

**PER BOYE HANSEN**

Artistic Director of the National Theatre Opera and the State Opera

opera

## The monumental *Gurre-Lieder* returning to the State Opera after 102 years

**Arnold Schönberg's Late-Romantic cantata *Gurre-Lieder*, based on a 14th-century Danish legend, will again be heard at the State Opera in Prague, which hosted its Czech premiere 102 years ago. A colossal apparatus of almost 250 singers and instrumentalists, including the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Norwegian Radio Orchestra, will appear under the conductor Petr Popelka. Part of the Musica non grata project, the programme will contribute to the celebrations marking the centenary of Czech Radio.**

"The inclusion of the *Gurre-Lieder* in the Musica non grata cycle and its return to the State Opera is entirely logical, as it was at this very venue, formerly the Neues deutsches Theater, where, on 9 June 1921, the masterpiece received its Czech premiere, conducted by Alexander Zemlinsky, one of Musica non grata's central figures," said **Per Boye Hansen**, Artistic Director of the National Theatre Opera and the State Opera. **Arnold Schönberg** worked on the monumental cantata on and off for 11 years, starting in 1900 and finishing in 1911. The *Gurre-Lieder* was first performed on 23 February 1913 in Vienna under the baton of Franz Schreker. It is based on **Jens Peter Jacobsen's** 1868 poem cycle *Gurresange*, inspired by the medieval Danish legend, set at the Gurre Castle, telling the tragic love story of King Waldemar and his mistress Tove Lille (Little Tove), murdered by Queen Helvig. The grief-stricken King curses God and is consequently condemned to fly for ever with his dead minions through the night sky, seeking his beloved Tove, who has transfigured through the magnificence of Nature. Schönberg's cantata features some 35 leading motifs depicting not only the main characters but also natural phenomena (sunset, sunrise, galloping horses, etc.) and a variety of emotional states (desire, affection, fear, mourning, etc.). Noteworthy too is the fact that in the *Gurre-Lieder* Schönberg employed for the very first time the *Sprechgesang*, a "spoken singing" technique. "I find it immensely exciting that at the time when Schönberg shocked the world with *Pierrot lunaire*, ushering in a brand-new musical-aesthetic style, in the *Gurre Lieder* he brought to bear to great acclaim for the last time the Late-Romantic idiom of the early 20th century," Per Boye Hansen added.

Stellar Czech and foreign singers will appear at the State Opera. The solo parts in the *Gurre-Lieder* have been assigned to artists of such renown as **Michael Weinius**, a regular guest at the Wiener and Bayerische Staatoper; the Grammy Award winner **Dietrich Henschel**; the German soprano **Susanne Bernhard**; the Norwegian baritone **Yngve Søbørg**, a finalist of the prestigious International Hans Gabor Belvedere Competition; and the Czech mezzo-soprano **Štěpánka Pučálková**. Schönberg's gigantic cantata will be performed by a formidable body of almost 250 vocal and instrumental forces, including the **Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra** (SOČR), the **Norwegian Radio Orchestra** (KORK), the **Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno** and the **Slovak Philharmonic Choir**, conducted by **Petr Popelka**, Music Director of the SOČR and the KORK. "I deem the *Gurre-Lieder* one of the most marvellous compositions in the history of music, the crowning glory of the entire evolution of tonality, hence I feel greatly honoured to have been afforded the opportunity to conduct a performance of it. I also cherish the fact that, after more than a hundred years, we will bring the *Gurre-Lieder* back to the venue where it was presented under Alexander Zemlinsky. The SOČR and the KORK are top-notch European orchestras, and I believe that binding together their singular energies will enrich their players musically and personally, giving rise to a truly remarkable experience," Petr Popelka pointed out.

The performance in Prague of the *Gurre-Lieder* is a co-production between the National Theatre Opera and the State Opera, the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Norwegian Radio Orchestra and the Musica non grata cycle, funded by the Embassy on the Federal Republic of Germany to the Czech Republic. The concert on 20 June at the State Opera will be broadcast live from 7 pm on Czech Radio Vltava and the Norwegian radio channel NRK P2. The evening will be recorded by Czech Television. "Rarely indeed is a work of this magnitude performed in Prague, or anywhere else for that matter. We are talking decades. For the members of the orchestras it may even be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Fortune dealt us a kind hand and, owing to many favourable circumstances, we can perform the famous opus within the celebrations of the centenary of Czech Radio. I believe that the radio and television recordings, as well as the audio document of the concert, will offer music lovers the possibility to acquaint themselves with this extraordinary piece," **Jakub Čížek**, Director of the SOČR, added.

More information about the *Gurre-Lieder* performance and ticket purchase is available at [musicanongrata.cz](http://musicanongrata.cz) and [narodni-divadlo.cz](http://narodni-divadlo.cz), and at the National Theatre box offices. You can also follow the latest news pertaining to the project on the Czech Radio Vltava portal.

**Gurre-Lieder**

20 June 2023, State Opera, 7 pm

Music: Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951)

Text: Robert Franz Arnold (1872–1938), based on a poem cycle by Jens Peter Jacobsen (1847–1885)

Conductor: Petr Popelka  
Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra  
Norwegian Radio Orchestra  
Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno  
Chorus master: Petr Fiala  
Slovak Philharmonic Choir  
Chorus master: Jozef Chabroň  
Waldemar: Michael Weinius  
Tove: Susanne Bernhard  
Wood Dove: Štěpánka Pučálková  
Peasant: Yngve Sjøberg  
Klaus the Jester: Kevin Connors  
Speaker: Dietrich Henschel

**Project detail:** <https://bit.ly/3LPtXQg>

**Visuals**

Graphic visual: [https://1drv.ms/f/s!ApBE3x3pPyNihod7Bh3D6OGcdD\\_uAw?e=mJWsUR](https://1drv.ms/f/s!ApBE3x3pPyNihod7Bh3D6OGcdD_uAw?e=mJWsUR)

Artist photos: [https://1drv.ms/f/s!ApBE3x3pPyNihod84r8AFarRS\\_J\\_g?e=3zf2wk](https://1drv.ms/f/s!ApBE3x3pPyNihod84r8AFarRS_J_g?e=3zf2wk)

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