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University of Washington
THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC
and
THE SCHOOL OF DRAMA
present

the 59th program of the 1987-88 season,
its 201st Opera Production

the American premiere of

JULIETTA

(The Book of Dreams)

by
Bohuslav Martinu

Based on the play *Juliette ou La Clé des Songes*
by Georges Neveux
English Translation by Brian Large
by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Ltd.

*Julietta was first performed at the National Theatre,
Prague, on March 16, 1938.*

Music Director Robert Feist
Stage Director Vincent Liotta
Set Design Jeffery Frkonja
Costume Design Quincy Anderson
Lighting Design Roberta Russell

May 12 and 14, 1988, 8:00 PM, Meany Theater
May 15, 1988, 3:00 PM, Meany Theater

RECOLLECTIONS OF PRAGUE AND JULIETTA

My first encounter with the mysterious Julietta was in Prague, in 1965, in the same theater which had given it its world premiere in March 1938, the *Narodni Divadlo* or *National Theater*. It was but one of some 18 or more Czech operas I had experienced in Czechoslovakia, and it left an indelible impression. True, there were many such powerful impressions that year, one of discovery of the vast repertoire of Eastern Europe, chiefly Czechoslovakia and Russia, but also Poland, Hungary, Rumania, and Yugoslavia. It had long been a desire to do this research and exploration "on location", having already lived in Italy and Germany for ten years, conducting and otherwise getting to know a vast repertoire of Italian and German operas, many scarcely known at all beyond the confines of the country itself. Aware of the profound ties between the language, history, legends and music of any particular country, it seemed essential to explore the repertoire of Eastern Europe on "home soil", rather than in the often unsuccessful transplanted productions of their repertoire which I had seen, in translation, in Western Europe. As the recipient of a unique Rockefeller Foundation grant, the first awarded to a conductor for this purpose, I spent an intense—even grueling—year or more, immersing myself in the operatic and symphonic output of these countries, with France, and its repertoire and traditions, forming a part of the package in certain periods.

I found Czechoslovakia to be the most fertile soil, with constantly stimulating discoveries and the gracious warmth and hospitality of the Czech people a marvelous source of support and assistance. As more or less an official guest of the major opera houses of the land, I shuttled between Prague (home base) and Brno, Pilsen, Ostrava and Bratislava, depending on the current offerings on their stages, pouring over scores in their own archives, meeting most of the major conductors, singers and stage directors, and spending countless and memorable hours with them, in theaters, coffee houses, *Bierstuben*, etc., in an effort to assuage this new thirst for authentic Czech opera. The discoveries were many: not just another *Jenufa* or *Bartered Bride*, which were familiar to me already from the West, but five more of Smetana's eight operas, five of Dvorak's ten, and five more by Janacek, as well as isolated titles by Fibich, Suchon, Cikker, and others, including Martinu.

In almost daily visits to one of Prague's three opera houses (the National Theater, the Smetana Theater, and the Tyl Theater—site of the first *Don Giovanni*), and in hearing and re-hearing many of these works, it became apparent that the majority of them, so closely tied to the native soil in language, legend and musical idiom—and beloved there—are not truly "exportable", in the sense that *La Boheme*, *La Traviata*, *Carmen*, or *Lohengrin* are. Like certain wines, they do not "travel well." There are exceptions, of course, chiefly in the works of Janacek, and certain operas of Dvorak (*Rusalka*, *Dimitrif*) and Smetana (*The Kiss*, *The Secret* and *The Two Widows*, the latter of which I introduced to Italy in an Italian Radio production by RAI Milano a few years later). Martinu, however, like Janacek, is a case quite different and unique in many ways.

A major 20th century composer, who spent much time outside his country in France, Switzerland, and even in the USA (as is noted in an accompanying

article here) Martinu, like Janacek, is in a sense familiar to us with his excellent symphonies, concerti and chamber music; the operatic output, however, may come as a surprise. Yet, he wrote fourteen operas, and of these, a few titles may be known to the historian or opera fan: *Comedy on a Bridge* (1948), often performed in University opera theaters and smaller professional theaters, *The Marriage* (1954, after Gogol), *What Men Live By* (1953, after Tolstoy), and, most particularly, the posthumously premiered *Greek Passion* (Zurich 1961), which made quite a stir, as I recall, due not only to the music but its origins in the famous novel by Kazantzakis.

