



JOHANN STRAUSS II

Blindekuh



Davidson • Kunkle • Bortolotti • Pichler

Bowers • Chudak • Schliewa • Byrne • Rohde

Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus • Dario Salvi



Johann
STRAUSS II
(1825–1899)

Blindekuh (1878)
(‘Blind Man’s Buff’)

Operetta in three acts
Libretto by Rudolf Kneisel (1832–1899)
after his comedy of the same name

Herr Scholle, landowner **Robert Davidson, Bass-baritone**
Frau Arabella, his wife **Kirsten C. Kunkle, Soprano**
Waldine, his daughter from his first marriage **Martina Bortolotti, Soprano**
Hellmuth Forst **Roman Pichler, Tenor**
Adolf Bothwell, Scholle’s nephew from America **James Bowers, Tenor**
Betsy, Adolf’s wife **Andrea Chudak, Soprano**
Herr Kragel, officer of the Court **Daniel Schliewa, Tenor**
Fräulein Elvira, governess to Waldine **Emily K. Byrne, Mezzo-soprano**
Johann, Scholle’s servant **Julian Rohde, Tenor**
Baron von Hasemann **Boyan Vasilev, Tenor from chorus**
Leimenreim, poet **Tenor from chorus**
Quintenheim, composer **Tenor from chorus**
Landrath von Silbertau, District Administrator **Peter Petrov, Bass from chorus**
Minna, Landrath’s wife **Soprano from chorus**
Children **Sopranos from chorus**
Frau von Sadowitt **Snezhina Kumanova, Contralto from chorus**
Cäcilia and Aurelia, Landrath and Minna’s daughters **Sopranos from chorus**

Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus • Dario Salvi

Recorded live: 7–13 January 2019 at Bulgaria Hall, Sofia, Bulgaria
Producer: Roumyna Stoyanova • Engineer and editor: Ivaylo Yanev

CD 1

49:55

- ① Overture 9:23
- Act I. The vestibule of Scholle’s country mansion**
- ② No. 1a. Introduction: Couplets mit Chor: Welch’ buntes Leben wird das hier geben
(*Arabella, Scholle, Chorus*) 2:46
- ③ No. 1b. Allgemeiner Chor und Soli: Es kommt ein Wagen an
(*Baron von Hasemann, Leimenreim, Quintenheim, Landrath von Silbertau, Minna, Children, Frau von Sadowitt, Cäcilia, Aurelia, Chorus*) 4:03
- ④ No. 2. Couplets: Ich bin Gourmand, ja ich gestehe, Liebe feine Küche sehr
(*Johann*) 2:15
- ⑤ No. 3. Duettino: Ein holder Frühlingsmorgen
(*Waldine, Elvira*) 4:15
- ⑥ No. 4. Couplets: Die Schwiegermutter zu gewinnen
(*Hellmuth*) 3:25
- ⑦ No. 5. Couplets: Die Eisenbahnen weit und breit
(*Hellmuth*) 3:27
- ⑧ No. 6. Quartett: Ha! Ha! Ha! Was soll dies Lachen?
(*Hellmuth, Johann, Kragel, Elvira*) 3:59
- ⑨ No. 7. Finale: Ha! Ha! Ha! Traurige, schaurige Situation, Ha!
(*Scholle, Arabella, Hellmuth, Johann, Waldine, Elvira, Kragel*) 16:12

