Wozzeck, Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District, Lear

Touching the Nerves of Modernism

Wozzeck, Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District, Lear: the three 20th-century operas which stand out among the upcoming Festival programme are some of the most striking works of musical theatre in recent history. Taken in sequence, they mark breaking points and reflect the intensification of the genre.

The 137 rumoured rehearsals are the stuff of legend, but even the 34 orchestral and 14 vocal rehearsals that actually took place speak for themselves: the effort seemed to exceed all reasonable limits when Erich Kleiber prepared the world premiere of Alban Berg’s Wozzeck at Berlin’s Oper Unter den Linden in 1925. The subject was equally unheard-of as the musical idiom itself; the notation of the atonal sounds, unfolding far beyond major and minor tonalities, was rhythmically difficult to read. Kleiber’s meticulousness, however, paid off: while conservatives reacted with outrage, progressive listeners immediately recognized the expressive, even emotionally overwhelming power of Berg’s music and his plea for the exploited title figure and all its tribulations. Faced with the betrayal of his beloved Marie, the soldier Wozzeck commits murder and suicide as the only way out of his desperation.

Berg condensed the story of this anti-hero from Georg Büchner’s dramatic fragment into three acts of five scenes each, steering Wozzeck towards catastrophe in cinematographic rigour. Berg reaches the utmost concentration in his “invention on one note”, the murder
scene, in which the note B – the note of death – rises up in a huge crescendo from the entire orchestra: lament and accusation in one.

**Matthias Goerne is the ideal Wozzeck**

The conductor Christoph von Dohnányi, known for his particularly sharp ears, once praised baritone Matthias Goerne after a joint performance of *Wozzeck*, saying that “never in the history of the opera” had he “heard so many notes of the role sung right”. This demonstrates both Goerne’s exceptional status in the title role, but also the fact that the work’s challenges continue to be enormous. At the Festival, the work was last performed in 1997 in an interpretation by Claudio Abbado and Peter Stein; now Matthias Goerne forms the expressive centre of a high-profile cast working on a new interpretation together with Vladimir Jurowski conducting the Vienna Philharmonic and William Kentridge as director.

In 1933 *Wozzeck* was banned in Nazi Germany as “degenerate”, and performances came to a near standstill abroad as well; only after 1945 was the work generally accepted as part of the opera canon.

**Shostakovich’s Compassion for Katerina Izmailova, Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District**

However, *Wozzeck* did shock the Leningrad audience in 1927 – and with it, Dmitri Shostakovich, 20 years of age at the time. He produced his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* there in 1934, and the work was an instant success. Based on a novella by Nikolai Leskov, he puts on stage a figure that might be called Wozzeck’s Russian sister. The essential difference is that this Katerina Izmailova liberates herself by murderous violence from her joyless and loveless surroundings, eliminating first her brutal father-in-law and then her weakling husband with the help of her lover Sergei. Her supposed happiness, however, does not last long. Found guilty and condemned to lifetime hard labour, the pair finds itself en route to a prisoners’ camp in Siberia. Here Katerina has to contend with a young rival and thus sees the last thing left to her disappear: Sergei’s love. Finally, Katerina kills the girl and herself at the same time.

The plot, considered monstrous at the time, was translated by Shostakovich into extreme sounds – including extremely naturalistic ones. Violence and sex are here transformed into
sound as clearly and drastically as never before. Between Russian folk music, piercing orchestral colours, percussion attacks and the characters exaggerated to the point of parody, Shostakovich's sympathy and compassion for Katerina are plainly obvious – a daring plea for this character.

Thus, he would not have expected in his wildest dreams that the work's success might suddenly be wiped out, and that the regime he lived under might suddenly turn against him and his music: the Soviet equivalent of the artists denigrated, persecuted and murdered by the Nazis. For after Stalin had attended the opera in 1936, obviously with disgust, Pravda wasted no time in publishing an infamously scathing review. Julian Barnes summed up the worst three sentences of this article and their potential threat in his biographical novel about Shostakovich, *The Noise of Time* (2016): "'The composer apparently never considered the problem of what the Soviet audience looks for and expects in music.' That was enough to take away his membership in the Union of Composers. 'The danger of this trend to Soviet music is clear.' That was enough to take away his ability to compose and perform. And finally: 'It is a game of clever ingenuity that may end very badly.' That was enough to take away his life." The henchmen failed to appear. The terror, however, remained for the rest of his life.

