

PIERROT LUNAIRE QUESTIONNAIRE.

How many times to date have you performed PIERROT?

Eight times. (My ninth will be at the St Magnus Festival in June 2007.)

When/where was the first time?

The Royal Academy of Music as a student: June 2000.

Had you heard other performances/recordings?

(Please name any specific vocalists).

Two: yours with Rattle/BCMG, and the Schafer/Boulez recording, for a different approach to sprechstimme. I didn't listen to them until after I worked everything out for myself though, to avoid any "copying" of mannerisms/approach.

Roughly how long did it take you to prepare your own part?

About two months. I took it slowly, mostly because I wanted the German to be perfect.

How many rehearsals did you have with the ensemble?

First time? – six. But that was as much for the ensemble as for myself, and I asked to attend all rehearsals for my own benefit.

Did you perform it with/without conductor?

With a conductor, first time.

Did you perform it from memory?

No.

Where did you stand on the platform in relation to instruments/conductor?

In front and slightly to the LHS. I could view the conductor.

Were you 'miked'?

No.

Was it 'staged' /in what costume/ with lighting? Any other visual effects?

I wore a costume of my own thoughts – mainly to help me be in character. I would describe it as an “edgy Colombine”, with elements of rag-doll, commedia-ish makeup but with a slight hint of high fashion. I like clothes ^_~

No lighting apart from usual evening concert lighting. Extra note: I did come onto the stage a good ten minutes beforehand (in the interval) and put my makeup on in front of the audience in a big round handheld (symbolic) mirror. I have repeated this since to good effect.

Did you make movements/gestures?

Yes, but not large. Mind you, I usually do for everything!

How did the audience react? (please describe basic composition of audience, age. etc.)

A mainly student audience the first time (so young but musically educated and aware, in the main), and they received it very well – as an opera more than a concert, judging my comments after, which pleased me.

What was your basic approach to the sprech-stimme, especially regarding accuracy of pitch as well as rhythm?

I have pitch so I like to be accurate in that aspect – however if a line leads me to “overshoot” the written pitch due to the emotion and shape of the line’s arc (usually in the second third) then I go with it. Same with rhythm, although I cannot remember an instance when I have been rhythmically “inaccurate” (deliberately! –heh) – however, I have been known to mess about with the tempo slightly where it is possible for emotional ends – ie. Der Kranke Mond.

Did you start by speaking /singing it?

I had extensive German coaching (for free – yey!) before the first performance, so I spoke all the words out of rhythm first, and then in rhythm, before I “stimmed”.

Did you read the texts in advance? Did you have to do extra work on the German or not? (Or did you do it in English? -which translation, if so)

I read the texts in advance, and tried to understand them as poems first. See above for the German work. I have never performed it in English.

Do you find the texts predominantly a) poignant b) dramatic c) disturbing d) ironic

e) humorous, or a combination of these?

All of the above. And my opinion of these elements change in every performance (and even every rehearsal) – that’s why it’s so fabulous to perform!

Do you see the work as Expressionist or ironic- satirical, or a mixture?

A delicious mixture.

Do you conceive it, interpretatively, as a) an example of ‘fin de siècle’ Post-Romantic decadence.

b) a sophisticated form of cabaret. c) a heightened form of dramatic declamation

or d) ripe for a contemporary ‘make-over’? (Other personal insights welcome!)

a), b),c) = yes, yes and yes, but the heaviest element for me is cabaret.

d) – it’s no more “ripe” than any other work of classical music written in the past. Everything should be kept fresh and insightful within reason, but makeovers for the sake of makeovers are pointless IMO.

Which movements do/did you find most difficult a) musically b) vocally/technically

c) balance-wise d) stamina-wise e) interpretatively.

1. Parodie was the hardest to get together ensemble-wise, the first time. The trills are very delicate, and there has to be a lightness of touch from everyone that is a difficult balance, I think.

