

**BBC**

THE WORLD'S BEST-SELLING CLASSICAL MUSIC MAGAZINE

Claim your **FREE** download every week at [www.bbcmusicmagazine.com](http://www.bbcmusicmagazine.com)

# music

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

## OPERA'S SAVIOUR

How **Edward Gardner** rescued English National Opera from ruin

**ON YOUR FREE CD** A complete recording of Schumann's rousing Symphony No. 4

120  
REVIEWS  
CDS, DVDS &  
BOOKS  
see p65

### BOOK NOW!

Our guide to the UK's unmissable concerts in 2010

### CAUGHT ON FILM

The movie composers who 'borrow' from the greats

### PLUS

#### A WALK ROUND PARIS

Follow in the footsteps of Stravinsky, Chopin and Fauré

#### HANS WERNER HENZE

An exclusive interview with the legendary composer

**BBC**  
RADIO



**Every month!**  
Complete BBC  
Radio 3 listings

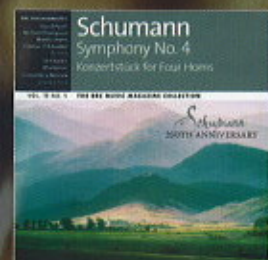


9 770966 718103

01 >

**JANUARY 2010**  
USA \$8.75/ CAN \$12.75

**£4.50**



Every month, hear great artists perform complete works, including new and archive BBC recordings. If your CD is missing, please see your newsagent

# LIVING LEGEND

He is one of the truly great composers alive today, but, as **Michael Church** finds out, it's taken more than 40 years for Hans Werner Henze's home country of Italy to commission an opera from him

**H**ans Werner Henze is one of today's most prolific orchestral composers – and one of a handful privileged to see their operas enter the repertory in their own lifetime – but his style defies all attempts at categorisation. *The Oxford Dictionary of Music* sounds awestruck: 'Bewilderingly diverse, reflecting his fertile imaginative gifts, and his refusal to be tied down by formulae. As much a French or Italian composer as German, he can adopt at will Schoenbergian, Stravinskian, or aleatory styles'. That percipient critic Bayan Northcott is more perplexed: for him, much of Henze's music remains 'unaccountably, obstinately out of focus... a kind of aural mirage of music, rather than music as such'. But Simon Rattle has no doubts: Henze is simply a sensualist, with an 'aching lyricism' lurking behind the violence, always ready to burst out in long, singing lines. This was the impulse that drove Henze out of the cerebral Darmstadt school of Boulez and Stockhausen, after the briefest and most abortive of flirtations.

Henze once described his composing

as 'like digging in a mine, a form of self-psychoanalysis'. But he's also intensely engaged with the real world: no other composer has attracted more devoted adherents – or lost more musical friends – through such passionate involvement with revolutionary political causes, most notably Cuban. For me, his music is a chiaroscuro landscape, sometimes aggressively forbidding,

**The commission is the 'rectification of a scandalous injustice'**

sometimes surpassingly beautiful, often Olympian in its majesty, but his works usually feel like gardens or palaces that smilingly invite exploration. And it's to his own cypress-girt palace with its olive grove, in the hills south of Rome, to which I am bidden, as his new chamber opera is readied for production. The building is crammed with Oriental ceramics, Greek busts, paintings and

hangings, all exquisitely arranged. Ushered into the pillared central chamber, I find the 82-year-old composer enthroned like a king with young male attendants ministering to his needs: obviously ill. While he silently beckons me to sit, I take in this distillation of his world: a pair of Steinways, a pair of glossy whippets which prance around his feet, and on the desk two big photographs of his lifelong companion Fausto Moroni, who died two years ago, and for whom Henze's recent *Elogium Musicum* is an eloquent obituary. One picture shows him as a toddler, the other as a young and handsome hero.

The ensuing interview contains very few words, since each question is met with a

silence during which Henze dives down into his well of memory, ruminating at length before delivering his reply; heavy medication plus heavy consumption of alcohol – giant Martinis at eleven in the morning – slows his mind to a glacial pace. But his replies are as astringent and gracefully phrased as they were when I interviewed him eight years ago.

His new work is entitled *Immolatione* (The Sacrifice), and is the setting of an extraordinary Expressionist verse-drama by the Austrian-Jewish poet Franz Werfel, which Henze has been obsessed with for half a century. Straying by a river, a little dog from a good home encounters an outcast on the run from the police: as Henze's synopsis puts it,

'the stranger kills the little dog, in his distress and panic'. But it's a joyful death, and the poem ends in a mood of exaltation. Why has Henze waited so long to set it? 'All my friends without exception found it not a good choice – too much pathos, too much sentimentality. But when I received this invitation from the Accademia di Santa Cecilia, I said to myself, this is the moment to ignore all the trivial objections of my friends – and to make an opera.' This is the first commission he has received from an Italian institution in 40 years of Italian domicile: 'the rectification of a scandalous injustice,' says Antonio Pappano, who conducts its premiere next month.

Why must the dog die? 'I don't know!'