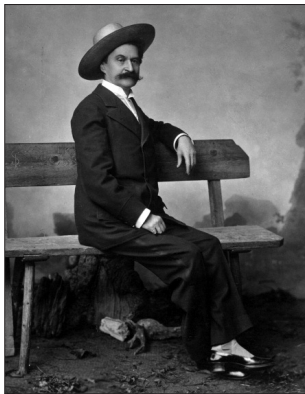
CD 2

55:16

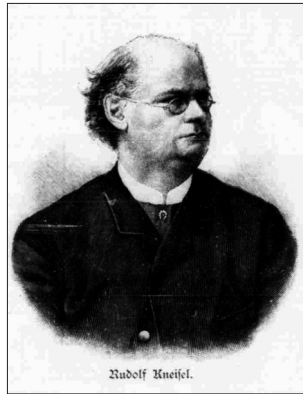
- Act II. The park of Scholle’s mansion**
- ① No. 8a. Introduction und Chor: Duftige Blumen laßt uns binden Tulpen
(*Chorus*) 1:37
- ② No. 8b. Couplets: Wie sprießt so frisch das Laub am Baume
(*Johann*) 2:49
- ③ No. 9a. Ensemble: Ein Fremder kommt!
(*Waldine, Hellmuth, Chorus*) 3:55
- ④ No. 9b. Duett: Sie lachen über mich, das find ich unmanierlich!
(*Hellmuth, Adolf*) 2:59
- ⑤ No. 10. Couplets: Jung und schön, von edlem Wuchse
(*Kragel*) 4:36
- ⑥ No. 11. Couplets: Eheglück und Flitterwochen
(*Betsy*) 2:57
- ⑦ No. 12. Terzett: Ja, endlich find’ ich Sie allein!
(*Arabella, Hellmuth, Betsy*) 5:31
- ⑧ No. 13. Finale: Ja, ja, nur zu, nur zu, wir spielen Blindekuh
(*Waldine, Betsy, Arabella, Elvira, Hellmuth, Adolf, Johann, Scholle, Kragel, Chorus*) 13:45

Act III. The ballroom in Scholle's mansion

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|----|---|------|
| 9 | No. 14. Cotillion und Chor: Welche Luft, bei diesen Klängen
(Chorus) | 2:04 |
| 10 | No. 15. Terzett: O Elvira! Teure Braut!
(Kragel, Elvira, Johann) | 4:42 |
| 11 | No. 16. Quartett: Beim spazieren amüsieren wir uns sehr
(Adolf, Hellmuth, Waldine, Betsy) | 4:37 |
| 12 | No. 17. Couplets: Küssen mag' ich gar nicht gern
(Betsy) | 2:16 |
| 13 | No. 18. Finale: Ja, warum habt Ihr denn Alles gethan?
(Waldine, Betsy, Arabella, Elvira, Hellmuth, Adolf, Johann, Scholle, Kragel, Chorus) | 3:10 |



Johann Strauss II (1825–1899)
Photographer: Charles Scolik



Rudolf Kneisel (1832–1899)
Photographer unknown

Johann Strauss II (1825–1899)

Blindekuh

First performance: 18 December 1878, Theater an der Wien, Vienna, Austria.

The composition of Johann Strauss's sixth operetta was delayed by the death of his first wife Jetty (Henriette) and his immediate marriage to Angelika Dietrich, who was 30 years his junior. The work appeared four years after *Die Fledermaus* ('The Bat', 1874), and followed on two other operettas: *Cagliostro in Wien* ('Cagliostro in Vienna', 1875) and *Prinz Methusalem* ('Prince Methuselah', 1877). The overture was aired earlier at a charity concert. Although the operetta itself was not well received, and taken off after 16 performances, the overture remained in the repertoire of the Strauss orchestras and the military bands. *Blindekuh* (literally 'blind cow'), is the German term for the game of 'blind man's buff'. This work languished neglected, the least known of Strauss's operettas, before being revived by Dario Salvi and the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra in January 2019.

The anthologies of symphonic pieces that Strauss, as usual, drew from his operettas, kept many of the melodies known:

- *Blindekuh*, overture
- *Kennst du mich?*, waltz Op. 381
- *Pariser-Polka*, French polka Op. 382
- *Nur fort!*, quick polka Op. 383
- *Opern-Maskenball-Quadrille* Op. 384
- *Waldine*, polka-mazurka Op. 385

The beautiful waltz *Kennst du mich?* ('Do you know me?') featured a principal melody that became especially famous because Ralph Benatzky arranged it for soprano and choir and incorporated it in his operetta-pastiche *Casanova*, as the Nuns' Chorus (recorded by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Hilde Gueden and Joan Sutherland).