2. All the BIG cabaret numbers – Die Kreuze has huge breaths and demands some kick-ass belting! Haha

3. (Of course) Mondfleck is the hardest to balance and keep true to Schoenberg’s markings.

4. I guess Rote Messe as well as Die Kreuze both take it out of you somewhat...!

5. I always find it hard to get through the last two (which feel like one movement anyway) without cracking emotionally/crying. The journey that you are forced to travel over the 40 mins all adds up to that last page.

Do/did you attempt to characterise the movements individually (using different timbres?)

Yes. There’s no other way IMO!

What are your favourite movements? Why?

I love Galgenlied, the moment in Mondfleck where you hear everything shift into reverse, but Madonna is my favourite. Such a beautiful arc of dynamic and emotion! Oh yes – and the piccolo “scream” in *Gemeinheit!* – and all of the comedy of the extended viola joke!...

So many bits...! I love it all!

Are there any individual moments of interplay with instruments that you especially relish?

Aha! – see above! – also I love it when I notice an instrument sneaking in to counterpoint my melody – ie. Parodie’s canonic “knitting needles” figures, the piccolo “footsteps” in *Rote Messe*, the piano having a tantrum which continues from my vocal tantrum - oh! – so many elements that I cannot even list them all!...

What aspect do you feel you need to work on further?

I would like to perform the work off by heart.

How has it affected your other work – vocally, artistically, aesthetically?

Every work I love affects how I see others, and how I perform, and PL is no lesser an influence (or indeed no more) than any other work I love. (For example Shost 14th *Symph.*, or *Cunning Little Vixen*, or *Lulu*). Perhaps they all help me to understand myself a little more? – even the bits of myself I’m not that keen on?...

Certainly I am made vulnerable by all works I feel an affinity with...

Have you tackled any other works involving ‘heightened speech’ (*FAÇADE*, etc.).

How did they compare?

I have: usually very modern works, but not *sprechstimme* all the way through – usually just as an effect. They usually do not have that cabaret element that I love in PL in it, and so don’t “do it” for me in the same way.

Please add any other reflections, including how subsequent performances have affected your view of it, and how confident you feel/felt about performing it.

I love the fact that every time I perform it it feels like a different piece; a different journey, and my mood at the time affects that tremendously, more than any other piece I have ever performed. I feel that the “stimmer” in PL really helps to shape the work as it flies live, and then the audience “bat it back” to the performer, and so on and so forth, which is possibly why I never enjoy recorded versions half as much as live ones. I

always long to do “another Pierrot!” – I hope at least to be able to perform one a year for as long as possible!

EXTRA EMAILED QUESTIONS:

a) Did you work with a pianist/coach prior to performing Pierrot. Was this helpful?

I did – but just the German coach (Geraldine Frank, btw), and then straight into the ensemble situation. I don't think it would have been helpful for me to work with a vocal coach, and luckily coz I wasn't rushed for time, I didn't need to.

b) Did your voice teacher help you with it? Were they sympathetic?

My voice teacher didn't directly help, mainly coz she said outright she wouldn't feel she could be helpful. However, she did indirectly help, due to Husler Technique. (NB. Husler Technique 90% concentrates on stamina/muscle exercises rather than a technique-based coaching approach on the actual music that you sing – if that makes sense! - , so that helped more than anything that my teacher could have done directly with PL, and I used my learned skills in my interpretation without even thinking). My vocal coach at the time came to some of the last rehearsals of the ensemble though, to help me on how it came across, and where I could do more or less for the same effect. That was also very helpful.

c) When/after rehearsing/performing the piece, were you/are you aware of any sign of vocal fatigue ? If so, how do/did you address this?

If I ever let my emotion get the better of me (certainly in Part 2) I sometimes belted without proper technique, or even shouted without thinking (!) and that could, and did, tire me. I have learned since then never to go there ^_~ and now I'm always fine. I'm usually emotionally exhausted after a performance, but never vocally.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME!

You're more than welcome! - if you need me to expand more on anything, I would be more than happy to do so.

Nat x