

Debussy - Pelléas et Mélisande (Boulez) [1991]

Written by bluesever

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Disc 1 1 Act 1. Scene 1. *Une forêt. (A forest)* 2 Act 1. Scene 2. *Un appartement dans le château (A room in the castle)* 3 Act 1. Scene 3. *Devant le château (In front of the castle)* 4 Act 2. Scene 1. *Un fontaine dans le parc (A fountain in the park)* 5 Act 2. Scene 2. *Un appartement dans le château (A room in the castle)* 6 Act 2. Scene 3. *Devant une grotte (Outside a cave)* Disc 2 1 Act 3. Scene 1. *Une des tours du château (One of the castle towers)* 2 Act 3. Scene 2. *Les souterrains du château (The castle vaults)* 3 Act 3. Scene 3. *Une terrasse au sortir des souterrains (A terrace at the entrance to the castle)* 4 Act 3. Scene 4. *Devant le château (In front of the castle)* Disc 3 1 Act 4. Scene 1. *Un appartement dans le château (A room in the castle)* 2 Act 4. Scene 2 3 Act 4. Scene 3. *Une fontaine dans le parc (A fountain in the park)* 4 Act 4. Scene 4 5 Act 5. *Une chambre dans le château (A room in the castle)*
George Shirley (Tenor), Donald McIntyre (Bass Baritone), David Ward (Bass), Yvonne Minton (Mezzo Soprano), Anthony Britten (Treble), Elisabeth Söderström (Soprano) Royal Opera House Covent Garden Orchestra and Chorus Pierre Boulez – conductor

One might have thought that the exceptional nature of this opera, lull of vague thoughts and understated music, would prove elusive on disc, but Boulez's much praised 1970 recording, made after his performances of it at Covent Garden, reappears amid a positive welter of recommendable versions of the work, making choice increasingly difficult. His long introductory essay that accompanied the original LP issue, setting out his ideas on the opera and its casting, has unfortunately now been dropped; but in particular he made a point of the importance of the orchestra — "to reduce the score to an accompanied recitative is conspicuously to betray it" — and under his direction the orchestral sound is truly splendid, reflecting his reaction against the "bloodlessness" with which the drama is often presented.

The French of his completely non-French cast (contrasting with those of Dutoit and Jordan Decca, 3/91 and Erato, 12/91 respectively) is let down only by George Shirley—I am surprised that Boulez did not insist on something being done about his poor vowels—and though, as a

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tenor, he conveys Pelléas's youthfulness, his tone is rather unyielding for much of the time. The other slightly disappointing piece of casting is David Ward, who makes old Arkel sound merely glum (though that seems to have been the reading Boulez wanted). But the strength of this performance lies with the intelligent and vocally assured Söderström and with McIntyre's superb character study of Golaud, against his will eaten up with a jealousy that drives him to near-madness; and exceptionally good is the boy Anthony Britten as little Yniold. The recording, always very satisfying, is now "enhanced using 20-bit technology", if you know what that means: at any rate, it sounds fine to me. -- L.S., Gramophone [4/1992]

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