

[Excerpt from the "Wales Arts Review" Volume 3, Issue 17]

<http://www.walesartsreview.org/wales-arts-review-volume-3-issue-17/>

David Pountney in Conversation at the Bregenz Festival: 'A Unique Event in a Unique Location' - By Steph Power

I gather that Nali's [Heinz Karl "Nali" Gruber's] opera was originally planned for 2013 but that he needed more time to complete the score. When programming, do you always have in mind a Plan B in case events force a change?

Actually no, not at all! And originally I wasn't going to do this extra year here either, but there was a big muddle about the succession, and then they appointed someone who didn't turn up – or anyway was sent back again before he could even start! – so then I was asked to take care of this extra year. Then the situation with Nali came along – and actually I think André Tchaikowsky really found me; it was quite, quite funny. [Last year saw the posthumous première at Bregenz of Polish composer André Tchaikowsky's *The Merchant of Venice*, directed by Keith Warner. Which, incidentally, was awarded 'Best World Première' at the 2014 International Opera Awards. Tchaikowsky lived from 1935-1982. He died in Oxford, and was no relation to the Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky].

So how did the Tchaikowsky opera come about at Bregenz?

Well, I'd done the Weinberg portrait in Leeds and a Russian musicologist called Anastasia Belina-Johnson came up to me and said, oh you've done Weinberg, now you have to do André Tchaikowsky, and I sort of went, 'What?!' It rang a bell because in fact he had played through a part of *The Merchant of Venice* to a group of us at English National Opera – in 1982 I think, in the first year I went there. We hadn't done it for one reason or another, and very shortly after that, Tchaikowsky sadly died and the opera had fallen out of my mind really.

Anyway, so this woman mentioned it to me on this particular day in Leeds, and the very next day I flew to Warsaw. There I was, in the foyer of the Grand Theatre in Warsaw, and from the far corner of this huge marble foyer, a little figure came out and came up to me from across the whole foyer and said [in a heavy Polish accent] 'Ah Mr Pountney, oh yes, now you've done this Weinberg you know the next thing you have to do is André Tchaikowsky'. So I went [looking up] 'ok ok, I get the message!' I thought, well I have to do something! I got the piece and we had some play-throughs down in Wales and I thought yes, ok. So when Nali came up with a revised timing I knew exactly what to do! But it was chance. André Tchaikowsky's dybbuk!*

* In Jewish mythology, a dybbuk is a malicious possessing spirit believed to be the dislocated soul of a dead person. It supposedly leaves the host body once it has accomplished its goal.