

ANDREW D. MC. CREDIE AM MA (Hons) (Syd), Dr. Phil. (Hbg.) FAHA
Professor Emeritus of Musicology, University of Adelaide, Australia Hon.
Visiting Professor University of Queensland, Brisbane, Professor adjunctus,
Monash University, Clayton Vic, 3168 Melbourne, AUSTRALIA
Guest Professor: Nordwest Deutsche Akademie Detmold, Germany.

80638 München
Tintorettostr. 1/III
Germany
Tel/Fax: +4989 - 1782325

13/18 Lansell Rd,
Toorak Vic 3142
Melbourne Australia
Tel: 00613 - 9826 6348

Fellow, Australian Academy of the Humanities Edward J. Dent Medal Laureate,
(Royal Musical Association of Great Britain, International Musicological Society)
Member, Order of Australia.

opera in review

Estonian version of *Cyrano*

tallinn

Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, is located opposite Helsinki across the Gulf of Finland, and is reached either by an 18-minute helicopter flight or a trans-gulf skim of an hour and 20 minutes by catamaran.

The population of Estonia of just over 1.5 million, is only slightly larger than those of Adelaide or Perth. The centre of Tallinn is the old town with its surviving buttressed medieval wall, and a mixture of architectures combining past historical eras of Hanseatic prosperity, Teutonic knights, Swedish 17th-century hegemony, Romanov Russia and the more recent occupations. Immediately adjacent to the old town is the new metropolitan centre with its booming 20-storey tourist hotels and other structures that threaten to obscure the previous older skyline.

The impressive opera house is a double-winged complex housing both an opera theatre and concert hall. The original complex was inaugurated in 1913, but destroyed in the Second World War. Redesigned in 1947 it has now been fully functional for several decades. The accommodation of the entire building comprises two large auditoria and three smaller performing areas. The main opera auditorium has 695 seats. On average some 250 performances are given of 25 different productions attracting audiences of 130,000. The permanent staff of 500, includes an orchestra of 90, a chorus of 60, 25 regularly contracted soloists and 60 ballet dancers. The recently concluded season comprised 13 operas, eight ballets, four operettas and two children's operas. Its mu-

tion of that composer's 75th birthday. Tamberg (b. 1930) was a senior seminal figure in Estonian musical life, having fulfilled professorial positions in composition and numerous musical consultancies during the Soviet and post Soviet periods. A prize winner and laureate of various composers' competitions he is represented by four major opera scores, *The Iron House* (1965), *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1974), *Parineye* (*Soaring*) 1983 and *Peeglimängvd* (2002), as well as several major ballet scores, four symphonies, seven concertos and one orchestral concerto.

The sequence of events and dramatic structure of his *Cyrano* opera adhere relatively closely to Rostand's original verse play as does Alfano's opera. Tamberg, in common with Alfano, produces a score whose character is one of solid neo-classical and neo-romantic stylisation, incidentally also using a relatively safe and non-controversial idiom, if possibly escapist strategy under the prevailing political and aesthetic positions in the Soviet Union of 1974. The composer's astute professionalism, having incorporated elements of baroque style in embracing stage and pit, has been a factor in sustaining over three decades with revivals since 1975 in 1995 and 2005.

The production seen on May 25, under the musical direction of Vello Pähn, was directed by Neeme Kuningas, with stage sets by Ervin Ounapuun, costumes by Mare Raidma and lighting by Neeme Jõe. Ranno Elm as *Cyrano* de

The impressive opera house is a double-winged complex housing both an opera theatre and concert hall. The original complex was inaugurated in 1913, but destroyed in the Second World War. Redesigned in 1947 it has now been fully functional for several decades. The accommodation of the entire building comprises two large auditoria and three smaller performing areas. The main opera auditorium has 695 seats. On average some 250 performances are given of 25 different productions attracting audiences of 130,000. The permanent staff of 500, includes an orchestra of 90, a chorus of 60, 25 regularly contracted soloists and 60 ballet dancers. The recently concluded season comprised 13 operas, eight ballets, four operettas and two children's operas. Its music director Arvo Vollmer is already well known to Australian audiences as chief conductor of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.

Between 1680 and 1865 there was a long prehistory of opera performances in Tallinn developed by students of its then secondary college. This organisation was succeeded in 1865 by the song and drama society Estonia which became a fully professional mixed theatrical organisation in 1906, itself superseded by the music theatre of 1947, which in 1997 was parliamentarily constituted as the Estonian National Opera.

On May 25, I was able to attend a performance of Eino Tamberg's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, in commemora-

era. Tamberg, in common with Alfano, produces a score whose character is one of solid neo-classical and neo-romantic stylisation, incidentally also using a relatively safe and non-controversial idiom, if possibly escapist strategy under the prevailing political and aesthetic impositions in the Soviet Union of 1974. The composer's astute professionalism, having incorporated elements of baroque style in embracing stage and pit, has been a factor in sustaining over three decades with revivals since 1975 in 1995 and 2005.

The production seen on May 25, under the musical direction of Vello Pähn, was directed by Neeme Kuningas, with stage sets by Ervin Ounapuun, costumes by Mare Raidma and lighting by Neeme Jõe. Rauno Elp as Cyrano de Bergerac optimised the poetic qualities and psychological complexity of his persona. His characterisation was well matched by Alfia Kamalova's Roxane, compared with which Mati Kõrts' Christian was by contrast the young if inarticulate lyric hero. To this combination Jassi Zahharov's de Guiche is the gruff, unobvious, cunning embodiment of evil. The supporting dramatis personae are mainly brief cameos. The quality of the performance was well underscored by chorus and orchestra, revealing a well routinised professionalism not always readily encountered in the Southern Hemisphere.

—ANDREW D.
McCREDIE

Opera Opera Sydney
Australia November 2005