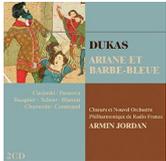


Dukas - Ariane et Barbe-Bleue (2013)

Written by bluesever

Wednesday, 11 January 2017 14:39 -

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CD: 1 1. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte I scene 1 a mort a mort!* 2. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte I scene 2 ou sommes nous* 3. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte I scene 3 hesitante, elle ouvre la sixieme porte* 4. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte I scene 4 ariane que faites-vous* 5. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte I scene 5 vous aussi* 6. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte II scene 1 ecoutez la porte se referme* 7. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte II scene 2 Ah! Je vous ai trouvees!* 8. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte II scene 3 nous comptons mal les jour* CD : 2 1. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte II ah ce n est pas encore celle-ci!* 2. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte II scene 5 je vois la mer!* 3. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte III scene 1 prelude* 4. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte III scene 2 nous n'avons pu sotir du chateau enchante* 5. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte III scene 3 il revient! Il est la!* 6. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte III scene 4 madame on peut entrer* 7. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte III scene 5 adieu adieu; vous nous avez sauvees* 8. *Ariane et barbe bleue acte III scene 6 adieu*

Ariane KATHERINE CIESINSKI, mezzo-soprano (Ariane) Barbe-Bleue GABRIEL BACQUIER, baritono (Barbe-Bleue) La Nourrice MARIANA PAUNOVA, mezzo-soprano (Nurse) Selysette HANNA SCHAER, contralto (Sélysette) Ygraine ANNE-MARIE BLANZAT, soprano (Ygraine) Melisance JOCELYNE CHAMONIN (Mélisande) Bellangere MICHELLE COMMAND, soprano (Bellangère) Choeurs de Radio France Nouvel Orchestre Philharmonique Armin JORDAN – conductor

Dukas' *Ariane et Barbe-bleu* is cut from the same cloth as Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, but much less well known; unfairly so, in my view. Both are based on work by Maeterlinck and both are fairly plotless inner-dramas where the poetry of symbolism is more important than any action. In the same way that *Pelléas* and *Mélisande* inhabit the timeless, locationless region of Allemonde, *Ariane* takes place entirely indoors in a carefully unspecific time and place, with only the briefest intrusion of the outside world towards the opera's conclusion. The affinities go even deeper when you compare their musical style side by side. Dukas' style of orchestration is very similar to that of Debussy. His is a half-lit world of twilight and near darkness, literally so in the second act when Ariane enters - or, in this production, descends - into the final chamber to meet and then set free Bluebeard's previous wives. The orchestration is suggestive of weight and claustrophobia, with strong use of the darker colours of, say, the horn and cor anglais. That

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is not to say that Dukas is overwhelmed by the prior example of Debussy; quite the opposite. He proves himself every inch the master of his subject and is not in the least intimidated by the stature of his predecessor. Listen, for example, to the extraordinary prelude to second act, depicting the darkness of the seventh chamber in which are imprisoned Bluebeard's wives, a subtle but unflinching crescendo that makes its way fleetingly towards the uncertain light. Like Debussy, this is not a world of melody but of suggestion and atmosphere and it is very powerful, Dukas adopting (and adapting) the sound-world of Wagner to his own special ends. It's an extraordinary and multi-layered work of music drama, and I suspect that the main reason why this opera isn't better known is simply because Debussy got there first.

The story, what there is of it, bears some similarities to Bartók's in its first act, with seven doors, behind the last of which lie Bluebeard's previous wives. However, while Bartók's Judith is an abrasive character who finally accedes to her place in Bluebeard's gallery, Ariane is liberated and a liberator. She perpetually takes control of her situation and she sets free Bluebeard's five wives, encouraging them to freedom. Intriguingly, however, they are not prepared to follow her. In the final scene Bluebeard is wounded by the hostile villagers but, rather than kill him, the wives (including Ariane) tend his wounds and try to nurse him back to health, to music of remarkable tenderness. In the end only Ariane has the courage to leave and she does so alone. There is ripe territory here for a director who wants to explore the deepest implications of the Stockholm syndrome, with the suggestion of the wives returning voluntarily to their imprisonment. Guth's production is very static, but it's hard to complain about that in an opera like this one. The white which dominates all the sets and costumes is reminiscent of sterile institutions like hospitals, prisons and asylums, and Guth's depiction of the five wives is surprisingly naturalistic in its vision of the deranging effects of solitary confinement.

For all his importance to the plot, Bluebeard has a tiny role in the action. He appears on stage in the third act, but his singing is limited to a very few phrases at the end of the first act. --- Simon Thompson, musicweb-international.com

Paul Dukas's take on the Bluebeard legend has a libretto by Maurice Maeterlinck and a score that evokes both Debussy (directly quoted) and Wagner. It's a curious take, in that Bluebeard has no more than 20 bars to sing in the whole opera, whereas Ariane – the sixth wife who eventually abandons him to her five predecessors – is on stage throughout. The second most prominent character is Ariane's nurse. Add important contributions from four of the other wives (the fifth being a foreigner who doesn't speak the language), and it's almost a concerto for female voices and orchestra. Without a score or libretto (the latter happily provided here) it can

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be difficult on CD to know just who is singing at any moment.

For a long time the only recording in the catalogue was a 1983 Erato version under Armin Jordan. This, though, is the fourth further release in recent years. Of these I confess to fondness for a slightly abridged 1968 French radio recording for its full complement of native French singers and a conductor (Tony Aubin) who studied with Dukas himself. However, it can only be an adjunct to a recording with modern sound that brings out the full glory of Dukas's luminous score.

That is certainly provided by this newcomer – a splendid 1986 recording from the archives of Cologne Radio. From the very first bar Gary Bertini reveals a mastery of the score that puts in the shade all but Bertrand de Billy, achieving a menacing quality and tension missing elsewhere, and surging to brilliant effect at key orchestral moments such as the opening of the various doors of Bluebeard's castle to reveal ever greater hordes of priceless jewels.

As for the main singers, Bertini has the most natural pairing in Marilyn Schmiege and Jocelyne Taillon – expressive, secure in intonation, well coupled and well contrasted. By contrast, Jordan has a plummy Bulgarian Nurse with odd French vowels, de Billy a sometimes ill-focused Ariane, and Botstein voices poorly distinguishable from each other. Altogether this newcomer seems to me a clear winner all round. --- Andrew Lamb, gramophone.co.uk

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