

musicality and sensitivity to text.

Vivat's release offers two excellent program notes—a helpful one from R. Larry Todd, describing the historical circumstances behind the hybrid oratorio, and a revelatory one from King, detailing Mendelssohn's process in this adaptation and King's own in reassembling it. —*Fred Cohn*

Dellaira: *The Death of Webern*



CD Hardenbergh, Denison; Boutté, Almonte, DuPont, Williams, Short; Frost School of Music Chamber Orchestra, Johnson. English text. Albany Records Troy 1613



COMPOSER Michael Dellaira and librettist J. D. McClatchy's vital new opera *The Death of Webern* is compelling in multiple ways: it's a gripping investigation, detective-thriller style, into the random, tragic circumstances of the influential Viennese composer's death in 1945, as well as a subtle manifesto on the importance and inevitability of his music. The protagonist is not the composer himself but the musicologist Hans Moldenhauer, who fled Germany for the U.S. in 1938 and later made it a project to uncover the previously unknown details of Webern's death. "A man who devoted his life to sound is swallowed by silence," sings Moldenhauer, portrayed by Kevin Short, whose steely bass-baritone resonates with the gravity and firm resolve of his character's quest.

Webern himself has less stage time, but in the centerpiece scene, McClatchy's thoughtful, eloquent libretto, in combination with Dellaira's austere yet expressive music, allows Webern to make the best case I've ever heard for the importance of the "brutal, illogical, strange" new music of the Second Viennese School: "Nature has already foreseen—or rather, foreheard—all the ways sound can embody ideas according to musical laws, laws before unknown but existing forever." The music in this passage is appropriately

Webernesque, but most of the opera is not. Dellaira was wise to modulate the musical style throughout: having contrasting consonant sections makes for more effective storytelling, and it allows the aforementioned scene to stand out as even more remarkable. As Webern, tenor Tony Boutté is as articulate and persuasive as the music and words require. Possessed of a radiant, communicative tenor, he speaks the score's various musical languages with the same ease.

In his relentless quest for an explanation as to why and by whom Webern was shot on the balcony of his daughter's home in the Austrian village of Mittersill in September 1945, Moldenhauer endures a bureaucratic run-around that ultimately leads him to the North Carolina home of the widow of Raymond Bell, the army cook who pulled the trigger. Maria Fenty Denison creates a sympathetic portrait of this decent, troubled woman. "Sometimes when he was intoxicated, he would say, 'I wish I hadn't killed that man,'" she laments, subtly implying that Bell quietly drank himself to death in remorse.

The final chapter is told by Amalie Waller, the eldest of Webern's three daughters. Amalie gives Moldenhauer a vivid description of the anguish and tumult experienced by the family that night. Esther Jane Hardenbergh, singing Amalie, asks the central tormenting question of any tragic situation: Why did it have to happen this way? Hardenbergh's Amalie summons the requisite strength to take us on a lurching narrative and emotional journey, which she concludes by demanding, "Where is the justice?" Moldenhauer's fervent closing monologue ends decisively in C major, possibly a hat-tip to Schoenberg's famous midcareer observation that "there is still plenty of good music to be written in C major."

Conductor Alan Johnson leads an adept six-member chamber orchestra from the University of Miami's Frost School of Music with stylistic assurance. *The Death of Webern* is a striking example of how to write an illuminating opera about a famous composer without merely appropriating that composer's music. —*Joshua Rosenblum*

Faccio: *Amleto*



CD Hamza, Worra; Richardson, González, DeVine, Curran, Beruan; Chorus and Orchestra of Opera Southwest, Barrese. No libretto. Opera Southwest (2)



THOSE WHO KNOW of Franco Faccio have hitherto remembered him as an associate of Verdi who conducted *Otello*'s 1887 world premiere. We now realize Faccio had other arrows in his quiver, thanks to the musicological labors and persistent advocacy of American conductor Anthony Barrese. Years before Verdi worked with Arrigo Boito on his two final masterpieces, Boito assisted Faccio *the composer* to write a Shakespearean music drama, *Amleto*. First heard to some acclaim at Genoa in 1865, Faccio's four-act work foundered when revised and presented at La Scala six years later.

Barrese led the work's modern premiere at Albuquerque's Opera Southwest; that 2014 production was recorded live for this well-engineered release, with applause and stage noise. The orchestra, though not first-rate, is well prepared, and Barrese's tempos seem reasonable. The chorus fares well in the many ensembles, which are both musically engaging (I'd cite Gounod as well as Verdi as Faccio's melodic and coloristic influences) and formally noteworthy. Boito's libretto creates—as in *Otello* and *Falstaff* to come—multiple mini conversations taking place during single ensembles.

Other composers tackling this iconic play have summoned full-voiced baritones for its lead—Jean-Baptiste Faure, Verdi's first Rodrigue, for Ambroise Thomas (Paris, 1868), and the late, great Tom Krause for Humphrey Searle (Hamburg, 1968). A true Italian, Faccio wanted a tenor Hamlet, Mario Tiberini, who was well known internationally: a year after creating *Amleto* he sang in the premiere of the revised *Forza del Destino* at La Scala. Unfortunately, Tiberini (ill and under-rehearsed) was