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## John Treleaven:Siegfried

by Jessica Duchon

The British tenor John Treleaven is currently one of the most sought-after Siegfrieds on the international Ring cycle circuit. Yet Siegfried himself is often seen as a controversial character. Although he's the hero of the cycle – the operas all build up towards his death in *Götterdämmerung* – Siegfried is often derided as all brawn, no brain. To Treleaven, this is far from an accurate assessment of a role which provides him with eternal fascination and joy.

'I've never thought of Siegfried as Einstein', he says, 'but also not as Arnold Schwarzenegger – though these days, perhaps that's not such a bad analogy! After working on the role for ten years, I can say for sure that there's only one moment in the opening scene of Siegfried where he has to resort to physicality to get the result he wants from Mime; and Mime is being cruelly manipulative, raising Siegfried only as a means to slaying the dragon, not for the sake of seeing him becoming a well-balanced young person. Is he more brawn than brain? If you define brain as intellect, he hasn't had the opportunity to hone that aspect of his mind - but in terms of instinctive knowledge, he's a very grown-up person. He does respond in a childlike way in many situations, though, especially in response to nature. It always remains his solace, the one thing that never lets him down.'

What's the role's greatest appeal? 'For me, it's the wonderful opportunity to play such a free spirit,' Treleaven declares. 'More and more it's hard to maintain freedom of spirit in our world. Siegfried does that for most of his life, without looking back.' And the biggest challenge? 'It's a huge role and it's hard to say at the beginning how you're going to play the end. You need to go through the catharsis of a long rehearsal period to know how you'll balance it. Wolfgang Wagner, the composer's grandson, asked me years ago at Bayreuth how many times I'd sung the role - back then, it was 15 or 16 times – and when I told him, he said, 'Excellent: you're nearly at the point where you will start to understand the task'. That comment was born of a lifetime's experience of the incredible demands that his grandfather's music makes!'

For Treleaven, the Royal Opera House's production is particularly special as he's had the opportunity to renew long-term working relationships with the director, Keith Warner, and, as Wotan, the bass John Tomlinson. 'I've always enjoyed

John's company, his singing and his professionalism, while watching him develop into a truly great international artist. Having not stood on a stage with him for many years, it was a deep wish for me to share the stage with him in this genre; this opportunity has been a great personal joy for me.'

'The scene between us, which is tremendously sad but includes much ironic humour, shows the grandfather determining whether the grandson is of the right metal to carry on. That scene was really honed by our experiences together years ago, and it's an experience I'll take with me for the rest of my days, and be grateful for forever.'