Henze replies, with the ghost of a grin. 'Why do you think he must?' Because he is innocent, I suggest. Henze changes the subject: 'According to the existent law, the man is very guilty.' Does he think the law should be changed? His answer to that is oblique: 'The man has to run for his life, but this sweet thing leaping around made it impossible for him to flee. I had to try to make music from my own knowledge of crime and the police, of mishaps, and fear, and rage. As much as I could remember, I put into this score, from my own life.' So is he this man? 'I'm not rude enough!' In all other respects, we can safely assume that he is, for Henze himself grew up in every sense an outcast. ▶

ROME, SWEET HOME: Henze in his garden up in the hills to the south of the Italian capital



## HANS WERNER HENZE THE MAJOR WORKS



MUSICAL ICON:  
Hans Werner  
Henze in the 1970s

### BOULEVARD SOLITUDE

(1950, right)

Henze himself has dismissed this charming opera – a reworking of the Manon story – as ‘a childish thing’ marred by amateurish scoring, but it has superbly stood the test of time. Jazz mingles with Berg and Henze’s all-time hero Stravinsky in the variegated score; the troubled hero is his self-portrait.



### DER PRINZ VON HOMBURG (1958)

Luchino Visconti persuaded Henze to turn this 19th-century German play into an opera, and it entirely justified the film director’s hunch. The prince is a poetic dreamer, trapped in a harsh, militaristic regime. The young Henze’s absorption in 19th-century Italian opera resulted in a gloriously sensuous score.

### THE BASSARIDS (1965)

Euripides’ play *The Bacchae* is here given a literary make-over by those ace librettists WH Auden and Chester Kallman; JS Bach, Rameau and Mahler are just some of the musical influences brought to bear in Henze’s rich score. The whole thing has a symphonic quality, with a suite of Bacchic dances, an extended adagio and a vast passacaglia.

### SIXTH SYMPHONY (1969)

Henze regards this as his most successful synthesis of symphonic elements with gritty sounds from the real world. There are the rhythms of Afro-Cuban Yoruba rites, quotes from Vietnamese folk songs and Mikis Theodorakis’s chant against the colonels who had temporarily usurped the Greek state.

### THE ENGLISH CAT (1990)

This ‘story for singers and instruments’ employs a libretto by Edward Bond based on a feline parable by Balzac. The libretto follows the ballad pattern established by Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*; the music is, in Henze’s words, ‘sinister and oblique’, with a heavy debt to Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations*.



LEARNING FIRST-HAND:  
Antonio Pappano and  
Henze discuss *Immolatione*

He was a pacifist homosexual, son of a loathed Nazi father, and he spent his 1930s adolescence in a state of alienation. In 1944, when Hitler’s defeat was starting to look inevitable, he was conscripted into a unit whose purpose was to act as cannon-fodder. ‘Our days were spent in a torrent of insults,

abuse, and punishments,’ he recalled in his autobiography. He narrowly survived the war after witnessing unspeakable horrors. ‘But the major problem was hunger, even after the war when I was a POW,’ he says. ‘That took root in my mind, and can’t be erased. My dislike

## ‘I learnt my use of dissonance from Haydn and Mozart’

for the German race meant I wanted to get out as soon as possible.’ How German does he feel now? After an exceptionally long silence, he replies, ‘I feel I am a European.’ Not an Italian? ‘Berlusconi is disgusting.’

As we talk, I register ceramic and bronze whippets around us on every table. Were the live ones his inspiration? ‘No, because mine are not so spoilt! But sometimes a dog sees you, and thinks that you are fabulous. And they are right!’ An indulgent smile, as a dog jumps into his lap: this is Belmonte, named after the hero of Mozart’s *Die Entführung*. ‘I love their beauty,’ he explains, ‘their elegance’. Tenor Ian Bostridge will incarnate the dog, with the Wagnerian bass John Tomlinson – whose performance in *The Minotaur* greatly enthused Henze – as the Alberich-like outcast. As his synopsis puts it: ‘On the one

hand, the music ascends (for the ascension of our little dog), while on the other it descends into the unfathomable depths of the stranger’s soul.’ What was the musical germ of the piece? ‘The noise of the river – a ground bass. I was curious to see how it would develop – I just let my ideas flow over it. If I may consider myself a symphonist, it has all been about thesis and antithesis. That was the most German thing which remained in my mind, after I left Germany.’ A wicked glint. ‘And I pay my taxes [to Germany] out of fear, not of love!’

‘I like music to be made entirely out of lines,’ he told me back in 2001. ‘Moving forward, and not diving, or drowning! Think of those poles they put into the mud in Venice: that is how I use chords, fitting straight downwards in order to regulate the stream of my imagination. And my use of dissonance was never serialist: it was learned from our common ancestors Haydn and Mozart. My dissonances are also an expression of pain at our separation from their pure, beautiful world.’

After an hour he’s tired, and it’s time for the photo shoot – which has been taking place round us – to move outdoors. I leave him seated in lonely eminence at his table in the courtyard, with ‘HWH’ picked out in a baronial mosaic on its surface. His parting wave is slow, but debonair as ever. ■

On 16 Jan, the Barbican and Radio 3 will devote a *Total Immersion weekend* to Henze. Events include Oliver Knussen conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra & Chorus in the UK premiere of ‘Elogium Musicum’, and Huw Watkins playing music for solo piano. ‘Phaedra’ gets its UK premiere from the Ensemble Moderne under Michael Boder. ‘Immolatione’ will receive its world premiere in Rome on 10 Jan.