

# High Notes from a Year of Plenty

*Among 2009's most memorable performances was the Metropolitan Opera's production of Janacek's "From the House of the Dead."*



Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

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ONE of the pleasures of frequent concertgoing is discovering an exciting new or little-known work. The American premiere of "In Vain," an opulent, kaleidoscopic masterpiece by the Austrian composer Georg Friedrich Haas, proved an exhilarating experience in February, when Michel Galante led the Argento Chamber Ensemble in a vivid performance of the hourlong score at the Miller Theater. Both musicians and audience were sometimes submerged in darkness, adding to the eerie theatrical effect.

Also satisfying on every level was Patrice Chéreau's moving production of Janacek's "From the House of the Dead" at the Metropolitan Opera in November, with Esa-Pekka Salonen making a notable house debut in the pit, leading a stellar cast that included the baritone Peter Mattei. The stark, eloquent staging powerfully evoked the Siberian prison of Dostoyevsky's novel.

James Levine offered another memorable experience at the Metropolitan Opera this year with a magisterial rendition of Wagner's "Götterdämmerung." During the performance I heard in April, Mr. Levine led the orchestra to spine-tingling heights, with particularly radiant playing from the strings. He was greeted like a conquering hero at his curtain call.

The talented young cast in Rossini's seldom-

staged "Semiramide" at the Caramoor International Music Festival in Katonah, N. Y., in August also enjoyed justifiably rapturous applause for their vocal acrobatics, particularly the luminous-voiced soprano Angela Meade in the title role. Will Crutchfield conducted the Orchestra of St. Luke's and Ms. Meade's dynamic colleagues, who included the virtuoso mezzo-soprano Vivica Genaux as Arsace and Lawrence Brownlee, a rising bel canto star, as Idreno.

Kurt Weill's operetta "The Firebrand of Florence" (with lyrics by Ira Gershwin) received a rare and enjoyable outing at Alice Tully Hall in March. Ted Sperling conducted the Collegiate Chorale, the New York City Opera Orchestra and stars from the opera and theater worlds (including Nathan Gunn and Terrence Mann) in a lively rendition of the score, a blend of quasioperatic numbers and satirical musical-theater-style excerpts.

As part of the Celebrating Hungary festival at Carnegie Hall in February, Gyorgy Kurtag, the 83-year-old Hungarian composer and pianist, made a memorable New York debut with Marta Kurtag, his wife of more than six decades. On an upright piano they performed selections from Mr. Kurtag's "Jatekok" ("Games"), a collection of expressive miniatures, and several Bach transcriptions.

Mitsuko Uchida also offered piano buffs a rewarding experience at Carnegie Hall in October, with Beethoven's final three piano sonatas. Her playing was distinguished by its probing intelligence and searing introspection.

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