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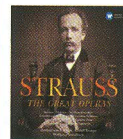
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COVER: Omer Meir Wellber. Photo by Felix Broede

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## Welcome



BENJAMIN FAJONIGA

The season of awards ceremonies is upon us. In recent weeks, in quick succession, we've seen the International Opera Awards (IOA) putting on the glitz for a second year running; the BBC Music Awards, drawing attention to the extraordinary richness and variety of classical music on record; and the Olivier Awards highlighting the successes of London's Theatreland.

Awards ceremonies are often criticised for handing out gongs to all the usual suspects. However, beyond the glamour of high-profile celebrities, at every one of these awards ceremonies, something brave and unexpected was brought into the spotlight: English Touring Opera's Olivier Award commended this company's adventurous productions that challenge and stimulate audiences across the nation; *Grimes on the Beach* (winner in BBC and IOA categories) provided an ambitious

and spectacular centrepiece to last year's Benjamin Britten celebrations that is unlikely to be repeated; IOA's Male Singer of the Year Award acknowledged the extraordinary performances of Australian tenor Stuart Skelton – not a household name but one of the most intense and moving singers I know, and thoroughly deserving of the limelight.

I confess I knew nothing of the work of Teatro Sociale in the beautiful city of Como in the northern Italian Lakes. That is, until the opera house won this year's Accessibility Award at the IOA. Perhaps that doesn't sound very exciting, but then I learnt that this theatre, to celebrate its bicentenary last year, invited hundreds of people from across Como and the surrounding community to take part in a spectacular performance of Orff's *Carmina Burana*. Of the hundreds of participants, many had never attended an opera, let alone performed on an opera stage. The experience has forged new and close links between the opera house and the local community. At a time when stories of opera in Italy tend to focus on gloom and doom, this was real cause for celebration and a perfect example of why awards ceremonies deserve to prosper.

Since we're giving people a pat on the back, this seems a good moment to highlight a fantastic new initiative from the company behind *Opera Now*, Rhinegold Publishing. **Rhinegold LIVE** is a new series of concerts at the Conway Hall in central London which presents great musicians performing repertoire that they love in an informal, intimate setting. Each concert is free (just sign up online for complimentary tickets) and is curated by an Editor from Rhinegold's stable of performing arts titles (including my colleagues at *Classical Music* and *International Piano*). Each performance concludes with a Q&A session with the Editor, allowing our artists to share something of their human side with the audience. *Opera Now's* first Rhinegold LIVE evening features the stunning young British soprano Mary Bevan, appearing at the Conway Hall at 6.30pm on Monday 10 November. Before that, you can catch her this month when she appears as Despina in English National Opera's new production of *Così fan tutte*.

Ashutosh Khandekar

Sign up for your complimentary tickets to Mary Bevan's concert in the Rhinegold LIVE series by visiting [www.rhinegold.co.uk/live](http://www.rhinegold.co.uk/live)

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