While lacking the touch of genius revealed in *Die Fledermaus* and *Der Zigeunerbaron*, the dazzling melodic vein of *Blindekuh* makes it hard to understand the initial

failure of the work. This must be explained by circumstances other than the quality of the music. Indeed, the Viennese newspaper *Neue freie Presse* ascribed the lack of success to the mediocre quality of the somewhat confusing libretto, which dragged down the music 'of a talented artist like Johann Strauss'. The librettist was the German dramatist Rudolf Kneisel (Königsberg 1832–Berlin 1899), an almost exact contemporary of the composer. His twelve plays, usually comedies and farces, appeared all over Germany between 1860 (*Eine Zeitungssente*, Frankfurt) and 1894 (*Sie weiss etwas*, Leipzig).

Strauss alternates captivating waltzes, polkas, mazurkas, and marches (like the one that ends Act I). The climax the work is the Finale to Act II, which features the superb waltz whose grave principal motif, heard at the end of the overture, captivates when the beguiling melody is repeated in chorus on the words 'Blindekuh, Blindekuh!...'

The overture is built out of themes from the Act II ensemble (CD 2 [3]), Act I march finale (CD 1 [9]), and the Act II waltz finale (CD 2 [8]). The piece was described by a commentator as a game of blind man's buff between a teasing polka and a roguish waltz, the two staple dance rhythms of the operetta genre.

The score reflects the scenario of pastoral comedy, with a delicate tinge of social burlesque. This is prefigured in the opening chorus and couplets, where the three prominent guests and their families all arrive, proclaiming their unique identity and importance to the same strophic melody and construction. The couplets for cheeky Johann present a comic figure, a servant and hence a social outsider. The *tenorino* Fach emphasises this vulnerability. The duettino for Waldine and Elvira uses the *bel canto* topos of two female voices singing in rapturous interaction.

The two successive couplets for the mainstream hero Hellmuth reinforce his nodal position for the narrative, each revealing differing aspects of his character and dramatic purpose. The first, in his real character, confirms his genuine love for Waldine, especially when his

protestations resolve into a serene waltz melody, the sure sign of a beneficent intention. His second couplets must reflect his assumed persona as the American cousin, and couch his enthusiastic description of life in the USA as a perky polka, in the manner of the railway and holidays pieces composed by Joseph and Eduard Strauss.

The Act I finale is constructed on a Mozartian modal (Act II of *Le nozze di Figaro*), with a sequence of key, temporal and metrical changes as each stage of the intrigue progresses: *Allegro 2/4*; *Allegro vivo 3/8*; *Allegretto 3/3* (interpolated couplets 'So sind Sie nicht der Bräutigam'); *Moderato 2/4*; *Allegro vivo 3/4*; *Allegro moderato 2/4* ('Der Herr der da steht'); *Tempo di marcia 4/4* ('Arm in Arm wird jetzt marchiert'). It represents an apotheosis realised in march form, but comically undercut by the parody of progressing to the lavish meal on offer.

The opening chorus of Act II captures the idyllic atmosphere of the park, with Johann's slightly wistful couplets intensifying the feeling. The following ensemble sustains this mood, with the striking 4/4 theme from the overture strengthening the musical line. Conversely the duet for the two ostensible tenor rivals captures the light-hearted mood in the manner of Eisenstein and Dr Falke in *Die Fledermaus*. Kragel in his couplets presents the fourth tenor role, typical of the comic persona created by Josef Josephi and Alexander Girardi, especially in the fleet unison passages.

The character of Betsy dominates the second half of the scenario, her couplets establishing her *soubrette* nature, reflected in the delicate filigree writing and restrained coloratura. This is emphasised in the conversational flow of the succeeding trio, with its fluent unison writing.

The Act II finale echoes the structural ambition and control of the conclusion to Act I. It is dominated by the waltz form, its refreshing melodic sequences fixing the swirling mood, capturing the giddy game of blind man's buff, with its confusion and deception. The famous *Blindekuh* melody appears briefly at the beginning, recurs in various guises, before eventually emerging in fullness and resolution with coloratura counterpointing to bring the act to a splendid highpoint.

Act III opens with a brilliant cotillion, the fast sequence then taken up by the chorus to exhilarating effect. The succeeding trio is a fine example of the trope of mock terror, the shuddering temolos, diminished sevenths, consistently undercut by the comedic unison refrains, as all reflect on the imminent threat of *Raubmord* (murderous robbery). The following *buffo* quartet is a rondo based on ensemble singing, characterised by a suave waltz theme, interspersed by conversational exchanges that all resolve in the 3/4 theme.

