Eduard Lalo & Arthur Coquard - La Jacquerie (2016)



Act I Scene 1: Introduction: Grâce, pitié! (Chorus, The Seneschal) 2:31 Act I Scene 1: Monsieur le Sénéchal (Jeanne, The Seneschal, Guillame) 2:57 Act I Scene 2: Air: Jacques Bonhomme! (Guillame, Chorus) 2:28 Act I Scene 3: Ce jour viendra (Jeanne, Robert, Guillame, Chorus) 1:44 Act I Scene 4: Duo: Quelle pensée le ramène (Jeanne, Robert) 1:40 Act I Scene 5: Arioso et suite du duo: En rouvrant la paupière (Jeanne, Robert) 3:19 Act I Scene 5: Allez! Prenez mes hommes (Blanche, Chorus, The Baron) 2:24 Act I Scene 6: Récit et air: Pourquoi ne pas l'aimer (Blanche) 3:38 Act I Scene 7: Non! Ma mère, j'irai (Blanche, Jeanne, Robert) 1:06 Act II Scene: Prélude orchestral 2:23 Act II Scene 1: Eh bien! Robert! (Robert, Guillame, Chorus) 4:41 Act II Scene 1: Air: Sont-ils plus durs (Guillame, Robert) 1:58 Act II Scene 1: Tais-toi Guillaume! (Robert, Guillame, Chorus) 1:02 Act II Scene 2: Toi, leur chef? (Jeanne, Robert) 1:21 Act II Scene 2: Arioso: Reste auprès d'elle (Jeanne, Robert Guillame) 1:29 Act II Scene 2: Arioso: J'aime mieux avoir faim (Jeanne, Robert) 3:48 Act II Scene 2: Stabat mater: Mais vois! Notre-Dame Marie (Jeanne, Robert, Chorus) 2:44 Act II Scene 2: Écoutez tous! (Jeanne, Robert, Chorus) 0:59 Act III: Prélude orchestral 1:12 Act III Scene 1: Ballet - Fête du printemps: Danse noble 4:31 Act III Scene 1: Ballet - Fête du printemps: Musique de scène 1:02 Act III Scene 1: Ballet - Fête du printemps: Sérénade 1:53 Act III Scene 1: Chœur: Vive le Mai! (Blanche, Chorus) 4:38 Act III Scene 2: Dieu! Comme cette odeur (Blanche) 1:55 Act III Scene 3: Duo: Seule… et tout bas rêvant (Blanche, Chorus) 4:23 Act III Scene 4: Ooooh… Ooooh… (Blanche, The Count, Chorus) 2:09 Act III Scene 5: Franchise! (Chorus, The Count, Robert, Guillame) 1:35 Act III Scene 6: Auprès de leur seigneur (Robert, The Count) 1:48 Act III Scene 6: Prenez garde! (Blance, Robert, Guillame, The Count, Chorus) 1:55 Act III Scene 7: Ni taille, ni corvée (Blanche, Robert, Guillame, The Count, Chorus) 5:56 Act IV: Prélude orchestra l3:25 Act IV Scene 1: Introduction: Je ne le verrai plus (Blanche) 1:20 Act IV Scene 1: On ne voit point d'ici la route (Jeanne, Blanche) 2:48 Act IV Scene 1: Sans parler de tourment (Jeanne, Blanche) 2:04 Act IV Scene 1: Désormais leurs jours sont comptés (Jeanne, Blanche) 1:09 Act IV Scene 1: Pitié pour eux (Jeanne, Blanche) 3:13 Act IV Scene 1: Ah! La faiblesse (Jeanne) 2:08 Act IV Scene 2: Blanche! Dieu, seule ici (Robert) 2:10 Act IV Scene 2: Il me faut son pardon (Blanche, Robert) 2:07 Act IV Scene 2: Je ne puis écouter ces mots (Blanche, Robert, Guillame) 0:54 Act IV Scene 3: Guillaume! (Robert, Guillame) 1:50 Act IV Scene 4: Ah! Je suis un maudit (Blanche, Robert) 2:52 Act IV Scene 4: Vous m'aimez? (Blanche, Robert) 3:23 Act IV Scene 4: Duo avec chœur: Être en?n délivrés du poids (Blanche, Robert, Chorus) 4:31 Act IV Scene 6: Écoutez! (Jeanne, Blanche, Robert) 1:24 Act IV Scene 6: Mourir était si doux (Blanche, Jeanne, Robert, Guillame) 2:07 Véronique Gens - soprano (Blanche de Sainte-Croix) Nora Gubisch - mezzo-soprano (Jeanne) Charles Castronovo -

tenor (Robert) Boris Pinkhasovich - baritone (Guillaume) Jean-Sébastien Bou - bass-baritone (Le Comte de Sainte-Croix) Patrick Bolleire - bass (Le Sénéchal) Enguerrand de Hys - tenor (Le Baron de Savigny) Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France Patrick Davin - conductor

Late in life, Lalo had tasted sweet celebrity with his opera Le roi d'Ys finally staged in 1888 after it had been turned down by both the Théâtre Lyrique and the Opéra de Paris. Le roi d'Ys, based on an old Breton legend of the drowned city of Ys, was extraordinarily successful with 100 performances reached within a year of its opening. Thus encouraged, Lalo was fired to create another operatic triumph. He turned to the bloody peasant uprising of 1358, known as La Jacquerie, after the English won the Battle of Poitiers and captured King John II of France. They extorted a heavy ransom for him which was so crippling that the French nobility, in turn, demanded even heavier taxes from the peasants, already crushed under the weight of existing tributes, and reduced to poverty and hunger.

