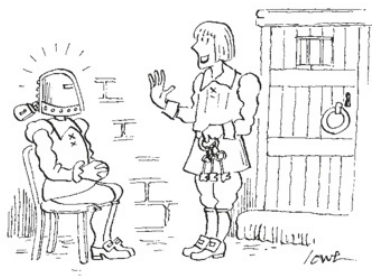


may be nothing more than that the pound is weaker than a year ago and there are more tourists around.

Whatever the reason, I would like to put down a marker that these statistics are one in the eye for all those doomsayers, most notably Norman Lebrecht, who, 10 to 15 years ago, made money out of saying that classical music was dying. Their gloom was dished out under various headings. The collapse of the CD market was the favourite: the big names were going under, priceless reputations and blue-chip repertoires were about to be lost to the civilised world; though in the event all that happened was the long-established companies that had ruled the roost for decades were reduced, and traditionalists didn't like it. The actual number of CDs recorded and released shot up; and, because they were now generally much cheaper to buy, more were sold.

Then there was the 'there is no classical music in our schools' scare, which some were quick to say was indicative of how the country was going to the dogs, predicting it would lead to a collapse of interest among young people in going to classical music concerts. In fact, as with the humbling of the old CD market, there was some truth in the detail — and there is still cause for concern about how music is taught in our schools — but it didn't lead to fewer people at concerts. Nor to fewer teenagers hoping to study at our conservatoires. You don't need to have studied fine art at school to want to visit an art gallery, or to have read Shakespeare before going to the theatre (though it helps). Going to a Prom is not dissimilar from walking into the National Gallery for an hour or two, and it needn't cost much more. In the past 15 years it has been quite clear that more people than ever want to listen to classical music, either at home or in the concert hall, and certainly there has been more and more of it to choose from.

Attendance at those Berlin Philharmonic concerts must have been 100 per cent. I don't know how the authorities decide when the arena and the gallery are full, but I couldn't see the floor of the arena for people. On the other hand, the crowd for the BBC Symphony Orchestra on the 8th couldn't have been more than 65 per cent.



'Hi, I'm the new gaoler — now don't tell me ... you must be ...'

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This enormous difference in popularity seemed a little unfair. Of course, the Berlin orchestra is probably the leading ensemble of its type in the world, and Rattle is more loved here than Jiri Belohlavek, good as he is. And the BBC SO must have been listened to by a lot of people already by this point in the season. It was either the programme or the fact that the schools had gone back between the two concerts; though if it was the programme, the difference between Mahler's First Symphony and Bruckner's Seventh surely isn't that great.

Maybe the insistent drive for yet bigger and better and more, which has so palpably underlain the Proms' thinking in recent years, has finally gone too far and the series is a week too long? There is a parallel here with the cricket season. There is always more, never a retrenchment. One can only hope that this last week of the Proms doesn't spoil the overall box-office average, because it has been a great season and these figures will pay tribute to it.

## Opera

### Murdering Mozart

Michael Tanner

**Così fan tutte; Don Pasquale**  
Royal Opera House

While the Royal Opera is touring Japan, its home team opened what looks to be mainly an unadventurous season with revivals of two celebrated productions by Jonathan Miller, for which Miller himself returned, having, it seems, modified his view of *Così fan tutte* drastically, while there probably aren't two ways of looking at *Don Pasquale*.

The *Così* was relayed to about 200 cinemas worldwide, as Thomas Allen told us in a characteristically arch speech before retreating into the character of Don Alfonso. Whereas at the last revival of this production, in January, one was simply depressed by the superficiality of the interpretation and the lifelessness of the conducting, this time round the result was positively vicious, an affront to Mozart and Da Ponte for which I can imagine no adequate punishment.

The conductor was Thomas Hengelbrock, new to the Royal Opera but due to return later in the month with an obscure baroque opera. His conducting of *Così* was so wildly eccentric that it is hard to begin to convey credibly how weird it sounded and how perverse. The overture was slammed out in a spirit of utter malevolence, punctuated by vast unmotivated pauses, and the same applied to most of what followed. When the music arrived at anything especially significant, the tempo collapsed and the volume increased or became a whisper.

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