Betsy's Kissing Couplets are characteristically delicate in her comedy mode, with hesitant *fermate*. The finale is brief in the operetta tradition, resuming the opening theme of the overture, a new waltz motif, the return of Betsy's song, and culminating in the reprise of the beautiful Blind Man's Buff waltz with its brilliant soprano top line.

The work is performed in concert version without dialogue. All singers engage with intelligence, finesse and warmth. The conductor Dario Salvi has recreated the dazzling music with attention to performing traditions, 'breathing' the right *tempi* against the current trend to rush, and conversely without ever forcing the pace by intervening restraints and self-conscious nuances. He draws the composer's bright tones from the orchestra, leading his singers to vivify this evocative and seductive music.

Synopsis

CD 1

1 Overture

Act I

Vestibule of an elegant country house with lawn, figures, flower pots, richly ornamented.

2 The opera opens in the country estate of Herr Scholle (bass-baritone), a rich landowner. Guests are arriving for a grand party organised by Scholle and his wife Arabella (soprano). Scholle prepares to receive a nephew from America to whom his daughter Waldine, born of his first

marriage, was promised while still a child. Indeed, an indemnity of some \$40,000 rests on the success this brokered nuptial arrangement.

3 It is a lovely spring day and the scene is delightful – everyone is in their best attire, the servants run to the carriages to help the guests out, escorting and introducing them to Scholle. Everyone important in the constituency is there: barons, landowners, civil servants with their families, but also musicians and poets.

4 One of the servants, Johann, sneakily goes from table to table sampling all the food available on the buffets: pheasants, grouse, venison, desserts and champagne! But he is also looking very attentively at the lovely ladies amongst the guests.

5 One of them is the pretty Waldine (soprano), who has come to the party with her governess Elvira (mezzo). They are wandering around the gardens admiring the flowers and plants – a good opportunity for Elvira to give Waldine a lesson in botany! But despite all her best efforts Elvira cannot make Waldine concentrate on the scientific side of the lovely nature that surrounds them. Waldine's imagination sees more in flowers than can be read in books – passion, grace and love. She dreams rather of romance, especially since she is attracted to a young man named Hellmuth.

6 And of course, just as Waldine is lost in her admiration for all things beautiful, the dashing and daring Hellmuth (who calls himself Adolf, pretending to be a distant cousin of Waldine, whom she has never met), comes on the scene and kneels in front of her. He tells her to dissemble with him to settle the question of marriage to the cousin from America. Unsettled by the return of her stepmother Arabella, Waldine introduces Hellmuth as a man named Herr Meyer, who claims to be the agent of a Viennese jeweller sent to recover an outstanding debt. The spendthrift Arabella is disconcerted but the gallant 'Meyer' reassures her by kissing her hand. Herr Scholle surprises them but believes that his American nephew, Adolf Bothwell, has finally arrived.

7 Adolf-Hellmuth is thus forced to invent elaborate and rather fanciful descriptions of America for his so-called uncle! Now one of the guests, Herr Kragel, secretary to

the Courts of Justice and in charge of police duties (tenor), thinks he recognises in this 'cousin' a notorious and inveterate seducer.

8 Elvira is worried and upset, as are all the other guests. The hosts themselves add to the confusion and try to work out who Hellmuth really is.

9 Scholle and Arabella vainly seek to clarify the situation which becomes even more complicated. Johann tries to convince Scholle to challenge Hellmuth to a duel. The duel is suspended following a heated discussion when all (apart from Hellmuth) agree that he really is Herr Meyer! The confusion soon reaches fever pitch in a catchy march: the social situation does not prevent the guests from rushing happily to the well-stocked tables for breakfast.

CD 2

Act II

Park with statues, fountains, etc. To the left, the entrance of the country house, to the right, an arbour.

1 The guests are disporting themselves in the sumptuous park, lined with statues and fountains. 2 Johann is also wandering in the garden, clearing the buffet tables, and taking in the vernal beauty that surrounds him.

