

LANZELOT

OPER VON PAUL DESSAU

LIBRETTO VON HEINER MÜLLER

audite



Staatskapelle Weimar
Dominik Beykirch

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Paul Dessau (1894-1979)

LANZELOT

Opera in 15 pictures based on motifs by Hans Christian Andersen
and the fairy tale comedy *The Dragon* by Evgeny Schwarz

Elsa Emily Hindrichs
Drache Oleksandr Pushniak
Bürgermeister Wolfgang Schwaninger
Kater Daniela Gerstenmeyer

Lanzelot Máté Sólyom-Nagy
Charlesmagne Juri Batukov
Heinrich Uwe Stickert
Medizinmann Andreas Koch

Interpret / Sekretär / Lakai Andreas Karasiak
Freundinnen Ylva Stenberg / Heike Porstein / Katja Bildt
Arbeiter Jörn Eichler / Uwe Schenker-Primus / Gregor Loebel
Kunsthändler Jens Schmiedeke

Esel Jörg Rathmann
Berater Klaus Wegener /
Alexander Günther /
Oliver Luhn
Militärexperte Henry Helml
Bürger Walter Farmer Hart /
Borislav Rashkov /
Dmitry Ryabchikov
Polizisten Mark Mönchgesang /
Jan Rouwen Hendriks
Bürgerin Susann Günther
Wagner-Siegfried Jong-Kwueol Lee
Kind Kilian Bauer / Jasper Jakob Schöning

Opernchor des DNT
Chor des Theaters Erfurt
Kinderchor schola cantorum Weimar
Staatskapelle Weimar

Musikalische Leitung
Dominik Beykirch
Regie Peter Konwitschny



audite

Vorspiel 1:36

Bild 1

Steinzeitsiedlung am See 1:39
„Da kommt der Medizinmann“ 4:53
Feuer. Der See kocht 4:05

Bild 2

Wald im Jugendstil 2:22
Zwischenspiel 0:46

Bild 3

Büro 2:59
„Wann wird dieses Volk sich endlich selbst regieren!“ 3:05
„Exzellenz. Vor Ihnen ein gramgebeugter Patriot“ 3:31

Bild 4

Haus Charlesmagne 1:18
„He! Kater!“ 3:00
„Junger Mann“ 2:44
Zwischenspiel 0:23

Bild 5

Fernsehraum 3:07
„Fünf Jahre zu Fuß von hier“ 3:28
„Ein Revolutionär. Wie lästig“ 1:41
Zwischenspiel 0:55

Bild 6

Haus Charlesmagne 1:53
„Großer Drache! Ihr Archivar...“ 3:00
„Der Kampf ist morgen“ 2:01
„Glücklich die Stadt, die einen Drachen hat“ 2:45
Zwischenspiel 0:40

Bild 7

Intermezzo. Drache im Schaukelstuhl 1:20
„Wenn Exzellenz zu gestatten geruht...“ 1:44
„Wir stellen zweitens die Ermordung
des Nemeischen Löwen dar...“ 1:22
Pantomime 0:42
„Das Verbrechen, welchem zum Opfer fiel
die Lernäische Hydra...“ 2:36
„Viertens lenken wir Ihre Aufmerksamkeit auf
ein Beispiel subversiver Tätigkeit...“ 1:57
Zwischenspiel 1:17

Bild 8

Stadt 2:50
„Achtung. Exzellenz tauchen über
den Vorbergen auf“ 1:34
Lacharie 0:28
„Lanzelot! Ich bin es...“ 2:44
„Könnt ich dich töten tausendmal“ 1:26
„Willst du mich heiraten, Elsa?“ 2:00
„Soll ich töten, den ich liebe?“ 2:16

