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Michael Romain
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Jonathan Miller is one of the most important and prolific directors of theatre and opera today. Written with Miller's full cooperation and with access to rehearsals, this is the first book to explore his work in depth. Michael Romain examines this significant career in theatre through a series of interviews with Miller and his collaborators. It is rare that a director is willing or able to discuss his craft and rarer still to find colleagues who can recount their impressions of rehearsals and productions. In a series of conversations with actors, conductors, designers, singers, directors, and writers, a fascinating portrait of Miller emerges.

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A profile of
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MILLER**

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To my parents
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Foreword

The Earl of Harewood

For much of his life, certainly since it started to become public at the time of *Beyond the Fringe*, Jonathan Miller's achievements, not least because of their multiplicity, have invited superlatives in such quantity that to praise him has been seen as a cliché. This is nothing short of ludicrous, because a man's versatility does not diminish what he's done or make it less worthwhile.

I first met him at the time of *Beyond the Fringe*, when his sense of the ridiculous, both verbal and physical, permanently enlarged my vocabulary, but it has been in his capacity to illuminate other men's work, in the theatre primarily but also in the field of painting and visual imagery, that I have found him at his most stimulating. A description of his activities suggests a dilettante, but the reality is far from that. In the field I know best he is an outstanding professional, and his operatic productions are among the best of our day. I was lucky enough to meet Janáček's *Cunning Little Vixen* in the production of Walter Felsenstein in East Berlin, and quite mistakenly thought it so nearly definitive that no other would stand comparison. But Jonathan Miller's production for Glyndebourne quite swept that notion away, and it was a great pleasure when he agreed to direct Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* for English National Opera while I was Managing Director. *Figaro* was an outstanding success, full of accurate observation – Marcellina picking Susanna's new bonnet to bits at the start of Act I; pointed business – the Countess going into a faint when Susanna emerges from the dressing-room;

Foreword

new light on old situations – the Countess teasing Cherubino in Act II with more erotic overtones than I had previously encountered. At a small party after the first night, I asked Jonathan whether he would consider Britten's *Turn of the Screw* for his next venture with ENO, and he hardly had time to accept before he was describing medical theories which make the Governess's hallucinations (if that is what they are) horribly plausible.

Nobody has a greater sense of what's publicly ridiculous, and the *Mikado* he directed for ENO found things in text and music which had never been discovered before, all delivered with a disciplined timing which would have delighted W. S. Gilbert, even if some of the goings-on would have surprised him. I have the happiest memories of *Rigoletto* in his production, but almost as bright are recollections of the discussions we had about projects which never came to fruition. *Those* would have enlivened any Festival programme.

Perhaps Jonathan Miller's greatest quality is the ability to inspire whoever he's working with. When the by no means short rehearsal period for *Figaro* was over and the first night had arrived, I went, before the performance, into the singers' dressing-rooms, and the Countess said straight out: 'I'm so unhappy it's all over. I've never enjoyed anything as much as these rehearsals!' You don't very often hear a director praised like that.

Chronology

Jonathan Miller was born in London on 21 July 1934. He was educated at St Paul's School, London, and read Natural Sciences at St John's College, Cambridge (MB, B.Ch.1959; Hon. Fellow 1982); he qualified as a Doctor of Medicine in 1959.

PERFORMANCES

- 1954 *Out of the Blue* (Cambridge Footlights), Phoenix Theatre, London
- 1957 *Tonight*, BBC TV
- 1960 *Beyond the Fringe*, Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh Festival
- 1961 *Beyond the Fringe*, Arts Theatre, Cambridge
- 1961–2 *Beyond the Fringe*, Fortune Theatre, London
- 1962–4 *Beyond the Fringe*, John Golden Theatre, New York
- 1964 *One Way Pendulum*, Woodfall Films, dir. Peter Yates
- 1976 *Pleasure at Her Majesty's*, Her Majesty's Theatre, London
(Amnesty Benefit)

STAGE PRODUCTIONS

- 1962 *Under Plain Cover* (Osborne), Royal Court Theatre, London
- 1964 *The Old Glory* (Lowell), American Place Theatre, New York
- 1966 *Come Live with Me* (Minoff and Price), New Haven, Connecticut
- 1967 *Prometheus Bound* (Aeschylus/Lowell), Yale Repertory Theatre,
Connecticut
- Richard II* (Shakespeare), Ahmanson Theater, Los Angeles
- 1968 *Benito Cereno* (Lowell) Mermaid Theatre, London
- The School for Scandal* (Sheridan), Nottingham Playhouse

