

SCHAVERNOCH AND HAAS TURN THE MET OPERA INTO A FROZEN SEASCAPE

Frozen Doom

BY GLENN LONEY

Set designer Hans Schavernocho and costume designer Lore Haas have combined talents to create a new production of *Der Fliegende Holländer* for the 89-90 season of New York's Metropolitan Opera, directed by August Everding, with lighting by Gil Wechsler. Schavernocho and Haas made their Metropolitan debut with last season's glittering post-modernist vision of *Bluebeard/Erwartung*. This time, they've rethought Richard Wagner's evocation of the eternally doomed seaman in a stunning combination of the starkest naturalism and razor-sharp expressionism. It is visually so strong it demands equally powerful singers to inhabit it. Fortunately, Everding has made the most of the settings, achieving almost choreographed movement, yet with deeply human portrayals, and the needed power is there.

Initially, Daland's ship is icebound in the Arctic, with two immense faces of glacial ice looming over it. Gusts of wintry fog blow through, with Wechsler shooting brilliant white light across the stage, for a horizontal thrust of light and moisture-laden air.

The major visual astonishment of Schavernocho's set is the Dutchman's huge vessel which slides silently on in the first scene, under cover of a gale, silhouetted between Daland's deck and the icebergs. Towering high into the flies, its deck unseen by those below, it dwarfs Daland's icebound ship. The simplicity and flatness of the Dutchman's ghost ship contrasts dramatically with the naturalist detail found elsewhere — the deck of Daland's ship encrusted with ice; its railings and riggings fouled with it. Throughout, Haas' costumes for the sailors and Norwegian villagers are understated period garb of the late 1800s — very serviceable, very Scandinavian.

Traditionally, the second scene takes place in a spinning-room in Daland's house. In this Met version, the room looks like a sail factory, with five huge multipaned windows dominating its back wall. They are smudged with frost, and the chamber feels cold as well, with strong white lights making the mounds of sailcloth resemble ice floes. Instead of

spinning wheels, industrial sewing machines have been provided, and making sails heightens the obsession with the life of land and sea.

The huge black mass of the Dutchman's doomed craft makes itself known, sliding slowly on from stage left, blotting out the light in each window. When the women depart the scene, they cover their sewing machines with sailcloth, so that when the black-garbed Dutchman appears and tries to win Senta, their confrontation seems like a courtship among miniature icebergs. Subtle lighting changes throughout the scene are expressionist, rather than naturalistic. They are keyed to emotions revealed through the music; not by the normal passing of a winter day.

In the final scene, the contrast between naturalism and expressionism is particularly vivid. On the right, broad stone stairs lead up to a quay, with the masts and rigging of sailing ships in sight. The dock area extending across the stage is littered with old pieces of junk and lumber. Kerosene heaters warm the frigid space as village children assemble with jack-o-lanterns and colorful folk masks. This scene suggests the coldest Halloween ever in Norway — the night when all the souls of the damned awake.

When the villagers call out to the seemingly deserted ship, its sleek side becomes hideously, expressionistically, transparent, revealing writhing corpses inside, and doomed mariners suspended on metal ships' ladders. The Dutchman begs a yielding Senta to come with him and break the curse with her unselfish love. But held back by her father and a local suitor, the ship departs without her, and she sacrifices herself into the sea, overcome with desire to be united with the mysterious mariner.

When the Dutchman's ship arrives and departs, from high above it beams brilliantly cold white spots on the real world below, as if it were an alien craft from above. This is only one of the provocative images Schavernocho and Everding use to enhance the mystery of this old fable, making it almost a New Age parable.



BEATRIZ SCHILLER

■ The basic image in the current production of *Der Fliegende Holländer* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York is the gigantic black prow of the haunted ship, designed by Hans Schavernocho, with lighting for the opera by Gil Wechsler and costumes by Lore Haas. In Act I huge icebergs loom over the ghostly schooner, dwarfing Daland's immobilized ship.

● *L'image essentielle dans Der Fliegende Holländer actuel à l'Opéra Metropolitan de New York est la proue noir gigantesque du bateau fantôme, un décor créé par Hans Schavernocho, avec l'éclairage de Gil Wechsler et costumes de Lore Haas. Dans le premier acte, des icebergs immenses dominent le navire hanté, ce qui réduit ce bateau immobilisé en miniature.*

▼ Das Grundbild der jetzigen Produktion des *Fliegenden Holländers* an der Metropolitan Opera in New York ist der gigantische, schwarze Bug des verwunschenen Schisses, designt von Han Schavernocho, Light Design von Gil Wechsler, und Kostume von Lore Haas. In ersten Akt ragen riesige Eisberge drohend über das Geisterschiff verkleinern Dalands Schiff.