3 Suddenly Waldine, together with several lady friends, comes into the garden. She is full of excitement as she has just received the news that her cousin has just arrived from America. Hellmuth is following them – he still is trying to confer with Waldine, but she distracts him by introducing him to her all friends, Wilhelmine, Euphrosine, etc. Hellmuth is disheartened as he has still not managed to tell her who he really is, and, exasperated, leaves. Now the real cousin, Adolf Bothwell, enters. He explains to Waldine that he cannot marry her because he is already married. The news certainly makes Waldine happy, but she also thinks it strange that there are *two* cousins called Adolf!

4 When Hellmuth (who is still pretending to be Adolf) reappears, she presents him to the real Adolf and vice versa, to the great bewilderment of the latter! Irony and

suspicion tinge the duo of the two men. Hellmuth is forced to reveal his identity as Herr Adolf Meyer!

5 Kragel in an aside reveals his passion for Fraulein Elvira, a paragon of virtue and learning.

6 Hellmuth thinks he has found a solution when Betsy (soprano), the American wife of the real cousin Adolf, appears incognito. She has also recently arrived after a stormy Atlantic crossing, and is apparently here on her honeymoon, although frustrated that her husband abandoned her in a hotel to visit his family.

Hellmuth's plan is to continue pretending to be Adolf, and thus obtain Herr Scholle's direct consent to marry Waldine. The angry Betsy is willing to assist in his scheme and even gives him Adolf's wallet, but they will have to be cautious since Herr Kragel is still suspicious.

7 Betsy helps Hellmuth sustain his disguise as the agent of a Viennese jeweller by pretending to be his assistant when Arabella seeks to arrange payment of her extravagant debts before her husband gets to know of them.

8 All the company returns, eager to play the party game blind man's buff, to the astonishment of Adolf who does not know this pastime. Waldine explains the rules to him, to the sound of the waltz heard at the end of the overture. Soon it is Adolf's turn to be blindfolded. Hellmuth pushes Betsy into Adolf's arms. Adolf, the 'blind cow' of the game, removes the blindfold and is flabbergasted to recognise his wife. In the meantime Herr Kragel enters, followed by Herr Scholle: the policeman demands that Hellmuth reveal his identity. He persists in posing as cousin Adolf, and even presents Betsy as *his* wife, to the amazement of the real Adolf! The poor man, bewildered, can only curse the deceptive game of blind man's buff. At the climax of the confusion the whole company joins in the irresistible waltz refrain 'Blindekuh, Blindekuh! / Wir allen führen dich' ('Blind cow, Blind cow! / We all lead you on!').

Act III

Rococo style ballroom with picturesque perspective.

9 In the large elegant ballroom, guests join in a cotillion.

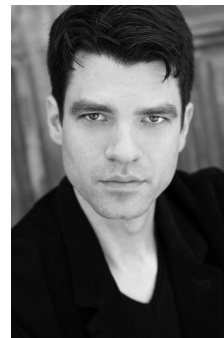
10 Herr Kragel, overheard by Johann, tells Elvira that he loves her, but before thinking of his personal happiness, must fulfil his duties as a police officer. It seems that an American named Adolf Bothwell was murdered in Hamburg. The suspect is his valet who then took his identity. Elvira and Johann are shocked and very anxious.

11 Meanwhile Adolf, Hellmuth, Waldine and Betsy are promenading in the garden. Waldine is surprised at the familiarity between Adolf and Betsy, who reveal that they are married. 12 Asked why they are not more intimate, Betsy points out that in America kissing is seen as a superfluous waste of time – to the disquiet of both Waldine and Hellmuth. Hellmuth, still posing as cousin Adolf, tells Scholle that he cannot marry Waldine, because he is already married: he therefore pays Scholle the \$40,000 forfeit. Waldine will now be free to marry the man she loves: Hellmuth Forst. Her father asks who Hellmuth Forst is, and the false cousin Adolf provides a flattering portrait that reassures Herr Scholle! Elvira now warns everyone about the assassin valet, and then Herr Kragel enters with the police. They arrest the false Adolf-Hellmuth for the murder of his master. But now the real cousin Adolf comes forward and proclaims that he is alive! Scholle does not understand anything, but when Waldine introduces Hellmuth as the man she loves, the mystery is finally resolved.