**Nina Stemme embodies the passionately loving Lady Macbeth**

In 2001 Valery Gergiev and Peter Mussbach presented the work in Salzburg; now Nina Stemme, one of the leading highly dramatic sopranos of our times, sings the role of Katerina in a production by Andreas Kriegenburg; the Vienna Philharmonic is conducted by Mariss Jansons, who studied in Leningrad and still experienced the climate of Soviet cultural policy personally.
"Rarely before – perhaps in Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* – has human loneliness been portrayed so convincingly from the facts that the protagonist remains blind to his fellow human beings": thus wrote Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau about Aribert Reimann's *Lear*, the opera which he himself had suggested to the composer. At its celebrated first performance in Munich in 1978, Fischer-Dieskau also sang the title role.

*Wozzeck* marked the birth of atonal opera; with *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, an acid naturalism conquered the stage; both pieces, beholden as they were to a new form of social criticism, were suppressed by the dictatorial regimes of their countries of origin.

**Lear falls prey to the flattery of two daughters**

*Lear*, on the other hand, symbolizes a later turning point – or rather, synthesis – in 20th-century music history: the transformed return of the primacy of the human voice and of exalted, genuine pathos; the applicability of the latest compositional techniques to musical theatre, for example sound fields whose shimmering contourlessness constitutes a liberation from the constrictions of linear, serial thinking. Verdi already wanted to set to music the story of King Lear, who abdicates for the sake of his daughters, but falls prey to the flattery of the two older ones and disdains the honest, brief words of the youngest, Cordelia – a lapse of judgment which leads to tragedy.

**Aribert Reimann's creative frenzy**

On the basis of an 18th-century Shakespeare translation, Claus C. Hennerberg assembled a libretto which Reimann approached hesitantly at first, but then fell into a creative frenzy. "The dark colour, massive agglomerations of brass, sound fields in the low strings led me to 'Lear' the person," he wrote in his notes. Cluster formations allow the inner and outer raging of the storm to merge in the tempest scene, a 48-note string chord no longer differentiates "between the cosmological and the human abyss" (Norbert Abels).

**Three women – three fates: Marie – Katerina Izmailova – Cordelia**

Like Marie’s affair and Katerina’s murderous deed, here it is Cordelia’s refusal to flatter her father: once again, a woman self-confidently steps outside the boundaries which men have set for her – this time without being trapped in her own guilt and that of others, but with higher justice on her side. And yet – or precisely for that reason – disaster runs its course.

"It can never sound better than from the Vienna Philharmonic," Reimann was already convinced in 2004, when his *Zeit-Inseln* were first performed in Salzburg. Now the master orchestra is guided through the highly complex score by Franz Welser-Möst; Gerald Finley loves and suffers in the role of Lear, Anna Prohaska is the devoted daughter Cordelia, and Michael Maertens plays the Fool.
Alban Berg Wozzeck

Oper in drei Akten op. 7 (1917-1922)
Libretto von Alban Berg nach dem Dramenfragment Woyzeck (1836) von Georg Büchner

Neuinszenierung
In deutscher Sprache mit deutschen und englischen Übertiteln
Koproduktion mit der Metropolitan Opera, New York,
und der Canadian Opera Company, Toronto

Vladimir Jurowski, Musikalische Leitung
William Kentridge, Regie
Luc De Wit, Co-Regie
Sabine Theunissen, Bühne
Greta Goiris, Kostüme
Catherine Meyburgh, Video Compositor & Editor
Urs Schönebaum, Licht
Kim Gunning, Video Operator

Matthias Goerne, Wozzeck
John Daszak, Tambourmajor
Mauro Peter, Andres
Gerhard Siegel, Hauptmann
Jens Larsen, Doktor
Tobias Schabel, 1. Handwerksbursch
Huw Montague Rendall*, 2. Handwerksbursch
Heinz Göhrig, Der Narr
Asmik Grigorian, Marie
Frances Pappas, Margret

