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Künstlerischer Leiter der Oper des Nationaltheaters und der Staatsoper

Schönbergs monumental Gurre-Lieder returning to the State Opera after 102 years

Arnold Schönberg's Late-Romantic cantata Gurre-Lieder, based on a 14th-century Danish legend, will again be heard at the State Opera in Prague, which hosted its Czech premiere 102 years ago. A colossal apparatus of almost 250 singers and instrumentalists, including the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Norwegian Radio Orchestra, will appear under the conductor Petr Popelka. Part of the Musica non grata project, the programme will contribute to the celebrations marking the centenary of Czech Radio.

“The inclusion of the Gurre-Lieder in the Musica non grata cycle and its return to the State Opera is entirely logical, as it was at this very venue, formerly the Neues deutsches Theater, where, on 9 June 1921, the masterpiece received its Czech premiere, conducted by Alexander Zemlinsky, one of Musica non grata's central figures,” said **Per Boye Hansen**, Artistic Director of the National Theatre Opera and the State Opera. **Arnold Schönberg** worked on the monumental cantata on and off for 11 years, starting in 1900 and finishing in 1911. The Gurre-Lieder was first performed on 23 February 1913 in Vienna under the baton of Franz Schreker. It is based on **Jens Peter Jacobsen's** 1868 poem cycle Guresange, inspired by the medieval Danish legend, set at the Gurre Castle, telling the tragic love story of King Waldemar and his mistress Tove Lille (Little Tove), murdered by Queen Helvig. The grief-stricken King curses God and is consequently condemned to fly for ever with his dead minions through the night sky, seeking his beloved Tove, who has transfigured through the magnificence of Nature. Schönberg's cantata features some 35 leading motifs depicting not only the main characters but also natural phenomena (sunset, sunrise, galloping horses, etc.) and a variety of emotional states (desire, affection, fear, mourning, etc.). Noteworthy too is the fact that in the Gurre-Lieder Schönberg employed for the very first time the Sprechgesang, a “spoken singing” technique. “I find it immensely exciting that at the time when Schönberg shocked the world with Pierrot lunaire, ushering in a brand-new musical-aesthetic style, in the Gurre Lieder he brought to bear to great acclaim for the last time the Late-Romantic idiom of the early 20th century,” Per Boye Hansen added.

Stellar Czech and foreign singers will appear at the State Opera. The solo parts in the Gurre-Lieder have been assigned to artists of such renown as **Michael Weinius**, a regular guest at the Wiener and Bayerische Staatopern; the Grammy Award winner **Dietrich Henschel**; the German soprano **Susanne Bernhard**; the Norwegian baritone **Yngve Sjøberg**, a finalist of the prestigious International Hans Gabor Belvedere Competition; and the Czech mezzo-soprano **Štěpánka Pučálková**. Schönberg's gigantic cantata will be performed by a formidable body of almost 250 vocal and instrumental forces, including the **Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra (SOČR)**, the **Norwegian Radio Orchestra (KORK)**, the **Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno** and the **Slovak Philharmonic Choir**, conducted by **Petr Popelka**, Music Director of the SOČR and the KORK. "I deem the Gurre-Lieder one of the most marvellous compositions in the history of music, the crowning glory of the entire evolution of tonality, hence I feel greatly honoured to have been afforded the opportunity to conduct a performance of it. I also cherish the fact that, after more than a hundred years, we will bring the Gurre-Lieder back to the venue where it was presented under Alexander Zemlinsky. The SOČR and the KORK are top-notch European orchestras, and I believe that binding together their singular energies will enrich their players musically and personally, giving rise to a truly remarkable experience," Petr Popelka pointed out.

The performance in Prague of the Gurre-Lieder is a co-production between the National Theatre Opera and the State Opera, the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Norwegian Radio Orchestra and the Musica non grata cycle, funded by the Embassy on the Federal Republic of Germany to the Czech Republic. The concert on 20 June at the State Opera will be broadcast live from 7 pm on Czech Radio Vltava and the Norwegian radio channel NRK P2. The evening will be recorded by Czech Television. "Rarely indeed is a work of this magnitude performed in Prague, or anywhere else for that matter. We are talking decades. For the members of the orchestras it may even be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Fortune dealt us a kind hand and, owing to many favourable circumstances, we can perform the famous opus within the celebrations of the centenary of Czech Radio. I believe that the radio and television recordings, as well as the audio document of the concert, will offer music lovers the possibility to acquaint themselves with this extraordinary piece," **Jakub Čížek**, Director of the SOČR, added.

Gurre-Lieder

20 June 2023, State Opera, 7 pm

Music: Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951)

Text: Robert Franz Arnold (1872–1938), based on a poem cycle by Jens Peter Jacobsen (1847–1885)

Conductor: Petr Popelka
Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra
Norwegian Radio Orchestra
Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno
Chorus master: Petr Fiala
Slovak Philharmonic Choir
Chorus master: Jozef Chabroň
Waldemar: Michael Weinius
Tove: Susanne Bernhard
Wood Dove: Štěpánka Pučálková
Peasant: Yngve Sørberg
Klaus the Jester: Kevin Connors
Speaker: Dietrich Henschel

Project details: <https://bit.ly/3LPtXQg>

Visuals

Graphic visual: https://1drv.ms/f/s!ApBE3x3pPyNihod7Bh3D6OGcdD_uAw?e=mJWsUR

Artist photos: https://1drv.ms/f/s!ApBE3x3pPyNihod84r8AFarRS_J_g?e=3zf2wk

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