13 Hellmuth Forst has regained his true name and identity, and when Scholle asks why he and Adolf assumed all these disguises, they answer that it was part of their sly plan – for Hellmuth simply to marry Waldine without challenges! Adolf, responsible for so much confusion from the beginning, observes that practical jokes are the American way! All ends well, and when Arabella asks: 'But how did all this happen?', Waldine replies, 'Well we played the game of blind man's buff!'. The refrain 'Blindekuh! Blindekuh!' returns as the curtain falls.

Robert Ignatius Letellier

Robert Davidson



Robert Davidson has sung leading roles with numerous professional organisations including the New York City Opera, Opera in the Slope Brooklyn, Christman Opera Company NYC, Russian Opera Workshop at the Academy of Vocal Arts, Opera Philadelphia, Ars Tempo Guatemala and the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra. At home in a broad range of styles, his rich, flexible voice adds a golden-age touch to opera, operetta and musical theatre. Davidson is a founding member of the Philadelphia Opera Prep Club, a role study club for opera students and professionals. He resides in University City, Philadelphia, with his family, where he studies and teaches *bel canto* singing.

www.robertjamesdavidson.com

Kirsten C. Kunkle



American soprano Kirsten C. Kunkle has been hailed as an outstanding singing actress with a voice that has been described as beautiful, ethereal, powerful, fiery and bewitching. She is the co-founder and artistic director of Wilmington Concert Opera. Her career highlights include singing at Carnegie Hall, inclusion on the list of Classical Native Artists and Musicians at the National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian Institution, and creating numerous roles with The Philadelphia Opera Collective. Her discography includes nearly 30 recordings with Comic Opera Guild, focusing on the works of Victor Herbert.

www.kirstenckunkle.com

Martina Bortolotti

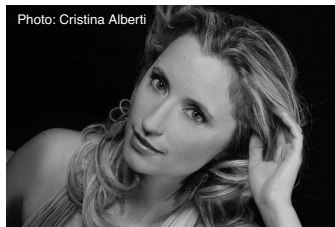


Photo: Cristina Alberti

Award-winning soprano Martina Bortolotti graduated from the Milan Conservatory where she won a scholarship at the Accademia Teatro alla Scala. She was also awarded an Erasmus scholarship by the Milan Conservatory for the Hochschule für Musik und Theater München where she studied with Helmut Deutsch. She has attended masterclasses with Teresa Berganza, Raina Kabaivanska and Brigitte Fassbaender. She has sung leading roles in prestigious theatres such as the Teatro alla Scala, Teatro La Fenice and Cairo Opera House. She has sung under conductors such as Riccardo Muti and Donato Renzetti, and worked with stage directors including Franco Zeffirelli and Bepi Morassi. She has appeared at international festivals, and was invited by the Smithsonian American Art Museum to perform as part of its Steinway Series concerts.

www.martinabortolotti.com

Roman Pichler



Photo: Beano Costabiei

Born in Brixen (South Tyrol) and currently based near Graz, tenor Roman Pichler studied at the JF Conservatory Graz with Natela Nicoli, and has won several competitions including the Internationaler Gesangswettbewerb Feruccio Tagliavini and the Accademia Belcanto competition. Pichler has appeared in roles such as Adam and Stanislaus (*Der Vogelhändler*), Alfred (*Die Fledermaus*), Jan (*Der Bettelstudent*), Edwin and Boni (*Die Csárdásfürstin*), Zsupan (*Gräfin Mariza*), Caramello (*Eine Nacht in Venedig*), Siedler (*Im weissen Rössl*), Nemorino (*L'elisir d'amore*), Duca (*Rigoletto*), Tamino and Monostatos (*Die Zauberflöte*), and Quint (*The Turn of the Screw*), and has performed at the Musikalische Komödie – Oper Leipzig, Oper Graz, Stadttheater Bozen and the Südtiroler Operettenspiele. He has also appeared at various festivals, performing Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Haydn's *The Creation* and Handel's *Messiah* among many others.

www.roman-pichler.com

James Bowers



Photo: Jamie Capewell

English tenor James Bowers is an opera singer, concert soloist and choral singer. He studied at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama and has performed as a soloist on the concert platform in the UK and internationally. In 2017 he became an Iford Arts New Generation Artist, and he made his London operatic debut with Fulham Opera in 2018. He is also a recording artist for Naxos, Toccata Classics and SOMM Recordings. He has recently completed his first season with Opera Holland Park and is due to return in 2020.

