**Tristan und Isolde, Longborough Festival Opera, 2017: Reviews**

*“The most compelling Tristan und Isolde I can remember”*

*“Jakobi’s grasp of the trajectory and destination of the lovers’ passion – of all passion according to Wagner – was absolute, and Wedd and Bisset lived Wagner’s dream unsparingly.”*

Peter Reed, Opera Magazine

★★★★★

*“Jakobi’s intelligent, detailed direction stands up to unsparing scrutiny, miraculously sustained over the time-spans involved”*

*“Kimie Nakano’s designs for Tristan have a Zen-like minimalism…and her elegant costumes refer vaguely to a Japanese medievalism. Ben Ormerod’s lighting is subtle and very beautiful. By not getting in the way, the staging enhances the intensity between the lovers, and with Peter Wedd and Lee Bisset you see and hear something quite remarkable unfold, something you know the opera carries but which rarely erupts to such annihilating effect.”*

Peter Reed, Classical Source

★★★★★

*“Carmen Jakobi’s production of Tristan und Isolde is the strongest argument imaginable for small-theatre Wagner.”*

*“[Lee Bissett] creates, through bodily gesture and mobile facial expression, a vivid image of a young woman who is finding it hard to decide whether she hates or is in love with the man who is escorting her to marry the King of Cornwall…she conveys equally well the rapture and intensity, and the inevitable doom, of the love in question”*

*“[Peter Wedd] is a Tristan palpably on the verge of a forbidden love, and petrified of the fact. Out of this portrait there develops a nearly unbearable intensity in the subsequent acts, an intensity of a kind perhaps only really achievable in an intimate theatre. The second act love duet is almost embarrassing in its proximity, as if one were eavesdropping on something too personal for public display. And Wedd’s third act delirium, magnificently sung, has an immediacy I’ve rarely experienced in this often wearisome monologue…well worth seeing, if you can cadge a ticket, just for this duo: marvellous character drama as well as great singing.”*

*“Kimie Nakano’s set designs, simple but atmospheric, and exquisitely lit by Ben Ormerod, are a joy”*

Stephen Walsh, The Arts Desk

*“Anthony Negus, is the UK’s most eminent Wagnerian.”*

*“It is not easy to imagine a better [production of] Tristan…* *Perhaps the biggest congratulations are owed to the director, Carmen Jakobi, and movement director, Caroline…a near-perfect miniature Tristan, with wonderful Rothko-like, colour-field backgrounds that mesmerise you but keep you alert to the smallest changes, moving your moods and emotions, without calling attention to themselves. These are the sterling work of designer Kimie Nakano, and especially of the lighting designer, Ben Ormerod”*

*“But the reason this production is so close to ideal is the acting. I have certainly never seen a better Act II; their erotic business is totally convincing and moving”*

*“This musically near-faultless production, with its abstract, minimalist, colour-led sets, exquisite lighting and mostly graceful movement, is a triumph of direction and interpretation. The director…has got the actual details of the performance so supremely right. If you have the chance, go and see this production, of which Wagner himself would surely have approved. I hope someone has filmed this production – not merely to give more people the pleasure of seeing and hearing it, but so that it can be used as a model for future productions elsewhere.”*

Paul Levy, Arts Journal

★★★★

*“A flesh and blood Tristan, powerfullly acted and sung”*

*“In the pit, Anthony Negus presided over a probing but never eccentric reading of the score that made a virtue of the intimate confines of the Longborough auditorium. A disciple of the late Reginal Goodall, Negus brought much of his mentor’s scholarly attention to detail to the performance but never sacrificed forward momentum to linger over detail. The Longborough Festival Orchestra followed him unerringly throughout.“*

