



ROTTERDAMS
PHILHARMONISCH
ORKEST

Programme Notes

Duke Bluebeard's Castle

Fri 24 February 2023 · 20.15

Sun 26 February 2023 · 14.15



PROGRAMME

conductor **Lahav Shani**
mezzosoprano (Judith) **Claudia Mahnke**
baritone (Bluebeard) **Johannes Martin Kränzle**

György Ligeti (1923-2006)
Atmosphères (1961)

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)
Duke Bluebeard's Castle, op. 11 (1911)
opera in one act after a libretto by
Béla Balázs

Concert ends at around 21.30 / 15.30

Most recent performances by our orchestra:

Ligeti Atmosphères: Sep 2022,
conductor *Lahav Shani*
Bartók Duke Bluebeard's Castle:
Sep 1999, mezzosoprano Márta Lukin,
bass Kolos Kovács, conductor
Valery Gergiev

Cover: Photo Gary Alvis

Illustration from *Bluebeard* (1911) by Walter Crane

Hungarian horror

The composers did not deliberately set out to frighten the public. But that is exactly the effect that the two Hungarians, Béla Bartók and György Ligeti, created with the new work they presented to the public. *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* demonstrated that the Romantic era was really at an end. Whilst *Atmosphères* opened up a world of sound that no one had envisaged.

The unimaginable

Sixty years ago György Ligeti's *Atmosphères* provoked strong reactions. It would never become a mainstream work. However, new age, experimental pop, film scores and computer games have since changed our listening habits to such an extent that the piece can now rely on greater understanding. Wider acceptance began with Stanley Kubrick's very effective use of the music in his 1968 film hit 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. Ligeti's music perfectly encapsulated Kubrick's visualisation of the otherworldly and mind-bending. What scared (or simply irritated) people back then about *Atmosphères* is the way it draws you in at the same time as repelling you: as a listener you have nothing to hold on to. It is music that suggests timelessness and weightlessness; it goes nowhere and sounds like nothing else. The composer of such a piece

can't have enjoyed a laid-back life. The young Ligeti, a Hungarian Jew, was the prey of anti-Semites, his family was murdered by the Nazis, and after the war he saw his country fall to a Soviet dictatorship. After the Hungarian uprising in 1956 (bloodily put down) he fled to West Germany. Here, although he found artistic freedom, his aversion to political systems ran so deep that he refused to sign up to the prevailing trends for the avant-garde. Ligeti wanted to create his own musical universe.

Extremities

Ligeti devoted himself to electronically-produced sounds – essential for a sixties composer – and he then imitated the strange, 'unearthly' sounds thereby created in his compositions for the symphony orchestra and human voice. In the sound pictures of *Atmosphères* the instrumentation of a classical orchestra is scarcely recognisable.

Ligeti's aim was to create a sonic amalgam in which it was impossible to identify any harmony, melody, individual notes or rhythms. He achieved this goal through something that he called 'micropolyphony'. The work consists mainly of massive 'clusters' of closely spaced tones, ranging from low to extremely high. These clusters grow tighter together, and then thin out. At the same time some instruments play fast trills or slow glissandi, devoid of any musical accents. The toneless, restless sounds of brass instruments and the scraping of brushes over piano strings add to the effect of alienation. The result is a huge, motionless 'wall of sound' - but beneath the static surface there is enormous activity. 'Nothing happens in this piece', scoffed a German critic at the time. Ligeti considered it a huge compliment.

Primal drives

Exactly 50 years before *Atmosphères*, Béla Bartók composed his dark music drama *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*. He was still at the launch of his career; the fusion of traditional Balkan music and modern compositional techniques, so characteristic of his later work, had not yet crystallised. However, he was already demonstrating in this work his fascination for the ghostly sounds of the night, and for the powers that bind people together. With his later focus on folk music, Bartók aimed to bring various peoples together. Here he describes a love that is taken to extremes. The character of Bluebeard had been introduced in 1697 by the French writer of folk tales, Charles Perrault. Ever since, this butcher of women has

appeared in many picture books, poems and plays. However, the questions as to why all these women did accompany Bluebeard to his lugubrious castle, and why he was never satisfied with just one bride only became topical in the nineteenth century, with the birth of the study of psychology.

Bartók relied on a symbolist theatrical work from his compatriot Béla Balázs, which describes characters' submission to primal urges and the strangeness of their nature. Not only Judith is thereof a victim, but Bluebeard too. Both characters are willing to sacrifice themselves in their yearning for love.