www.jamesbowerstenor.com

Andrea Chudak



Photo: Alex Adler

Soprano Andrea Chudak studied at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin as well as the Institut für MusikTheater der Hochschule für Musik Karlsruhe. She has attended many master courses, including with Peter Schreier and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. Andrea Chudak has won many prizes in national and international competitions, including at the Emmy-Destinn-Gesangswettbewerb in Budweis. Since 2001 she has sung as a soloist at the opera houses in Karlsruhe, Kaiserslautern, Stuttgart, and at the Staatsoper Berlin and the Theater an der Wien. She has performed in concerts both nationally and abroad, and has worked with the Kunming Symphony Orchestra, Berliner Symphoniker, Philharmonie der Nationen, Philharmonie Baden-Baden, Vogtland Philharmonie and the Mittelsächsischen Philharmonie. Her discography dates from 2003, and includes the rediscovery of the works of Giacomo Meyerbeer.

www.sopranissimo.de

Daniel Schliewa



Tenor Daniel Schliewa completed his studies at the Musikhochschule Lübeck with Professor Michael Gehrke and Professor Manuela Uhl. He also studied with Harald Stamm, Irmgard Boas, Michaela Schuster and Iris Vermillion. During his studies he worked with Theater Lübeck, Theater Bremen, Landestheater Detmold, Hamburger Kammeroper, Hamburger Engelsaal, Laeiszhalle, Elbphilharmonie, Kunst am Kai Festival, Brahms Festival and the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra as well as conductors such as Simone Young, Robert Stehli, Christoph Eschenbach, Eric Whitacre, Rolf Beck, Sir Jeffrey Tate, Kent Nagano, Dario Salvi, Ulrich Windfuhr and Kaspars Putniņš. Daniel Schliewa was a scholarship holder of the Bayreuther Festspiele.

www.daniel-schliewa.de

Emily K. Byrne



Mezzo-soprano Emily K. Byrne's diverse range of performance credits include her European debut as a soloist with the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra in their concert of Johann Strauss's operetta *Blindekuh*. Her favourite roles include Rosemarie (*The Duchess of Chicago*), Olga (*The Dollar Princess*), Flora (*La traviata*), Mrs. Nolan (*The Medium*), Sesto (*La clemenza di Tito*), Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*), Prince Orlofsky (*Die Fledermaus*), Third Lady (*Die Zauberflöte*), Mercédès (*Carmen*), Pitti-Sing (*The Mikado*), Mrs. Gobineau (*The Medium*), and Miss Pinkerton (*The Old Maid and the Thief*).

www.emilykbyrne.com

Photo: John Sturgis Photography

Julian Rohde

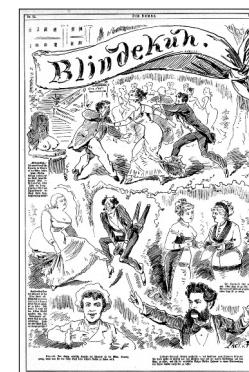


Julian Rohde is a young tenor from Germany. He has recently worked at the opera of Hildesheim, previously performing at the Staatsoper Hamburg, where he debuted in roles including Spoletta in *Tosca*. Besides opera he also performs Lied and oratorios. His first album was released in cooperation with Barockwerk Hamburg. He studied at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg with Yvi Jänicke and later privately with Valentina Aleksandrova Kozhanova. Rohde undertook linguistic studies in Italian and Russian, attending masterclasses with renowned singers such as Simone Kermes.