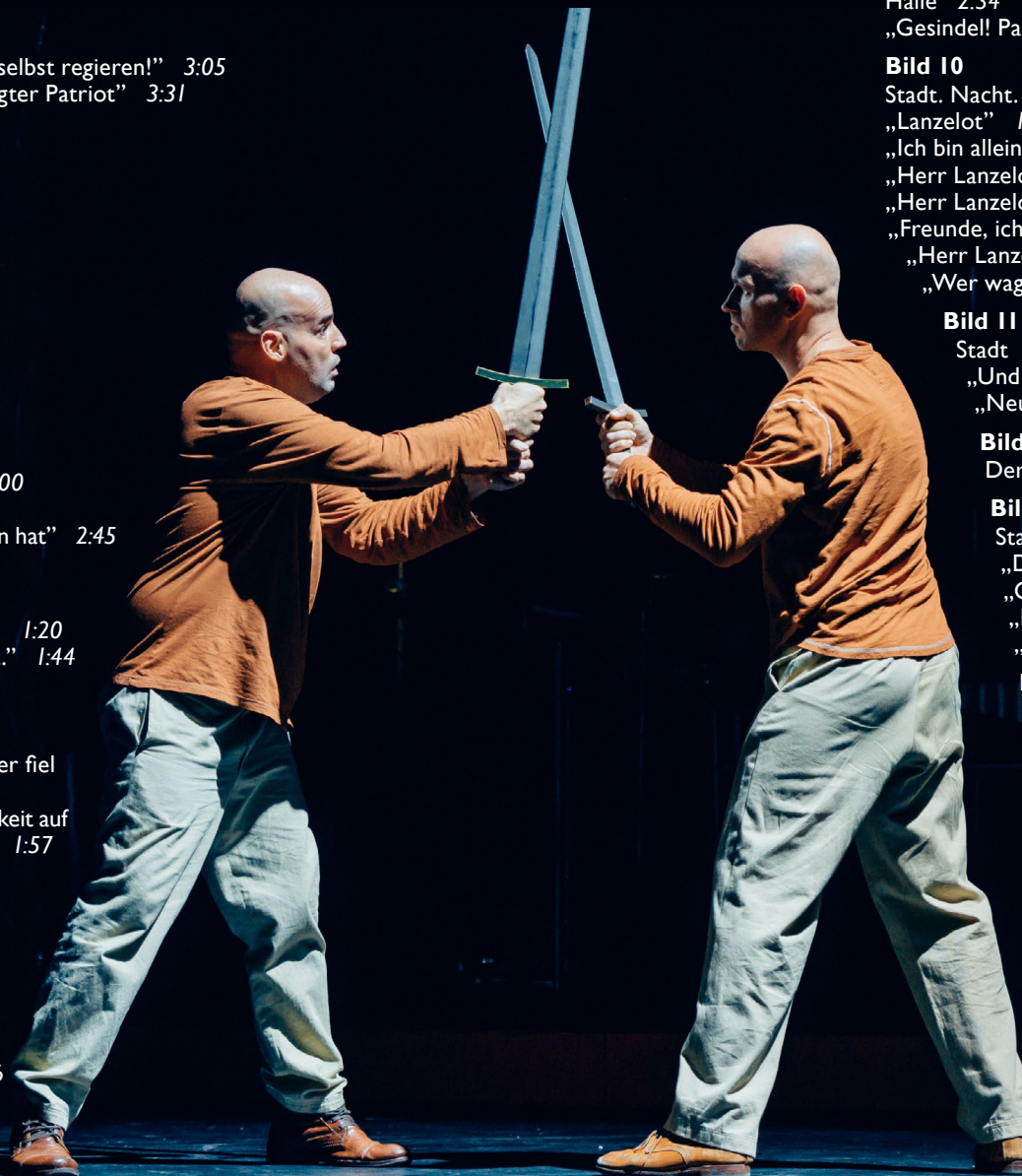


Bild 9

Halle 2:34
„Gesindel! Pack!“ 2:46

Bild 10

Stadt. Nacht. Ballett-Pantomime 1:19
„Lanzelot“ 1:06
„Ich bin allein“ 1:37
„Herr Lanzelot. Schramm. Kunst und Antiken“ 1:02
„Herr Lanzelot, wir und die vor uns kamen...“ 2:00
„Freunde, ich bitte sich kurz zu fassen“ 1:33
„Herr Lanzelot, in der fünfzigsten Generation...“ 1:09
„Wer wagt es?“ 2:07

Bild 11

Stadt 2:12
„Und so etwas wird Oberarchivar“ 0:52
„Neues vom Himmel?“ 1:19

Bild 12

Der Kampf. Himmel 1:36

Bild 13

Stadt. Volk. Regen von Drachenköpfen 1:09
„Dradra hat keinen Kopf mehr“ 0:54
„Gib mir meinen Sohn wieder...“ 1:07
„Er wollte das Gefängnis aufschließen“ 1:18
„Lanzelot? Lebt er?“ 2:11

