The Richard Wagner Society

Prague State Opera Blessing for Tristan and Isolde

For the operatic legacy of Richard Wagner, Prague has lately been no bed of roses. The National Theatre, which will naturally argue that its prime purpose is to cater for Czech opera, has since 1990 mounted a single production, of *Tristan und Isolde*, followed in 2005 by two premiere showings of the *Ring*. For its part, the State Opera let its stagings of *Rienzi*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin* peter out into a decade of silence, whereafter a first sign of new developments came only with the company´s production of *Der fliegende Holländer* marking 125 years from the composer´s death.

Finally now, less than two years later, another Wagner title is beckoning, and one of the choicest ones, to be sure: *Tristan und Isolde*, the monumental drama which was seen only once on this stage after the second world war, in a 1976 guest appearance by the Dresden Opera. And yet, this is a work which should keep returning, at least now and then, onto the repertoire of every opera house with some degree of ambition, by no means only in German-speaking countries.

The **Prague State Opera management** has been perfectly well aware of the affinity existing between this company, which was once the New German Theatre of Prague, and the work of Richard Wagner, which occupied a key position in its programme right from the theatre´s foundation in 1888. Moreover, it has been just as well aware of the counterproductiveness of a policy centered around the endless repetition of established Italian titles, however less expensive that might be and no matter how safer it certainly is in terms of box-office receipts, while the opera house should also strive continuously to give proof of its highest artistic ambitions. Be it as it may, the Prague State Opera is now sticking its head above the parapet, to put it broadly. Indeed, flooded as they are by ever fresh CDs and DVDs, music lovers and critics alike by now know their Wagner full well, so they are not likely to be in any way benevolent towards a faltering orchestra, a singer´s mistake, or flaws of staging and art design. Still, those who will come to the theatre to see one of the opera´s performances, ought to take into good account when comparing this production with those at the Vienna State Opera, Munich´s Bavarian State Opera, Barenboim´s Berlin stagings, or even with Bayreuth, the budgets that are at the disposal of the above-listed most prestigious opera houses, and that which is available to the PSO for making the two ends meet. The obtaining of a quality conductor, staging team and soloists has certainly been far from simple or cheap. Yet, to the best of my belief, what has been achieved there guarantees a work well done. Regardless of the definitive outcome of the production process, the Prague State Opera has already deserved thanks for an exceptional dramaturgical initiative, for its determination and courage in tackling this four-hours-long colossus of music, while facing up uncertainty as to how the Czech audience is going to respond to a work with which it has not been particularly well acquainted.

The Richard Wagner Society of Prague, one of whose tasks has been to champion Wagner´s compositional legacy in the Czech Republic and to encourage its presentation on Czech operatic stages, is unequivocally upholding this project which already anticipates the Society´s co-operation with the State Opera during the International Wagner Congress which will be held in Prague in 2012. The coming production will enable the Czech audience to see on their home turf, without having to journey hundreds of kilometres off, one of the key titles of the world opera literature, a feat which in itself is worth the effort. Therefore, we keep our

fingers crossed for the Prague State Opera and for all those involved in the project, with the best of hopes that the hard work which the production of *Tristan und Isolde* has doubtless cost, will yield meaningful fruit.

Luděk Patrák
Chair Richard Wagner Society