

always instantly recognisable. Glenn Close has it. The first night audience roared its approval when she sang *With One Look*. And they roared again when she sang *New Ways to Dream*.

The final scene, when Norma Desmond

thinks of her father Haymarket, is one of his very best. There are three married couples: the airily vague upper-middle class (Nicholas Le Prevost and Jenny Seagrove); the stridently vulgar middle class (Tamzin Outhwaite and Jason Merrells); and the dull, boring lower-

Charlotte-Anne Tooplin, tries to find erotic comedy in a mother suffering from postnatal depression but succeeds only in being crude and irritating.

Robert Tanitch

MUSIC

Painted lady dazzles at Leeds song festival

Leeds Lieder is a cute but not entirely accurate name for a festival that takes in every kind of art song, not just German. And it's flourishing. There was a time when serious song was an endangered species; it was certainly a hard sell. But the packed audiences for this annual Yorkshire fixture tell a different story. And telling stories in song was the theme of the 2016 programme, run by accompanist Joseph Middleton and baritone Roderick William.

With the actor Rory Kinnear in residence to read verse alongside the sung repertoire (in a persistently accusatory and tearful manner, as though rowing with his girlfriend), there was a relentless sequence of superb recitals from the likes of Roderick Williams, Marcus Farnsworth, Mary Bevan

and Nicky Spence – the cream of younger UK singers, with a good few of the best accompanists in tow.

Outstanding performances included Spence performing Britten; Williams doing John Ireland; and the stunning Mary Bevan (with whom every man, woman and child in the audience must have been in love) singing a batch of Brahms and Schumann duets featuring that classic Lieder template: the suitor at the door asking to come in, and the girl inside who says no.

But there were also two agreeably unusual items on the programme – one a rehabilitative packaging of Brahms's little-loved *Die Schöne Magelone*, a clunky and impenetrable song cycle that's based on a Teutonic fairy tale, but doesn't really tell the story. Hence the fact that no one plays it any more.

Accompanist Iain Burnside encased the songs inside a narration supposedly given by Brahms's soulmate Clara Schumann which explained all. And with masterful singing by Williams, alongside magisterial playing by Burnside himself, it worked as I've never heard before. A revelation.

Revelatory in different ways, though, was the focus on new work and artists. There were two significant commissions from Cheryl Frances-Hoad (an approachably attractive setting of verse by Ian McMillan) and Edward Rushton (a self-lacerating rumination on the agonies of the creative process), plus assorted workshops for emerging young composers/poets/voices that produced no new scores of distinction but did have some promising performers. I liked Michael Vickers, a silky soft and superlatively charming baritone from the Guildhall School; Charlotte Hoathe, a wirily expressive soprano from the Royal Scottish Conservatoire; and above all Sarah Lenny, a mezzo of astonishing technical virtuosity from London's Royal College, whose commitment to a new song about alien children was so total that she painted herself head to toe in green to sing it. She got strange looks as she sat among the audience, waiting to sing. But for artistic dedication, nobody could fault her.

Michael White