

What the Critics are saying about DONALD RUNNICLES

Conducting Opera & Concert

John Adams: *Dr. Atomic*

World Premiere, San Francisco Opera, October 1, 2005

“But best of all is an immensely complex, unmistakably American rhythmic tapestry that demands and nearly gets a performance of supra-technical ease from the orchestra under Donald Runnicles.”

– *Financial Times* 10.4.05 (Andrew Clark)

“Ablly marshaled by SFO music director Donald Runnicles, the orchestra makes fine work of an often beautiful and almost always arresting score. The poetic arias might be excerpted and turned into a marvelous orchestral song cycle.”

– *Dallas Morning News* 10.3.05 (Scott Cantrell)

“Donald Runnicles led bone-chilling performances of Adams’ many-edged music. ... I find it the brainiest, the most challenging of Adams’ large-scale stage works, the one least subject to easy solutions.”

– *L.A. Weekly* 10.10.05 (Alan Rich)

“Donald Runnicles drew a keen, compelling and assured performance from the orchestra.”

– *New York Times* 10.3.05 (Anthony Tomassini)

“The cast, singing under the vigorous leadership of Music Director Donald Runnicles, is uniformly magnificent.”

– *San Francisco Chronicle* 10.4.05 (Joshua Kosman)

“Donald Runnicles' conducting of the SFO orchestra deservedly got the evening's most fervent applause.”

– *Variety* 10.5.05 (Dennis Harvey)

“Donald Runnicles conducted the orchestra in an imposingly athletic and gritty account.”

– *Orange County Register* 10.3.05 (Timothy Mangan)

“The San Francisco Opera Orchestra, conducted by Donald Runnicles, brings an adrenaline-charged tension and gleaming burnish to Adams' complex and ingenious score, which manages to evoke hidden worlds and processes: of the atom, the human psyche.”

– *San Jose Mercury News* 10.3.05 (Richard Scheinin)

“In the pit Donald Runnicles had the Wagner-sized orchestra purring like a big, dangerous cat.”

– *Oakland Tribune/Inside Bay Area* 10.4.05 (Stephanie von Buchau)

Giuseppe Verdi: *Requiem*

“The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra has a great track record with conductor Donald Runnicles, and played here with unobtrusive gusto and a well-moderated sense of colour.

Runnicles despatched the music with the minimum of fuss, in a style that brought to mind the considered approach of Carlo Maria Giulini.”

– *Daily Telegraph* 8/16/05 (James Allen)

**Peter Tchaikovsky: *Queen of Spades*
San Francisco Opera, June 13, 2005**

“Conductor Donald Runnicles was the musical titan of Sunday afternoon's season-opening performance. His command of the textures and tonal variety of the music set a high standard for the singers ... Runnicles elicited the score's rich detail ... from the strings' heaving sighs in the brief prelude to hushed, swaying figures and carefully articulated solos.”

– *San Francisco Chronicle* 6/14/05 (Steve Winn)

“Donald Runnicles in San Francisco did wonderful justice to Tchaikovsky's swooning, harrowing, eclectic mix of musical emotions [in *The Maid of Orléans*].”

– *Wall Street Journal* 7.6.05 (David Littlejohn)

**Richard Strauss: *Der Rosenkavalier*
Metropolitan Opera, March 11, 2005**

“The general success of the [Rosenkavalier] season premiere (March 11) owed much to Donald Runnicles, who brought his thoroughbred orchestra out of the gate fast but with verve and dazzling accuracy even in the brass section ... He was especially considerate in maintaining transparent textures for the Marschallin.”

– *Opera News* 06/05 (David Shengold)

“Mr. Runnicles showed a secure hand in the pit, at times almost violently stirring up the score as if to remind us that this Strauss, too, has its modern edges. But he also knew when to pull back on the reins in key moments of the second and third acts.”

– *New York Times* 3/15/05 (Jeremy Eichler)

“Donald Runnicles conducted the [Metropolitan Opera] orchestra superbly, bringing tremendous energy but also great sensitivity to the intricate textures and harmonies.”

Strauss: *Der Rosenkavalier*, 3/11/05

– *Associated Press* 3/13/05 (Mike Silverman)

“I have never fully understood how a conductor, equipped only with a small stick, herds flocks of singers and musicians into wistfulness and keeps them there for hour upon hour, with controlled excursions toward bluster, camp, rue and endearing adolescent sentimentality. But Runnicles did. Waltzes glided, brass frothed, and tempos slowed and swiveled so that even a contemporary New Yorker could get lost in memories of imperial Vienna. ... Aikin, Graham and Denoke spun a diaphanous silver finale under Runnicles' delicate baton.”

