

PARALLEL TRACKS

By the Editor

Among the goodies packed into this month's issue, don't miss the review of Heidi Waleson's new book, *Mad Scenes and Exit Arias: The Death of the New York City Opera and the Future of Opera in America* (pp. 1311-2). As our reviewer George Loomis concludes, 'In this time of uncertainty, Waleson's book merits a careful read.' Though he—like the book—focuses on the American operatic scene, it is indeed 'a cautionary tale' for the wider world, and for Londoners in particular; if cash-rich New York City could allow its second opera company—one with a proud history of adventurousness—to die, it's not unthinkable that the same could happen here.

All right, NYCO has been reconstituted, but not as we knew it—the outfit now operating under that name is but a ghost of the former company. Waleson tells the history of NYCO, and it's a big subject with even bigger implications, as reflected in the second part of the book's long title. Even for well-managed companies in the US, the prognosis is grim, at least if such wise and experienced voices as David Gockley's are to be believed. Despite the fact that there is plenty of money around, the culture of giving to culture seems to have changed, and it is unlikely to change back so long as the current incumbent squats in the White House. Contrary to what the president may think, Silicon Valley is not the stage name of a model but the richest region in the country and one from which plenty of money could flow to non-profit arts organizations in a different socio-political climate.

The mood may not be much better over here, where the country remains in the throes of a slow-motion nationalist coup, but at least London still has its second opera company. Yet for how long? The parallels between ENO and NYCO are painful to see. For all the problems of staying in the over-sized Coliseum, the story of what happened to NYCO when it gave up its Lincoln Center home should ring alarm bells here whenever that subject is raised. And ENO's shrinking output should give further pause for thought, since NYCO's decreasing productivity was part of what led to its filing for bankruptcy.

It's certainly a little optimistic of ENO to describe itself, as it did recently in a job advertisement, as 'Britain's only full-time repertory company'. But passing over this spot of fake news, the company appears to be acknowledging a vacuum at the top. As the advert says, 'Following Stuart Murphy's appointment as chief executive earlier this year ENO are now seeking exceptional candidates to join the organization in the new role of COO.' For those who don't speak in TLAs (sorry, three-letter acronyms), this translates into the company needing a chief operating officer to sort out the current executive shortcomings.

Happily, this month's issue may give some useful pointers to those in charge of stricken opera houses. We interview two of Europe's most visionary Intendants, Fortunato Ortombina of La Fenice in Venice and Waldemar Dąbrowski of the Teatr Wielki in Warsaw—both theatres that not so long ago had been stuck, albeit for different historical reasons, in the doldrums. As he reveals over the page, Ortombina has lifted La Fenice by increasing its productivity: surely it is universally true that opera houses thrive not by cutting back but by improving their visibility.

STOP PRESS. As we go to press it is confirmed that Aidan Lang, currently general director of Seattle Opera, will be returning to Britain next year to become Welsh National Opera's new general director. More on this news next month, but in the meantime the US-UK operatic traffic remains busy.