The action of the Lalo/Coquard opera takes place near Beauvais in the village of Saint-Leu-de-Cérent. The Count wants to marry his daughter, Blanche, to the Baron de Savigny. The Count expects his peasants to stump up the necessary dowry. This is brutally demanded by the Count's vicious Sénéchal. Understandably, the peasants are appalled; this is the last straw and they, especially the hot-headed Guillaume, thirst for bloody revolt. At this moment Robert arrives on the scene. He has just returned from Paris where he had been involved in rebellion and was hurt and nursed by Blanche. Love had flared between them. Robert is more cautious about rebellion and suggests a more peaceful solution and compromise. His mother, Jeanne, does not want him involved and Robert has to convince her that it is in the interests of France and liberty that he leads the peasantry. In the Count's castle merrymaking ensues. The peasants storm the castle and demand the Count accept their conditions which he haughtily refuses. Guillaume, impatient, sees red and all hell is let loose. The Count is slain. Guillaume is about to kill Blanche when Robert notices her and recognises her as the girl who had nursed him in Paris. At the risk of being branded a traitor, he defends her and escapes with her but they are separated. Later the nobility regroup and the peasants' uprising is crushed. The peasants are being hunted down everywhere. Blanche is with Jeanne. Robert arrives as Jeanne leaves to look for him. Blanche accuses him of killing her father, an allegation he indignantly denies. Guillaume appears and accuses Robert of being a traitor. As both Robert and Blanche are about to die they confess their love for each other. The seigneurs arrive to save Blanche but Guillaume, accusing Robert of treachery, plunges a dagger into his heart. A distraught Blanche resolves to enter a convent.

The hardback book, published in French and English (in black and blue inks respectively),

covers this storyline in detail as well as Lalo's contribution to French music including the success of Le Roi d'Ys. La Jacquerie is based on a poem by Édouard Blau, librettist of Le Roi d'Ys and co-author of Massenet's Werther and Le Cid. Blau's work had, in turn, been influenced by Prosper Mérimée's Scènes féodales concerning the peasant uprising. Arguments erupted between Blau and Lalo who resisted any idea that a love story be introduced that would dilute the grim reality of La Jacquerie. However, Lalo had only time to work on Act I before he died, although sketches were evidently available for the succeeding Acts' music, to guide Coquard in completing the opera. The love interest was included - one might judge it a practical necessity to balance so much bestiality. An article on how the opera was staged and how those stage directions were lost and found again makes fascinating reading. Even more interesting, is an in-depth review of the Paris premiere of the work by one Arthur Pougin published in La Ménestrel of 29 December 1895 in which he heaps praise on Coquard's completion and especially the second act of the opera. It's an Act that incidentally has no love interest, but includes Jeanne's pleading that Robert play no part in the insurrection; he is finally persuaded that it is his patriotic duty, and she kneels at the foot of the cross to pray for his survival as the peasants sing the Stabat Mater. An extensive synopsis is included as is the full libretto, and photographs of the singers. What is missing is an appreciation of the production we hear on the CD - how it developed, and what influences and opinions guided Patrick Davin in his interpretation of this opera.

My own impressions are that the 1895 critic had covered the few strengths and considerable weaknesses of La Jacquerie very well. The love interest between Robert and Blanche is tepid, too much happens off-stage, and it is too often trite and, especially in Act IV, feeble, and limp-wristed. Much more interesting are the exchanges between Robert and his mother Jeanne – and between Jeanne and Blanche in Act IV. Charles Castronovo as Robert does what he can with his material but scores more heavily when he comes up against the reckless, impetuous Guillaume (boldly portrayed by Boris Pinkhasovich). Similarly of note is Robert persuades Jeanne of the righteousness of his cause. Véronique Gens as Blanche, again does what she can with her material pleasantly and sympathetically but scores in her Act IV exchanges over Robert (lover vs mother) with Jeanne. The stand-out performance is Gubisch's strong portrayal of the sorrowing mother Jeanne. She really immerses herself in the role and convinces piquantly. Bolleire's Sénéchal is blackly sinister and unfeelingly brutal. Quite the contrary is Bou who is a sympathetic Count and father caught up in events beyond his understanding and control. Davin's orchestra delivers a fine accompaniment despite allowing the original complaint about over-strident brass for the aristocrats' ensembles to prevail. It is a pity that so little of the score makes a memorable impression. The ballet music for the celebratory scene in the Count's castle before the peasants' rampage is pleasant but of little consequence. Despite all my carping, however, this opera has its moments and I applaud the enterprise of this release. I wonder if I might dare to suggest that there is sufficient merit in the basic concept of the opera for some 21st Century teaming of a 'new Blau and Coquard' to reshape and tauten it somewhat and dispense with the bathos of the romance? ---Ian Lace, musicweb-international.com

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