
René Pape

Selected Reviews

***Parsifal* – DVD**

Royal Opera House (December 2014)

“René Pape (Gurnemanz)[is] vocally tireless, streets ahead of modern-day rivals.” – **David Gutman, Editor's Choice, Gramophone Magazine**

Parsifal

Royal Opera House (November 2013)

“René Pape brings crisp, conversational tone to Gurnemanz’s monologues”. – **Andrew Clark, Financial Times *******

“René Pape’s Gurnemanz is magnificently sung: nobly authoritative, but never pompous or barking.” – **Rupert Christiansen, The Telegraph *******

“Vocally the standard is set by René Pape’s immaculate, intense Gurnemanz, who makes every syllable in his narrations matter.” – **Andrew Clements, The Guardian *******

“Vocally the stars are René Pape whose Gurnemanz is easy, conversational but cavernously strong, and Gerald Finley as Amfortas.” – **Michael White, The New York Times**

“René Pape gives one of his more verbally animated performances as Gurnemanz.” – **Barry Millington, Evening Standard *******

“That this is still a triumphant evening is thanks... to the burnished beauty of Pape’s singing.” – **Michael Church, The Independent**

“René Pape as the wise, troubled, authoritative Gurnemanz, is warm and rich in tone.” – **Fiona Maddocks, The Observer**

“René Pape is Gurnemanz, pouring out a stream of luscious though surprisingly quiet tone.” – **Michael Tanner, The Spectator**

“El otro gran cantante de esta nueva producción de la Royal Opera es René Pape, un Gurnemanz de fraseo igualmente claro y timbre bellissimo en su lubricada emisión y variación de color.” – **Agustín Blanco Bazán, Mundo Clasico**

“Gerald Finley (Amfortas) and René Pape (Gurnemanz) both possess superb baritone voices and a gift for emotional directness. It’s five-and-a-half hours of nearly unalloyed pleasure.” – **Warwick Thompson, The Metro *******

“Rene Pape’s richly lyrical Gurnemanz.” – **George Hall, The Stage**

“Vocal honours of the evening go to René Pape’s glorious assumption of the role of Gurnemanz. To hear the role really *SUNG* by an artist at the peak of his powers was a real privilege. He made every word tell, his long narration in Act One flew by, and in the third act was nothing sort of sensational.” – **Keith McDonnell, Whats On Stage**

René Pape

Selected Reviews

Peter Grimes / Mariinsky Recording **Aldeburgh Festival (MAR0526)**

"Rene Pape's Wotan is pretty magisterial. The advantage of having a bass sing the role is apparent, and luckily Pape also has a thrilling top..." – **Opera Now**

Beethoven 9 with Barenboim **BBC Proms 2012**

"The four soloists were led into their battle by the clarion tones of René Pape, a bass whose vocal depth and presence anchored some of the most challenging ensemble writing in the repertoire." – **Guy Dammann, *The Guardian* *******

"The soloists, particularly bass René Pape, were full of fire and conviction." – **Ivan Hewitt, *The Telegraph* *******

"the electrifying entry of bass René Pape in the finale" – **Richard Fairman, *The Financial Times***

"Pape was on amazing form, positively spitting out the "Feuer" (at "Feuertrunken")." – **Colin Clarke, *SeenAndHeardInternational.com***

"The effect was incredible and gave context to the rest of the symphony, starting with a jubilant tutti realisation of the tune and magnificently bold entry of René Pape. By some distance the best of the soloists, he gave great personal character to his recitative in addition to a wonderfully imposing voice throughout." – **Rohan Shotton, *BachTrack.com***

"The final injection of adrenaline was administered by René Pape, in a declamatory intervention delivered in magisterial voice." – **Mark Pullinger, *ClassicalSource.com***

Faust **Royal Opera House (October 2011)**

"René Pape was simply magnificent as Mephistopheles, his vocal power, histrionic authority and sly wit putting him in the Chaliapin league." – **Rupert Christiansen, *Daily Telegraph***