Bild 14

Lanzelot allein 3:45

Bild 15

Saal im Präsidenten-Palais. Hochzeitstafel 1:03
Präsidentenmusik 0:33
„Ruhmreicher, der mit starker Hand...“ 0:35
„Ich danke euch, meine Lieben“ 2:10
„Bürger. Bevölkerung. Volk. Freunde“ 3:37
„Elsa, deine Hand“ 1:37
„Papa, wer ist Lanzelot?“ 1:10
„Ich komm auf die Stunde...“ 1:47
„Es ist soweit...“ 0:30
„Du bist gekommen“ 1:00
„Ich weiß alles über dich...“ 1:01
„Wie mach ich Menschen jetzt
aus diesen Puppen...“ 2:26
„Alles Gebundne befreit unser Fest...“ 2:09

audite

LANZELOT**A LISTENING GUIDE**

by Dominik Beykirch

translation: Viola Scheffel

PRELUDE AND 1st PICTURE

Birdsong, paradisiacal melodies and calmly pulsating strings suggest a state of nature untouched by man, before the listener is brutally catapulted into the Stone Age. Predominantly speaking, gestural choruses and recitative-like solos are accompanied by much drumming as well as rustic brass outbursts. Wilderness and cholera are unmistakably part of everyday life.

2nd PICTURE

After a dance-like transition, the first great tune of the opera follows in a wonderful instrumentation of piccolo, accordion and guitar. The accompaniment of the three friends adopts an increasingly mocking tone – an expression of a dishonest friendship with Elsa, who reveals her musical calling card for the first time on the high E flat at “Warum hat er gerade mich gewählt?!” [Why did he choose me, of all people?!].

INTERLUDE AND 3rd PICTURE

The dragon's soundscape is, first and foremost, martial and brutal: alongside harsh brass blows, the metallic percussion instruments dominate; his vocal delivery is jagged and full of sudden outbursts. Others attending the scene shudder audibly in his presence (xylophone, temple blocks).

4th PICTURE

Folk music (two soprano saxophones, mandolin) introduces the contrasting, private picture at Charlesmagne's house. Lancelot, the professional hero, appears in a typically operatic manner (Rossini) with wide, sweeping melodies – Charlesmagne, on the other hand, is also musically uneasy about the newcomer. Elsa's entrance is romantically framed by a leitmotif-like cello solo.

5th PICTURE

In the same way as the dragon changes his surveillance films, the music appears in different guises: his people, strikingly depicted as dim-witted, listen to a baroque concerto grosso with simultaneous mirroring, without displaying any cultivated behaviour; the three female friends are shopping, singing freely chosen words with the accompaniment of a popular tune. Charlesmagne recites an old story echoing the Stone Age picture, and Lancelot's tale of natural suffering is illustrated by melancholy strings and delicate wind solos. The dragon becomes nervous: shrill brass glissandi, whip and numerous percussion effects raise his pulse.

6th PICTURE

The dragon's music (tape recording with wind machine, flutter-tonguing brass and many choral effects) creates an increasingly menacing, forceful atmosphere. Charlesmagne stammeringly tries to explain the legal situation; with the aid of thunder sheets the dragon marks his power. The mayor breaks into this picture with stage drums and, once again, stammering music: this time the (rehearsed) opposition is to feign satisfaction. Heinrich provokes Lancelot with a derisive laugh (flute) before honest fear is expressed by Elsa (shaky viola tremolo, iron chains on steel plates).

7th PICTURE

Designed as an intermezzo, this picture thrives on a singular combination of prepared piano and electronic organ (tape recording). The scenes presented are separated by a *Magic Flute*-like fanfare before "the order of the world" (quotation from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony) is "shamelessly turned from head to toe".

8th PICTURE

The public meeting: with whimsical effects (clarinets) and a slightly driven tempo, the mayor wants to signal a short trial. Lancelot's will to win is depicted motivically for the first time: swinging thirds – reminiscent of *Hansel and Gretel*, played by all kinds of "ringing" instruments (celesta, glockenspiel, triangles). The dragon reacts to the declaration of war with a satirical laughter aria (jazz-like, at times reminiscent of *The Threepenny Opera*), before he is acoustically confronted with the underground (tape recording with hammering tubular bells, mallet percussion instruments and a murmuring choir). He wants to turn Lancelot into a gold mine (various rattles) and is made to feel Elsa's rebuff (contrabassoon). Her touching scene of self-doubt displays parallels to Mozart's Pamina.

9th PICTURE

The dragon trains "culturedly" in the presence of a chamber music trio – echoes of Schoenberg and Ravel. Following the Lancelot motif played by the solo viola (descending fourth and ascending seventh), he unleashes his wild power: the writing no longer has any bearing on metre or pitch.

10th PICTURE

A nocturnal scene is introduced by agreeable bar music; Lancelot's social loneliness is evident in the patchy accompanying texture. The art dealer tries to do his business with the aid of several tambourines; among the workers, Dessau quotes himself ("Appell an die Arbeiterklasse" [Appeal to the working classes]). The musical interpretations of the three auxiliary objects are wonderful: camouflage helmet (confusing dancing and trills), flying carpet (string glissandi and mouth siren) and sword.

