



LUCERNE FESTIVAL

HISTORIC
PERFORMANCES

audite



Rafael Kubelík

Bartók Bluebeard's Castle
Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau | Irmgard Seefried
Swiss Festival Orchestra



Béla Bartók (1841–1904)
Bluebeard's Castle, Op. 11 (Sz 48)
 Opera in one act
 Libretto by Béla Balázs

- 1 *Wir sind am Ziele (Here we are now)* 4:32
- 2 *Dies ist also Blaubarts Feste! (So this is really Bluebeard's castle!)* 5:53
- 3 *Stumm und verschlossen die Türen (Seven doors all barred and bolted)* 4:48
- 4 *ERSTE TÜRE: Weh! – Was siehst Du? (Woe! – What seest thou?)* 4:03
- 5 *ZWEITE TÜRE: Was siehst Du? – Tausend schaurig scharfe Waffen
 (What seest thou? – Piles of cruel arms and armours)* 4:46
- 6 *DRITTE TÜRE: Oh, welche Pracht! (Mountains of gold)* 2:28
- 7 *VIERTE TÜRE: Ein Blumenmeer, ein einziger Duft (Ah! What lovely flowers!)* 4:48
- 8 *FÜNFTE TÜRE: Ah! – Sieh, so weit die Blicke reichen
 (Ah! – Now behold my spacious kingdom)* 6:31
- 9 *SECHSTE TÜRE: Unbeweglich, weiß und stille (I can see a sheet of water)* 6:48
- 10 *Herzog Blaubart, lass Dich fragen ... (Tell me, dearest Bluebeard)* 6:25
- 11 *SIEBENTE TÜRE: Schau, die früher'n Frauen alle
 (Hearts that I have loved and cherished)* 2:34
- 12 *Früh am Morgen kam die erste (The first I found at daybreak)* 6:57

Publisher: Universal Edition AG, Wien

Performance in German

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau *Bluebeard*
 Irmgard Seefried *Judith*
 Swiss Festival Orchestra

Rafael Kubelík

“Making the ‘intrinsic inwardness’ of the scores come alive for all the senses”

Rafael Kubelík and Lucerne

The Czech conductor Rafael Kubelík is one of the artists who have, over the decades, contributed to shaping and defining the face of the Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern, today's LUCERNE FESTIVAL. On 28 August 1948 he conducted the Swiss Festival Orchestra for the first time in a concert featuring Dvořák's Seventh Symphony, Janáček's *Taras Bulba* and Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto with Alexander Brailowsky as soloist. Only a few weeks previously, Kubelík, following the communist coup in Czechoslovakia, had decided after an engagement in Britain not to return to his homeland. “A bird does not sing in a cage”, he explained later: “I left my home country in order not to be forced to leave my people. [...] I left so that I would not have to be part of the demise of our culture and humanity.”

Born in Býchory near Prague on 29 June 1914 as the son of the then world-famous violinist Jan Kubelík, Rafael Kubelík was at that point already one of the leading musicians of his country. He had conducted the Czech Philharmonic for the first time at the

age of nineteen, he had directed the Brno Opera between 1939 and 1941 (when the Nazis closed the theatre) and subsequently became Václav Talich's successor as chief conductor of the Czech Philharmonic. In the West, Kubelík quickly forged his path with guest appearances with the great orchestras and as music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (1950-53). His happiest years – the German music critic Joachim Kaiser even refers to his “golden age” – were in Munich as chief conductor of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, a post he held from 1961 until 1979, remaining associated with the orchestra until 1985. It was also during Kubelík's tenure at the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra that the ensemble forged, in the summer of 1965, an association with Lucerne which was to become very close. Less fortunate were Kubelík's short-term leading positions at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (1955-58), where a press campaign initiated by Sir Thomas Beecham led to Kubelík's resignation, and at the Metropolitan Opera, New York (1973-74), where he quickly stepped down after the premature death of its new director Göran Gentele, who did not live to see his first season at the opera house. Those who know how





dedicated a prophet of Janáček's operas, how eloquent an advocate for Berlioz' *Les Troyens* and how passionate a conductor of Verdi's works Kubelík could be at the opera house, will – despite several excellent studio recordings – regret that his appearances on the opera podium remained few and far between.

