

Krzysztof Penderecki – Die Teufel von Loudun (Janowski) [1970]

Written by bluesever

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Disk: 1 1. *Ich will einen Weg finden* 2. *Wollen wir zusammen gehen?* 3. *Sag mir, warum kommst du zu mir?* 4. *Dieser Menschenkopf erfüllt mich mit Erwartung* 5. *Ich bin hier als Sonderkommissär* 6. *Wir sind alle froh, Vater Mignon* 7. *Ich konnte aus der Priorin weiter nichts herausbringen* 8. *Bitte, lieber Gott* 9. *Exorcizo te* 10. *Ihr wißt, daß Euer Name* 11. *Liebe Schwester in Christo* 12. *Das war ein unschuldiges Frauenzimmer* 13. *Was gibt es?* 14. *Mir ist heut' abend der Eintritt ins Kloster verwehrt worden* 15. *Mutter ...* 16. *D'Armagnac, seit Ihr es* 17. *Man sagt, Ihr waret nicht wahrhaft von Dämonen besessen* 18. *Alleuia. Cedant tenebrae lumini* Disk: 2 1. *Habt Ihr geschlafen?* 2. *Guten Morgen, ihr Herren* 3. *Urbain Grsandier, Ihr seid schuldig befunden* 4. *Kommt hinein, teure Mutter* 5. *Wollt Ihr gestehen?* 6. *Mein Sohn ...* 7. *Dicas! Dicas!* Jeanne Tatiana Troyanos (Mezzosoprano) Urbain Grandier Andrzej Hiolski (Tenor) Vater Barre Bernard Ladysz (Bass) Vater Rangier Hans Sotin (Bass) Vaer Mignon Horst Wilhelm (Tenor) Adam Kurt Marschner (Tenor) Mannoury Heins Blankenburg (Baritone) Baron Laubardemont Helmut Melchert (Tenor) Chor und Orchester der Hamburgischen Staatsoper Marek Janowski - conductor

Under the forward-thinking, often risk-taking regime of Rolf Liebermann—from 1959 to 1973—the Hamburg State Opera premiered many new works. Furthermore, Liebermann took 13 of his productions into the studio to be filmed for television. (Remember when television was regarded as an exciting medium for opera?) One of these was Penderecki's controversial work, first performed in June 1969 and recorded a short time later with the original cast but a different conductor. (The young Janowski took over from Penderecki specialist Henryk Czyz.)

The opera is based on John Whiting's dramatization of Aldous Huxley's book *The Devils of Loudun*, set to a German translation by Erich Fried. Huxley researched a documented incident which took place in the provincial town of Loudun in August 1634: the torture and execution of a renegade Catholic priest, Urbain Grandier. Although Grandier had broken his vow of celibacy—repeatedly—the execution seems to have been politically motivated, a sortie in the

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vicious power struggle between Cardinal Richelieu and the Huguenots. Whiting's point was that religious beliefs, particularly entrenched ones, may be manipulated for secular political ends. (But not today, of course!) Huxley, in the book, was also interested in the suppression of the sexual urge under the strictures of church dogma, and the psychological damage resulting from that inhibition. The latter theme is personified in Jeanne, the deformed Prioress who nurses a lust-driven obsession with Grandier, without ever having met him. In the course of her subsequent exorcism (female sexual desire being the work of the devil), she accuses Grandier of presiding over a black mass and corrupting the entire Ursuline nunnery.

Penderecki's opera and its contemporary, the movie *The Devils* directed by Ken Russell (1970), emphasize the lust and madness quotient over the political intrigue, although the latter is still present. For their part, in both the movie and the opera, the nuns oblige by cavorting in a suitably possessed manner, rubbing their hands up and down their persons and adopting expressions of demented ecstasy: a type of acting opera singers are often asked to do. The required contingent of cripples and beggars is thrown in for good measure.

In other words, it's all "over the top," nowhere more so than in this made-for-television version filmed by Joachim Hess; but how else could it be? Penderecki's score is over-the-top as well. Shocking at the time, when Penderecki was the definition of cutting edge, his striking but ultimately limited box of tricks is fully on display: vocal lines lurching across a great range; an orchestra filled with clusters of swarming pizzicato strings; growling bass trombones; glissandos from everyone capable of making them; atonality in its purest sense. In fact, so apt was Penderecki's language for the representation of hysteria and grotesquery, it is clear he had nowhere to go but back to tonality, which eventually he did. The composer had graver things he wished to say, but also realized that once an enfant terrible is no longer an enfant, he is liable to be thought of simply as terrible.

The TV movie pulls no punches. Hess's camera spends a lot of time in deconstructive close-up, as these singing actors emote at a level designed for the opera house. There are special effects, superimposition and so on, which were radical then but look a bit corny now. Ditto the grainy 1960s color, the Liz Taylor makeup and beehive hairdos, and the penchant for simulated sex scenes featuring unattractive people. As with Ken Russell's work, time has lent it an unintended camp quality. But countering this, or possibly enhancing it if you like camp, are several tour de force performances. New York born mezzo Tatiana Troyanos in the central role of Jeanne gives the performance of her alas all too short lifetime. Not only does she cope with Penderecki's vocal demands, producing a powerful, rich sound, but she does so wearing a constrictive harness to represent a hump, while flinging herself fearlessly around the stage. Troyanos even retains dramatic integrity when, during her exorcism rite, the priests give Jeanne a Holy Water enema. (That's the act I closer. Drinks, anybody?)

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Singing, and for that matter lip-synching (of which there are occasional traces) are of a high level throughout. These performers were thoroughly committed to the drama. A standout on camera is the creepy doctor of Heinz Blankenburg—Fritz Lang would have loved him!—and it is good to see another singer at the beginning of an international career, bass-baritone Hans Sotin. Hiolski is strong in the important role of Grandier, but more convincing as a victim of torture than an object of lust. The opera orchestra attacks the music with confidence; the mono sound allows everything to be heard. This DVD also comes with detailed notes and English subtitles.

I doubt whether The Devils of Loudun will stay in the repertoire; musically it is too much of its time, and the subject matter will probably always be an embarrassment to Catholic opera goers. Nevertheless, it is great to see something from an era when a mainstream art form incorporated an element of bold experiment. Also, there is no denying the star quality of Tatiana Troyanos. Recommended to the adventurous, the libidinous and/or the devout. ---FANFARE: Phillip Scott, arkivmusic.com

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