

Royal Holloway, University of London
19 May 2004

Citation for Miss Susan Bullock

Chairman of Council, it is my pleasure to present to you Miss Susan Bullock.

Susan Bullock is one of the leading sopranos of her generation, and one of Royal Holloway's most distinguished music graduates. Born in Cheshire, she read for the BMus at Royal Holloway and graduated with a 2:1 in 1980, having won the Driver Prize for performance in two successive years. She pursued singing as a postgraduate at the Royal Academy of Music, studying with Marjorie Thomas, and at the National Opera Studio. In 1984 she won the top prize in the prestigious Kathleen Ferrier Award competition, and her professional career since then has featured one triumph after another. It began with the English National Opera, whereas Company Principal she sang the lyric roles of Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, Marguerite (*Faust*) and Alice Ford (*Falstaff*), and then the dramatic roles of Desdemona (*Otello*) and Ellen Orford (*Peter Grimes*). She received particular acclaim for her ENO performances of Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly*, a role she later sang at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires and for New York City Opera, Portland Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Oper der Stadt Bonn and New Israeli Opera. Indeed, Hugh Canning in *The Sunday Times* referred to hers as, "one of the most moving and truthfully sung Cio-Cio-Sans in living memory".

Other Puccini roles have included Suor Angelica and Giorgetta (*Il tabarro*) at the Spoleto Festival USA, and Tosca for Portland Opera and at the Royal Albert Hall. She gained further renown in two of Janáček's most celebrated roles: Jenůfa (at Glyndebourne, ENO, New Israeli Opera and Spoleto Festival USA) and Kátya Kabanová (also at Glyndebourne, where in addition she has sung Lisa in Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades*).

Susan Bullock has tackled roles from later twentieth-century operatic repertoire as well as those within the main canon. She sang Magda Sorel in Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Consul* at the Spoleto Festival in Italy, which was recorded live and released on CD by Chandos, and at the Teatro Colón.

Her performance at Spoleto, conducted by the composer, won the Pegasus Award for Outstanding Artist at the Festival. She has also sung Princess Natalie of Orange in Henze's *The Prince of Homburg* for ENO, Hecuba in Tippett's *King Priam* for Flanders Opera, Mrs Fabien in Dallapiccola's *Volo di Notte* for Long Beach Opera, and the Mother in Dallapiccola's *The Prisoner* for ENO.

Her performance in the title role of Strauss's *Die Ägyptische Helena* in its first British staging at Garsington Opera led to further acclaimed performances as Isolde in Opera North's *Tristan und Isolde*. The *Observer* wrote in 2001 that, "the real star of this production was the English soprano Susan Bullock singing her first Isolde, without strain or difficulty. There is nothing her voice cannot master. She can also convey the various facets of this perverse, maddening, impassioned woman".

Thanks to this success Susan Bullock has established herself as Britain's leading Wagnerian soprano. Last season she made her debut appearance with the Orchestra of the Bayerische Staatsoper under Zubin Mehta singing the *Liebestod* and Immolation Scene, and she gave highly acclaimed performances as Isolde at Oper Frankfurt and ENO. About the latter The *Sunday Telegraph* enthused: "Isolde is sung by Susan Bullock with a luxurious tone that gleams like steel, she puts every word across clearly and always commands the vocal power to dominate her scenes while adding an extra degree of warmth and lyricism. Bullock is passionate and visceral. [A] superb performance, a landmark of her career to rank with her Brussels Elektra".

Recent engagements include not only Elektra but Brünnhilde at Perth International Festival, Els in Schrecker's *Der Schatzgräber* with Oper Frankfurt, and Lady Macbeth in Bloch's *Macbeth* in Vienna. This season she has appeared as Isolde with Opéra de Rouen, and she returned to the Toyko New National Theatre to sing Brünnhilde in *Götterdämmerung*. In addition, she will sing the role of Female Chorus (*The Rape of Lucretia*) in Munich and appear in the BBC Proms performing *Messiaen's Poèmes pour Mi*. Next season she makes her debut at La Scala as Elektra, and in 2005/06 at Covent Garden as Marie in *Wozzeck*.

Susan Bullock has also been active on the concert stage, having recently performed Stravinsky's *Les Noces* with London Sinfonietta and Wagner's *Wesendonk Lieder* at the Ulster Hall, Belfast, which one reviewer described as "a very fine performance", the musical and dramatic demands being handled "with real distinction". Susan Bullock has also featured in the Windsor Festival, Aldeburgh Festival and Welsh Proms, and she appears regularly on BBC Radio 2.s Friday Night is Music Night.

All of this would be reason enough to confer an Honorary Fellowship on Susan Bullock, but she has furthermore been a strong supporter of Royal Holloway and has served as a model to current and former students alike, as well as a source of pride and inspiration to those who taught her. Although her glittering successes are a cause for admiration, so too is the undying commitment she has shown to music and to the pursuit of the highest standards in her singing. Singing is, in a sense, the most natural form of musical performance, in that the body is one's very instrument. But that is why it is also so difficult. Singing well involves incredibly hard work, over many many years, and to perform an operatic role requires untold effort, concentration, and stamina. We should not underestimate all that Susan Bullock has invested in each beautiful note, each physical gesture, each emotional utterance on stage.

Nevertheless, if, as Aristotle proclaimed, "song is man's sweetest joy", singing of the kind Susan Bullock has mastered is in the realm of the transcendent, releasing us from our humanity even as we celebrate it through listening, becoming, and aspiring.

In recognition of her outstanding contributions to the world of music and on the operatic stage, may I invite you, Chairman of Council, to induct as an Honorary Fellow of Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, Miss Susan Bullock.

Professor John Rink
Head of the Department of Music
19 May 2004