Rafael Kubelík's final years were an affliction. Serious rheumatism forced him, after abandoning a concert in Munich on 7 June 1985, to withdraw from all public engagements. He focused solely on composing and spent the winter months in the hot and arid climate of California. It was only the breakdown of communist rule in Czechoslovakia that motivated him to return to the stage. At the invitation of the new president, Václav Havel, he travelled to Prague in April 1990 in order to open the "Prague Spring Festival", which he had co-founded in 1946, with Smetana's symphonic cycle, *Má Vlast* (My Homeland). "Never did I cease to believe in the victory of truth", he proclaimed at his return. Equally moving was the open-air concert on the day of the first free elections in Czechoslovakia on 9 June 1990 when he performed *Má Vlast* once again as a patriotic-humanist avowal with three

orchestras, the Czech Philharmonic, the Brno Philharmonic and the Slovak Philharmonic. *Má Vlast* also formed part of the programme of the very last concert under his direction, once again with the Czech Philharmonic, on 2 November 1991 in Tokyo. In the previous year he had also stepped in at Lucerne once more, substituting for Zdeněk Mácal in a performance of the Sixth Violin Concerto by Jan Kubelík, his father, with Yuuko Shiokawa as soloist.

With this, a circle was closed: Lucerne was the centre in the life of the émigré Rafael Kubelík. Here, he gave twenty-five concerts between 1948 and 1990; here, four of his works were première, including the requiem written in memory of his first wife, Ludmila Bertlová (*Requiem pro memoria uxoris*); here, he gave several courses in interpretation for conductors, and here he was a member from 1981, alongside Paul Sacher and Vladimir Ashkenazy, of the artistic advisory board. For many, Kubelík was something like the "secret chief conductor" of the Swiss Festival Orchestra, a combination of the finest Swiss orchestral musicians that existed until 1993. He settled in Lucerne in 1953, made it his new home and took Swiss citizenship in 1967. In 1968 he moved to Kastanienbaum, into



the three-hundred-year-old “House in the Sand” right by Lake Lucerne. This was also where he held his garden party in August 1969, one year after the Russians had invaded Prague, when he presented the members of the Czech Philharmonic who were performing at the festival with a “Freedom Memorial Medal” which he had donated himself for this occasion. For he believed that music had an ethical mission: in 1981 he explained that for him “music and art generally are only justified if they strive to improve humanity. [...] At least I strive towards this aim [...], as without such an ethical justification art would only be a witty game.” On 11 August 1996 Rafael Kubelík died at Kastanienbaum.

What was the fascination, the charisma that Kubelík exuded, which was so intensive that those fortunate enough to have experienced him are able to feel it even decades later? Albert Scharf, the former *Intendant* of Bavarian Radio names four characteristics in his portrait of the conductor which, for him, represented Rafael Kubelík’s physiognomy as an artist: “warm humanity”, “openness to partnerships”, “hands-on creative enthusiasm”, “integrity towards the work and its creator”. In my own memory of many concerts

at the Munich Herkulesaal and of numerous opera performances at the Munich National Theatre, two further definitive aspects come up – uncompromisingness and impulsive emotionality. Kubelík was a musician whose approach towards a work was whole-hearted, whose realisation he tackled and with which he identified completely, without ever crossing the fine line towards narcissist self-staging. The warmth and humanity that his music-making exuded was reminiscent of Bruno Walter; his fervent expressive desire and his emotionality, on the other hand, were reminiscent of Wilhelm Furtwängler, with whom he also shared his unorthodox stick technique as well as his fluid conducting gestures.

The powerful magic that emanated from his personality – Kubelík himself talked about a “fluidum” – was transferred equally towards the musicians and the audience: “For me it is important every evening to bring something new from the podium [...], to tear myself to pieces, in a way – every time to give, not take, something. Taking is not worthy of a musician.” One element in this approach was, not least, the atmosphere of the concert, the internal participation of the audience, which is also a form of giving. Kubelík was no



studio conductor. Only rarely do his studio recordings communicate his impulsive and yet restrained emotionality, conscious of its own effect, which would set in at his concerts. (This also becomes clear when one compares the live-recordings of his legendary Mahler cycle given in Munich, issued by audite, to the studio recordings made for Deutsche Grammophon.) Internalisation and expressivity were no antipodes for him in making music, but devices with which the work could be explored from different angles. The composer Wilfried Hiller explained the mystery that was Kubelík most succinctly: “He wanted to make the ‘intrinsic inwardness’ of the scores come alive for all the senses.”