Salzburger Festspiele und Theater Kinderchor
Wolfgang Götz, Leitung Kinderchor
Konzertvereinigung Wiener Staatsopernchor
Ernst Raffelsberger, Choreinstudierung
Wiener Philharmoniker

* Teilnehmer des Young Singers Project – unterstützt von der KÜHNE-STIFTUNG

Premiere: 8. August, 20 Uhr

Weitere Vorstellungen: 14., 17., 24. und 27. August
Haus für Mozart

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Dmitri Schostakowitsch *Lady Macbeth von Mzensk*

Oper in vier Akten (Urfassung 1930-1932)
Libretto von Alexander Preis und Dmitri Schostakowitsch nach der gleichnamigen Novelle (1865) von Nikolai Leskow

Neuinszenierung
In russischer Sprache mit deutschen und englischen Übertiteln

Mariss Jansons, *Musikalische Leitung*
Andreas Kriegenburg, *Regie*
Harald B. Thor, *Bühne*
Tanja Hofmann, *Kostüme*
Stefan Bolliger, *Licht*
Christian Arseni, *Dramaturgie*

Dmitry Ulyanov, *Boris Timofejewitsch Ismailow*
Maxim Paster, *Sinowi Borissowitsch Ismailow*
Nina Stemme, *Katerina Lwowna Ismailowa*
Maxim Aksenov, *Sergej*
Evgenia Muraveva, *Aksinja / Zwangsarbeiterin*
Andrei Popov, *Der Schäbige*
Oleg Budaratsky, *Hausknecht / Wächter*
Boris Stepanov*, *Vorarbeiter*
Igor Onishchenko, *Mühlenarbeiter*
Vasily Efimov, *Kutscher / Betrunken Gast*
Alexey Shishlyaev, *Polizeichef*
Valentin Anikin, *Polizist / Sergeant*
Ksenia Dudnikova, *Sonjetka*
Andrii Goniukov, *Alter Zwangsarbeiter*

Konzertvereinigung Wiener Staatsopernchor
Ernst Raffelsberger, *Choreinstudierung*
Wiener Philharmoniker

* Teilnehmer des Young Singers Project – unterstützt von der KÜHNE-STIFTUNG

Premiere: 2. August, 18 Uhr
SALZBURG FESTIVAL
21 July – 30 August 2017


Großes Festspielhaus

Supported by Bank of America Merrill Lynch

**Aribert Reimann Lear**

Oper in zwei Teilen (1976-1978)
Libretto von Claus H. Henneberg nach William Shakespeares Tragödie *King Lear* in der Übersetzung von Johann Joachim Eschenburg (1777)

Neuinszenierung
In deutscher Sprache mit deutschen und englischen Übertiteln

Franz Welser-Möst, *Musikalische Leitung*
Simon Stone, *Regie*
Bob Cousins, *Bühne*
Mel Page, *Kostüme*
Nick Schlieper, *Licht*
Christian Arseni, *Dramaturgie*

Gerald Finley, *König Lear*
Tilmann Rönnebeck, *König von Frankreich*
Derek Welton, *Herzog von Albany*
Michael Colvin, *Herzog von Cornwall*
Matthias Klink, *Graf von Kent*
Lauri Vasar, *Graf von Gloster*
Kai Wessel, *Edgar*
Charles Workman, *Edmund*
Evelyn Herlitzius, *Goneril*
Gun-Brit Barkmin, *Regan*
Anna Prohaska, *Cordelia*
Michael Maertens, *Narr*

Konzertvereinigung Wiener Staatsopernchor
Ernst Raffelsberger, *Choreinstudierung*
Wiener Philharmoniker

**Premiere: 20. August, 19.30 Uhr**

Felsenreitschule

Mit Unterstützung der Freunde der Salzburger Festspiele e.V. Bad Reichenhall

**Zu den Fotos:**
http://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/fotoservice/subcategoryid/5778/archivyear/2017