



[Lulu](#) by [Welsh National Opera](#)

Reviewed by [Denis Joe](#) February 2013

*“She was created to incite to sin, to lure, seduce, poison—yea, murder, in a manner no man knows.”* (Frank Wedekind)

**Lulu** is seen by many as one of the greatest operas of the 20th Century (if not *the* greatest). Left unfinished by the untimely death of

**Alban Berg**

, the opera was performed incomplete by the Zurich Opera in 1937. It wasn't until 1979 that the world premiere of the three act

*Lulu*

, completed by the renowned composer and musicologist,

**Friedrich Cerha**

, was performed at the at the Opera Garnier, conducted by

[Pierre Boulez](#)

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For this production **WNO** have used a third version of Lulu, by the German born musicologist **Eberhard Kloke**

allowing performers a freer hand in shaping scenes and dramatic developments. But Kloke does not deviate very far from Cerha's approach. This was the UK premier of Kloke's version.

When the curtain is raised we are transported into a world that instantly brings to mind the vision of Fritz Lang's **Metropolis**. But this is not the monochrome, doom-laden version, but a colourful circus, with monkeys and crocodiles dressed in sharp colours. A ring master (

**Richard Angas**

) invites the us to see some wild animals, the wildest of all being the "serpent" Lulu ( *Hereinspaziert in die Menagerie*

). We will soon see how she snares people, precipitating immoral deeds (

*Sie ward geschaffen, Unheil anzustiften,/Zu locken, zu verführen, zu vergiften-/Und zu morden - ohne das es einer spürt*

)'.

Act One takes us to a painter's studio, where Lulu (from the outset the incredibly sexy, **Marie Arnet**),

the wife of Dr. Goll, an elderly Medical Professor, is having her portrait painted. The sitting is watched over by her lover, Dr. Schön, an editor in chief who rescued her from the gutter as a child. They are interrupted by Alwa, Schön's playwright son (

*Darf ich eintreten?*)

who, having invited Lulu to a performance of his play - with a cynical judgemental remark concerning the whereabouts of her husband (

*Aber wo ist der Herr Gemahl?*

) leaves with his father.

The painter (**Mark Le Brocq**) tries to seduce Lulu and she wards him off, demanding that he

continues painting. He asks her to lift her skirt ( *Wenn Sie links das  
Höschen ein wenig höher...* ) and further attempts to seduce her. She caustically dismisses his advances by telling him he is too slow to catch her ( *Sie bekommen mich noch lange nicht* ). But she faints and the painter bolts the door. Then goes to Lulu and kisses her, telling her how much he loves her.

They are interrupted by Dr Goll, banging on the door and demanding to be let in. Lulu panics and pleads with the painter to hide her ( *Er schlägt mich tot* ). Goll breaks down the door and seeing the two alone, he collapses and dies of a heart attack. Lulu realises how rich she will be on Goll's inheritance. The painter is horrified ( *Hast du denn keine Seele?* ), he tells Lulu to put on her clothes, then kneels over the body and delivers a moving aria, saying how jealous he is of the husband and how much he fears good fortune ( *Ich möchte tauschen mit dir, du Toter! Ich geb' sie dir /Zurück* ). There follows a short orchestral interlude, during which the Doctor's body is removed by stagehands and hoisted on a hook above the stage. Lulu re-enters and asks the painter to fasten the back of her dress and the both leave the stage.

In scene two Lulu and the artist (Whose name we learn: Walter) are married. Sitting in a comfortable room, they are interrupted by a caller at the door, who turns out to be Schigolch, an old derelict who is somehow part of Lulu's past. The painter leaves the two alone and Schigolch asks Lulu for money, complementing her on her good fortune ( *Du hast es weit gebracht! Die Teppiche...* ).

Schön arrives and assumes the departing Schigolch to be Lulu's father. He has come to ask her to get out of his life ( *Ich bitte dich, deine Besuche bei mir einzustellen* ). Lulu tries to calm Schön

by telling him that Walter is too infatuated to know that she is having an affair. Schön is concerned that he is about to marry and wants no scandal. Lulu assures him that her life belongs to him in a powerful and beautiful aria (

*Wenn ich einem Menschen auf dieser Welt angehöre,/gehöre ich Ihnen. Ohne Sie wäre ich - ich will/nicht sagen, wo*

), which gives us a glimpse of Lulu as dependant, and suggests a level of desperation, that seems to contradict the image of the liberated woman. Here we can see the influence of Wagner's ideal of the purity of love, as is the basis for

[\*Tristan and Isolde\*](#)

. We could assume that Lulu feels a debt of gratitude towards Schön, but her final line of this aria (

*Welt hat je etwas für mich übrig gehabt?*

) suggests that she values Schön for the love he showed her.



Some tend to see the role of Lulu as a portrayal of the classic (and clichéd?) [\*femme fatale\*](#)<sup>ii</sup>. Wedekind, whose dramas

*Earth Spirit*

and

*Pandora's Box*

are the basis of the opera

*Lulu*

, created a certain ambivalence to how we should view Lulu. This aria suggests that Lulu is not narcissistic or even the piteous victim, but someone who is, as in the characters of Wagner's opera, driven by her love for one man.

When the Painter comes in, Lulu leaves him to learn some facts of life from Schön. Schön explains that he has known Lulu since she was twelve and has tried to get her out of his life. Now, he says, the Painter must assert himself and make Lulu behave like a respectable wife (*Laß sie Autorität fühlen; sie verlangt nicht mehr,/als unbedingt Gehorsam leisten zu dürfen*).