"Also new is the Mephistopheles, leading German bass Rene Pape, who is too rarely in London. Hearing his majestic voice in a major role here is a great pleasure....." – **Richard Fairman, *Financial Times***

"Pape's Mephistopheles always offered good value – and eloquent eyebrows, too. This Devil snared his catches through mischievous underplaying." – **Geoff Brown, *The Times***

"Any staging of the story demands, above all, a convincing Mephistopheles and they do not come any better than the German bass René Papp who gives a truly commanding performance in the role. His huge deep voice and powerful presence conveys an impression of awesomely undeniable evil that dominates the entire work." – **William Harston, *Daily Express***

René Pape

Selected Reviews

'In this Royal Opera production of Gounod's Faust, there's no question about who's in charge. Not only does the devil get all the best lines, but he bosses the show from beginning to end. Clad in feathered hat, long curly wig and reminiscent of the Laughing Cavalier, René Pape plays Mephistopheles quite superbly, alternating between mercurial bouffe comic lines and extreme sardonic nastiness. His voice was smooth and controlled and his whole presence radiated command.' – **David Karlin, *Bachtrack***

"And the devil himself? From the moment René Pape appears, waving sulphurous smoke away from his face, his is an enticingly nonchalant malevolence, booming bass authority offset by melting head tones and many a vocal shrug."

The Independent

"Rene Pape...the magnificence of the voice...." – **George Hall, *The Stage***

"Lording it over it all was Rene Pape's marvellous Mephistopheles, rolling out one generous phrase after another and acting with an irresistible mischievous glint in his eye." – **Hugo Shirley, *MusicalCriticism.com***

"He (Grigolo) forms a strong partnership with René Pape's Méphistophélès, Grigolo acting as the yapping, snapping terrier, Pape as the Alsatian happy to do things in his own time. Pape's resonant bass is put to good use in the role as this Méphistophélès cuts an intrinsically rough, but outwardly spruced up, figure." – **Sam Smith, *Musik OMH***

"When it comes to ideal casting you probably can't get much better than René Pape as Méphistophélès ...Pape's Wagnerian instrument has a luscious "black" timbre and is perfectly smooth and even throughout the range, possessing the heft and authority required to really make an impact in this vital role... His Act III incantation "O nuit, étends sur eux ton ombre!" was sung with such noble majesty that he could have been Wotan saluting Valhalla.." – **Faye Courtney, *Opera Britannia***

"...he was no match musically for the superb René Pape as Méphistophélès. Pape, in addition to superb stage presence, has a huge voice; he has taken the role of Wotan – Siegfried – for the Berlin State Opera and La Scala, Milan, which should give some indication as to the size of his voice. Yet it is sublimely focused, too. As with the character he portrayed, control was all; his "Le veau d'or" left one in no doubt of this. Vocal staccato is perfectly controlled." – **Colin Clark, *Seen and Heard International***

"René Pape's Méphistophélès had imperious charm." – **Fiona Maddocks, *The Observer***

"René Pape had enormous fun as the charismatic devil figure; vocally he was as rich and sonorous as one could hope for. In both dramatic and vocal terms he caught the cynical, nonchalant and malevolent aspects in equal measure, and managed to be humorous and slightly scary at the same time." – **Alexander Campbell, *Classical (Source undated)***

'The opera blogosphere is buzzing today over this photo from the revival of David McVicar's 2004 Covent Garden production of Gounod's Faust. The opera had its season premiere on Sept 18.

The German base baritone sings the role of Mephistopheles, the devil who spends five acts negotiating for the possession of the title character's soul. The Prince of Darkness is less successful in his attempts to ensnare Marguerite (Faust's love interest). But by the look of things, he manages to acquire the soul of her couturier.

