

**Concert**  
**Kiri Te Kanawa**  
 Tower of London  
 ★★☆☆☆

Richard Morrison

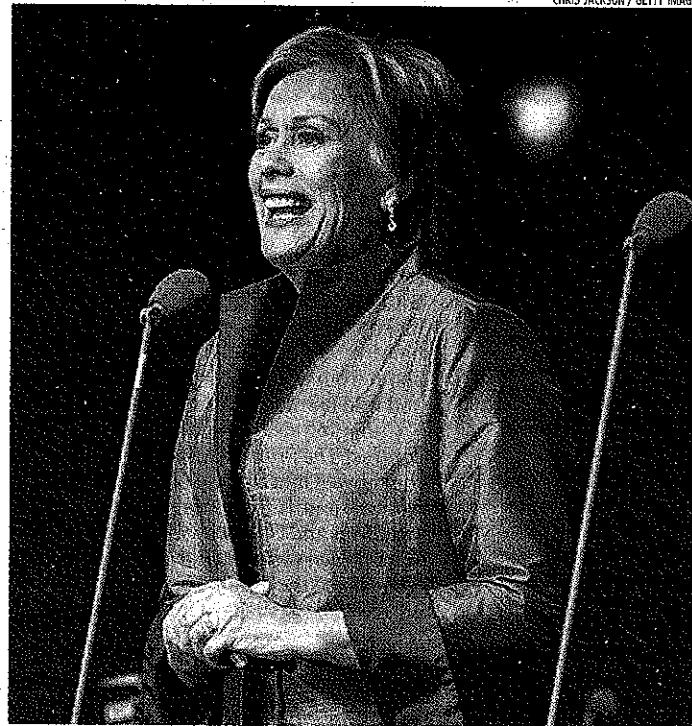
The ebullient Harvey Goldsmith moved his Continental Airlines Tower Festival from June to September because he thought that the later month was likely to offer better weather for enjoying music alfresco in the world's most famous medieval moat. Tell that to the 900 punters who stoically sat through a cloudburst on Tuesday to see *The Yeomen of the Guard*.

It wasn't too balmy on Wednesday either. But at least it stayed dry for Dame Kiri Te Kanawa to introduce her *Future Stars of Opera* in a genial show efficiently

backed by the City of London Sinfonia and Robin Stapleton.

What with the police sirens and aircraft passing every five minutes (were they Continental?), the conditions weren't ideal for judging young voices — all participants in this year's Solti-Te Kanawa Accademia in Italy. But the baritone Phillip Rhodes — a good-looking Maori, like Te Kanawa herself — delivered *Largo al factotum* with such panache (albeit at a steady speed) that a lifetime of Figaros and Papagenos seems guaranteed.

His was the meatiest and most developed voice. The Mexican tenor Roberto Gomez and the Lithuanian soprano Lauryna Bendziunaite are both still students at the Royal Academy of Music in London, and sounded like it. But the light-voiced Gomez floated some sweet high notes in *Una furtiva lagrima*, and Bendziunaite has a fierce edge to her timbre that could be exciting if she can



CHRIS JACKSON / GETTY IMAGES

muster a little more colour and feeling.

What, though, of the diva herself? Having hinted earlier this summer that she was winding down, 38 years after she first dazzled Covent Garden, Te Kanawa now seems keen to go on and on. "I don't know why they are planning to retire me," she said last week. "I haven't got any plans to die, either. That could be on the cards, too, before I retire."

On the strength of what she sang here, shivering in a stiff breeze, she could spin out her farewell tour for years, especially with a microphone to compensate for inevitable loss of power. The velvety plushness is intact; she still rises confidently above the stave, and after a nervous start in Bizet she relaxed in the Lloyd Webber, Bernstein and Gershwin that followed. Quite a few regal ladies have made their swansong at the Tower over the centuries, from Anne Boleyn onwards. But this, it seems, was not one of them.

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