Blood and tears

The opera opens with Bluebeard escorting his new bride Judith into his gloomy castle. This is a no-go area, she knows it - but her curiosity gets the better of her. The two characters enter into a strange power game. Judith wants to bring light into the darkness; the windows must be opened, and likewise the seven doors in the background. Bluebeard protests: every door that is opened will take away some of their happiness. However, he eventually hands over the keys for which his wife has been literally pleading. In turn, the open doors reveal a torture chamber, a munitions store, and a room full of treasure. Behind the fourth door is a flower garden, and behind the fifth huge lands stretch into the distance. But blood drips from the rose bushes and paints the fields red.

So far, Bluebeard is thankful that Judith has brought so much light into the castle, but he forbids her to open the last two doors. She disobeys him, and

uncovers a sea of tears. Behind the seventh door are her three predecessors; not dead, but doomed to wander aimlessly. They represent the morning, afternoon, and evening. Judith joins them, and the cycle is complete: 'Now it is eternally night...night...night.'

Loneliness

Good and evil are relative concepts, as explored in this tale. Bluebeard is grateful that Judith lightens his soul and wishes to share his wealth with her. But her doubt is stronger than her confidence. By opening the last door she forfeits their chance to shared happiness. Both characters are consigned to a dark loneliness.

In this early work Bartók was more heavily influenced by Debussy and Richard Strauss than by the traditional Balkan music that his calling card would later suggest. Nevertheless, the harmonisations and melodies often sounded strange and exotic. The vocal parts are unadorned, sung 'parlando', and entirely at the service of the intimate, mournful atmosphere – an atmosphere that would be recreated in Bartók's orchestral works, concerti, and string quartets. Later in his career Bartók would observe that vocal music was not one of his strengths, and never would be. He thought above all in terms of rhythms and instrumental sound palettes. To give form to these ideas, he needed no song text. With *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, Bartók explored in one work everything he felt he needed to say in the genre of opera.

Michiel Cleij



Lahav Shani - chief conductor

Born: Tel Aviv, Israel

Current position: chief conductor Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra; music director Israel Philharmonic Orchestra

Before: principal guest conductor Vienna Symphony Orchestra from 2017 to 2020

Education: piano at the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music Tel Aviv; conducting and piano at the Academy of Music Hanns Eisler Berlin; mentor: Daniel Barenboim
Breakthrough: 2013, after winning the Gustav Mahler International Conducting Competition in Bamberg

Subsequently: Staatskapelle Berlin, Berlin State Opera, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Staatskapelle Dresden, Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra, Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra
Debut Rotterdam Philharmonic: 2016

Claudia Mahnke - mezzosoprano

Born: Meerane, Germany

Education: vocal training at the Dresden University of Music with Heidi Petzold

Awards: Bundeswettbewerb Gesang Berlin (1994), Kammersängerin (2006)

Breakthrough: Title role in Hartmann's *Simplicius Simplicissimus* (Munich Opera Festival 2005)

Subsequently: Ensemble member Frankfurt Opera, guest roles at San Francisco Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Opéra National de Lyon, Komische Oper Berlin, Semperoper Dresden, Bavarian State Opera, Bayreuth Festival, Vienna State Opera, Metropolitan Opera New York, for instance in Strauss's *Salome* (Herodias), Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (Brangäne) and *Ring* (Fricka, Waltraute), Mozart's Da Ponte operas (Cherubino, Zerlina, Dorabella) Berg's *Wozzeck* (Marie), Berlioz' *Les Troyens* (Dido) and Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* (Judith)

Debut Rotterdam Philharmonic: 2023



Photo: Monika Rittershaus

Johannes Martin Kränzle - baritone

Born: Augsburg, Germany

Education: violin with Rudolf Koeckert, direction in music theatre (in Hamburg), voice at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts with Martin Gründler

Awards: laureate of the international competitions of Vercelli, Perpignan and Paris, Grand Prix international competition of Rio de Janeiro (1991), Opernwelt Singer of the Year 2011 and 2018

Breakthrough: 2010: debuts La Scala Milan and Berlin State Opera

Subsequently: guest appearances Glyndebourne Festival, Salzburg Festival, Royal Opera House London, Metropolitan Opera New York, Opéra National de Paris, Bayreuth Festival, for instance in Wagner's *Meistersinger* (Beckmesser) and *Ring* (Alberich, Gunther), Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Tsar's Bride* (Gryaznoy), Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (Don Alfonso) and Berg's *Wozzeck* (title role)