The dress shows up in the Walpurgisnacht scene in Act IV, a huge ballet sequence with Mephistopheles leading all of the demonic powers of hell in a terpsichorean celebration of how cool it is to be the Devil. Most productions, including stagings at the Met over the last three decades leave the sequence out entirely." – **Paul Pelkonen, *Superconductor***

René Pape

Selected Reviews

Die Walküre

Berlin Staatsoper (April 2011)

'The Berlin performances brought some changes in the cast, the greatest interest being attached to René Pape's role debut as Wotan, and he didn't disappoint. The summoning of Brünnhilde at the beginning of Act 2 was glorious stuff, crowned by a superb F sharp, and a sure harbinger of great things. Pape found movingly intimate touches in the Act 2 monologue and in the well-paced final scene, phrasing broadly and employing a varied tonal palette.' – **Carlos Maria Solare, *Opera magazine*, July 2011**

Boris Godunov

Metropolitan Opera (March 2011)

"...the exciting cast the Met had assembled, headed by the great German bass René Pape in the title role...

We first meet Mr. Pape's Boris at the czar's coronation. With his towering physique and unforced charisma, Mr. Pape looks regal and imposing. Yet with his vacant stare, the haggard intensity in his face, his stringy long hair and his hulking gait, he is already bent over with guilt and doubt. Mr. Pape has vocal charisma as well, and his dark, penetrating voice is ideal for the role...his enunciation was crisp and natural. And in every language, Mr. Pape makes words matter.

During the coronation there is a soul-searching moment when Boris removes his crown and voices his remorse to himself. Some great Borises have conveyed the character as beset with internalized torment. Mr. Pape's anguish is always raw, fitful and on the surface. But the volatility is balanced by the magisterial power he conveys.

Mr. Pape is riveting in Boris's death scene, where, seemingly through sheer, body-crunching guilt, the czar has a physical breakdown and dies.

The strong cast members...were all cheered, especially Mr. Pape." – **Anthony Tommasini, *New York Times***

"Many basses make Boris bigger than life; René Pape makes him life-size, also poignant and splendidly sonorous." – **Martin Bernheimer, *Financial Times***

"At the heart of the opera is Boris himself, given agonizing life by the resplendent bass René Pape, who was singing the role for the first time at the Met. With his richly beautiful voice and searing stage presence, Mr. Pape's tormented Boris always seemed to be looking behind him for the ghost of the child he killed, and by the end of the opera he was barely able to hold himself upright. This was the most poignant of murderers, one who has realized too late that human connection matters. Most heartrending were the scenes with Boris's own children, and in Act IV, as he is dying and prays desperately for their protection, the irony was unmistakable." – **Heidi Waleson, *The Wall Street Journal***

"René Pape is superb as a wrenching, troubled Boris." – **Steve Cohen, *The Opera Critic***

"As for Pape, there is hardly another singer alive with his power to make the scene around him look sharper and sound more intense... Pape wraps his ermine voice so tightly around the character's psyche that singer and sovereign fuse. Boris is a Lear-like figure, intertwining majesty, age, and doubt, and Pape savors his complexities. Mussorgsky translated the irregular rhythms and veering inflections of speech into short, mercurial phrases, and Pape, instead of bellowing and rasping his way toward his death, delivers Boris's agonies with restrained grace, illuminating his magnetism and fragility."

– **Justin Davidson, *New York Magazine***

René Pape

Selected Reviews

19th Century German Lieder [Brian Zeger - Piano], Carnegie Hall, 26th April 2009

Franz Schubert: Schwanengesang: Aufenthalt, D. 957, No. 5; Ständchen, D.957, No. 4; Der Atlas, D.957, No. 8 – Der Einsame, D.800 – An die Musik, D. 547 – Lachen und Weinen, D.777 – Heidenröslein, D.257 – Der Musensohn, D.764 – Lied eines Schiffers an die Dioskuren, D.360 – Prometheus, D.674