Chronology

- 1969 *The Seagull* (Chekhov), Nottingham Playhouse
King Lear (Shakespeare), Nottingham Playhouse
- 1970 *Twelfth Night* (Shakespeare), Arts Theatre, Cambridge
Julius Caesar (Shakespeare), Arts Theatre, Cambridge
Hamlet (Shakespeare), Arts Theatre, Cambridge
The Tempest (Shakespeare), Mermaid Theatre
King Lear, National Theatre at the Old Vic, London (Nottingham production)
The Merchant of Venice (Shakespeare), The National Theatre at the Old Vic (also ATV film)
- 1971 *Prometheus Bound*, Mermaid Theatre
Danton's Death (Büchner), The National Theatre at the Old Vic
- 1972 *The School for Scandal*, The National Theatre at the Old Vic
The Taming of the Shrew (Shakespeare), Chichester Festival Theatre
- 1973 *The Malcontent* (Marston), Nottingham Playhouse
The Seagull, Chichester Festival Theatre
- 1974 *Measure for Measure* (Shakespeare), The National Theatre at the Old Vic
The Freeway (Nichols), The National Theatre at the Old Vic
The Marriage of Figaro (Beaumarchais), The National Theatre at the Old Vic
 'Family Romances': *Ghosts* (Ibsen); *The Seagull*; *Hamlet*, Greenwich Theatre
Arden Must Die (Goehr), Sadler's Wells Theatre, London
Noyes Fludde (Britten), Roundhouse Theatre, London
- 1975 *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Wilde), Greenwich Theatre
All's Well that Ends Well (Shakespeare), Greenwich Theatre
Measure for Measure, Greenwich Theatre
Così fan tutte (Mozart), Kent Opera
Rigoletto (Verdi), Kent Opera
The Cunning Little Vixen (Janáček), Glyndebourne
- 1976 *Orfeo* (Monteverdi), Kent Opera (also BBC TV)
The Three Sisters (Chekhov), Cambridge Theatre, London
- 1977 *The Cunning Little Vixen*, Frankfurt Opera
The Cunning Little Vixen, Australian Opera
Eugene Onegin (Tchaikovsky), Kent Opera
- 1978 *The Marriage of Figaro* (Mozart), English National Opera at the London Coliseum
- 1979 *La Traviata* (Verdi), Kent Opera
She Would if She Could (Etherege), Greenwich Theatre
The Flying Dutchman (Wagner), Frankfurt Opera
A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare), Vienna Burgtheater
The Turn of the Screw (Britten), English National Opera

Chronology

- 1980 *Arabella* (Strauss), English National Opera
Falstaff (Verdi), Kent Opera
- 1981 *Otello* (Verdi), English National Opera
- 1982 *Rigoletto*, English National Opera (also Metropolitan Opera, New York
 and Thames TV/Channel 4)
Così fan tutte, St Louis Opera, Missouri
Hamlet, Donmar Warehouse, then Piccadilly Theatre, London
The School for Scandal, American Repertory Theater, Harvard University
Fidelio (Beethoven), Kent Opera (also subject of Channel 4 series)
- 1983 *The Magic Flute* (Mozart), Scottish Opera
- 1985 *Don Giovanni* (Mozart), English National Opera
- 1986 *The Magic Flute*, English National Opera
Tosca (Puccini), Maggio Musicale, Florence
The Mikado (Gilbert and Sullivan), English National Opera (also Thames
 TV)
Long Day's Journey into Night (O'Neill), Broadhurst Theater, New York,
 then Haymarket Theatre, London (also BBC TV)
- 1987 *Tosca*, English National Opera
The Emperor (Kapúscinski/Miller and Hastings), Royal Court Theatre
 (also BBC TV)
Measure for Measure, Teatro Ateneo, Rome
The Mikado, Los Angeles Music Center Opera (also US TV)
The Barber of Seville (Rossini), English National Opera
Tristan and Isolde (Wagner), Los Angeles Music Center Opera
The Taming of the Shrew, Royal Shakespeare Company,
 Stratford-upon-Avon, then Barbican Theatre, London
- 1988 *Andromache* (Racine), The Old Vic
One Way Pendulum (Simpson), The Old Vic
Busy D'Ambois (Chapman), The Old Vic
The Tempest, The Old Vic
Candide (Bernstein/Voltaire), The Old Vic (also Scottish Opera and BBC
 TV)
- 1989 *King Lear*, The Old Vic
La Traviata, Glimmerglass Opera, New York State
Mahagonny (Brecht and Weill), Los Angeles Music Center Opera
The Mikado, Houston Grand Opera
The Liar (Corneille), The Old Vic
- 1990 *Don Giovanni*, Maggio Musicale, Florence
- 1991 *The Girl of the Golden West* (Puccini), La Scala, Milan, Teatro Regio,
 Turin
Katya Kabanova (Janáček), Metropolitan Opera, New York
Così fan tutte, Maggio Musicale, Florence

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- Tosca*, Houston Grand Opera
The Turn of the Screw, Los Angeles Music Center Opera
The Magic Flute, Mann Auditorium, Tel Aviv
Fidelio, Glimmerglass Opera, New York State
The Marriage of Figaro, Vienna State Opera
 1992 *The Marriage of Figaro*, Maggio Musicale, Florence
The Makropulos Case (Janáček), Glimmerglass Opera, New York State

