

Karol Szymanowski – King Roger (2015)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Król Roger (King Roger)* 1:31:13 Król Roger II - Mariusz Kwiecień Shepherd - Saimir Pirgu Roxana - Georgia Jarman Edrisi - Kim Begley Archbishop - Alan Ewing Deaconess - Agnes Zwierko Royal Opera Chorus Orchestra of the Royal Opera House Conductor - Antonio Pappano Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London, 19 May 2015

The Story.

A mysterious Shepherd is brought before King Roger. The Church officials want him punished for his heretical preaching, but Roger's queen Roxana pleads with the king to let the Shepherd speak first.

The Shepherd seduces the court with descriptions of his hedonistic faith. They follow him in a wild Bacchic dance, Roxana among them. As the long night ends, Roger seeks out the Shepherd and his followers. He is agonized by the temptation to follow them, but resists. Alone, he hails the new dawn. --- roh.org.uk

Polish composer Karol Szymanowski began to gather ideas for *Król Roger* (King Roger), his second and final opera, in 1918. He was in part inspired by Euripides' *The Bacchae*, in which King Pentheus attempts to suppress the hedonistic worship of Bacchus but ultimately succumbs to his temptation and is destroyed in a bloody frenzy. Szymanowski's cousin, the poet Jarosław

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Iwaszkiewicz, provided the original libretto; but in Szymanowski's arduous six-year gestation of the piece he altered the third act. His King Roger instead becomes a Nietzschean hero, who resists his desire and emerges 'strong enough for freedom'. But the focus of the opera is Roger's agonizing indecision – and the glorious music of the Act II Bacchic dance leaves a profound impression of the power of sensual temptation.

Szymanowski's music for the opera is opulently scored. The three short acts – commonly called the Byzantine, the Oriental and the Hellenic – brilliantly incorporate distinct musical styles. There are passages of exquisite lyricism, such as Roxana's soaring Act II aria, alongside thrilling writing for the chorus. Kasper Holten's new production (The Royal Opera's first) finds in Roger's indecision an expression of the struggle we all face – the struggle between intelligence and instinct in what is the innate duality of human nature. --- roh.org.uk

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