

Mike Ashman's updated production of *Der fliegende Holländer* at Covent Garden in 1986 explored contemporary visual equivalents for the opera's spectrum of characters without dwelling on negative implications. Neither did he obliterate the drama's carefully structured play of contrasts. Ashman's Daland was a dapper business operator, his Dutchman the operator of a dilapidated boat. Peter Konwitschny's placement of Wagner's spinning ladies atop cycling equipment in Moscow and Munich in 2004 and 2006 moved the action into a high-spirited present, under bright lights, but concluded with a markedly pessimistic scene in which Senta was depicted as a suicide bomber. Director Martin Kušej had Erik kill both Senta and the Dutchman at the end of their 2010 production in Amsterdam, following a string of scenes in which the simple shape of the drama and its basic elements were deliberately muddled. Of the few recent directors to see some positive redemptive value in the opera's ending, Götz Friedrich deserves special mention here. At the Deutsche Oper in Berlin, in 1997, he staged *Der fliegende Holländer* for the first time, after directing all of Wagner's other mature operas on numerous occasions in various European opera houses. Gottfried Pilz's designs alluded sporadically to German life from the years just following World War Two through to the present, as with the construction cranes so familiar to Berliners in the years following reunification. Senta's self-sacrifice, in this instance, was shown to redeem not a problematic individual but a crowd of grey-clad men and women at the end – a recognizable population indeed for Friedrich's audience.

Wagner's 1852 attempt to steer directors and singers away from interpretations of Senta as a victim has found few adherents in recent decades. Her relationship to the Dutchman is one that almost no contemporary staging celebrates unequivocally. At the same time, approaches focusing on the stereotypes that undoubtedly lie beneath Wagner's subtly adjusted characters offer insight into the creative process of a progressive artist who sometimes over-estimated his achievements. The theatrical vitality of his *Holländer* continues to be appreciated in a variety of revisionist interpretations, with modern technology opening up new ways of bringing the opera's supernatural and psychological realms to life.

Thematic Guide

Themes from the opera have been identified by the numbers in square brackets in the article on the music. These are also printed at corresponding points in the libretto, so that the words can be related to the musical themes.

Overture

[1]
Allegro con brio
molto marcato

[2]

[3]

[4]

[5a]
Andante
p dolce

[5b]