



Fig. 7

Here the Eb is missing from the melodic line but again shows up in the viola line.

### What is the explanation?

As the D-S-C-H motive is used at key structural points, and as Mozart uses the same compositional procedures at each appearance, 'monkeys on typewriters' coincidence theories can be ruled out.

Time travel? There are solutions of Einstein's equations of general relativity which some consider permit the possibility of time travel. Some physicists, notably Stephen Hawking, have investigated this area. Some consider that theoretical devices such as wormholes or Tipler cylinders could allow backwards displacement in time.

Whatever the explanation, I would really like to know what it is.

## CONCERT REVIEW

### Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk / Emperor's New Clothes



Alan Mercer

In January 2009 Paris' Opera Bastille welcomed the now well-established Amsterdam Opera production of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* produced by Austrian Martin Kušej, Boris was sung by Vladimir Vaneev, Zinovy by Ludovit Ludha, Katerina by Eva-Maria Westbroek and Sergei by Michael König.

For any readers who haven't seen this live, or even the DVD, the unforgettable focal point of the stage production is a huge and striking glass house, or illuminated cage, bedecked with sliding doors and ladders and surrounded by smart shoes (a sign of wealth and opulence) and by chained dogs (a sign of violence and oppression). Needless to say that this same construction serves throughout the opera, with stunning changes of light and of dressing that serve to move the action from Russian farmland to the bleak torment of the Siberian steppes. (See illustrations on following page).

In general the key dramatic episodes were brought off extremely well by Kušej and his team, highlights being Katerina and Sergei's sex scene, lit in a sea of stroboscopic light and at the moment Katerina sees Boris's ghost, where corpses emerge from the earth, crawl across to the walls which they scale, wraithlike. Also the police make their entrance at the wedding by crashing through a giant table, causing the guests to flee in all directions and for act four, the grid-like flooring rises, revealing a nightmare – a bedlam-like scene where inmates drift, sodden, aimlessly. Less impressive was the cellar door, whose horizontal aspect deprived it of its gloomy, ghoulisish interior.

As far as performances were concerned, this was never the ultimate *Lady Macbeth*. Eva Westbroek was dramaturgically powerful, although at times her higher register felt restrained, stifled. Deliberate underplaying or not, this aspect is at odds with the sheer physicality that the music implies. Boris' sexual innuendo emerged with more lewdness than many, and overall Vaneev's interpretation was the unexpected high-point. Zinovy's characterisation was simply too weak to be credible – Ludovit Ludha lost his way and frankly never regained it, be it through his dramatic persona or his vocal aptitudes. Sergei, whilst sung admirably by Michael König was simply not believably lecherous enough – hindered rather by his portly demeanour. Aksinya's rape was clumsy and unnecessarily flesh-bound. Ah yes, the audience: in spite of the use of surtitles there was almost no audience reaction to any of the satire that bleeds through the opera: at least not for the Sunday matinée performance I attended. Finally, the orchestral direction and execution of the work lacked punch, drive, and even the appearance of a dozen off-stage brass players (7 trumpets, 3 tubas and 2 cornets) failed to dynamise the rendition by the Opéra National de Paris Orchestra led by Hartmut Haenchen.

This is a production which is very much one person's view – Kušej's – and to good effect. But on-stage dexterities aren't sufficient to raise the overall impression from 'good' to the 'exceptional' that this performance was certainly not.



*Katerina alone*

*Act One with Eva Westbroek*

*Act Four - Convicts*




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*On a Scene from the Emperor's New Clothes, York, UK, Jun 2009 (composed by Hilary Nicholls)*

*E. Haddon*

In the York University Spring Festival in May 2009, student group Viriditas presented a preview of a projected one act satirical opera by York undergraduate Hilary Nicholls. The piece is a setting of the well known Hans Christian Andersen story. This satirical piece is strongly influenced by the subversive *yurodivy* – court, or holy fool – tradition of Russian culture. The *yurodivy* is notable in its ability to tell the dictator the truth and to get away with it; a phenomenon to which the late Ian MacDonald, among others, alluded to in order to hypothesise on Shostakovich's role under Stalin.

In this Court, however, there is no *yurodivy* so there is nothing to prevent the absurdity running its full course: that is until the child in the last scene cries – 'But he's got no

clothes on!' Recent events – the credit crisis, British MP's (Members of Parliament's) expenses abuses – confirm that free(ish) markets, dictatorships and baroque courts can all use *yurodivy* figures.

Nicholls' evocation of the weaving of the tailors and the King's scrutiny of their work reflects the dichotomy of the varied realisms of the persona involved through music which is complex, yet does not obscure the text. This presentation of a work in progress was presented in piano score – the work will be for chamber orchestra. It is in a lyrical postmodern style, strongly influenced by semitonal harmony but without resorting to brutalistic serialism. The production, realised by Mary E. Larew, used simple, yet effective gestures to complement the music and focus the dramatic and satirical elements of the opera.

