

Press Release of the Salzburg Festival 2022



Romeo Castellucci

Romeo Castellucci, Director, Sets, Costumes and Lighting, explains his approach to the works:

Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* / Carl Orff's *De Temporum fine comoedia*

After last year's *Don Giovanni* you are returning to Salzburg this year with even two operas. How did you hit on the idea to combine Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* with Orff's *De temporum fine comoedia*?

That is a question I have to share with Markus Hinterhäuser because he had the powerful idea to combine two different philosophies of music. This combination works very well by association. To combine these two pieces is a work the spectator has to do. This friction is a gift. Bartók represents postromantic music, but behind any definition it's a psychological landscape, an inner world and it is about dark water, it is about diving in the "psicologia del profondo". It is a psychology that belongs to everyone, so we see them as a mirror: it is about the pain of life, the fragility of a human being. We are fragile, and that is revealed by Bartók.

I consider Bluebeard a female portrait, a kind of screen in which are projected her passion, her struggles. So it is mainly a portrait of a woman. This intimacy reacts by context with the mechanical strength of Carl Orff's *De temporum fine comoedia*.

In Orff we are confronted with the Last Judgement. It represents the End of Time, everything is done, we cannot repair what we did wrong. It is a trial, and we can feel the fear the hammer of the judgement is causing. It expresses a muscular force, the strength, the judgement with no mercy. But in the last moment of *De temporum fine comoedia* a magic moment appears with Lucifer, etymologically the "bringer of light": he is asking for forgiveness. Through his figure we discover our human fragility. In that scene we see Judith and Bluebeard coming back on the stage in front of Lucifer. They could remind us the mythical couple Adam and Eve, giving back the apple without any bite. It's a coming-back-full-circle situation.

You are working together with Teodor Currentzis for the third time now. What is special about working with him in general?

He is a great collaborator. He loves theatre, as well as poetry, all kinds of music, cinema, literature, visual arts. We share a common feeling about contemporary culture, we share the same aesthetics. There are conductors who are interested just in the score. Classical music is not ash, it is fire. Theatre is not a church, not a mausoleum. So we have to keep it alive. Also we have to transform our gaze, keeping open our eyes.

Is it due to Greek-Italian history?

I don't know. There is a difference between the two roots, because my roots are catholic, and his are orthodox.

Nevertheless, both are thinking of ancient philosophy?

Yes, for sure. We share a common root in the Attic Tragedy. For me Greek tragedy is the matrix of everything, also a way to consider life on earth: It's not just aesthetics, it is also a philosophy, the Greek tragic conception of life, the beauty from the surprise of being born and the pain of this discovery.



Ensemble (Sibyls), Extras in Carl Orff's *De Temporum fine comoedia*

Orff's work is dealing with essential religious questions, i.e. topics like Apocalypse respectively Last Judgement. Do you think that all human beings are confronted with questions of guilt and absolution in the moment when facing death?

I don't know. It is a question with a perfect impossible answer. For that reason we have art. Religion, all religions give you one answer, art multiplies questions, so we can answer with another question. In this case I don't have an answer – but even this is an answer.

I recognize in *De temporum* a mechanical principle related to a specific idea of movement. That's why I asked my wonderful friend and great choreographer **Cindy van Acker** to take care of this mechanical and dynamic dimension that reveals a final connection with this epiphany of Lucifer. The libretto in Latin, Greek and German is not a drama, they are just words, harsh words against the human being. It's like beating a person already on the floor. But then the beam of light comes on stage, Lucifer. So, the answer is the choreography embodied by all the singers.



Ausrine Stundyte (Judith)

Let's talk about Bluebeard's Castle. It mainly consists of the two characters Judith and Bluebeard, who are they and what do they stand for in your opinion?

They are not a couple in my opinion. The work has a lot to do with her. Probably we can say that the origin of the pain of Judith is her choice to renounce to a normal life. She ran away from a wonderful life. Why? Why does she abandon her family, the castle under the sun with flowers, with a husband – why? She decides to go into the darkness, deeper and deeper into the source of her pain, the pain – that is a tragic vision – to be alive. It was better never to have been born according to Sophocles, according to visional Greek tragedy. And that is clearly a tragic piece in my opinion. It seems she has a baby. So the travel in darkness is provoked by a big loss. The source of the struggle is a trauma that is not completely expressed, it's just a suspicion.

The setting of your concept is based on an atmosphere of darkness. What is your intention behind this, what aspects of the work is this aiming at?

The Felsenreitschule allowed us to dare something. It is not a normal stage, we had to consider this space as a character. For me it was important to take literally some notes from the libretto where the castle is completely dark.

There is no light, there is water from the walls. And there will be flames, fires and water.

What role do specific artists play with regard to your concept?

An important role. For example Ausrine Stundyte. She is playing a key role. We therefore needed a very good actress – and she is a very good actress. The same goes for Mika Kares, who rigorously plays a complex character with a powerful voice.

Did you work together with her before?

No, but I saw her in the Warlikowski's *Elektra*. She is great, visceral. And she has the necessary power of voice. The decision for MusicAeterna choir was a conscious one with regard to the choir's artistic approach.

What is your point of view towards Russian art and artists from this country?

I consider any kind of cultural embargo a big error, useful only to their promoters in building their reputation of intransigence, not assuming their previous connivances or, at best, condescending attitude towards the reality they are now condemning.

Compared to those who today condemn Russian artists – dead and alive – the always valid phrase of the Gospel of John, "who is without sin throw the first stone". My condemnation of Russia for the atrocities committed in Ukraine is evidence.

Many newspapers have described Currentzis as "the straw man", according to the anthropology of the scapegoat, but the drastic times that we are experiencing would rather require to reread René Girard.

If Currentzis does not publicly condemn Putin it is because he is thinking about the future of the musicians of MusicAeterna, and their family. In Russia you risk your life for certain things. No kidding. Many Russian artists are hostages to Putin, paralyzed by the dilemma of whether to abandon their land forever or condemn Putin. Asking others to self-immolate, sitting on the sofa, is simply shameless.

I believe in the power of art. A power that has the capacity to bring down the powers that be. That is why I believe that we should support art especially in countries where there is authoritarianism. Making art means producing problems, producing thought, and where there is a thought there is the power of criticism. Criticism changes minds, changes things.

The premiere on 26 July will be followed by five performances until 20 August at the Felsenreitschule.

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Kind regards,

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