The same is true of the Lucerne concert of 15 August 1962 with the Swiss Festival Orchestra; the programme consisted of Beethoven’s *Egmont Overture*, Mozart’s *Symphony in G minor, K. 550*, and Béla Bartók’s only opera, *Bluebeard’s Castle* (*A kékszakállú herceg várá*). The vocal soloists were Irmgard Seefried (Judith) and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (Bluebeard), and the sung language was German. Kubelík replaced the then already seriously ill Ferenc Fricsay, who died six months later. Kubelík had always been an advocate

of modernist music (“How can one love Bach and Beethoven without knowing Hindemith or Schoenberg”), and Bartók’s opera in one act, written in 1911, could certainly be classified as such at that time. Kubelík had performed the piece in Munich only three months previously – albeit in a concert version – also with Fischer-Dieskau in the title role, but with Hertha Töpper as Judith (who had also sung the role in Fricsay’s studio recording of 1956). In 1981 he conducted the opera, now in its original language, with the New York Philharmonic (the live recording of which has been released several times on disc).

Willi Schuh’s concert review in the evening edition of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 17 August 1962 elaborates on the libretto and music, acknowledges the accomplishment of the two soloists, characterises Kubelík’s music-making as possessing a “great, lively trait”, but remains reticent about Kubelík himself. This concert recording, issued here on CD for the first time, enables us to savour the performance in detail. As is characteristic of Kubelík, he, on the one hand recedes into the work, and on the other hand identifies deeply with it. From the opening bars – the pentatonic string motif and the wistfully lamenting wood-



winds – he reveals the inner tragedy of the unviable relationship between Judith and Bluebeard, as well as the eerie, stifling atmosphere which does not abate until the end. It takes a while until everything, particularly the coordination between vocal and orchestral parts, is perfect. This brings to mind a remark by Kubelík, circulated by Albert Scharf, where he mocked clinical flawlessness in music-making: “We can do with a little bit of humus if something is meant to flower, it just mustn’t become dung.”

It is surely not solely down to the recording equipment and the unfavourable microphone positioning for the singers that in this performance Bartók’s orchestral opulence and his musical drama of light colours dominate. This pertains not only to the many expressive instrumental details and nuances, but also, and even more so, to the emotional abysses with which the music – symbolised by the seven doors that Judith opens in an obsessive urge to discover the truth – uncovers Bluebeard’s innermost secrets. Bartók’s idiom, expressively hardened even in this state of ecstasy, goes far beyond the influence of French impressionism. Kubelík moulds the chambers, and thus the inner story line

concealed behind the doors, with expressive psychological gestures – whether this be the treasure chamber, illuminated by shimmering harp and celesta sounds, or the hymn-like emphasis in C of the estates gleaming in the light, or the grief-stricken lake of tears with its music, wincing as though it is being beaten, or the nightmarish apparition of the former wives after the last door has been opened. Kubelík uncovers Bluebeard’s blood-stained past, and thus the battle of the sexes in this opera, within the orchestra.

According to Willi Schuh, the critic of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Irmgard Seefried and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau were the “ideal interpreters” of these two roles who, “thanks to the emotional concentration and intellectual density of the performance”, guaranteed the “resounding success of the work with the doubtless largely conservative festival audience”. The *Tages-Anzeiger* of 18 August 1962 was equally enthusiastic: “The stage was presided over by two vocal artists who managed to find the happy medium between operatic and concert singing [...]” Both singers had enjoyed a close association with the festival even before this performance: Irmgard Seefried gave song recitals almost every



summer until 1968 and also appeared as a soloist in Haydn's oratorios or Mahler's Fourth Symphony and, alongside her husband Wolfgang Schneiderhan, premièred Frank Martin's *Magnificat* which is dedicated to the artistic couple. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, from his first performance in the summer of 1958 (when he interpreted Hugo Wolf's *Italienisches Liederbuch* together with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Gerald Moore), also regularly appeared in Lucerne, both as recitalist and as concert singer, over nearly four decades. Fischer-Dieskau sang the part of Bluebeard several times, not only in the afore-mentioned recording of 1958 with Ferenc Fricsay and Hertha Töpfer, but also, a good twenty years later, in a recording with Wolfgang Sawallisch and Júlia Várady. The choice of Irmgard Seefried, on the other hand, seems surprising since her light soprano voice, despite her lively interpretation of Bartók's small song-cycle *Village Scenes*, might not appear to be an obvious choice for the role of Judith which is often cast with lower, or certainly more dramatic voices (on stage she sang this role for the first time at the Vienna Volksoper in 1966). Seefried's heartfelt tone, her deliberate naivety, initially seems surprising but, psychologically, fits perfectly into the

