

Cover.

Lloyd Webber's 'Phantom of the Opera', it must be admitted, owes much of its success to Maria Bjornson's superb designs. As David Fingleton comments on another page 'Phantom' may have cost a bomb, but at least the budget has been spent with taste, imagination and skill.

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Distracting or Diverting?

If the aim is to expand your opera audiences, and surely this is what some of the Arts Council's money is intended to do, then a better understanding by non-linguistic audiences of the libretto and plot becomes a worthwhile objective.

For several years now English translations in performance, as given by ENO, have already made for a wider public enjoyment of Italian and German operas.

But excellent though they are these translated performances are thought by some to lack the musical flow and poetry of an aria sung in its original language.

For these more finely attuned opera enthusiasts, albeit unversed in foreign tongues, the advent of surtitles to explain the action and the burden of the singing must be a welcome innovation.

However, the cognoscente, some reviewers and critics among them, feel strongly otherwise, maintaining as they do that surtitles are an abominable distraction.

That could be so for a few purists. But for the rest of us we read as we run. And so engrossed in the performance do we become that far from distracting our attention from the stage we sometimes miss that despised, almost subliminal translation so helpfully and discreetly provided above the proscenium.

Perhaps the purists, as some have already threatened should stay away. The loss will be theirs because there are always many more of us waiting to fill the empty seats who will appreciate the more diverting entertainment provided by opera with surtitles.

So, well done Touring Glyndebourne and the R O H