During my two lengthy visits to Prague in those years (at one time in the midst of the "Prague Spring" Festival, with no hotels available, I stayed in the home of a leading singer of The Prague National Opera, and in the studio of the leading stage director)—everyone who knew me as the "visiting American conductor" urged me to see, above all else, the Martinu *Julietta*, then in a new production at the National Theater. When I first saw it, I was captivated; knowing no Czech at all (all conversations were done in German), it still made an immense impact. Why? Similar to my first acquaintance with Berg's *Wozzeck* and Dallapicolas' *Il Prigioniero* or Strauss' *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*, it simply moved me in a visceral sense as great musical theater. I had known Martinu's symphonic repertoire, unjustly neglected too, but his unique combination of neoclassicism (his chief imprint), hints of Debussy or Roussel, bits of Stravinsky, all formed a whole that corresponded to the fascinating plot—if you can call it a plot. The effect is much like seeing a play by Ionescu or others of that type. Though we will be doing it in English, in the excellent Brian Large translation, I felt the same impact in Czech.

In any event, the 50th anniversary of the world premiere in 1938 is an apt occasion for the introduction to the American public (implying both North and South America) of his work, deemed by eminent Czech historians (chiefly Pavel Eckstein, with whom I had many discussions in Prague), as Martinu's operatic masterpiece and the work that caused the most stir in Prague between the two World Wars. Not only has the opera been seen in Europe, but its successive revivals at the English National Opera in London, in Brian Large's translation and stage production, and at The Guildhall School of Music (with an all-student cast in 1986) have indicated its importance on the European operatic scene. Negotiations have proceeded for more than a year with London and with Boosey and Hawkes, the publishers, and, needless to add, both the English National Opera and Brian Large (known to all opera-lovers for his array of PBS telecasts from The Met, Houston Grand Opera, etc.)—have given their utmost support and encouragement for this premiere—perhaps 50 years overdue. We trust, that with the facilities of the University of Washington Opera Department, in its 40 year history and 200 productions behind us, that we may be doing Martinu justice in a belated sense, enlisting the expert services of U.W. opera "veterans" such as Lesley Chapin and Jeff Francis, and the fine alternate Michel, John Ransom, plus a cast encompassing the Schools of Music and Drama, as well as others from Arts and Sciences, in finally bringing the elusive *Julietta* to life on the American stage.

Robert Feist

MARTINU'S LIFE AND WORK

Today Bohuslav Martinu is rightly considered the most important Czech composer of the second third of the Twentieth Century and is regarded as the natural successor of Janacek. With a catalogue of nearly four hundred works to his credit (some of them tentative, early experiments that can never be performed) he must have been one of the most prolific composers of his day. He was also one of the least critical and his output tends to be uneven. He composed at an incredible rate and he seems to have been curiously indifferent to performance and even more so to applause. He was, however, an artist and craftsman who could turn his hand to songs, instrumental pieces, chamber and choral works, symphonies, operas and ballets and was as much at home writing for the concert hall as when turning out scores for the film, radio or television studios. In this century perhaps only Prokofiev, Milhaud, Vaughan Williams, and Britten can claim to have moved with equal naturalness in all these media; but despite his very considerable achievement Martinu has waited a long time to be recognised in this country—a fact even more surprising considering his cosmopolitan outlook. His long residence in France, Switzerland and America certainly broadened his musical outlook but it did not change his basic musical language. Both man and musician remained Czech. Though living abroad, he was overwhelmed by the tragedy of events in his native Czechoslovakia leading up to the outbreak of war and was prompted to produce some of his most striking works out of a feeling for the fate of his homeland. While remaining a traditionalist (he shunned Schoenberg's cerebral compositional forms) he was able to develop a tradition of Czech musicality by injecting fresh impulses into his essentially vital and tuneful works. Of his large output the six symphonies, Concerto Grosso, Double Concerto, Ricercari tone poems from *Half-time* to *La Bagarre* up to *The Frescoes of Piero della Francesca* and *The Parables* as well as a number of concertos and chamber pieces deserve special attention, but most interesting are his stage works—fourteen operas and as many ballets.

