

Opera

Berg



Wozzeck

Christian Gerhaher *bar* **Wozzeck**
Gun-Brit Barkmin *sop* **Marie**
Brandon Jovanovich *ten* **Drum Major**
Mauro Peter *ten* **Andres**
Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacker *ten* **Captain**
Lars Woldt *bass* **Doctor**
Chorus of Zurich Opera; Philharmonia Zurich /
Fabio Luisi

Stage director **Andreas Homoki**

Video director **Michael Beyer**

Accentus ACC20363; ACC10363

(101' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DTS 5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, September 2015



Wozzeck sees red: the red moon; a bloody knife; flames in the sky. Zurich Opera's production,

directed by Andreas Homoki, is washed in radiation-yellow, a sickly glow evoked by lighting designer Franck Evin that might look painterly were it not such a chemical shade of jaundice. It picks out where real cheeks, chins and noses meet the cracked, heavy white facepaint on the characters' faces. Caught in close-up by Michael Beyer's sensitive video direction, perhaps you glimpse more human reaction than Homoki really wants you to see.

Büchner's drama, *Woyzeck*, was written in the 1830s but reclaimed by expressionists in the 20th century. Homoki offers a synthesis between the two worlds. A puppet theatre – the costumes and wigs say English seaside more than central European marionettes – is conjured up through Michael Levine's ingenious set: concentric wooden frames from which characters can appear and disappear as if manipulated by giant unseen hands. As the world slides away from Wozzeck – 'it's an abyss, I feel dizzy', the soldier complains – so even this precarious perspective crumbles. It's also a reminder that, just as the set can be shuffled, so can the drama itself, because Büchner's scrambled collection of scenes had no obvious order.

This is a finely honed production that follows its premise to an absurdist conclusion with slick theatricality and

dispassionate zeal. The children in the final scene are all sinister doll-like versions of the adult characters. They include a pint-size, preening Captain (with tricorn) and the Drum Major, whose own plus-size headgear is set off by a tumescent plume. Marie (Gun-Brit Barkmin) is a wide-eyed Victorian strumpet with scarlet rag-doll hair; her and Wozzeck's child is a true puppet, blank eyes in its wooden head.

All sentimentalism is banished here. So, largely, is the opera's plea for justice and compassion. It is left to Christian Gerhaher's Wozzeck to fight that battle, which he does with formidable diction and great lyrical beauty, offering, where he can, a still centre in the tumult. Perhaps the baritone has come to the role a shade too late; there's a world-weariness here that suggests this soldier had long since given up the fight. Barkmin shines, at least vocally, with a bright *jugendlich-dramatischer* sound that she stretches to raw, raddled contrition as the screw turns.

Brandon Jovanovich's muscular tenor gives (sorry) real thrust to his priapic Drum Major, and Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacker's Captain sings with silky venom. The dramatic chiaroscuro comes from the orchestra. Fabio Luisi's incisive conducting slices artfully between Berg's fatty cuts of late Romanticism (I'm sure I've never heard Baron Ochs join the waltz at the Heuriger tavern) and his queasy dissonances and eerie number-games. The orchestra, rapier-sharp and cutting to the quick, offer much more than Swiss precision. **Neil Fisher**

Britten



The Rape of Lucretia

Christine Rice *mez* **Lucretia**
Allan Clayton *ten* **Male Chorus**
Kate Royal *sop* **Female Chorus**
Duncan Rock *bar* **Tarquinius**
Matthew Rose *bass* **Collatinus**
Michael Sumuel *bass-bar* **Junius**
Catherine Wyn-Rogers *mez* **Lucia**
Louise Alder *sop* **Bianca**
London Philharmonic Orchestra / Leo Hussain

Stage director **Fiona Shaw**

Video director **François Roussillon**

Opus Arte OA1219D; OABD7206D

(114' + 17' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080p • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • S/s)

Extra features: 'Post-War Britten: the History of

Lucretia'; 'Innocence Corrupted: a Conversation with Fiona Shaw'; Cast Gallery

Recorded live at Glyndebourne, August 9, 2015



Fiona Shaw's production of Britten's first chamber opera opened during the Glyndebourne tour in 2013 – the composer's

centenary year – and was revived at the main festival two years later, when this DVD was filmed. In the opinion of many, it marked a belated homecoming. The opera was written for and premiered at Glyndebourne in 1946, and the accompanying documentary chronicles the impact of post-war austerity on both the subject and scale of the piece – that it was a chamber opera had as much to do with financial necessity as artistic choice – and outlines the consequences of the subsequent UK tour that led to an eventual rift between Britten and John Christie.

The aftermath of the Second World War to some extent forms Shaw's starting point. She dispenses with the idea that the Male and Female Choruses (Allan Clayton and Kate Royal) should be detached from the action and reimagines them as a pair of archeologists, themselves traumatised by war, who piece the opera's narrative together from what they unearth during a dig, and whose relationship and beliefs are challenged by what they find. The concept allows Shaw to probe both the work's unstable mix of pagan brutality and Christian moralising, and its sometimes troubling sexual politics.

Clayton develops an initial fascination with Tarquinius's insistent sexuality, gleefully carrying him piggyback to Rome during the first-act interlude, before turning away in revulsion as the danger to Christine Rice's Lucretia becomes increasingly clear. Royal, in a crisis of faith, soon abandons the Bible we find her clutching at the start and later proffers Lucretia the crucifix she wears round her neck in the unavailing hope of providing some comfort. In a scene which Shaw appears to have toned down between 2013 and 2015, the couple copulate, consensually but desperately, in the immediate aftermath of the rape.

Shaw is careful in her handling of the relationship between Lucretia and Duncan