Debut Rotterdam Philharmonic: 2023



Photo: Monika Rittershaus

Agenda

Thu 9 March 2023 • 20.15

Fri 10 March 2023 • 20.15

Sun 12 March 2023 • 14.15

conductor **Jordi Savall**

Rebel Les éléments

Marais Airs pour les Matelots
et les Tritons

Händel Water Music

Rameau Selection from Les Indes

Galantes and Hippolyte et Aricie

Fri 17 March 2023 • 20.15

Sun 19 March 2023 • 14.15

conductor **Timur Zangiev**

violin **Kristóf Baráti**

Gubaidulina Fairytale Poem

Prokofiev Violin Concerto No. 1

Rachmaninoff Symphony No. 2

Sun 26 March 2023 • 10.30

Music for Breakfast No. 4

with **Julien Hervé** (Clarinet),

Noëmi Bodden (Violin), and

colleagues from the orchestra

Chamber Music by **Ravel**, **Fauré**

and **Debussy**

Thu 6 April 2023 • 19.30

Fri 7 April 2023 • 19.30

Sat 8 April 2023 • 19.30

conductor **Peter Dijkstra**

soprano **Jeanine De Bique**

countertenor **Maarten Engeltjes**

tenor (Evangelist) **Maximilian**

Schmitt

tenor **Fabio Trümper**

baritone **Thomas Oliemans**

bass (Christ) **Thomas Stimmel**

chorus **Laurens Collegium**,

Nationaal Kinderkoor

Bach St Matthew Passion

Thu 20 April 2023 • 20.15

Fri 21 April 2023 • 20.15

Sun 23 April 2023 • 14.15

conductor **Maxim Emelyanychev**

harpsichord **Jean Rondeau**

Debussy Prélude à l'après-midi

d'un faune

Poulenc Concert Champêtre

Rossini Overture 'Il barbiere di

Siviglia'

Mendelssohn Symphony

No. 4 'Italian'

Musicians

Chief Conductor

Lahav Shani

Honorary Conductor

Yannick Nézet-Séguin

Principal Assistant Conductor

Bertie Baigent

First Violin

Igor Gruppman,

leader

Marieke Blankestijn,

leader

Quirine Scheffers

Hed Yaron Meyerson

Saskia Otto

Arno Bons

Mireille van der Wart

Cor van der Linden

Rachel Browne

Maria Dingjan

Marie-José Schrijner

Noëmi Bodden

Petra Visser

Sophia Torrenza

Hadewijch Hofland

Annerien Stuker

Alexandra van

Beveren

Koen Stapert

Second Violin

Charlotte Potgieter

Cecilia Ziano

Frank de Groot

Laurens van Vliet

Tomoko Hara

Elina Staphorsius

Jun Yi Dou

Bob Bruyn

Letizia Sciarone

Eefje Habraken

Maija Reinikainen

Wim Ruitenbeek

Babette van den Berg

Melanie Broers

Viola

Anne Huser

Roman Spitzer

Galahad Samson

Kerstin Bonk

Lex Prummel

Janine Baller

Francis Saunders

Veronika Lénártová

Rosalinde Kluck

León van den Berg

Olffe van der Klein

Cello

Emanuele Silvestri

Joanna Pachucka

Daniel Petrovitsch

Mario Rio

Gé van Leeuwen

Eelco Beinema

Carla Schrijner

Pepijn Meeuws

Yi-Ting Fang

Double Bass

Matthew Midgley

Ying Lai Green

Jonathan Focquaert

Robert Franenberg

Harke Wiersma

Arjen Leendertz

Ricardo Neto

Flute

Juliette Hurel

Joséphine Olech

Désirée Woudenberg

Flute/Piccolo

Beatriz Da Baião

Oboe

Remco de Vries

Karel Schoofs

Anja van der Maten

Oboe/Cor Anglais

Ron Tijhuis

Clarinet

Julien Hervé

Bruno Bonansea

Clarinet/ Bass Clarinet

Romke-Jan Wijmenga

Bassoon

Pieter Nuytten

Lola Descours

Marianne Prommel

Bassoon/ Contrabassoon

Hans Wisse

Horn

David Fernández

Alonso

Wendy Leliveld

Richard Speetjens

Laurens Otto

Pierre Buizer

Trumpet

Alex Elia

Simon Wierenga

Jos Verspagen

Trombone

Pierre Volders

Alexander Verbeek

Remko de Jager

Bass Trombone

Rommert Groenhof

Tuba

Hendrik-Jan Renes

Timpani

Danny van de Wal

Percussion

Ronald Ent

Martijn Boom

Adriaan Feyaerts

Harp

Charlotte Sprenkels