Antonín DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)  
Rusalka - opera in three acts Op.114 [153.00]  
Sally Matthews (soprano) – Rusalka; Evan Leroy Johnson (tenor) – Prince; Patricia Bardon (Mezzo) – Jezibaba; Alexander Roslavets (bass) – Water Gnome; Zoya Tsererina (soprano) – Foreign Princess; Colin Judson (bass) – Gamekeeper; Alix Le Saux (mezzo) – Kitchen girl; Vuvu Mpofu – First Wood Nymph; Anna Penisi – Second Wood Nymph; Alyona Abramova – Third Wood Nymph; Adam Marsden (baritone) – Hunter  
Glyndebourne Festival Chorus and London Philharmonic Orchestra/Robin Ticciati  
Stage Director: Melly Still  
Designer: Rae Smith  
Movement Director: Rick Nodine  
Lighting Designer: Paul Constable  
rec. Glyndebourne Festival Theater, 7 August 2019  
bonus Feature: Rusalka Flying Through Water [8.00]  
Sung in Czech with subtitles in English, German, French, Korean, Japanese  
Filmed in High Definition; Picture: 1080i/16:9 Anamorphic Widescreen;  
Sound: LPCM Stereo/ DTS-HD MA 5.1; Region code: A,B,C  
OPUS ARTE Blu-ray OABD7266D [161 mins]

Dvořák’s Rusalka has received a number of presentations on DVD and Blu-ray over the last 30 or so years. This new Blu-ray edition on Opus Arte confidently jumps ahead of the competitors thanks to a strong cast and a wonderful and imaginative production. Melly Still’s production at the Glyndebourne Festival was first staged in 2009 to great acclaim. Eventually Glyndebourne issued a CD set on its own label of that cast which featured Ana Maria Martinez, Brandon Jovanovitch, and Larissa Diadkova under Yuri Behlohalvek. For the revival last year Glyndebourne summoned a crackerjack cast to weave the Dvořák spell again.  
  
Melly Still’s production is a wonderful blend of fantasy and tragedy that features a cast of fairy tale archetypes who have had their distinguishing features pushed a little towards the edges. As an example both the Water Gnome and the Wood Nymphs have been sexed-up by a notch or two, which makes for a unusually interesting opening exchange between them. The director has filled the work with a myriad of interesting touches. During the prelude, Rusalka and the Prince rivetingly re-enact the encounter that Rusalka describes later in the act. The staging of the Song to the Moon is charmingly achieved with Rusalka lying on her back actually singing up towards the moonlight rather than out towards the audience. Such well-thought-out moments occur in this production for the duration of the opera which makes it preferable to all of the other video releases. The sets display a magical natural world with a strong element of danger thrown into the mix. The basic semicircular set seems to pay tribute to Gunther Schneider Siemssen’s Salzburg Ring Cycle in the late 1960s. The costumes tend to have a 1950s allusion to them, without quite representing that era but neither do they betray the 19th century romantic tradition. It’s a very difficult balance to achieve but the design team have really succeeded in hitting their mark.  
  
Rusalka is given an incandescent performance by Sally Matthews. Hearing her Konstanze in the past I would not have thought that Rusalka would be a natural fit for her, but she really excels at conveying the nymph’s fragility, terror and desperation. Vocally she gives a radiant account in which she starts out sounding a bit raw in the top region but it clears up a few minutes into the performance and she is in top form throughout. As her Prince, Evan Leroy Johnson is everything a fairy tale could wish for. His rosy hued tenor voice s is blessed with a clear ringing tone. His romantic good looks could charm the tail off an average mermaid and he is also a youthful still so that one doesn’t have to suspend disbelief in the drama. Please can we have more from this wonderful tenor? Patricia Bardon makes a meal out of Jezibaba, the witch of the wood. She is presented as less supernaturally evil and more a study of contrasts as she veers between grandmotherly and bloodthirsty behaviours. She sings the role with power and presence. Visually with her wide facial structure she looks as if she has stepped straight out of an old book of Czech fairy tales. Alexander Roslavets as the Water Gnome sings with a generally powerful and incisive tone. Dramatically he is less involving than the others, but when he sings the gorgeous lament for Rusalka during Act Two so touchingly, he more than makes up for it. As the Foreign Princess Zoya Tsererina shows her penetrating dramatic soprano and a multilayered approach to a character that usually seems rather one dimensional. Tsererina and the director give a far more sympathetic look at the Princess than I have yet encountered. She also looks wonderful in the playful 1950s couture of the Second Act. Colin Judson is a lively gamekeeper and Alix Le Saux reveals that her attractive mezzo is one to watch, thanks to her wonderful singing of the Kitchen Boy, which in this production is changed into a Kitchen Girl. The Wood Nymphs are a riotous lot, and of the excellent trio for the three main nymphs the irrepressible Vuvu Mpofu could give lessons to Mae West on luring men.  
  
Robin Ticciati and the LSO give a riveting account of the score catching perfectly the Arthur Rackham like colours of Dvořák’s fairy tale sound world. The Blu-ray has been produced with excellent sound and picture. There is a colourful new English translation for the titles which though perhaps not quite what Kvapil wrote it provided some real amusement in just the right way. There is an enjoyable bonus film that documents the cast getting accustomed to the flying apparatus during rehearsals.  
  
Among the video competition the Decca version of Otto Schenk’s old production for the Metropolitan Opera comes closest. That one has a more mature Renée Fleming as Rusalka and a fabulous Prince from Pytor Beczala under Yannick Nézet-Séguin. An earlier version on TDK from Paris features a splendidly sung account with a younger Ms Fleming alongside such talents as Sergei Larin, Franz Hawlata, and Larissa Diadkova under James Conlon, but unfortunately Robert Carsen’s depressingly modern domestic affair robs the opera of any magical elements and reduces this to a disc that is strictly for listening only. The old David Pountney production for English National Opera is still around if you look hard enough but while the production remains interesting the singing is less reliable generally and the sound and picture are now very dated. This Opus Arte version should definitely be snapped up while it remains around hopefully that will be for some time to come.

**Mike Parr**

A riveting and magical production featuring a near perfect cast becomes the top video recommendation.