FILM AND TELEVISION

- 1962 *What's going on Here?*, NBC New York (Director)
 1964–5 *Monitor*, BBC TV (Series Editor/Presenter)
 1965 *Profiles in Courage: Anne Hutchinson*, TV New York (Writer)
The Drinking Party (Plato's *Symposium*), BBC TV (Producer/Director)
 1966 *Alice in Wonderland*, BBC TV Film (Producer/Director)
The Death of Socrates, BBC TV Film (Producer/Director)
 1967 *Scotch*, Documentary Film For John Walker and Sons (Writer/Director)
 1968 *Oh Whistle and I'll Come to You*, BBC TV Film (Producer/Director)
 1970 *Take a Girl like You*, Columbia Pictures (Director)
 1973 *Clay*, BBC TV Film (Director)
 1975 *King Lear*, BBC TV (Director)
 1977 *The Body in Question*, BBC TV 13-Part Series (Writer/Presenter)
 1980 *The Taming of the Shrew*, BBC TV Shakespeare (Producer/Director)
The Merchant of Venice, BBC TV Shakespeare, Dir. Jack Gold (Producer)
All's Well that Ends Well, BBC TV Shakespeare, Dir. Elijah Moshinsky
 (Producer)
The Winter's Tale, BBC TV Shakespeare, Dir. Jane Howell (Producer)
Antony and Cleopatra, BBC TV Shakespeare (Producer/Director)
 1981 *Timon of Athens*, BBC TV Shakespeare (Producer/Director)
Othello, BBC TV Shakespeare (Producer/Director)
Troilus and Cressida, BBC TV Shakespeare (Producer/Director)
A Midsummer Night's Dream, BBC TV Shakespeare, Dir. Elijah
 Moshinsky (Producer)
Henry VI, BBC TV Shakespeare, Dir. Jane Howell (Producer)
 1982 *King Lear*, BBC TV Shakespeare (Producer/Director)
States of Mind, BBC TV 15-Part Series (Writer/Presenter)
 1984 *The Beggar's Opera*, BBC TV (Producer/Director)
Ivan, BBC TV *Horizon*, Documentary (Writer/Presenter)
 1985 *Così fan tutte*, BBC TV Film (Director)
 1986 *Origins*, BBC TV (Writer/Presenter)
Equinox: Prisoner of Consciousness, Channel 4 (Writer/Presenter)

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- 1988 *Four Virtuosos*, Channel 4 (Writer/Presenter)
 1989 *Dialogue in the Dark* (by Michael Ignatieff), BBC TV (Director)
Who Cares?, BBC TV 6-Part Series (Presenter)
Equinox: Moving Pictures, Channel 4 (Writer/Presenter)
 1990 *QED: What's so funny about that?*, BBC TV (Writer/Presenter)
 1991 *Museums of Madness*, BBC TV (Writer/Presenter)

PUBLICATIONS

- 1963 Film Critic for *The New Yorker* (also contributor to the *New York Review Of Books* and the *Partisan Review*)
 1971 *McLuhan*, Fontana Modern Masters
 1972 *Freud: The Man, His World, His Influence* (Editor), Weidenfeld & Nicolson
Censorship and the Limits of Permission, British Academy
 1978 *The Body in Question*, Jonathan Cape
 1982 *Darwin for Beginners* (With Boris Van Loon), Unwin and Writers and Readers Publishing Co-op
 1983 *States of Mind*, BBC Publications, London/Pantheon Books, New York
The Human Body (with David Pelham), Jonathan Cape
 1984 *The Facts of Life* (with David Pelham), Jonathan Cape
 1985 *Bodyworks*, Genesis Computer Program
 1986 *Subsequent Performances*, Faber & Faber
 1990 *The Don Giovanni Book: Myths of Seduction and Betrayal* (Editor), Faber & Faber

POSITIONS HELD

- 1970 Contributory Member of the Royal Society study group on non-verbal communication
 1970–3 Research Fellow in the History of Medicine at University College, London
 1973–5 Associate Director of The National Theatre
 1975–6 Member of the Arts Council
 1977 Visiting Professor in Drama, Westfield College, London
 1978–87 Associate Director of the English National Opera
 1981 Fellow, University College, London
 1983 Visiting Professor of Medicine at McMaster University, Ontario
 1984 Research Fellow in Neuropsychology at the University of Sussex
 1988–90 Artistic Director of the Old Vic

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Chronology

AWARDS

Jonathan Miller's awards include Director of the Year for *The Three Sisters*, Society of West End Theatre 1976; the Silver Medal, Royal Television Society 1981; the *Evening Standard* Opera Award for 1982 for *Rigoletto*; and the CBE in 1983.

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All the interviews were conducted between March 1989 and June 1990.

Michael Romain Hampstead, London