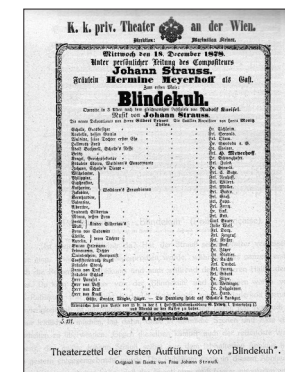
Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus

Founded in 1928, the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra has long established itself as one of the leading institutions in Bulgaria's musical life, representative of the overall contemporary musical culture of the country. Throughout its history, the orchestra has worked with eminent conductors such as Bruno Walter, Hermann Abendroth, Kurt Masur, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Valery Gergiev, Karl Österreicher, Neville Marriner, Charles Dutoit and others. Soloists who have performed with the orchestra have included David Oistrakh, Sviatoslav Richter, Emil Gilels, Alexis Weissenberg, Dmitry Shostakovich, Mstislav Rostropovich, Ghenia Dimitrova, José Carreras, Plácido Domingo, Sarah Chang, Thomas Hampson, Yuri Bashmet, Tabea Zimmermann, Elena Bashkistrova, Sonya Yoncheva, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Maxim Vengerov, Angela Gheorghiu, Vadim Repin, Paul Badura-Skoda, Joshua Bell and many more world-renowned artists. The Orchestra has received many prestigious accolades including Musician of the Year, awarded by the programme *Allegro Vivace* radio contest hosted on the Horizont channel on Bulgarian National Radio, the Golden Lyre and Crystal Lyre awarded by the Union of Bulgarian Musicians and Dancers and Classic FM Radio, the Honorary Sign of Sofia and the Honorary Sign of the President of Bulgaria. From 2017, the director of the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra has been Nayden Todorov.

www.sofiaphilharmonic.com



Cartoon from the magazine
Die Bombe, 22 December 1878



Playbill for the first performance at the
Theater an der Wien, 18 December 1878

Dario Salvi



Dario Salvi is a Scottish-Italian conductor, musicologist and researcher who specialises in the restoration and performance of rare works. Salvi has conducted symphonic works, opera and operettas across Europe, the Middle East and the US. His passion is the rediscovery and performance of long-forgotten masterpieces by the likes of Suppé, Meyerbeer, Rumshinsky, Genée, Auber, and many others. He is collaborating with Naxos on recording a series on Romantic ballets, including works by Minkus, Pugni, Adam and others, and a series on Auber's overtures and orchestral music. Two other important projects include recording the last three missing operas by Johann Strauss II and three never before recorded operatic works by Giacomo Meyerbeer.

www.dariosalvi.co.uk

Blindekuh ('Blind Man's Buff') was Johann Strauss II's sixth operetta and his least known. Neglected for well over a century, it was revived by Dario Salvi and the forces on this album in January 2019. The work's initial lack of success is hard to explain but it may have been caused by a confusing libretto – the music itself is vibrant and captivating with waltzes, polkas, mazurkas, marches and *bel canto* arias. Performed in a concert version without dialogue, and in accordance with performing traditions, this production restores the work to the status of one of Strauss's most melodically seductive works.



Johann
STRAUSS II
(1825–1899)



Blindekuh ('Blind Man's Buff') (1878)

Operetta in three acts

Libretto by Rudolf Kneisel (1832–1899) after his comedy of the same name

Herr Scholle, landowner Robert Davidson, Bass-baritone
 Frau Arabella, his wife Kirsten C. Kunkle, Soprano
 Waldine, his daughter from his first marriage Martina Bortolotti, Soprano
 Hellmuth Forst Roman Pichler, Tenor
 Adolf Bothwell, Scholle's nephew from America James Bowers, Tenor
 Betsy, Adolf's wife Andrea Chudak, Soprano
 Herr Kragel, officer of the Court Daniel Schliewa, Tenor
 Fräulein Elvira, governess to Waldine Emily K. Byrne, Mezzo-soprano
 Johann, Scholle's servant Julian Rohde, Tenor

Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus • Dario Salvi

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

CD 1 1 Overture 9:23 2–8 Act I 40:30 CD 2 1–8 Act II 40:26 9–13 Act III 14:48

A detailed track list and full recording details can be found inside the booklet.

The German libretto and an English translation may be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/660434.htm

Edition: Dario Salvi • Booklet notes: Robert Ignatius Letellier

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Cover: Lithograph cover for the 'Opfern-Maskenball-Quadrille' on themes from *Blindekuh* (Op. 384) (1878).

The illustration depicts the leading actors of the world premiere, Hermine Meyerhoff, Albin Swoboda and Felix Schweighofer in a key scene from the operetta (from the collection of Dario Salvi).

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