A review of the operas shows how Martinu regarded the genre as a peg on which to hang various ideas from burlesque to tragedy. The earliest opera, *The Soldier and the Dancer*, based on Plautus's *Pseudolus*, is a satirical piece in the style of Offenbach and to that extent was fifty years behind the times when it appeared in 1927. The pattern it set was not to be repeated in Martinu's second opera—*The Tears of the Knife* an experimental piece remarkable more for its avant-garde macabre plot than for its use of jazz idioms. *The Three Wishes*, an opera film, epitomises those qualities fashionable in the music of *Les Six* and looks to the fantasy world of *The Love of Three Oranges* but is notable for the way it combines stage and film techniques. Medieval mystery plays prompted *The Songs of Mary* (1934) and Czech folk plays by Nezval and Klicpera inspired two radio operas, *The Voice of the Forest* and *Comedy on the Bridge* (both 1935). The *buffo* element which plays such an important part in *Comedy on the Bridge* returned in *Suburban Theatre* (1936), an entertainment combining *Commedia dell'Arte* elements with figures from popular Czech folk theatre. Another comedy followed in 1937 called *Alexander bis* and in 1952/3 two television operas—*What men live by* (after Tolstoy) and *The Marriage* (after Gogol). Goldoni's *La Lacandiera* inspired Martinu's best comedy,

Mirandolina (1953), and Kazantzakis's novel *Christ Recrucified* moved Martinu to write his only tragic opera, *The Greek Passion* (1955-9).

From this list of operatic sources it is clear that Martinu was an omnivorous reader. His thirst for new literary ideas had led him during the 1930's to join forces with members of the Parisian surrealist circles and to collaborate with the lyric poet Georges Neveux on no less than three occasions. Born in Russia of French parents in 1900, Neveux had studied law with the intention of becoming a judge but by the mid 20's had abandoned this idea and was working in Paris as Secretary to the *Comédie des Champs Elysées* (also known as the *Louis Jouvet Theatre*). He was active as poet and playwright and his *Voyage of Theseus* (1943) was to form the basis of Martinu's chamber opera *Ariadne* (1958). Neveux's *Accusation against the Unknown* (1946) also occupied Martinu in the 1950s but he lost interest in the project after completing the first act. However, the play on which Neveux's fame almost entirely rests is *Juliette ou La Clé des Songes* (1927) and it was this which moved Martinu to write his finest stage work.

When Neveux's play was first presented in March 1930 it split the Parisian audience on account of its surrealist theme — the confrontation of reality with the illusion of a dream. So stormy was its reception at the *Théâtre de l'Avenue* that most performances were interrupted by the protesting audience and on several occasions the actors are said to have left the stage to engage in a shouting match with the public. After thirty-one performances Neveux's play was withdrawn, but not before Martinu had become aware of it. The play's intangible elements of longing and searching and its ephemeral plot that is hardly a plot at all were just the things to attract Martinu who became passionate about the dream fantasies that are at the heart of *Julietta*.

When asked to describe what *Julietta* was about Martinu often hesitated because for him the whole piece balanced on the fine edge of reality and illusion, so that all reality seemed to be fictitious and all fiction reality. However, in 1947 when the opera vocal score was being prepared for publication Martinu at last attempted to put his ideas on paper in the form of a preface:

“Through the network of unforeseen situations and illogical conclusions runs the red thread of the human mind, of memory, on which the history of our actions and of our life depends. Here, however, we are faced with a world in which the thread of memory is cut, where everyone's deepest desire is to regain it, renew it, pick up the thread of the past, even if it is somebody else's past and make it their own, if only in some way they can reach out to the past and recall the fleeting moment. The situations, however, become absurd; they are set in a kin of continuous present of time and place in which past and future are unknown concepts. It is at bottom a psychological and philosophical problem: ‘What is man? What am I? What are you? What is truth?’ Neveux's play is no philosophical dissertation but an exceptionally beautiful poetic fantasy in the form of a dream — the only possible form for the description of psychological states. Only one of the characters, Michel, retains his memory and the recollection of events long past. But in this curious world outside time, this faculty is more a hindrance than anything else, for his normal and logical

thought processes clash at every turn with unforeseen and curiously absurd events. He is bombarded with unexpected situations which he is unable to comprehend and which make it difficult for him to reconcile himself to his own normal state. Situations arise in which memory records all these absurdities till in the end it loses itself in the maze and becomes equally absurd. The whole play is a desperate struggle to find some prop to lean on, something stable and concrete. Memory, consciousness is sought, something that does not dissolve as it is seized, is not transformed into tragic situations in which Michel fights to preserve his own mental stability, his balance, his common sense. Should he give in, he will remain forever in this world without memory, without time. Furthermore, Michel's situation is complicated by the fact that even his normal memory is full of fictional notions and conceptions, not clearly marked off from reality, an intricate complex of human desires, wishes and actions, such as exists in all of us".