– *Nesday*, 3/16/05 (Justin Davidson)

**Erich Wolfgang Korngold: *Die tote Stadt*
Salzburg Festival Summer 2004; Vienna State Opera December 2004**

“Under Donald Runnicles the Vienna Philharmonic makes Korngold's music sparkle and shimmer unimaginably well. A bright and optimistic tone prevails, appropriately, as the opera's original planned title was *Triumph of Life*.”

– *Salzburger Nachrichten*

“With Runnicles, at the premiere as next season in Vienna, the Vienna Philharmonic clearly has a conductor it loves. They play with audible joy, bring forth from the score all kinds of kaleidoscopic sparkle and intoxicating brilliance.”

– *Die Presse* (Vienna)

**Benjamin Britten: *Billy Budd*
San Francisco Opera, Fall 2004**

“Britten's sublimated morality tale, based on Melville's novella, received a powerful rendition under Music Director Donald Runnicles.”

– *San Francisco Chronicle* / Critics Choice/“Best of 2004” (Joshua Kosman)

“*Billy Budd* sailed back into the War Memorial Opera House on Sunday afternoon after a nearly 20-year absence, its emotional force and musical sweep as brilliantly potent as ever ... Music Director Donald Runnicles [presided] magisterially in the pit [with] hugely responsive musical leadership [shaping] the flow of the performance tenderly.”

– *San Francisco Chronicle* (Joshua Kosman)

“A triumph for Donald Runnicles ... [who] is in absolute control of Britten's remarkably rich, almost unbroken score. He draws from it – through awe-inspiring performances by the San Francisco Opera orchestra and chorus – a rolling ocean of emotion that darkly underlines and expands the moral and tragic psychological tragedy onstage ... orchestra and chorus carried the day.”

– *The Wall Street Journal* (David Littlejohn)

Conducting Orchestral & Choral Music

**Bruckner Symphony No. 8
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra**

“Donald Runnicles [offered a] compelling, often deeply moving interpretation ... [Bruckner's] Eighth is clearly a specialty piece for the ASO's principal guest conductor. He never confused ponderousness with profundity, instead letting the symphony expand at what felt like a comfortable and natural pace, building it up phrase by phrase, movement by movement. He made the ASO sound like an Old World orchestra, plush and weighty. The strings sang with a creamy tone. The horns and brass – including four Wagner tubas – delivered their parts with lightness and strength.”

– *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* [Pierre Ruhe] 5.5.05

**Benjamin Britten: *War Requiem*
Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, December 2003 (debut)**

“Finally, a successful conductorial debut with the Berlin Philharmonic! ... Donald Runnicles succeeded incisively and penetratingly in making the work contemporary, while accurately emphasizing its otherworldly qualities. At the end, tears were not quite dry, but a quiet joy about the ensemble's success and the Philharmonic's happy partnership with Runnicles prevailed.”

– *Morgenpost* (Berlin)

**Messiaen: *Trois Petites Liturgies de la Présence Divine*
Duruflé: *Requiem*
BBC Symphony Orchestra, London, December 18, 2005**

“The BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Donald Runnicles gave a very fine concert – Messiaen's *Trois Petites Liturgies de la Présence Divine* and Duruflé's *Requiem*. ... [all participants] were superb, led by Donald Runnicles into one of those rare performances that really did make Messiaen's inward vision clear. ... Runnicles's authoritative, scrupulously prepared performance even persuaded me that, perhaps after all that, Duruflé's inspiration doesn't flag towards the end. And like all good Requiems, this one was very life-affirming.”

– *Sunday Telegraph* 1.1.06 [Peter Reed]

“This was a strong, persuasive account of a work [Messiaen's *Trois Petite liturgies*] where timidity reaps no rewards. ... Well planned, well executed, offering much food for thought, this was another solid BBC concert.”

– *The Times* 12.21.05 [Geoff Brown]

“The imaginative juxtaposition of Duruflé's masterpiece [the *Requiem*] with Messiaen's exotic *Trois petites liturgies de la Présence Divine* (1943) in this imaginative BBC/Barbican concert could hardly have been more striking. ... Donald Runnicles [paced] the whole 35 minutes [of the Messiaen] with immaculate timing, the visionary vividness of it all was hugely enjoyed. ... And such is Duruflé's skill, that a work one would have thought cried out for a resonant church acoustic sounded no less sonorous and full in the dryness of the Barbican, as potently realised by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, under Runnicles' measured sway.”

