

that deserves to make the transition from tour to festival. The Slovakian tenor Peter Berger nearly matched her, the tang in his voice sounding just right, even if he ended up being stretched by the role's demands. The tenor Gareth Huw John valiantly stepped into the big hole left by Poulton and made a lively Game-keeper. The remaining cast was unchanged, while, as he reportedly had at Glyndebourne, Jakub Hruška achieved wonderful things with the orchestra; Melly Still's production didn't travel quite so well, with tour conditions revealing the techniques behind its theatrical sleight of hand.

Figaro's alternate cast brought changes to all four principals (the first cast was also reviewed last month, pp. 1533-4), as well as in the conductor, with Ilyich Rivas presiding over a fluid, well-paced and lively account of Mozart's score. The cast shifts perhaps brought the best results with the leading ladies. Anna Devin—

serving out her apprenticeship on the Royal Opera's Jette Parker Young Artists Programme and good to hear in a substantial role—was a delightful and impeccably-sung Susanna, well complemented by Sarah-Jane Brandon's no-less-impressive Countess, creamy of tone and beautifully phrased. As her husband, Dawid Kimberg used his slender baritone with elegance, turning in an impressive account of his aria. As Figaro, meanwhile, Derek Welton showed he is the possessor of a major voice—a bass-baritone of easy power and robust, pleasing timbre—but one that has a little development to do still in terms of refinement and range (the 'din-din's of 'Se a caso madama' were a bit of a stretch). All four slotted in well with the rest of the cast, making the most of the dubious updating of Michael Grandage's production.

HUGO SHIRLEY



■ *Natasha Jouhl in the title role and Peter Berger as the Prince in Glyndebourne Tour's 'Rusalka'*

Anacréon

Music at Oxford at the Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford, November 9

Life still delivers its delicious novelties. In Oxford it was a performance of Rameau's *Anacréon*. Not a stage performance, admittedly, but by no means a static concert version either. There are two *Anacréons* by Rameau. This was the one written for Louis XV's autumn sojourn at Fontainebleau in 1754, and not heard (at least in its entirety) for 250 years. The work occupies the genre of one-act entertainment, in contrast to the more ambitious *tragédies en musique* (five acts) or ballets (more often three acts). There are several works like this from Rameau, notably *Pigmalion* (1748). In them we encounter a

single uncomplicated plot, whose events are not so much the focus of our attention as are the manner and finesse of their unravelling. This is where of course the power of music to negotiate nuance, subtlety, suggestion and affirmation knows no rival. To rehearse the plot is to risk ridicule: Anacréon, the elderly — and historical — poet, causes the virginal Chloé, already drawn towards Batile, to think he (Anacréon) has made a proposition of love, only to intend Chloé and Batile to find the words (and actions) for their mutual affection; these emerge in the denouement of scene 5, after a whole act of tense misapprehension. It is quite extraordinary how a libretto such as this is transformed into a thing of rare beauty, with dramatic sinew and bite. That is Rameau's gift.

It was also the gift of this performance, the first of a number of collaborations planned between the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the Faculty of Music at Oxford University. In the recitatives and airs the three characters found a manner in which the so-called contrivances of the French Baroque style became perfectly natural vehicles of declamation, rich in emotional hue and meaning. Matthew Brook (Anacréon), hiding behind his beard, played the old man, inflecting his lines with an exemplary musicality and dramatic force. He, like the others, gave us a presentation in body as well as sound. Anna Dennis (Chloé) was equally at home in an idiom that can easily overwhelm the singer. Her *tremblements*, *ports de voix*, accents, *pincés* were not imposed in any way: in fact, they were integrated to the point where you didn't hear them as ornaments, but as a realization of rhetorical intent. Agustin Prunell-Friend (Batile) had the high-wire tenor act, whose effect in such pieces is to transform the mortal into something god-like: how could any girl not fall for this bloke and his high notes? Batile, who otherwise might appear a somewhat weak-willed individual, triumphed.

Rameau also triumphed, particularly in the ballet music, where his originality as a melodist, as a maker of unusual (but never erratic) harmony, and as orchestrator *sans pareil* never fails to excite players. The members of the OAE were clearly delighted with their chance to be colourful and arresting, even wacky; their gavottes and airs and pantomimes and contredanses had them on the edge of their seats in the best sense: engaged, disciplined *and* unbuttoned. The two 'flutes' (Lisa Beznosiuk and Katy Bircher) provided — most beautifully — fluttering hearts and birdsong enough to melt both agony aunts and ornithologists. And over it all presided Jonathan Williams, the musicologist *and* musician (lest the two are thought to be mutually exclusive) who had prepared the edition of *Anacréon*, who knew the score backwards, and whose skill at releasing its energy, caprice, novelty and depth was the best of all the pleasures of the evening. EDWARD HIGGINBOTTOM

The Pilgrim's Progress

English National Opera at the Coliseum, November 9

From the very first notes — a hymn-like, modally-inflected, tuba-rich concoction — there was no doubt of what we were in for. Vaughan Williams worked on his Bunyan-inspired *Pilgrim's Progress* on and off for most of his long life. By the time it finally reached the Celestial City, in 1951 during the Festival of Britain, the pros and cons of its reception seemed already well-rehearsed, not least by the composer himself. Endlessly asked then and now is the question: is it an opera? It's called a 'Morality in four acts', which keeps the balance between oratorio and theatre-piece nicely poised; but there are very few developed characters (just one, by a pessimistic count) and it omits a lot in Bunyan that