Dr. Brian Large

JULIETTA - A PSYCHIATRIC PROFILE

Madness in opera (e.g., *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *The Rake's Progress*, *La Jolie Fille de Perth*) has generally been used as a dramatic device and in the majority of instances, from the psychiatrist's point of view, only marginally convincing as clinical case history. *Julietta* is distinguished in that it does not attempt to offer the audience a dramatised spectacle of insanity. Instead of being merely interested onlookers we are drawn into participating in the process of losing touch with reality—the essence of psychosis—by our identification with the central character Michel. Fortunately, for most of us, our only experience of the splintered logic and distorted perception of the self which characterizes a breakdown, is in dreams. Essentially, *Julietta* is a dream experience but the librettist allows no point of reference with reality—so we are as perplexed (but hopefully not ultimately insane) as Michel.

From a clinical stand-point the evolution of Michel's dream bears a striking resemblance to the experiences described by patients who, in a state of clear consciousness (as opposed to the drowsy state of sleep, drug intoxication and fever) are progressing towards serious mental illness. Although perception of the environment and the integration of stored memories and emotions into an intelligible whole are idiosyncratic to the individual, in a healthy state of mind we retain a shared concept of our surroundings and a sense of continuity of ourselves as persons. Insanity involves a loosening of everyday logic, distortion of perception, and inability to control material which wells up from the unconscious. However, whatever may initiate the process, whether overwhelming emotional pressure, a chemical imbalance, or brain disease, each individual makes the effort to retain the integrity of his self by projecting his internal chaos onto his surroundings. At the outset the stage of perplexity and fear may be followed by the systematisation of his state of fantasy, acquiescing to a "new reality". The process may stop at this point and the sufferer cope with his own bizarre internal world retaining a hold on the routine of daily life. Alternatively, as in the case of Michel, he may gradually retreat into total isolation—in medical terms, a state of catatonia.

The opera opens in a place that is clearly known to Michel and yet, as in so many of our dreams, is strangely unfamiliar. Initially he takes the rather odd conversations at face value and does not seem to feel bewilderment or fear until he begins to realize that he is surrounded by contradictions. Then banal dialogues apparently unrelated to him are going on (a common feature of early psychosis when mumbblings and voices are heard) inducing a state of panic at the realization that the place he has come to is not the one he thought it was and that he has lost touch with the points of reference of his real life. His sense of isolation is immediately projected onto the Chief of Police who tells him that he is in a town where everyone has lost his memory. Doubts as to his identity begin to puzzle him further while he tries to maintain the continuity of his "self" by memories of childhood. The comforting memory of a toy duck is displaced by a series of images until he finds in spite of himself that he is the mayor of the town with a parrot and a pistol he is forbidden to use.

Michel is searching for Julietta: she is an idealized fantasy, possibly of someone he once knew, but she certainly symbolizes the perfect archetypal woman and represents security for him in his shifting surreal world. Despite her ecstatic recollections, he is even more confused when he cannot share them. From promising to be the fulfillment of his deepest wishes she becomes mocking and inaccessible. His response to her taunts after her tenderness is one of violence and subsequent guilt. He has a fear both of impotence symbolised by the image of the supine crocodile that she throws at him and of his own sexual potency, the pistol, which he bitterly regrets attempting to use. Fortunately, the internal logic of the dream serves as his defence from his own guilt and the death sentence that he feels has been passed upon him. His accusers fail to follow the sentence through: thanks to their inability to retain memories, he is able to distract them with an anecdote. He still needs to reassure himself that he has not destroyed Julietta, the *raison d'être* of his pilgrimage and his aspirations. As in a dream-within-a-dream, structuring and systematization take over and Michel accepts the reality of the Office of Dreams. The Beggar, the Convict, and the Engine Driver become projections of his confusion—all seeking an enigmatic Julietta. Although her voice is heard, Julietta remains unattainable for him. As Michel looks in the doorway from which her voice seems to have come, he is confronted by emptiness and his disintegration is complete.

By divorcing the whole action from conventional reality, Neveux prevents us from achieving a sense of detachment. We view the opera through the eyes of Michel, who is in effect the only character. All the other players are projections of aspects of himself, his desires, his goals and his fears.

Such a drama is open to psychological and philosophical interpretation on various levels. It has a universal validity, not only by virtue of its archetypal content, but also because within us all we have the seeds of dissolution which we may experience as a nightmare from which we wake with relief in the morning.

J. J. Bradley, F.R.C.P., F.R.C.Psych., D.P.M.

