

# MUSICAL JOURNEYS

Gramophone's monthly search for the best classical music experiences around the world

## *Madiba's generation*

**Philip Clark** finds out what life is like for young classical musicians hoping to make a career in today's Cape Town



Cape Town Opera: *Porgy and Bess* was a success but funding has still been cut

The students who are currently passing through Franklin Larey's piano class at the University of Cape Town (UCT) were all born after Nelson Mandela became South African president in 1994. 'I call them Madiba's generation – they're happy to study traditional South African music in the morning, Mozart or Brahms in the afternoon,' Larey tells me. 'The hang-ups of earlier generations have simply gone.'

My family and I arrived in Cape Town in December, ostensibly for a winter-warmer holiday, but the opportunity to poke around the city's classical music scene proved impossible to resist.

The city's jazz heritage is writ large. Local record shops are proud to sell you discs by jazz pioneers such as Chris McGregor, Dudu Pukwana and Abdullah Ibrahim, but requests for CDs by local 'classical' composers are met with blank faces. Classical music in Cape Town has long had a harder ride than home-grown jazz or pop, and for good reasons. It doesn't take long to work out that the story of classical music in Cape Town, like everything else in South Africa, is a reflection of the wider political history.

What role should classical music take in a post-colonial city that, for nearly five decades, enshrined delusions of white superiority in law? That remains the big question.

Larey is a 'new' South African success story. A pianist who specialises in Brahms, Mozart, Ravel and Scriabin, he was categorised as 'coloured' during the Apartheid era – that is, with a higher status than 'black' but with fewer rights than 'whites' – and left the country to further his studies at the University of Cincinnati.

Today, he splits his time between UCT and Vermont's Adamant Music School and is pragmatic about the prospects for his Cape Town students. 'Students who are likely to have "big" careers need to go to London, New York or Paris,' he says. 'They can't sustain a career here; but I'm very selective. That pressured life, however, is not for everyone.'

Larey suggests I look out for Eben Wagenstroom, one of his most talented pupils, who has all the technical and interpretative

tools to become a major artist. When I meet Angelo Gobbato, former head of opera at UCT and now chief executive officer of Cape Town Opera, he confirms that same brain-drain trend. His 'star' pupil is the soprano Pretty Yende, who now lives outside of South Africa and rubs shoulders with Andrea Bocelli in New York's Central Park.

Gobbato arrived as a small boy from his native Milan in 1950, when Cape Town's opera scene was largely make-do-and-mend. Performances he witnessed during his teens were usually staged in repurposed cinemas, so-so acoustics mingling with mock-Tudor architecture. Someone could write an opera based on his telling of the unfolding comedies and tragedies of opera in Cape Town, a story that could easily fill the next 12 issues of *Gramophone*. There's far too much detail to recount here, but Gobbato has written an account for the Cape Town Opera website – Google it

## *'Students likely to have big careers need to go to London, New York or Paris'*

*Franklin Larey, Cape Town University*

and read on in amazement. As Apartheid bit, he faced a common dilemma – whether to stay or go. 'I stayed and tried to make a difference,' he explains, 'using opera to build bridges.' But South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994 brought with them an unforeseen and bitter paradox. Black vocal students started enrolling in great numbers at the previously off-limits UCT Opera School, and graduated just as the new ANC government began dismantling national funding for the arts – a scheme associated with the old regime.

Cape Town Opera has since lived a hand-to-mouth existence, squirrelling away small pots of local, lottery-based funding that allowed it to mount last year's widely praised tour of *Porgy and Bess*. But even that source of funding has now been chopped. 'We're left to appeal to corporate sponsors, who are more interested in sport than music,' Gobbato says. 'You'd think our *Porgy and Bess* would be a great advert for South Africa. But the future looks very grim.'

## *Vienna in Cornwall*

**Hannah Nepil** braves the floods to experience the unique atmosphere of the Music at Tresanton festival in St Mawes

A train, a rail-replacement bus, a train, and one more train: en route from London to Cornwall and hampered by flooding, I realised one thing: those who had braved this journey to Music at Tresanton – an annual chamber music festival in the Cornish village of St Mawes – must have really, really wanted to get there.

On arrival, it wasn't hard to see why. Drenched in the sound of churning waves and the eerie glow of moonlight, St Mawes in

November makes a highly atmospheric venue, on which Noam Greenberg's weekend festival has sensibly capitalised.

The pianist founded Music at Tresanton in 2006 as a one-off event to indulge his love of Schumann. 'It was all a bit accidental – I had no plan to make a festival,' says Greenberg, 'but it was Schumann's 150th anniversary year, so I had the idea to play all of his chamber music with piano.'

Since then, Greenberg's concerts have evolved into an annual fixture, embracing many composers other than Schumann. But the spontaneous approach has stuck, along with a preference for the small-scale and intimate: most of the performers – such as the cellist Alexander Chaushian and clarinetist Chen Halevi – are

*'It was all a bit accidental – I had no plan to make a festival'*

Noam Greenberg, pianist

friends of Greenberg's. The entire festival consists of four concerts held over one weekend, all taking place in the minuscule St Mawes Methodist Chapel, and programmes are constructed organically. 'There is no ethos; no mission statement or purpose behind it all,' says Greenberg. 'There are different focuses behind the programmes every year, but they tend to start with a certain interest – such as a composer – and grow from there.'

