



■ Irene Dalis as Eboli

brilliance and power, but was not especially plush or sumptuous. And while it was not marred by a harsh or unattractive edge, there was an element of tension and muscularity to the sound that allowed it to cut through big orchestras, suiting her fiery temperament. Dalis seemed happiest when operating at full throttle, but her singing was never vulgar.

It is interesting to sample her in unfamiliar repertoire. The Handel arias, which include 'V'adoro pupille' (transposed down) as well as 'Caro mio ben', and Ochs's ersatz Handelian 'Dank sei dir, Herr' are little more than curiosities: grandly sung and accompanied by a superabundance of strings, they sound anachronistic even by 1950s standards. But her searing account of 'Divinités du Styx' (*auf Deutsch*) is something formidable, and her 'Bel raggio lusinghier', stylishly sung in the original key with good coloratura, comes as a revelation.

Nearly half an hour of this well-filled disc is devoted to excerpts from *Carmen*, originally issued on a 10" LP in which her colleagues, all capable, participate on a near-equal basis; the tenor Heinz Hoppe makes an especially favourable impression. In the Seguidilla and Habanera (both also heard in different performances) Dalis lightens the voice appealingly and gives due attention to the (German) words.

Still, I keep coming back to 'O don fatale', sung with blazing intensity and a stunning high C flat—this best represents the mainstream of her career. Fortunately, there are many live performances available that do so as well.

GEORGE LOOMIS

Opera books

So What Does a Conductor Do?

By Nicholas Braithwaite. 291pp. £27.66. ISBN: 978-0-646-97145-2

Though it is one that is often asked, the question outlined in the title of Nicholas Braithwaite's self-published book is somewhat misleading, since this is not, essentially, a treatise on the conductor's art—although some technical information on the subject is imparted along the way, while the final chapter, 'This conducting thing', contains critiques of a selection of distinguished exponents of the baton—tactfully, all but one of them (Barenboim,

whom Braithwaite knew well at one period) no longer with us. Furtwängler comes off best. It is, rather, an honest and personal summing-up of Braithwaite's long and varied career as he approaches his 80th birthday next year.

Born in London in 1939, Nicholas was the son of Warwick Braithwaite, another conductor who maintained a successful career at Sadler's Wells, Covent Garden, Welsh National Opera and elsewhere and

who himself was born in New Zealand in 1896. Educated at Bedales—a school run by and for free spirits—and the Royal Academy of Music (less so, apparently, in those days), Nicholas then moved on to more formal studies in Vienna under Hans Swarowsky (whom he doesn't rate), and less formally at annual masterclasses at Bayreuth run by Friedelind Wagner (whom he does).

He details the trials, frustrations and intermittent joys of building a career as a freelance trombonist and budding conductor in the UK and Ireland in the 1960s with considerable honesty, an infallible ear for an anecdote and at all times a sense of humour that has clearly stood him in good stead. When things go wrong (which, as all musicians know, they often do) he describes them, laconically, with the one-word sentence 'Interesting'. When they go badly wrong, he uses two words: 'Very interesting'.

But much of his career went right. Operatically, he enjoyed significant periods with Sadler's Wells/English National Opera (1970-6), where he conducted many well remembered productions and several *Ring* cycles; with Glyndebourne (1971-81), where he was music director of the touring company

for some years; and then at Gothenburg's Stora Theatre (1981-4), as well as freelancing with other companies. He was a regular with Chelsea Opera Group. Perhaps surprisingly, his favourite commitment was the Music Camp held latterly at Pigott's Farm near High Wycombe, where amateur players gathered annually over a period of 36 years to rehearse operas by Wagner and Strauss under his baton. His accounts of the productions, personalities and politics at all these institutions invariably read as fair-minded.

In addition, Braithwaite was in demand as an orchestral conductor, with long relationships with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and the Manchester Camerata, as well as ensembles in Norway and Australia, where his career eventually took him, leading, inevitably, to decreasing visibility in the UK. About that, and other things—including those that did not end well—Braithwaite is philosophical and modest to a fault. He may not, as he puts it, 'have the talent to be one of the greats', but he has produced high-quality work over a long career and numerous organizations are significantly the better for his devoted stewardship.

GEORGE HALL

Bedřich Smetana: Myth, Music and Propaganda

By Kelly St Pierre. University of Rochester Press/Boydell & Brewer. 166pp. £75. ISBN: 978-1580465106

A warning to the curious: his name may adorn the spine, but this slim volume has little to say about Bedřich Smetana's life or work. Nor does it live up to its subtitle. The author boils down the rich concept of 'myth' to its plainer sense of 'untruth', avoids discussion of 'music' wherever possible, and forgets her promise to rehabilitate 'propaganda' (as the propagation of ideas) once she reaches the communist era. Her original title, *Revolutionizing Czechness: Smetana and Propaganda in the Umělecká beseda*, was more honest, for

under the authoritative current one lies a brief student dissertation seeking to explore how Czech critics, mostly associated with the influential Umělecká beseda ('Artists' Forum'), championed Smetana, moulding him into a myth representing 'Czechness'.

The quotations Kelly St Pierre translates from such vivid writers as Otakar Hostinský (1847-1910) and Václav Juda Novotný (1849-1922) are worth reading, if we don't mind solemn analyses of their departures from verifiable truth and their regrettably