

Press Text on the New Production *Káťa Kabanová* by Leoš Janáček

“It’s a piece about all of us”



Left to right: **Jakub Hruša** Conductor, **Barrie Kosky** Director © SF/Birgit Probst

After his great success with Offenbach’s *Orphée aux enfers* in 2019, it was clear to director Barrie Kosky that his next production at the Salzburg Festival would have to offer a contrast. Together with Artistic Director Markus Hinterhäuser, he hit upon the idea of *Káťa Kabanová* – the first Janáček opera he ever saw, at the age of 15. “This piece has always been on my wish list; I remember that I was deeply moved at the time by its sound world, the figure of Káťa and the story,” Kosky recounts, adding that he is particularly fascinated by the concentration of this work, in which the action is condensed into 90 minutes: “In only a few measures, Janáček manages to create a breath-taking cosmos; just a few notes say it all.” He is also fascinated by the character as Káťa as the central figure – he calls her an “emotional volcano” – as well as Janáček’s special gift for characterizing the other protagonists.

Speaking with Markus Hinterhäuser, he says, he quickly realized that the Felsenreitschule is the ideal venue for the content of this opera. The stone wall might have been created with the claustrophobic, threatening element in mind that is inherent in the piece. “This creates a metaphor for the village and the province where the action is set. This musical theatre is particularly well expressed here,” Kosky declares. He took conscious care not to set the action in any concrete place in Eastern Europe: “It’s meant to be a piece about all of us,” he emphasizes.

Asked about his native town of Brno, where most of Janáček’s operas had their world premieres, Jakub Hruša says: “Yes, there is such a thing as a special Brno tradition; the understanding of his music is very pronounced there and a constant presence. That, however, doesn’t mean that the piece is less understood elsewhere.” Commenting on the musical aspects and Janáček’s characteristics as an opera composer, he continues: “Janáček was a dramatist in all his pieces; opera was the best form for him to express himself. In his works, those emotions dominate which represent the flow. His music occasionally appears like a mere sketch, but it is incredibly well prepared and then composed with a rapid hand – that makes it so fresh.”

As an example for musical illustration, Jakub Hrůša points out: “The chorus here represents the power of nature as the original, ancient element, able to simultaneously calm and disquiet with great ambivalence – in this case, the water of the River Volga.” A special effect is achieved by having the chorus singing from a different space. For the orchestra, it is particularly important to keep Janáček’s music very transparent – a routine manner of playing does not work here. Barrie Kosky agrees: “This music is painted with a particularly fine brushstroke.” As a director, he benefits from Janáček’s dramatic thought process: “He had the ability to see the entire piece before his inner eye before writing down the composition. He was a true man of the theatre – a gift to directors.”



His masterful harmonies and specific sound colours make Janáček’s musical idiom unmistakable, even after a few seconds of any section of the score – an idiom, however, which the composer only found in the later years of his life. “This is why I consider him one of the most authentic composers.”

Leoš Janáček (1854 - 1928) - KÁŤA KABANOVÁ

Opera in three acts (1921)

Libretto by Leoš Janáček, based on the play *The Storm* (1859) by Alexander Nikolayevich Ostrovsky in the Czech translation by Vincenc Červinka

New Production

The podcast can be found here: <https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/presse/podcasts>

Premiere: 7 August, 8 pm, Felsenreitschule

Further performances: 11, 14, 21, 26 and 29 August 2022

Cast: <https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/p/kata-kabanova>



TV Broadcast: ORF2 on 15 August at 11:05 am, 3Sat on 20 August at 8:15 pm,
Mezzo on 26 August at 9 pm

Siemens FESTIVAL>NIGHTS Screening on Kapitelplatz on 15 August at 8 pm
and 28 August at 8 pm

Radio Broadcast: Ö1 on 13 August at 7:30 pm

<https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/uebertragungen>

Kind regards,

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