This year, the running theme was 'Vienna – City of Song', inspiring a strongly contrasted opening programme: Chen Halevi gave us an effervescent reading of Schubert's Clarinet Sonatina in G minor, while heavier Viennese fare included Greenberg's and Ferenc Rados's extrovert rendition of Schubert's Sonata in C major for piano duet, and soprano Ailish Tynan's haunting account of

## The insider's guide

Gramophone selects February's unmissable musical events

**6 Sydney, Opera House**  
Vladimir Ashkenazy conducts the Sydney Symphony in Fauré's *Pelléas et Mélisande* Suite, Sibelius's *Legends* and Debussy's *La mer* on February 6, 8 and 9.  
[sydneyphilharmonicsymphony.com](http://sydneyphilharmonicsymphony.com)

**9 New York, Metropolitan Opera House**  
The Met presents Bizet's *Carmen*, starring Anita Rachvelishvili in the title-role and Yonghoon Lee as Don José. The production is conducted by Michele Mariotti and runs from February 9 to March 1.  
[metoperafamily.org](http://metoperafamily.org)

**10 London, Handel House**  
The Handel House Singers and harpsichordist Laurence Cummings invite the public to take part in workshops and rehearsals throughout the day, which culminates in a public performance of excerpts from Handel's oratorio *Saul* at Grosvenor Chapel.  
[handelhouse.org](http://handelhouse.org)

**13 Munich, National Theatre**  
Bavarian State Opera presents a new production of Mussorgsky's

*Boris Godunov* conducted by Kent Nagano and starring Alexander Tsymbalyuk in the title-role. Performances on February 13, 17, 20, 23, 27 and March 2.  
[staatsoper.de](http://staatsoper.de)

**13 London, St John's Smith Square**  
The London Mozart Players launch their mini-series at St John's Smith Square, performing Sibelius's *Pelléas et Mélisande* with a special script written and performed by actor Simon Callow; Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*; and Brahms's Violin Concerto, featuring soloist Joseph Swensen, who also conducts.  
[Imp.org](http://Imp.org)

**15 Sochi, Winter International Festival of Arts**  
Under the direction of Yuri Bashmet, the Sixth Winter International Arts Festival takes place between February 15 and 24 in the Russian city of Sochi. Artists taking part include Sir James Galway, Angelika Kirchshlager, Massimo Quarta, and the soloists of Vienna State Opera.  
[sochifestival.kinglike.ru/en/](http://sochifestival.kinglike.ru/en/)



Founder of Music at Tresanton, pianist Noam Greenberg, with Chen Halevi

Berg's *Frühe Lieder*. In the next morning's concert, a sensitive, if slightly underpowered, performance of Brahms's Cello Sonata – from Chaushian – sounded rather meek in comparison with Tynan's hot-blooded take on four Mahler songs that ended the programme.

But then, as Tynan tells me afterwards, she is currently in the 'recital zone'. 'Don't get me wrong, I love doing opera,' she says, her breath still steaming in the freezing chapel air. 'But with a recital there's nowhere to hide. It really reveals the heart and soul of the performer – not that of a director or conductor. It's *parfum* as opposed to *eau de toilette*.'

But such intensity comes at a price, she admits, particularly in such a tiny venue: 'Last night, doing the Berg, I thought, "Oh God, I'm probably blowing the heads off them."' **G**  
 For information about the 2013 festival, visit [musicattresanton.co.uk](http://musicattresanton.co.uk)

## 21 Los Angeles, Walt Disney Concert Hall

Dudamel conducts the LA Phil in Wagner's Funeral Music from *Götterdämmerung*, Schumann's Symphony No 3, *Rhenish*, and Brahms's Violin Concerto, with Gil Shaham, from February 21-24. [laphil.com](http://laphil.com)

## 22 Manchester, Bridgewater Hall

The BBC Philharmonic conducted by Gianandrea Noseda perform Stravinsky's *The Firebird* as part of a Stravinsky series for BBC Radio 3 which marks 100 years since the premiere of *The Rite of Spring*. [bridgewater-hall.co.uk](http://bridgewater-hall.co.uk)

## 22 Plymouth, University

The 2013 edition of the Peninsula Arts Contemporary Music Festival explores the theme of memory as a virtual sixth sense, drawing on classical and electronic music. Highlights of the three-day event (February 22-24) include the Bergersen String Quartet performing *Memoria Technica* by Cornish composer Matthew Slater, the Ten Tors Orchestra with works by Eduardo Reck Miranda and Nick Ryan, and guitarist Will McNicol performing his suite of four works exploring Alzheimer's disease. [pacmf.co.uk](http://pacmf.co.uk)

## EVENT OF THE MONTH

### February 21

#### *Bath, Bachfest*

The Bath Bachfest 2013 runs from February 21-23 in St Mary's Bathwick, the Guildhall, the Assembly Rooms and Bath Abbey. Highlights include the Gabrieli Consort and Players under Paul McCreesh in Handel's pastoral opera *Acis and Galatea*; the Academy of Ancient Music, directed by violinist Pavlo Beznosiuk in Bach's Suites Nos 1-4; and La Serenissima, directed by Adrian Chandler, in 'A Venetian Extravaganza', which includes works by Albinoni and Vivaldi.

[bathbachfest.org.uk](http://bathbachfest.org.uk)



Paul McCreesh conducts Handel