11th PICTURE

One after the other, different groups speculate about the battle: the three female friends (a Straussian trio at the end of which the first friend asserts herself as a potential new virgin with a high E flat), some citizens and the underground characters. The cat, otherwise accompanied by harp and guitar, is nervous (string accents, reminiscent of Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*).

12th PICTURE

Musical structures battle one another. The “Lied der Thälmannkolonne” (music by Dessau under a pseudonym) repeatedly appears with a rhythmic limp.

13th PICTURE

A chorus of nagging women fears for imprisoned family members; the confusion of recriminations is expressed through virtuosic, frantic music and various metal rattles. The gallows are invoked with low tom-toms (*Till Eulenspiegel*) before Elsa expresses her despair across a tessitura of two and a half octaves.

14th PICTURE

An intimate dialogue between Lancelot and a solo cello.

15th PICTURE

Metal castanets and mallet percussion instruments illustrate the bustle of setting the wedding table. Amid fanfares and a jubilant chorus, the self-appointed president (the mayor) appears; the ceremony proceeds with the constant presence of the various dragon pieces (!). After a scenic confusion (music of the Stone Age picture), Lancelot appears hymnally and heroically. Musically chaotic recriminations lead to a gigantic final build-up: one after the other, the vocal parts join together to form an 18-voice sound agglomeration. Elsa and Lancelot are therefore inaudible when they sing one single time: “All that is separated unites our feast.”

The complete libretto and further bonus material can be found here:

audite.de/s/Libretto-Lancelot

audite.de/s/Zusatzmaterial-Lancelot



Paul Dessau's fairy-tale opera LANZELOT

The activist

"On 2 July [1979] I flew to Berlin for Paul Dessau's funeral. Stayed at his house in Zeuthen near Königs Wusterhausen. Paul's dog Sasso roamed around the garden, howling softly. Dessau's children, Peter and Eva, came from the USA, Lotte Klemperer from Zurich. Dorotheenstadt cemetery, silent mourners. Wind in the oaks. Paul's urn was buried next to Fichte, Hegel, Schinkel, Bonhoeffer, Brecht, Heinrich Mann."¹ In his memoirs, the composer Hans Werner Henze noted, both laconically and sadly, the death of his friend Paul Dessau, who had refused all state honours and official eulogies for his funeral. After Henze had attempted suicide in Berlin during the early post-war period, Dessau, who had just returned from the USA, had devoted himself to, and looked after, his young colleague; ever since they had been close to one another, exchanging ideas regularly, including during visits to Zeuthen, where Dessau lived directly on the lake with his wife, the director Ruth Berghaus, and regularly received students and friends.

These meetings, which were joined not only by recalcitrant GDR authors such as Heiner Müller, but also by artists from former West Germany such as Hans Werner Henze, Luigi Nono and Aribert Reimann, were always a thorn in the side of the East Berlin authorities. And they shed a telling light on the man Paul Dessau, who was a politically loyal but also a defiant citizen of the GDR for three decades. "There was the sensitive, amiable private man who was full of affection – he loved people (not all of them) and music (not all of it) and the good things in life," Henze remembered of his mentor, without concealing Dessau's loyalty to the GDR's state party, the SED, of which he was a member: "There was a certain soldierly severity to this activist, of the old sort; he stood to attention, as it were, with the attitude of a staff officer, whenever he saw himself in connection with his state and socialism. [...] For him, the German Democratic Republic was the homeland to which, after his American exile, he had been able to return after it had been liberated from fascist Nazi rule; here he could finally live according to his concept of happiness and actively participate in the establishment of the new country."²

Dessau accepted many a headache for this pursuit of happiness and social justice in the so-called "workers' and peasants' state", which were mainly caused by the ideological decisions of the comrades at the ministry of culture. This is the key to understanding why his third opera, *Lanzelot*, which is essentially directed against authoritarian regimes of all political hues and written on the occasion of the "20th anniversary of the German Democratic Republic", is dedicated to all those "who fight and work for socialism in our republic"³. For them, Paul Dessau composed committed music that engaged with the establishment of the GDR, the Cold War, the Nazi past, the rampant anti-Semitism in the West, the Vietnam War as well as post-colonialism (as for instance his *Requiem* for the assassinated Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba). While this commitment was also welcomed by the left wing in West Germany, the 81-year-old Dessau manoeuvred himself into the sidelines by approving of the expatriation of the singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann in November 1976 – like his wife Ruth Berghaus, he felt that Biermann's criticism of the GDR constituted inadmissible "befouling of the nation's nest"⁴. No wonder therefore that on the other side of the Iron Curtain Dessau was regarded as a state composer and was thus met with hostility.

