

Bernd Alois Zimmermann – Die Soldaten 2010



1. *Preludio* 2. *Act I* 3. *Act II* 4. *Act III* 5. *Act IV* Wesener, ein Galanteriehändler: Frode Olsen (bs) Marie, seine Tochter: Claudia Barainsky (s) Charlotte, seine Tochter: Lani Poulson (mz) Weseners alte Mutter: Hebe Dijkstra (a) Stolzius, Tuchhändler: Michael Kraus (br) Stolzius' Mutter: Kathryn Harries (a) Obrist, Graf von Spannheim: Marek Gasztecki (bs) Desportes, ein Edelmann: Tom Randle (t) Pirzel, ein Hauptmann: Alexander Kravets (t) Eisenhardt, ein Feldprediger: Urban Malmberg (bs) Haudy, Offizier: Adrian Clarke (br) Mary, Offizier: Kay Stiefermann (bs) Drei junge Offiziere: Jeroen de Vaal (t), Brian Galliford (t), Pascal Pittie (t) Die Gräfin de la Roche: Helen Field (s) Der junge Graf, ihr Sohn: Christian Baumgärtel (t) Der Bediente der Gräfin: Brian Galliford (t) Der junge Fähnrich: Niklaus Kost (bs) Der betrunkene Offizier: Erik Slik (t) Vocaal Ensemble & Nederlands Philharmonisch Orkest Hartmut Haenchen – conductor De Nederlandse Opera, Muziektheater Amsterdam 20.XI.2010 Direct FM-broadcast Radio 4 (NL)

The tragic drama of Bernd Alois Zimmermann's first and only opera, *Die Soldaten* (The Soldiers) (1957-1960), is undoubtedly linked to the time he spent in military service, which interrupted his studies at the Cologne Musikhochschule and the universities of Cologne and Bonn. This work has been proclaimed the most significant German opera since Berg's *Lulu*, and is ranked as one of the musical landmarks of the twentieth century. When Zimmermann began the piece in 1957, he had just started as professor of composition and as chair of the department of radio, film, and stage music at the Cologne Musikhochschule. The following year *Die Soldaten* was formally commissioned by the Cologne Opera, where it eventually had its premiere nearly ten years later.

Conceptually, *Die Soldaten* was born in the middle of the 1950s, when Zimmerman was considering writing an opera setting of Ben Jonson's *Volpone*; however, this text was discarded and attention was given to J.M.R. Lenz's *Soldaten*, which Manfred Gurlitt had explored in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Zimmermann found himself respectfully drawn to the way the text explored how fundamentally honest, ordinary people could be destroyed by certain

situations and the strength of others. Essentially, it was a drama of social criticism and class conflict, which made a disturbing statement about the entire postwar generation, while offering a metaphor for the modern world. In his own libretto, Zimmermann condensed the lengthy text into four acts and poured in his hatred of the culture of militarism as he depicted the atrocities of the Second World War. In this well planned, formally structured, pluralist "collage," scenes are staged at different levels or angles simultaneously; the original concept had involved 12 acting areas, each with its own instrumental ensemble. In addition, several layers of multi-media, including video and electronic tape, merged together at once, within a combination of jazz, music, language, dance, pantomime, and circus. The work incorporates 40 roles, but the focus is on Marie, a young girl who is degraded in the hands of a corrupt and egotistical military aristocracy. It reflects the influence of Berg, Bach, Mozart, Debussy, Dante, Dostoevsky, Aeschylus, Joyce, Pound, Mayakovsky, and the medieval Catholic philosophy.

Despite its title, Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten* centers not around the soldiers in the story, but the young woman, Marie. Over the course of four acts -- deployed, after the manner of Berg's *Wozzeck*, as a series of traditional instrumental forms (*ciacona*, *ricercare*, *toccata*, etc.) -- Marie transforms from a lovestruck girl to a woman of tarnished reputation, to a prostitute, and, finally, a beggar.

When Zimmermann first presented *Die Soldaten* to the Cologne Opera, it was rejected as technically impossible. Between 1963 and 1964, the composer reduced the dramatic dimensions and trimmed the forces to create an acceptable simplified version. The first appearance of the opera took place in Cologne on February 15, 1965, conducted by Michael Gielen and directed by Hans Neugebauer. It was performed for the first time in America, in Boston, in 1982, where it was conducted by Sarah Caldwell, and in 1991 it was staged by the New York City Opera under Christopher Keene and Rhoda Levine. In *Die Soldaten*, Zimmermann succeeded in showing how separate and synchronous dramatic strands could effectively portray the monstrous dehumanizing effects of war. --- Meredith Gailey, Rovi

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