portrait that Bartók and his librettist are constructing of the estrangement between the sexes. Seefried's childlike questioning astonishment that she expresses at the most eerie peaks of the plot, such as at the sight of the lake of tears, are some of the most poignant moments in the performance. Judith's challenging curiosity and jealousy to which the powerfully voiced Bluebeard succumbs with a sense of resignation is far more convincing in Seefried's soft, restrained immediacy than in any larger-scale voice. Conversely, the lower passages of the role at times cause her audible difficulty, resulting in unclear pronunciation. However, as Rafael Kubelík, Irmgard Seefried knows how to illuminate words and music from the inside, and thus redeems any minor shortcomings.

Uwe Schweikert

Translation: Viola Scheffel

The libretto of the present performance of *Bluebeard's Castle* is available on our website www.audite.de.

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 LUCERNE FESTIVAL

recording: live recording at LUCERNE FESTIVAL (Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern)



recording date: 15 August 1962
recording location: Kunsthaus, Lucerne

remastering: © Ludger Böckenhoff, 2014

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Rafael Kubelík conducting the Berlin Philharmonic, Lucerne 1963
Rafael Kubelík, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Irmgard Seefried during the performance of *Bluebeard's Castle*, Lucerne 1962 / Hans Blättler

Rafael Kubelík with young autograph seekers

Irmgard Seefried (with Wolfgang Schneiderhan) signing autographs after the performance of *Bluebeard's Castle*, Lucerne 1962

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Irmgard Seefried after the performance of *Bluebeard's Castle*, Lucerne 1962 / Paul Weber

Rafael Kubelík in conversation with Pierre Fournier / Paul Weber

Rafael Kubelík / Paul Weber

Rafael Kubelík after his last appearance in Lucerne, 1990 / Peter Fischli

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Irmgard Seefried



Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau



Rafael Kubelik

Rafael Kubelik Geboren 1914 in der Tschechoslowakei als Sohn des Violin-Virtuosen Jan Kubelik. Debutierte 1933 als Dirigent in Prag, 1936–39 und 1943–48 Leiter der Tschechischen Philharmonie, 1939–41 Opernschef in Brünn. Seit 1938 Dirigent aller grossen Orchester. 1951–53 Leiter des Chicago Symphony Orchestra, 1954–59 des Covent Garden Opera House in London. 1961 zum Chefdirigenten des Orchesters des Bayerischen Rundfunks München ernannt. Lebt in Luzern. Dirigierte an den Festwochen Luzern 1948, 1950, 1953–55, 1957, 1959 und 1960.

Irmgard Seefried Gattin von Wolfgang Schneiderhan. Geboren in Deutschland. Musikalische Ausbildung durch den Vater, dann am Konservatorium Augsburg. Wurde 1940 von Karajan an das Opernhaus Aschen verpflichtet. Trat 1943 unter Karl Böhm in das Ensemble der Staatsoper Wien ein, dem sie heute noch angehört. Nach Kriegsende Gastspiele an der Mailänder Scala, an der Covent Garden Opera London und an der Metropolitan Opera New York. Seit 1945 regelmässiger Gast der Salzburger Festspiele. Sang 1955–1960 an den Luzerner Festwochen.

I. Sinfoniekonzert

Kunsthaus
Palais des concerts / Concert Hall

Mittwoch, 15. August 1962, 20.00 Uhr
Mercredi, 15 août 1962, 20 h
Wednesday, August 15, 1962, 8 p.m.

Schweizerisches Festspielorchester
Orchestre Suisse du Festival
Swiss Festival Orchestra

Leitung / Direction / Conductor
RAFAEL KUBELIK

Solisten / Solistes / Soloists
IRMGARD SEEFRIED Sopran
DIETRICH FISCHER-DIESKAU Bariton

Ludwig van Beethoven

**Ouverture zu Goethes Trauerspiel
«Egmont» op. 84**

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Sinfonie g-moll KV 550
Molto allegro
Andante
Menuetto: Allegretto
Allegro assai

Béla Bartók

«Herzog Blaubarts Burg» op. 11 (1911)
Oper in einem Akt von Béla Balázs
Herzog Blaubart: Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau
Judith: Irmgard Seefried