1 Hans Werner Henze: *Reiselieder mit böhmischen Quinten*. Autobiographische Mitteilungen 1926-1995, Frankfurt/Main, 1996, p. 468.

2 Hans Werner Henze: foreword to: *Paul Dessau 1894-1979. Dokumente zu Leben und Werk*, compiled and annotated by Daniela Reinhold [catalogue for the exhibition at the Akademie der Künste], Berlin, 1995, p. 5.

3 Paul Dessau: *Lanzelot. Oper in 15 Bildern*, score, East Berlin, 1969, p. 2.

4 Matthias Matussek: *Die Luxus-Dissidentin*, in: *Der Spiegel*, No. 28 of 08.07.1990.

The seeker

But while Dessau considered it his duty to praise GDR organisations or to set to music texts by SED leaders Ulbricht and Honecker, he categorically insisted on an advanced musical language, with which he defiantly opposed the party's demand for populist music. "Our work presupposes a desire for discovery, without which we cannot create genuine socialist music," the composer noted shortly before the premiere of *Lanzelot* in December 1969. "But a desire for discovery inevitably includes the possibility for experimenting, seeking, discovering, as well as differentiating, and setting standards for oneself and others. [...] The dialectic inherent in dodecaphony is more interesting for many than the mechanical dualism (theme 1 – theme 2 – major – minor – good & evil)."⁵

Time and again, Dessau countered the insipid epigonism of some GDR state composers with the twelve-tone method of the revered Arnold Schoenberg, which he had first been taught in French exile (1933-1939) by Schoenberg's student René Leibowitz. The years before this new orientation were a period of "searching" and "discovering" for this son of a Jewish tobacco merchant from Hamburg – his forefathers had been well-known synagogue cantors. As an opera conductor he gained experience with Otto Klemperer in Cologne and Bruno Walter in Berlin, and as a composer he tried his hand at the idiom of Hindemith and the New Objectivity. In exile, Dessau then reflected on his Jewish heritage and (in addition to his work for the cinema) became increasingly active as a political composer: for the international brigades in the Spanish Civil War, he composed the much-sung battle song *Die Thälmannkolonne* (which is quoted in the battle scene of *Lanzelot*), and in 1943 he began his collaboration with Bertolt Brecht in the USA. In the summer of 1948, Dessau returned to Germany and settled in the Soviet occupation zone – for many he was an unknown quantity at the time, earning a living with commissions for Berlin radio, arrangements of workers' songs and incidental music for the Deutsches Theater.

Surprisingly, it was precisely during this phase of new beginnings in the young socialist state that the "archbourgeois" genre of opera came into focus. Although the official aim of state culture was to appeal to the working classes and to educate them to become "new humans", the GDR did not want to lose the bourgeois classes, especially in the early days. In this context, music theatre became an important platform for the bundling of canonised, traditional works and newly composed operas.

However, before being premiered, new pieces were thoroughly examined by the composers' association and also in previews in front of party officials who scrutinised the works for their political stance and artistic accessibility. Dessau and Brecht also had to fight many a battle against blockheads and rigid language rules. The discussion around Dessau's opera *Das Verhör* [The Interrogation] (later: *Die Verurteilung* [The Condemnation]) *des Lukullus*, for which Brecht had reworked the text of a radio play into a libretto, became notorious. Although both the librettist and the composer made changes following political objections after the premiere, held in front of invited guests in March 1951, there were only a few performances. *Lukullus* had to wait for the "thaw in relations" at the end of the 1950s to return to the stage.

The alienated Gesamtkunstwerk

However, despite all the setbacks, by his mid-fifties, Paul Dessau, who had conducted many operas and operettas in his youth, had acquired a taste for redefining the genre of musical theatre in terms of the materialistic "dialectics in theatre". This term originated from Bertolt Brecht and denotes – as he put it in section 45 of his *Kleines Organon* – "societal circumstances as processes", which the theatre must reflect "in their contradictions": "In terms of dialectics, everything exists only by transforming itself, that is, in disagreement with itself."

⁵ Paul Dessau: *Entwurf einer Rede über den Umgang mit jungen Komponisten* (Dec. 1969), in: *Paul Dessau 1894-1979. Dokumente zu Leben und Werk*, *ibid.*, p. 136.

