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## Press Text: Terrace Talk *Macbeth*

### “I don’t believe in one-dimensional characters”



Left to right.: Małgorzata Szczęśniak (Sets/Costumes), Asmik Grigorian, Krzysztof Warlikowski (Director)

(SF, 6 July 2023) For the third time – after Hans Werner Henze’s *The Bassarids* (2018) and Richard Strauss’ *Elektra* (2020) – Krzysztof Warlikowski directs an opera at the Salzburg Festival. Once again, Małgorzata Szczęśniak is responsible for the production’s sets and costumes. Having previously appeared here as Marie in *Wozzeck*, the title role in *Salome* and Chrysothemis in *Elektra*, Asmik Grigorian makes her role debut as Lady Macbeth in Salzburg this summer. She describes the challenge: “The role is very demanding. As with every character I embody, I give it my best, investing lots of time in preparation”. She points out, however, that musically, this is not a radically new experience for her, as both her parents sang lots of Verdi and she grew up with the Italian repertoire.

Krzysztof Warlikowski directed *Macbeth* in Brussels in 2010, and for him it is not only a new opportunity to approach this opera, but the second time this year he is exploring a Shakespearean plot, having staged *Hamlet* (Ambroise Thomas) in Paris in March. “Both operas are rooted in mythological tales of antiquity and based on major works of world literature – musically, however, we are dealing with two different universes,” he says, explaining that the action is set in an era when the characters have gone mad. Elaborating their characterization, his interest is in their human dimensions – ultimately, he considers *Macbeth* a voyage to an inferno. He explains that he was inspired by associations with Bernardo Bertolucci’s film *The Conformist* (*Il conformista*). He describes the moment when Macbeth interrogates the witches about his future as a very special one: “It contains a conscious human decision, the will to be guided by it. That is the opposite of passively bowing to fate.”



Asmik Grigorian makes her debut as Lady Macbeth; director Krzysztof Warlikowski, Małgorzata Szczęśniak (sets and costumes).

Another important aspect in the context of Macbeth's questioning of the oracle is the relationship between him and Lady Macbeth, Warlikowski continues. Apart from the question of his own future, there is the issue of not having children of their own. This is a subject that can become the foundation of a relationship, while also influencing a couple's shared future. Therefore, the production concentrates on Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as a couple.

Asked whether Macbeth and Lady Macbeth see eye to eye as a couple, Asmik Grigorian replies: "On stage, as a rule, I try to explore the person behind the role. I want to put myself into their shoes, into the situations they are experiencing." A couple's relationship is always dynamic, she continues, so she wants to bring out their vulnerability and weaknesses. Portraying only the dark and evil aspects of this figure does not interest her, as she emphasizes: "I don't believe in one-dimensional characters. I'm very grateful to Krzysztof Warlikowski for telling the story in such a way that everything that happens has a reason and a motivation."

Małgorzata Szczęśniak, who is responsible for the stage sets and costumes, says: "We wanted to create a space which can be called universal, metaphorical and poetic at the same time. Our concept is divorced from images with any kind of warlike, military associations." She recounts how she was inspired by the „jeu de paume”, the “game of kings” from the renaissance era, the precursor of modern tennis.



Jeu de paume (image courtesy of Małgorzata Szczęśniak)

Commenting on the costumes, she adds: “They were inspired by the style of 1920s / 1930s Italy, the film world of *Il conformista*, which appears on the surface to portray a normal life.”

Asked about the children appearing as supernumeraries, Warlikowski declares: “Children play an important role, not only with regard to the action. They generally embody something instinctive, an element of surprise which does not need to obey formal constraints. That’s one reason our concept calls for children on stage.” Asmik Grigorian adds: “The presence of the children helps me personally too, in interpreting this role. Lady Macbeth’s radical decisions go back to the wounds inflicted upon her as a child.”

Asked whether the current political situation in the world had any influence on the production, Warlikowski responds: “The piece requires no updating. For us, the question in the foreground was: what makes people feel the urge to kill? It’s not about superficial black-and-white – for that, the opera has far too many nuances.”

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