– *Independent* 23.12.05 [Bayan Northcott]

“This fascinating concert began with Messiaen's perfumed, ecstatic hymn to the Almighty, the *Trois Petites Liturgies de la Présence Divine*. ... The conductor, Donald Runnicles, wisely kept the piece on a tight rein, driving the middle movement at a surprisingly fast (but very apt) pace. But at the same time, he managed to give the ecstatic slow moments space to breathe and bloom. The pregnant silences – of which this piece is full – were beautifully controlled.”

– *Daily Telegraph* 12.21.05 [Ivan Hewett]

“Runnicles encouraged the BBC Symphony Chorus to float [the Messiaen's] chant-derived melodic lines, rising to thrilling climaxes in the Kyrie and Sanctus. ... If Runnicles was unable to persuade that this is one of Messiaen's more substantial, more accomplished works, it provided nevertheless a revealing companion piece for the immaculately crafted Duruflé.”

– *Evening Standard* 12.19.05 [unsigned]

Recordings

Benjamin Britten: *Billy Budd* (Orfeo d'or)

“Aside from Shicoff, the biggest asset of the recording is the important orchestral contribution, the characteristic colors of the Vienna instrumentalists eloquently shaped by Donald Runnicles to shed fascinating new light on one passage after another. ... all the more impressive as this 2001 production was (we are told) the Vienna State Opera's first encounter with this opera. ... Comparing all the available recordings ... if one wants a distinctive Captain Vere and some stunning orchestral passages, those are the strengths of this Orfeo recording.”

– *Opera News* 11/04 (Jon Alan Conrad)

Wolfgang Korngold: *Die tote Stadt* (Orfeo d'Or)

“**More than anything, this performance belongs to conductor Donald Runnicles.** It's hard to imagine a more exciting interpretation of this score than that of Erich Leinsdorf on its first recording some thirty years ago, yet **Runnicles throws himself so completely into Korngold's phantasmagoric maelstrom that the effect is utterly gripping.** Clearly, Runnicles understands that there can be no half-measures when it comes to Korngold — such music calls for an interpreter's complete emotional honesty and abandon.”

– *Opera News* August 2005 (Eric Myers)

“Runnicles and the Vienna Philharmonic play the piece with some fire, bringing out every one of Korngold's ragbag of Puccini, Strauss and Wagner allusions. ... when it works, as it does here, Die tote Stadt still packs a punch.”

– *The Gramophone*, 11/05 (Patrick O'Connor)

**Wolfgang Mozart: Requiem
(Telarc)**

“[Runnicles and the ASO deliver **an emotionally complex and persuasive reading** – easily Runnicles' best recording with the ASO. He effectively paces the Mass, **steeped in Mozart's world of opera but also alert to the personal (and thus universal) message**. The orchestra is in fine form, with menacing trumpets and surprisingly heavenly violas, and throat-grabbing power – in attack and emotional pathos – from the ASO chamber chorus. ... This is another ASO disc destined for multiple Grammys.”

– *Atlanta Journal Constitution* 10/2/05 (Pierre Ruhe)

“The performance on this disc is excellent. With it conductor Donald Runnicles only adds to the splendid string of recordings he is making with the Atlanta orchestra.”

– Copley News Service, 9/27/05 (King Durkee)

“[Robert Levin's edition,] vividly rendered here by the Atlanta Symphony and Chamber Chorus under Donald Runnicles, is the most likable of the famous recompletions.”

– *New York Times*, 7/31/05 (Jeremy Eichler)

**Wolfgang Mozart: Symphonies 39 and 41
(St. Luke's Collection)**

“It's not an easy task leading a group that feels it can do just fine without a conductor. Members of the Orchestra of St. Luke's put out a fantastic Bach Brandenburg concerti set last year, but they love Runnicles on the podium. ‘We liked the way we sounded. ... It felt like playing chamber music,’ principal violinist Krista Bennion Feeney said about the Scottish conductor in the liner notes. Indeed, there's just as much intimacy in this CD as in the Bach one, with just the right touch of fire when Mozart calls for it. Runnicles not only matches the inner voices superbly and the proportions delicately but sustains melodic lines of the symphonies with grace. The latter is a byproduct of his successful career as an operatic conductor, the former simply the mark of a talented conductor.”

– *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (Andrew Druckenbrod)

**Carl Orff: Carmina Burana
(Telarc)**

“If the chorus drifts toward the heavens, the orchestra is all hellfire ('Floret silva nobilis'). With unapologetic percussion ('O Fortuna') and scorching brass ('Were diu werlt alle min'), the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra drives relentlessly while maintaining, miraculously, a lightness of touch.”

– *andante.com* (Ben Finane)

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