Paul Dessau elevated this thesis to his own programme⁶, which remained valid for him even after Brecht's death (1956). For him, it was not ideological unambiguity, as expected by the party, but the dialectical resolution and endurance of contradictions that could set in motion a process of recognition. The extreme artificiality of the opera genre suited him just fine, as he explained in the programme notes for the premiere of his *Lanzelot*: "I, for one, consider this complex large-scale form of theatre, in which such diverse artistic genres as music, poetry, pantomime, dance, singing and sprechgesang (as inaugurated by Arnold Schoenberg) are combined, complementing and enhancing each other, to form the most expressive genre for artistically illuminating the great social problems of our time."⁷

From a dramatist's perspective, Heiner Müller, who had written the libretto for *Lanzelot* together with his future wife Ginka Tcholakova, also saw the opportunities of a productive encounter between contemporary literature and the artificiality of the singing human. "Difficulty is a possibility," Müller wrote after his experience with *Lanzelot*. "Distance, as a feature in music, does not, geographically or historically, need to be introduced by the subject matter or, formally, achieved by the libretto; opera can, to a greater degree than drama, be an operative genre. What one cannot yet say, one can perhaps already sing."⁸

Müller's politically provocative conclusion ties in directly with Brecht's idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk, in which the arts should not, à la Richard Wagner, "all give up and lose each other", but instead "mutually alienate"⁹ each other. Dessau continued along this path even after the controversy surrounding his *Lukullus* and set Brecht's "folk play" *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti* to music towards the end of the 1950s. In order gradually to break away from his father figure Brecht, he sought new material, worked on an opera about Albert Einstein and finally became enthusiastic about the fairy tale *The Dragon* by the Soviet author Evgeny Schwartz (1896-1958), which Dessau had seen in the enormously successful production of the Swiss Brecht student Benno Besson at the Deutsches Theater in East Berlin.

The principal elements of the fairy tale were largely adopted by Müller and Tcholakova in the opera *Lanzelot* – to quote the compact synopsis of the National-theater Weimar: "Knight Lancelot wants to marry Elsa, who is destined to be eaten by the dragon, and challenges the beast to fight. The people do not want the fight, as they live in a profitable arrangement with the dragon and his totalitarian ruling method. Lancelot wins the fight. While he is declared dead, although only wounded, the second squad of rulers set themselves up to succeed the dragon. When Lancelot finally returns, he opens the prisons and brings about the overthrow of the regime. Will the liberated society be able to live without totalitarianism?"

The story of the people who have come to terms with their authoritarian ruler despite some harassment (such as the annual sacrifice of virgins) and regard the tyrannicide Lancelot as an annoying disruptive factor was not without controversy among the GDR's censorship authorities. For ultimately it took aim not only at fascist dictators and the major power of the USA, but also at autocratic rulers within socialism, from Stalin to Walter Ulbricht. After all, for a long time the subject matter was banned in the Soviet Union, and since the circles around Erich Honecker were already working on the removal of the long-time SED leader Ulbricht during the late 1960s, the plot possibly took on a piquant political nuance for insiders. Understandably, Paul Dessau never commented publicly on this, but always named the Nazis and the "imperialist" US as the targets of his opera. "I wanted to write [...] a contemporary piece, also about the war in Vietnam," the composer explained in 1974. "All too often I experience [...] that this barbaric killing, and what the Americans are inflicting on this small country,

⁶ See *Über politische Haltungen in der Oper*, in: Paul Dessau: *Notizen zu Noten*, ed. by Fritz Henneberg, Leipzig, 1974, pp. 147f.

⁷ Paul Dessau: *Die Oper – eine heutige Kunstgattung?* (1969), in: opera programme for the premiere of *Lanzelot* at the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin, cited in: Paul Dessau: *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus, Puntila, Lanzelot*, ed. and with an afterword by Fritz Henneberg, Berlin, 1976, p. 126.

⁸ Heiner Müller: *Sechs Punkte zur Oper* (1970), cited in: *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus, Puntila, Lanzelot*, *ibid.*, p. 125.

⁹ Bertolt Brecht: *Kleines Organon für das Theater*, section 74, cited in: Paul Dessau: *Einige Punkte zum Gegenwartsschaffen der Oper* (1961), in: *Notizen zu Noten*, *ibid.*, p. 151.

cannot be impressed enough upon our people.”¹⁰ This interpretation can also be found in Heiner Müller’s prologue to *Lanzelot* for the programme of the Berlin premiere: “The dragon haunts in changing guises [...] / He fights with napalm and with care packages / He pretends to be human and his money can kill.”¹¹