Richard Ely, Bachtrack

*“Too many distractions are … well, a distraction. The fewer the better, and Carmen Jakobi’s spare but psychologically rich production is helped by Kimi Nakano’s uncluttered designs, lighting by Ben Ormerod’s that subtly changes, and interactions between performers that beautifully reflect the composer’s intentions. Anyone who goes to a superb Wagner performance such as this will find the music and staging reveals hitherto unseen depths, and it would be invidious of me to give more than a personal view, but in Act II the meeting of the lovers carried extraordinary power, and as they sink together into the world of night (O sink hernieder, Nacht der Liebe), Brangäne’s off-stage warning (Einsam wachend) formed a magical connection to the world of day, while the lighting created an otherworldly atmosphere. Such sorcery lives in the music of course, but Carmen Jakobi has skilfully realised it on stage, and her essay in the programme book is well worth reading. Of course we would be nowhere without the superb music direction of Anthony Negus, and the wonderful performances of the singers.”*

Mark Ronan

★★★★★

*“Tristan und Isolde is far more emotion than action driven, and this may explain why the simplicity of Carmen Jakobi’s staging for Longborough Festival Opera (first seen in 2015) actually aids its effectiveness. Although the stage may initially seem to contain little more than a few blocks, the approach allows all of the drama to be generated by the performers themselves, thus ensuring it arises naturally out of both the characters’ emotions and the music.”*

*“Peter Wedd and Lee Bisset prove particularly effective in the title roles…Stuart Pendred is excellent as Kurwenal, revealing both strength and a certain warmth to his sound. Harriet Williams displays a full and assertive mezzo-soprano as Brangäne, and Geoffrey Moses’ demeanour as the broken King Marke is highly convincing. Anthony Negus’ conducting is immensely accomplished as he elicits the right senses of texture and flow from the orchestra while also ensuring that all lines are delineated well and a strong balance across the orchestra maintained.”*

Sam Smith, Music OMH

*“Anthony Negus and Carmen Jakobi’s Tristan und Isolde at Longborough excels musically and scenically… Longborough Festival Opera continues to strive for the highest standards and seems to get better each year…This was undoubtedly the best Wagner I have seen there both musically and scenically.”*

Jim Pritchard, Seen and Heard International

★★★★

*“This was a tremendous, all-consuming Tristan und Isolde, carrying us on waves of emotion from the Prelude’s sighs and swells to the Liebestod’s blissful oblivion.”*

*“Lee Bisset is an overwhelming and richly luminous Isolde, taking us from death-filled desires to feverish love with stamina and insight…the electricity between the lovers was palpable.”*

*“From pure blue for sea and sky to silvery flashes of transcendence, Ben Ormerod’s lighting is simple yet effective, working in harmony with Kimie Nakano’s abstract sets. Nothing distracts from the drama unfolding in the music. And what music! Anthony Negus knows exactly what to do with this score, and there were many orchestral glories”*

Rebecca Franks, The Times

*“Es bleibt wiederum ein unvergessliches Erlebnis, eine wahrhaft meisterliche Leistung”*

*[It was an unforgettable experience, a truly masterful achievement]*

Helmut Pitsch, O-Ton

★★★★★

*“This is quite simply one of the most engaging, stunningly apt and totally gripping productions of Tristan und Isolde…one has to begin with the figures of Tristan and Isolde themselves. They are so well cast, visually, vocally and dramatically, and so perfectly involved with the full presentation of the plight of their characters that not for a moment does concentration break… their emotional and psychological journey together are all presented with total sympathy, understanding and dramatic control.”*

*“One can give nothing less than full praise also to Anthony Negus and the orchestra for the sheer gorgeousness of the sound they created and such a rich and subtle rendering of the score while fully supporting the action on the stage. The sets, the costumes and the lighting were completely in keeping with the interpretation by Carmen Jakobi of this story. The approach was wisely simple, stark and direct; and the impact was almost overwhelming.”*

*“It felt like a real privilege to attend this Tristan und Isolde and it should go down in the history of opera production not only for its individual intelligence and emotional power, not only for its musicality, but also for achieving what Wagner wanted to create: a real coming together of all the elements of opera into a unified whole of great dramatic power. This really was opera as drama.”*

Mel Cooper, Plays to See

★★★★★

“Carmen Jakobi’s 2015 production of Tristan und Isolde is back, streamlined and overwhelming…The glisten of dawn at sea is captured by Ben Ormerod’s lighting and Kimie Nakano’s beautifully simple sets. Once again, Anthony Negus, British Wagnerian supremo, conducts. The orchestral writing is made transparent, the drama reined in and unleashed with absolute assurance.”