Shocked, Walter locks himself in another room when Lulu appears, followed by Alwa, who is excited over the news that revolution had broken out in Paris. But Schön quiets him and is concerned for Walter. The three break down the door and discover that the Painter has killed himself. Alwa berates his father for his lack of fidelity (*Hättest du, als meine Mutter starb, an dem Mädchen /anständig gehandelt!*). Schön calls the police, and Lulu predicts he will end up marrying her (*Sie heiraten mich ja doch! - Nur Geduld, Kinder*!). Walter's corpse is removed and hoisted above the stage. Sc

Scene three takes us backstage in a theatre, Alwa is pouring champagne for Lulu and telling how he first met her (*Sie trugen ein dunkelblaues Kleid.- Ich sah etwas/so unendlich hoch über mir Stehendes in Ihnen*), shortly before his mother's death, and how he wanted his father to marry her so she would always be around. An African Prince appears after Lulu leaves for her next cue; he is hoping to marry her (*Als Gattin wird sie einen Mann über alles glücklich/machen.Als meine Gattin*...). Onstage Lulu has pretended to faint after seeing Schön in the audience with his fiancée. Schön promptly appears in her dressing room, ordering her back onstage. Alwa tells the theatre director to go on with the next number, then leaves Schön with Lulu, who delivers an ultimatum: he must renounce his fiancée for her. She dictates the letter ("Nehmen Sie Ihr Wort zurück."/ "Ich kann es mit meinem Gewissen"...), which Schön calls his death sentence. As the bell rings for her next number, Lulu calmly goes onstage.

In Act Two we find Lulu, now married to Schön, saying good-bye to a visitor, the lesbian Countess Geschwitz, who admires her. As the two women leave the room, Schön is irrational with jealousy of real and imagined rivals, and bemoans the degradation of his final years of life (*Das mein Lebensabend. Die Pest im Haus. Dreißig!/Jahre Arbeit, und das mein Familienkreis*). Complaining that she feels neglected, Lulu entices him into their bedroom.

Geschwitz returns and hides as several other hangers-on appear: Schigolch and an Athlete, who is carrying a Schoolboy. They wait for Lulu, who comes in to make small talk with them. Schigolch denies he is Lulu's father, and says she is a Wunderkind (*Sie hat nie einen gehabt!*). A servant announces Dr. Schön, so the Athlete and Schoolboy hide, but it turns out to be Alwa. Schön who is watching from a distance as Lulu and Alwa converse. Alwa declares his love for Lulu (

*Mit deinen Gottesgaben macht man seine Umgebung/zu Verbrechern, ohne sich's träumen zu lassen*

), though she murmurs she poisoned his mother. Schön appears and escorts his son out of the room, then returns to look for the Athlete, who he knows is hiding. He is carrying a revolver, which he gives Lulu, telling her to use it on herself because of the shame she has brought both of them (

*Ich muß mich retten. Begreifst du reich?/Du sollst es dir selbst applizieren*

!). Trying to calm him, Lulu calls herself blameless for whatever others may have done on her account; Schön turns the pistol in her hand toward Lulu and seems about to pull the trigger.

When he is distracted by the emergence of the frightened Schoolboy from hiding, Lulu empties the revolver into Schön's back. The wounded man calls for water, but champagne is all she can find. He warns Alwa that he is her next victim (

*Laß sie nicht entkommen: Du bist der nächste*

)

Seeing Geschwitz, Schön dies. Though Lulu begs Alwa to let her escape, he bars her way until the police arrive. Schön's body is taken by stagehands and hoisted above the stage along with Dr. Goll's and Walter's corpses.

This scene has all the makings of classic *opera buffo* yet there is nothing comical about it. In that sense it brings to mind Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* and whilst the scenes in that do not lead to the tragedy we find in *Lulu*, the deception (a common ploy of *opera buffo*) that we find in Mozart's opera has a very cruel streak running through it.

There is a musical interlude that traces Lulu's trial, conviction, imprisonment, and eventual escape, and we find ourselves in the same setting, approximately a year later. Alwa, Geschwitz and the Athlete planning Lulu's escape, wait for Schigolch who brings passports, then leaves with Geschwitz to rescue Lulu from prison. The Athlete, planning a marriage of convenience to Lulu, complains about the work and money he has put into her escape plans (*Meine Vermögensverhältnisse sind auch zerrüttet*).

The Schoolboy appears, having run away from reform school to convince him that Lulu is dead, the Athlete shows a clipping that says she was hospitalized in prison with cholera, then throws him out. Lulu, leaning on Schigolch, appears wearing Geschwitz' clothes, her escape disguise. Angry at finding her wasted by illness, the Athlete threatens to go to the police. He leaves, as does Schigolch, who has to pick up train tickets. Geschwitz has traded places with Lulu in prison in order to get her out; Lulu tells Alwa how Geschwitz infected herself, with cholera allowing Lulu to escape. She asks Alwa for a kiss, to be sure he will protect and accompany her. Though she remarks that they are lying on the sofa on which his father died. Alwa is unperturbed by Lulu's wasted features, in fact it seems to excite him as he runs his hands over her body (*Durch dieses Kleid empfinde ich deinen Wuchs wie /Musik. Diese Knöchel:- ein Grazioso; dieses reizende /Anschwellen: ein Cantabile; diese Knie: ein Misterioso; und das gewaltige Andante der Wollust* ).

