

opera as a passacaglia with a nine-note theme that is later inverted and played backwards. This suggests serialism, but the music is heavily tonal and rich in arresting motifs.

The symphonies sometimes recall works by Sibelius, Shostakovich and Honegger but Tubin's operatic style defies categorisation.

There is room for Estonian local colour in some fine choral scenes but the opera's three compact acts move decisively to the bleak close, when the self-possessed Barbara, asked if she repents of her sin, responds, "What sin is that?"

*Barbara* could make more impact than Endrik Kerge's conventional staging allowed, and Eldor Renter's period costumes were almost too elaborate.

But the musical side under Volmer was strong. Heli Veskus sang Barbara with a creamy soprano, Roland Liiv's appealing tenor served for her lover Bonnius, and Rauno Elp was forceful as the lead brother Jürgen.

Teo Maiste displayed a smooth, expressive bass as the parson Friesner, who, like Raimondo in *Lucia*, sides with the heroine but proves ineffectual.

★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

Tel +37 2 683 1260

### Barbara von Tisenhusen

Estonian National Opera Tallinn

GEORGE LOOMIS

Interest in the Estonian composer Eduard Tubin has grown steadily since his compatriot Neeme Järvi began a complete recorded cycle of his 11 symphonies shortly before the composer's death in 1982. A second set followed from the Estonian conductor Arvo Volmer.

Volmer became artistic director of the Estonian National Opera in August and soon brought *Barbara von Tisenhusen*, the first of Tubin's two completed operas, to the stage. The new production

is the company's third, making *Barbara* the most frequently performed Estonian opera. Tubin lived in Sweden from 1944, but Soviet authorities eventually permitted visits home and he was present for *Barbara*'s 1969 premiere.

The story, based on a real event in 16th-century Estonia, is simple and grim. Barbara transgresses a rule against noble women marrying commoners without family consent. The honour of the Tisenhusens having been offended, her three brothers, armed with a court order, throw her under the ice of a frozen lake.

Tubin said he conceived the