Christopher Gillett | 12 May 2014

A Glyndebourne Summer Part 3
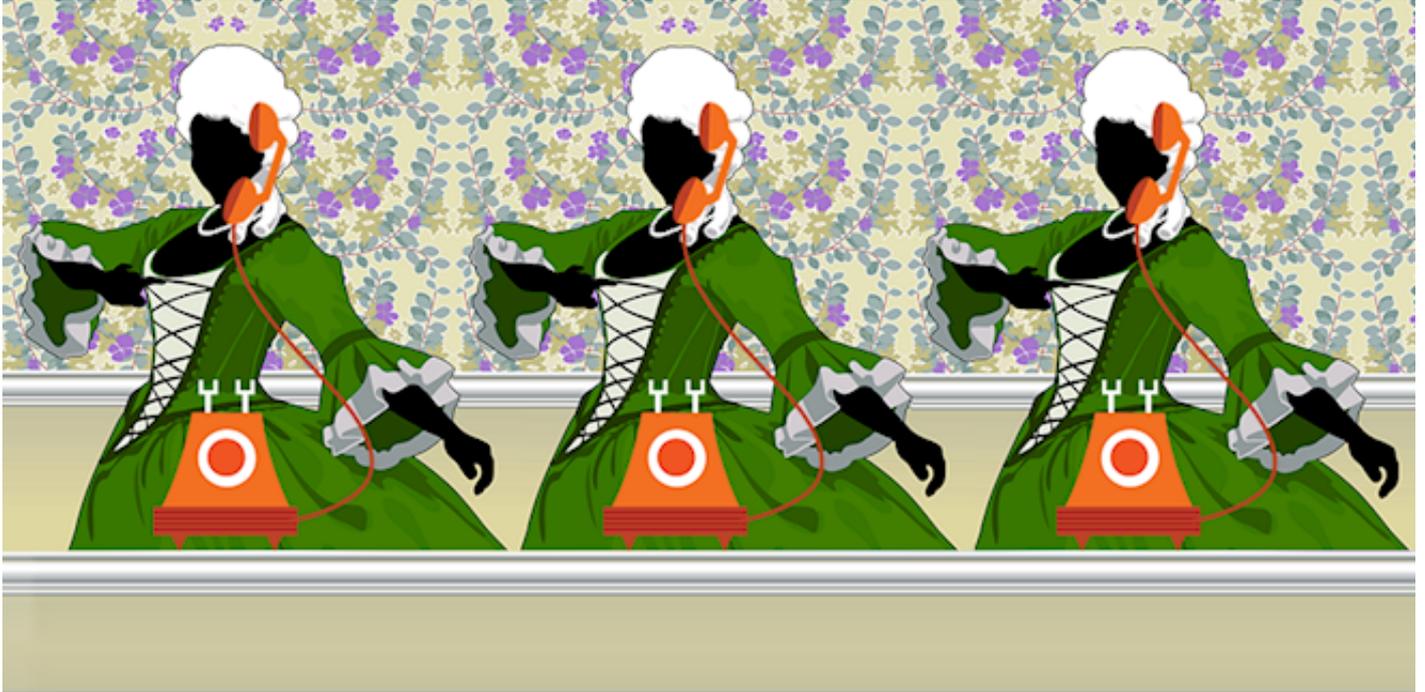
With Glyndebourne's 80th Anniversary season opening in less than a week there's no rest for Christopher Gillett and his fellow *Rosenkavalier* cast-members. They're available to offer gardening tips and dramatic insights. But, whatever you do, don't ask them what period the production is set in.

CG_446x446 There's only a week to go before *Der Rosenkavalier* opens, on May 17th, which also happens to be the Glyndebourne Festival's 80th birthday. To say we have been working hard in the last six weeks would be like saying Rembrandt knew how to draw or Mary Berry can knock up a passable Victoria sponge.

We have rehearsed six days a week, morning, afternoon and evening, including Good Friday and bank holidays, stopping only on Sundays to do laundry and draw breath. It's only with the arrival of the orchestra that we are now able to have rest days between our stage rehearsals, though, as the first night approaches, the media circus begins. For, as in any field of entertainment, it's part of our job to give interviews and feed the marketing beast.

Next week I'm doing a spot on BBC Gardeners' World, no less, bluffing that I know the difference between a daisy and a dahlia, and last week I was interviewed for a BBC4 documentary that will be going out in a month or so, in which I was asked about Richard Jones's 'take' on *Der Rosenkavalier*. I said I don't think Richard 'interprets' the opera, he just tries to tell the story in a way that makes absolute sense.

No doubt some will disagree because they see any production that isn't filled with tights and powdered wigs as a distortion of the composer's intentions, and frankly this baffles me. I was in a production a few years ago in Los Angeles of *The Marriage of Figaro* in which Figaro and all the servants wore livery but other characters wore 1950s costumes and the Countess used a telephone. This sent some critics and online commentators into a mild apoplexy. 'It doesn't make sense!' they yelled, electronically, over what they perceived as anachronisms.

To these people I would say: look at a day in the life of the Royal Family. A flunky in 17th century livery will open the door of Prince Charles's classic Aston Martin. Out he steps wearing a suit that looks as if it were designed in the 1930s, while a guardsman in Victorian uniform presents arms with his 21st century semi-automatic. The prince enters an 18th century palace festooned with 16th century tapestries, past a security guard in a polyester suit, wearing an earpiece, talking into his wrist.

Do we think that these visual contradictions pose a problem? Of course we don't.

If you really want something that is utter nonsense, try a good old *Lucia di Lammermoor* where everyone is strutting about in tartan kilts. It may satisfy the cookie-cutter sensibilities of someone who really believes that Scotland is all Walter Scott, scones and Edinburgh rock, but it is complete and utter tosh.

Watch Glyndebourne's *Der Rosenkavalier* and make up your own mind. But if anyone gets their knickers in a twist about 'which period it is set in' they'll have me to answer to. And my tartan-clad army.

***Der Rosenkavalier* opens on 17 May. <u>Booking is open now. (http://glyndebourne.com/how-book)</u>**

Read more of <u>Christopher Gillett on Sinfini Music (/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett)</u>.

<u>christophergillett.co.uk (http://christophergillett.co.uk/) (http://saddoabroad.blogspot.com/)</u>

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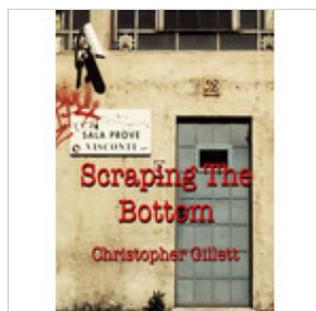
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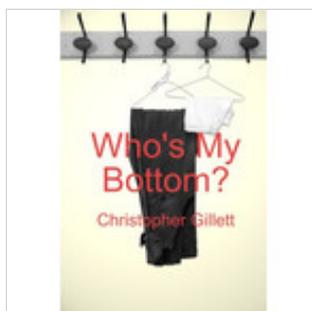
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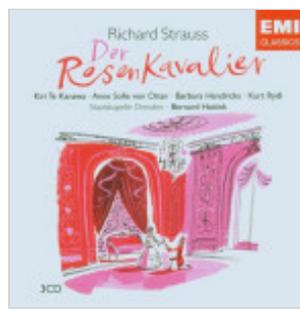
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