

Body of Work



Tara Erraught who sings Octavian in Glyndebourne's *Der Rosenkavalier*

When critics' responses to Glyndebourne's new *Der Rosenkavalier* were dominated by opinions of a singer's figure, the production made headlines for all the wrong reasons. Now fellow singer and cast-member Christopher Gillett adds his weight to the debate.

I really shouldn't sit down and write an article when I'm cross. I've tried to spend the last 24 hours stopping being furious, but it's no use; I've got to write the piece and cross I am. So there it is.

I suppose that this is a dilemma that critics face every time they review an opera. No matter what they're feeling when they sit in the dimmed auditorium, they have to put that aside and concentrate on the task at hand: reviewing the work.

It's curious then that on Saturday evening, a bunch of middle-aged men sat down to watch [Strauss \(/uk/learn/composers/richard-strauss\)](#)'s *Der Rosenkavalier* at Glyndebourne as if they had only just been handed their diplomas from The School of Good Old-Fashioned Sexism and were simply too excited to forget about it. Clearly the School had taught them that the only thing attractive about a woman is her body, that no matter how well a woman sings and acts, it's all a waste of time if she's not fit to go on the front page of *Vogue*. Not only that but, as one of them pointed out, if they haven't sung as well in the past as they're singing now it's probably because they had to do stressful lady things like having children. (My eyes nearly popped out of my head when I saw that in the *Daily Telegraph*.)

What next? Are we soon going to be treated to a commentary on how Ms X's performance was better this time because she didn't happen to be going through her period?

My initial reaction on reading this bilge was to want to respond with a taste of their own medicine. I mean, let's face it, none of these men is exactly an Adonis. Indeed, at least one of them has a permanent look (to borrow a phrase) of a bulldog who has just licked piss off a nettle.

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Ah, but it's not their job to look good. Well, curiously enough, it isn't really a singer's job either. A model's, yes. A singer's, no. And then, to make matters worse, even if a singer does have magazine cover looks, we get another middle-aged man drooling over reports of nudity (this commentator hadn't even seen the show) in terms barely short of 'Cor, Phew, Phwoar!'

I get to wear two hats. A singer hat and a writer hat. As a singer I've spent most of my working life being afraid of what the writers can do to me, taking the carps and moans on the chin as all my colleagues do; picking myself off the floor after a glib but devastating remark, pretending I don't mind. Well, now I'm really too old and too far into my inevitable decline to care anymore. This weekend a line was crossed. Not against me, but against my friends and extremely hard-working and talented colleagues.

I feel sorry for many critics. They aren't paid well at all and they struggle to keep their ever-shrinking column inches. But if some of them don't get their act together they can expect such a storm of disapproval that they'll look on the mild barrage that has come their way in the last two days with the warm glow of nostalgia.

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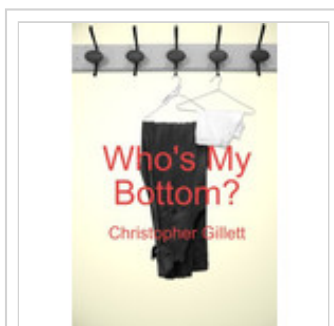
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