes a look of slight pain on the face of my interlocutor, as if I've just described in vivid detail the various stages of bowel surgery. If opera were an art gallery, I'd spend most of my time in the Contemporary section. Now I'll be in the Romantic section, where the paintings aren't to my usual taste. They're big and literal. People's eyes are actually on their faces.

My role is not huge - the Italian intriguer and gossip, Valzacchi - my main function, it seems, to sing lots of words incredibly fast. In fact I could neatly describe my role as someone who's trying to sing his way through the entire Vienna phonebook in the space of two minutes in an Italian accent. I'm sure I'll have much more to say about Valzacchi in the next few months. I'm going to have to live with him until the end of July, so we had better remain on good terms.

My first priority though is to make sure my iPad has the latest version of *Angry Birds*.

**[Der Rosenkavalier opens on 17 May. Bookings open on 10 March. \(http://glyndebourne.com/how-book\)](http://glyndebourne.com/how-book)**

**[Read more of Christopher Gillett's opinions on Sinfini Music \(http://sinfinimusic.com/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett\).](http://sinfinimusic.com/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett)**

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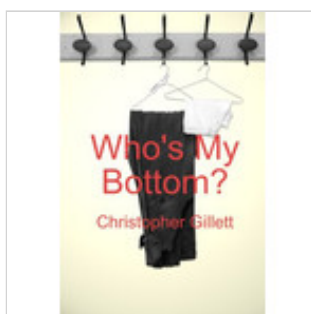
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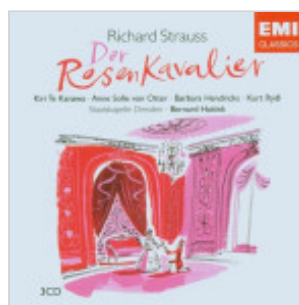
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