

VARIOUS COMPOSERS

# Krona Vaskeriet (Corona Laundrette)

**M**ike Bracegirdle and Lise Christensen, the marital partnership behind Søholm Opera, have grand designs on their little patch of Samsø, one of Denmark's most picturesque islands.

Within a few years, they hope to augment their farmhouse and sizeable plot with a beautiful carbon neutral auditorium by architects CF Møller; it will form the physical centerpiece of a cultural centre rooted in the locality but with international aspirations. Summer opera will be at the heart of the enterprise, but the vision is altogether broader and more holistic.

The prospect of watching their plans take shape over the course of the coming decade is an intriguing one. In the meantime, 2020 presented its own logistical challenges in the form of COVID-19. What should have been an immersive production of *Pagliacci* in the onion barn that forms Søholm Opera's current auditorium was abandoned after the virus took hold, replaced with *Krona Vaskeriet* (Corona Laundrette).

Re-assembling a cast and creative team from within Denmark, Natascha Metherell devised an opera gala disguised as a narrative work set in one of the coin-operated laundrettes found in the basement of many a Copenhagen apartment block.

In repurposing twenty-one arias and ensembles by twelve composers to tell the story of six locked-down residents and one washing-machine repairman, Metherell pulled off an extraordinary act of narrative complexity that appeared neither awkward nor unlikely. In fact, it all felt uncannily logical and dramatically clear, the result of insightful analyses of hidden meanings in arias and ensembles we think we know.

Some had a steely wit: the Flower Duet from *Lakmé* commandeered to depict two frustrated female neighbours awakening to the sexual pleasure of vibrating washing machines (the same two sang 'Prenderò quel brunettino' from *Così* while sorting their laundry into lights and darks); the list aria from *The Mikado* became a run-down

## Søholm Summer Opera

MUSIC ★★★★★

STAGING ★★★★★

Review by Andrew Mellor  
Photography by Jeanette Philipsen

of Corona-related regulations delivered by the pedantic caretaker. Some were more profound: the generous-spirited but forlorn repairman's recourse to *Pagliacci* (a hint of what might have been); 'Within this frail crucible of light' from *The Rape of Lucretia* to show the timid paleontologist Hans Christian's unrequited love for his neighbour Louise. Each character introduced the next to enter. Underneath them all, the Russian concert pianist Sergei, whose unceasing practice united the residents in irritation, threw in various well-known operatic leitmotifs to add commentary (the caretaker, naturally, became Beckmesser).

Welsh baritone (and now Copenhagen) David Kempster stole the show as the repairman Dai, brow-beaten but still good humoured and kind hearted; it was he who ensured Hans Christian and Louise ended up together, duetting in Lehar's 'Lippen schweigen'. It was thrilling to hear a voice as burnished and experienced as Kempster's up close and to some degree





liberated, though most will have left with an impression of his effortless comic portrayal.

Bracegirdle and Christensen appeared respectively as the caretaker and the sexually frustrated Ida, the latter trying to work her charms on everyone before winding up with Dai as the Carmen to his Toreador. Teit Kanstrup was moving as Hans Christian, a clean baritone with a fearful look in his eye.

The real-life married couple of Anders Sigfred Kampmann and Frederikke Kampmann, as the dreamer Julius and the single mother Louise, personified Søholm Opera's commitment to nurturing young Danish talent for which opportunities in the summer months are thin. His is a thrilling heldentenor in the making and hers a delectable, subtle soprano with a fine tone.

The audience loved every second of it. Would the whole thing have been as

*Clockwise from above left: Lise Christensen's Ida, fresh from the spin cycle, much to the shock of Teit Kanstrup's Hans Christian; David Kempster as the Dai, the Welsh maintenance man; Mike Bracegirdle as Leslie and David Kempster as Dai trying to revive a fainted Anders Kampmann (Julius) – Corona style!*

moving were it not the first staged opera many of us were seeing for months? I think so. **ON**