“Peter Wedd and Lee Bisset excelled in the title roles, their obsessive love so quietly erotic you felt almost voyeuristic watching them, their singing tireless, searing, intelligent. Harriet Williams’s glowing Brangäne and Stuart Pendred’s Kurwenal, touching and troubled, enriched these supporting roles, with Sam Furness making a shining company debut as Sailor/Shepherd. You may think intervals at these opera festival are all chat. It’s a first to come out of Act I, never mind the subsequent two acts, and find everyone dumbfounded. It’s hard to imagine this opera making a more shattering impact.”

Fiona Maddocks, The Observer

*“I have not had many opera experiences in my lifetime that I could describe with a clear conscience as formative… My most recent such illumination, after a long break, was the Longborough Tristan und Isolde, a production that shook me to such a degree that for the next year, I returned to it again and again – in essays, columns and reviews from completely different stagings.”*

*“With the performers, she worked through every move, every gesture and every exchange of glances, at moments creating such a suggestive atmosphere of intimacy that we didn’t know where to lay our eyes – we, accustomed to viewing sex, nudity and all manner of perversions in opera, but so pitifully helpless in confrontation with the view of pure, though staggeringly intense emotion between two people. Three scenes from the production should go down in operatic history…”*

*“I was confirmed in my conviction that Anthony Negus is one of today’s most distinguished interpreters of Wagner’s œuvre.”*

Dorota Kozińska, Atorod (Poland)

*“At Longborough, which this year has revived its 2015 production of Tristan und Isolde, the combination of depth, grandeur and delicacy of emotion are…successfully present, and the result is one of the most exalting experiences I have had in the opera house.”*

*“[Conductor] Negus searches for, and invariably finds, the warm unfolding melody throughout the work, and gets his singers and his superb orchestra to do the same.”*

Michael Tanner, The Spectator

*“All this expertise is pulled together most effectively by Carmen Jakobi…Full marks!... This production will receive heap upon heap of praise. Many in the audience needed the first interval to consider carefully just how brilliantly and movingly Act 1 had been sung, how perfect the staging and how well the 70 plus in the pit responded to the never failing inspiration of Anthony Negus.”*

Clive Peacock, Leamington Courier

“I know the opera extremely well, and have been to numerous productions over the years. All of them were unsatisfactory in at least one respect, most of them in several. But yours was the production that I had been waiting for for so long. You portrayed the essence of the outer and inner dramas quite perfectly. The impact was utterly stunning and the insights really original, yet I never felt that you stood between us and the work. The *mis en* scene and the stagecraft were superb and inventive; but they were utterly in keeping with the music - and indeed Wagner’s intentions. The psychological impact was very powerful, and you enhanced our understanding of that great but complex work. It was clear that you had rehearsed the singers without music at some point: they sang to each other; and we were gripped by their drama. How good it was, too, that there was no cut in Act II.

Overall it was an utterly memorable evening. I have honestly never been to a better production of a work by Wagner. I certainly never thought that I would see Tristan as I had always hoped; but at Longborough I did. The images that you gave us will always remain with me, and I for one am extremely grateful for this. Warmest congratulations on your wonderful achievement..“

Charles, Audience Member

“It was utterly wonderful! I have seen a number of Tristans in the past including in Osaka in the 60s where I worked with the Bayreuth team…However, it was my first time last night that I actually was in tears in the last act. I was so moved by the combination of music making and acting.”

Toshio, Audience Member