Hugo Wolf: Drei Gedichten von Michelangelo: Wohl denk ich oft - Alles endet, was entsteht - Fühlt meine Seele

Robert Schumann: Dichterliebe, Op. 48

"On Saturday evening at Carnegie Hall, René Pape, sharing the stage with the superb pianist, Brian Zeger, made his long-anticipated recital debut. In the fourteen years since he first appeared at the Metropolitan Opera, Pape has been much admired here for both his vocal and dramatic gifts. He has a powerful, flexible voice that is capable of producing a marvelous variety of colors. He sings with a beautiful and smooth vocal line throughout his considerable range. His enunciation is crystal clear. And, whether in star roles or in cameos (such as Fasolt in *Das Rheingold*, which I saw on Thursday), his voice illuminates the interior life of the characters he portrays.

The results are often surprising (his depiction of a love-sick, emotionally vulnerable Fasolt, for example) as well as deeply affecting. In his move from the opera stage to the recital stage, Pape made full use of all of these talents in a very ambitious program. Throughout, but especially in the second half, where he was virtually an equal partner, Brian Zeger played with great sensitivity and technical skill.

Zeger has an exceptionally broad range of abilities as well as responsibilities. He has a successful career as a pianist and in chamber music. He is an arts administrator, currently head of the Julliard Vocal Arts Department as well as the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artists Development Program. He is also a teacher and a writer. I am reminded a bit of an old friend's tongue-in-cheek observation about Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. "Surely, he said, there must be a Mr. Dietrich, a Mr. Fischer, and a Mr. Dieskau." Is there really only one Brian Zeger?

In the first set of Schubert songs, two of the three, *Aufenthalt* and *Der Atlas* showed off the unforced power and sonorous depth of Pape's voice. The second set was lighter in tone and in mood. *Der Einsame* had a sprightly playfulness but, underneath, there was the wistful sadness of the hermit sitting by the fire with only a cricket for company. *Heidenröslein* was sung as a mock tragedy, with beautiful vocal colors and dynamic finesse.

Between the two sets of Schubert songs, were Wolf's three songs based on poems by Michelangelo. The second of these, *Alles endet, was entsteht*, sung mostly in half voice, was an emotionally wrenching experience – a memento mori about the transitory nature of life, love, even memory. Nothing lasts. It reminded me of sixteenth century English poet Thomas Nashe's *In Time of Pestilence*, which is probably an unfortunate comparison to be making under current circumstances. Wolf died, insane, the result of syphilis, less than a year after he wrote these songs.

The second half of the program was devoted to Schumann's *Dichterliebe*, a song cycle of a very different type from Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*, both of which tell the consistent, linear story of one character. If there is a single character in *Dichterliebe*, it is Schumann himself. He selected sixteen poems from the sixty-four in Heine's *Lyrisches Intermezzo* and constructed a musically subtle and complex picture of love in all its aspects – with its hope and joy tinged with the possibility, even inevitability, of heartbreak and despair. This performance of *Dichterliebe*, one of the finest I have ever heard, was the highlight of the evening.

René Pape

Selected Reviews

In these songs, such as the extraordinarily tender *Allnächtlich im Traume*, Schumann transfigures heartbreak into something exquisite. Throughout, Pape's enunciation, phrasing and word painting brought out the nuances of the text. He employed a wide range of dynamics, from the powerful depths of his voice in *Im Rhein im heiligen Strome* to the gentleness of *Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen* and the melting lyricism of *Im wunderschönen Monat Mai*.

Dichterliebe is noteworthy for its extended -- and here, beautifully played -- postludes that crystallize the mood of the songs. Two lovely examples came at the end of *Im Rhein im heiligen Strome*, and *Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen*. The piano could also be a companion in despair, as in *Ich hab' im Traum geweinet*, where Zeger left us hanging on the last almost painfully tentative notes. Or the postlude could express a depth of emotion that the voice did not express, as in *Und wüssten's die Blumen*. The long postlude of the last song, *Die alten, bösen Lieder* seemed to achieve the peace that eluded the poet in life.