For Peter Konwitschny, the director of the Weimar revival of November 2019, such ideological aspects are hardly relevant after the end of the Cold War – but the homemade destruction of the planet addressed in the libretto certainly is, as well as the fact that the dragons of this world control their people via “consumerism and surveillance”. “Is anyone not happy in my city?” asks the dragon in the opera, and he can be sure that his subjects’ supply of bread and games (i.e. media) is quite sufficient for their happiness. Naturally, the victim Elsa, who is to be handed over to the dragon without any rights, and the knight Lancelot, who stands for the fortune of free thought and action, have a different attitude – in the preface, Heiner Müller calls it the “revolution thrice presumed dead”¹². But who can guarantee that Lancelot, the saviour, will not also become a tyrant in the end, as Konwitschny suggested in conversation: “What will the people make of him? Another new ruler? Another dragon? Or will the situation change? That is a question which concerns us very much.”¹³

On 19 December 1969, *Lanzelot* was premiered at the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin, conducted by Herbert Kegel and directed by Dessau’s wife Ruth Berghaus, who brought all of her husband’s operas (except *Lukullus*) to the stage for the first time; the designer for *Lanzelot* was Andreas Reinhardt. The ensemble featured rising GDR singing stars such as Siegfried Vogel in the title role, Reiner Süß as the Dragon, Renate Krahmer as Elsa, Horst Hiestermann as the Mayor and Eberhard Büchner as his son Heinrich. The production made quite an impression, but at the end remained rather vague in terms of the utopia of a new society. Gerd Rienäcker recalled that Dessau and Berghaus were asked about this in a public discussion, to which the composer replied in a Solomonic manner: “In order to grasp it concretely, he would have to be smarter than Lenin, and he was not.”¹⁴

After eleven performances, the elaborate *Lanzelot* was taken out of the repertoire of the Berlin Staatsoper; two new productions followed in 1971 in Dresden and Munich, whereupon the piece disappeared into oblivion for half a century without having been recorded on disc, which tended to be customary for Dessau. Peter Konwitschny commented laconically: “The piece was not uninteresting, it was simply *too* interesting, and therefore it was quickly gone. That’s what you do with political pieces.”¹⁵

Musical Total Theatre

“From the perspective of the score, the work is not written in a way that is particularly conducive to performance,” notes conductor Dominik Beykirch in the programme of the Weimar revival of *Lanzelot*. “Thirty solo parts with boundary-breaking vocal demands, a demanding chorus part, at times in nine voices, and a gigantic orchestral apparatus, the complete execution of which is inconceivable in an orchestra pit – plus the enormous technical and organisational demands: you really have to want to do this.”¹⁶ Apparently Hans Pischner, the director of the Staatsoper Berlin, who was open to new ideas, had given the composer free rein on the occasion of his 75th birthday to make full use of the resources of the GDR’s first opera house.

¹⁰ Paul Dessau: *Aus Gesprächen*, Leipzig, 1974, p. 84.

¹¹ Heiner Müller: *Vorspruch zu „Lanzelot“*, in: *Paul Dessau 1894-1979. Dokumente zu Leben und Werk*, *ibid.*, pp. 136f.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Lanzelot in Weimar. Ein Gespräch mit dem Regieteam*, in: programme of the Nationaltheater Weimar for Dessau’s *Lanzelot*, p. 11.

¹⁴ Gerd Rienäcker: „*Lanzelot*“ – *Festgabe oder Warenzeichen*, in: programme of the Nationaltheater Weimar for Dessau’s *Lanzelot*, p. 48.

¹⁵ See note 13, p. 9.

¹⁶ See note 13, p. 10.

A glance at the orchestration shows that Dessau went far beyond traditional forces. The “romantic” orchestra is supplemented by a full saxophone section, mandolin, guitar, accordion, concert grand piano and prepared piano, two harpsichords, electric organ (some of which are recorded on tape) and, above all, a rich percussion section in which Dessau includes many sound generators that the avant-garde of the late 1960s had tapped into, including thunder sheets, wind machine, washboard, “rattle” and iron chains. The instruments are not only used in tutti passages, but repeatedly split off into small ensembles, broadening the stylistic horizon: for instance, an entertainment combo that parodies metropolitan amusements in the 10th picture (“Stadt. Nacht. Ballett-Pantomime” [Town. Night. Ballet pantomime]), or small jazz formations in which there is quasi-improvisation up to and including free jazz (which was viewed critically in the GDR).

In contrast to his other operas, Dessau’s *Lanzelot* is a musical “total theatre” which both overwhelms the audience and – in the sense of Brecht’s theory of alienation – allows them to keep a critical distance from the plot. Traditional music styles are extensively cited, from the baroque-like concerto grosso in the 5th picture and Bachian counterpoint to quotations from Gounod and Wagner, from bubbly salon music to leftist agitprop marches and songs (such as the quotation of the *Thälmannkolonne* in the battle music), from jazz to dodecaphony and dissonant avant-garde music. There are arias, love duets, hollow jubilant choruses, bruitistic percussion eruptions and comedic performances by the tuba and solo trombone. Finally, in the 9th picture, the dragon’s combat training is accompanied by delicate chamber music from the alto flute, harp and viola, at the end of which the uncultured tyrant devours the musicians and their instruments – rarely has Brecht’s demand “Don’t stare so romantically!” been so drastically and humorously realised.

