

## Naked Opera

THE FORGE, CAMDEN TOWN, LONDON



**MUSIC  
REVIEW**  
Michael  
White

Speaking of mischief, *Naked Opera* was the naughty title of a sort of operatic cabaret that opened last week at the Forge, Camden Town, and was delivered fully clothed from start to finish. Nakedness, here, turned out to be metaphorical, a stripping bare of souls. Singers used to hiding who they are behind the characters they play stepped out of role and told us stories of their own, real lives – assisted by a comic compere and a pianist who accompanied a batch of intermittent, illustrative arias.

Essentially as a guide to how the world of opera works, it was all there: the occasional glamour, the persistent hard graft, the bizarrely roundabout routes people take into careers, the hazards of auditions, dodgy singing teachers, predatory conductors... poignant, funny, true. Devised by Lynn Binstock, a long-time staff director at ENO who interviewed dozens of struggling singers by way of research, it's one of the most original shows I've seen in ages – with the bonus of some very decent singing and a pianist, Robert Bottrill, who is one of those exceptional accompanists capable of making you forget they're not an orchestra. The whole thing is a joy. And educational.