Mr. Pape is currently appearing at the Metropolitan Opera as Fasolt in *Das Rheingold* and Hunding in *Die Walküre*.
– Arlene Judith Klotzko, www.concertonet.com

In Brooding Lieder, Gentleness and Drama

"By its nature the bass voice is better suited for melancholy music than for cheerful, celebratory works. You can find exceptions — the bass part in the Beethoven Ninth Symphony and Leporello's Catalogue Aria from "Don Giovanni," for example — but a sepulchral growl, room-shaking power and a dark, soulful coloration are the truest hallmarks of a great bass, and composers are drawn to those qualities for the naturalness with which they evoke desolation, melancholia and terror. René Pape sang a program of 19th-century German lieder at Carnegie Hall on Saturday, his New York recital debut.

René Pape has inhabited both the brighter and gloomier ends of the bass repertory on the opera stage and in orchestral performances, and although his appearance at Carnegie Hall on Saturday evening was his New York recital debut, he has also been heard here in the song repertory. He was one of four Metropolitan Opera singers who collaborated with James Levine on an evening of Schubert songs on this same stage in 2004. That night, not surprisingly, he sang the most heart-wrenching works on the program.

In a way that performance was a preview of his recital on Saturday. Except for his final encore — "Some Enchanted Evening" — he sang only 19th-century German lieder of the most brooding sort, with Schubert groups surrounding Wolf's "Drei Gedichte von Michelangelo" on the first half, and Schumann's "Dichterliebe" after the intermission.

"Aufenthalt," which opened the first Schubert group, offered a quick reminder of the depth and power of Mr. Pape's sound, as well as the subtlety of his interpretive style. He is not a singer who dazzles with agile changes of timbre within a song, and for the most part he chose songs that barely require that.

But his singing is hardly monochromatic. If "Standchen" lacked the lilt a higher voice gives it, the balance of drama and gentleness that Mr. Pape brought to it made it seem fresh. And the dynamic fluidity that both Mr. Pape and his eloquent pianist, Brian Zeger, lavished on "Der Atlas" pointed up the anguish that drives the song, much as a similar marshalling of resources unleashed the anger that propels "Prometheus," in Mr. Pape's second Schubert group.

For pure, soul-wrenching introspection, nothing on the program — not even "Dichterliebe" — quite matched Mr. Pape's rendering of the Wolf "Michelangelo" songs, particularly the central meditation on mortality, "Alles endet, was entsteht."

"Dichterliebe" grapples with a more transitory kind of pain, even if the Heine poetry that Schumann set paints the vicissitudes of love in the grandest terms. Here too it was the fine gradation that Mr. Pape and Mr. Zeger applied to the music that gave Heine's

René Pape

Selected Reviews

(and Schumann's) passion flesh and blood. Mr. Pape's sound was often at its lightest, but in songs like "Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen" and "Ich hab' im Traum geweinet," that gentleness had an irresistible power." – **Allan Kozinn, *New York Times***

***Tristan und Isolde* Glyndebourne Festival Opera (August 2007)**

"The greatest performance is René Pape's King Mark, who sounds the lowest depths of grief at his betrayal by his wife and his beloved nephew." – **George Hall, *The Independent***

"...bass René Pape as King Marke goes a long way [...]: generosity incarnate, a great performance."
– **Michael Church, *The Independent***

"With Rene Pape repeating his magisterial King Marke [...], this is opera as good as it gets." – **Anthony Holden, *The Guardian***

BBC First Night of the Proms Beethoven Symphony No.9 (July 2007)

"...the splendid bass voice of René Pape roused the performance out of its slumbers..." – **Richard Fairman, *Financial Times***

"But if the musicians were energised for the finale, it seemed as much down to René Pape's arresting opening bass solo as to Belohlavek's careful beat." – **Erica Jeal, *The Guardian***

"René Pape - contributed potent singing..." – **Geoffrey Norris, *The Telegraph***

"...bass René Pape did launch his opening invocation to joy unimpeded by a score - and all the more forcefully for that..."
– **Barry Millington, *Evening Standard***

"And some strong, characterful solo singing, too — particularly from the German bass René Pape."
– **Richard Morrison, *The Times***

***Parsifal* Metropolitan Opera (May 2006)**

"René Pape brings such bel-canto finesse to the ruminations of Gurnemanz...." – **Martin Bernheimer, *Financial Times***

***Lohengrin* Metropolitan Opera (May 2006)**

"René Pape intones Heinrich's royal platitudes handsomely, appears bored." – **Martin Bernheimer, *Financial Times***

René Pape

Selected Reviews

Tristan und Isolde

Staatsoper Unter den Linden (April 2006)

"Wenn der Marke, von René Pape mit überragender Bassgewalt und verzweifelter Schmerz gesungen, die Phrase "Da ließ er denn so sein" auf einem geflüsterten A ausklingen lässt, nimmt das Fagott dieses A in eben genau gleicher Textur und Farbe, dynamisch präzise abgestimmt, auf, führt es weiter, wird zum Echoraum des Seelentons der Bühnenfigur."

– **Von Götz Thieme, *Stuttgarter Zeitung***

"Coup de chapeau aussi au reste de la distribution, chanteurs et acteurs sans faille: ... René Pape (Marke bouleversant comme à son habitude)." – **Nicolas Blanmont, *La Libre***

Koenig Marke in Glyndebourne's 'Tristan und Isolde' and Koenig Heinrich in Covent Garden's 'Lohengrin', Summer 2003

"...poise and force..." – **Fiona Maddocks, *Evening Standard***

"...the commanding King Marke of Rene Pape rolling out his disappointment in tones as darkly mellifluous as his instrumental alter ego, the bass clarinet." – **Edward Seckerson, *The Independent***

"That fabulous bass Rene Pape shaped Marke's monologue into vivid emotional drama..."

– **Rupert Christiansen, *Daily Telegraph***

"Rene Pape makes an archetypally imposing Marke, gloriously sung..." – **Andrew Clarke, *Financial Times***

"In the German bass Rene Pape, Glyndebourne has the optimum casting for the role of the cuckolded Marke today. The king's long Act II lament can be a bore, but not when as spellbindingly sung as here, tone and word married in perfect harmony."

– **Hugh Canning, *Sunday Times***

"Rene Pape's King Marke is a magnificent and dignified performance, sung with the utmost compassion and with an enviable richness and range of bass tone." – **Michael Kennedy, *Sunday Telegraph***

"With Rene Pape as a resonant King Marke...this was one of those evenings which will long linger even in the critical mind..."

– **Anthony Holden, *The Observer***

"...I couldn't fault the singing and acting of Rene Pape (King Marke)..." – **Anna Picard, *Independent on Sunday***

"No praise can be too high for Rene Pape's King Marke..." – **Michael Church, *Glasgow Sunday Herald***

"...as Heinrich, Rene Pape displayed what must be the most sumptuous operatic bass in the world."

– **Rupert Christiansen, *Daily Telegraph***

"...exemplary..." – **Andrew Clark, *Financial Times***

"...strongly sung ...Rene Pape's sturdy Henry." – **Robert Thicknesse, *The Times***

René Pape

Selected Reviews

"Rene Pape, simultaneously impressing at Glyndebourne as King Marke, makes the most of his interim opportunities as King Heinrich." – **Anthony Holden, *The Observer***

"As King Henry, Rene Pape takes time off from his Glyndebourne King Marke to give another sympathetic display of the trials of kingship. In 1997 he was impressive, now he is magisterial, for he has become one of today's indisputably great basses." – **Michael Kennedy, *Sunday Telegraph***