Dessau not only brought together past and present in a complex commenting apparatus in his musical fairy tale, but in *Lanzelot* he also explored musical space anew. Pre-recorded tape recordings and noise salvos are played through panoramically arranged loudspeakers in the hall, breaking up the proscenium stage setting and drawing the audience into the sound – this effort, too, is unlikely to have facilitated the opera’s further dissemination.

With its fairy-tale plot and universalist musical approach, *Lanzelot* could certainly be described as Dessau’s *Magic Flute* – after all, in his last major operatic work, Mozart also deliberately broke down the genre boundaries between opera seria, opera buffa and singspiel, thus also ignoring social barriers in opera (incidentally, Dessau was very fond not only of the work itself but also of Emanuel Schikaneder’s often maligned libretto¹⁷). If one wanted to establish a contemporary model for *Lanzelot*, however, one work stands out which was premiered in Cologne a few years before Dessau’s opera: Bernd Alois Zimmermann’s opera *Die Soldaten* [The Soldiers]. *Lanzelot* reveals astonishing parallels to Zimmermann’s work in terms of his use of means, spatial concept, stylistic plurality and his critical stance towards power. In February 1967, by when Dessau had already decided on the subject matter by Evgeny Schwartz, Zimmermann attended a performance of his *Puntilla* at the Berlin Staatsoper and afterwards sent his colleague the score of his *Die Soldaten*, which Dessau lobbied the Staatsoper to perform.¹⁸ The work by the West German composer Zimmermann was never performed in the GDR, but there is much to suggest that *Lanzelot* provides a decidedly East German answer to many of the artistic and political questions articulated in *Die Soldaten*.

Michael Struck-Schloen

Translation: Viola Scheffel

¹⁷ See Dessau’s programme contribution *Evviva da Ponte, evviva Mozart!* (1964), in: *Notizen zu Noten*, *ibid.* p. 159.

¹⁸ See *Paul Dessau 1894-1979. Dokumente zu Leben und Werk*, *ibid.*, pp. 111f.



Emily Hindrichs (Elsa)

American soprano Emily Hindrichs studied at the University of Southern Mississippi, the University of Exeter (UK) and the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, and received her doctorate in 2009 on the history of the 1958 Aldeburgh Festival production of *Les mamelles de Tirésias*. The Britten Pears Library and Foundation commissioned Hindrichs to compile and arrange the manuscript arrangements by Benjamin Britten and Viola Tunnard. This version was performed in 2012 and 2014 in Aldeburgh, at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels and at the Festival Aix-en-Provence.

Hindrich's European debut as Constanza in *Riccardo Primo* at the 2014 International Handel Festival demonstrated her wide musical range. Hindrichs has been a member of the Cologne Opera ensemble since 2015. She sang the world premiere of Liza Lim's *Tree of Codes* (Adela) with Ensemble Musikfabrik, and at the ACHT BRÜCKEN Festival she performed Unsuk Chin's *Cantatrix Sopranica*.

In 2018, she made her role debut as Marie in Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten* to much acclaim: for this role she was nominated Singer of the Year in the *Opernwelt* critics' poll. Further debuts followed, including as Ishmaela in Olga Neuwirth's *The Outcast* at the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, as Marguerite in *Faust* at the Cologne Opera and at the Kongelige Teater Copenhagen, and as Clémence in Kaija Saariaho's *L'amour de loin*.

Máté Solyom-Nagy (Lancelot)

Máté Solyom-Nagy studied at the Béla Bartók Conservatory and the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in his home town of Budapest. Masterclasses with Julia Hamari, Nicholas Clapton, Walter Moore and László Polgár rounded off his training.

He has won prizes at various singing competitions, including at the "Saverio Mercadante" competition in Altamura, Italy, and the "Antonín Dvorák" competition in Karlovy Vary. In his native Hungary, Máté Solyom-Nagy has appeared predominantly on the opera stage in several Mozart productions. In 2002 he became a member of the Erfurt Theatre ensemble. Another artistic focus for him are twentieth century works, including Francis Poulenc's *Les mamelles de Tirésias* and Peter Maxwell Davies' *Resurrection*.

In 2017, Máté Solyom-Nagy was appointed Kammersänger.

Oleksandr Pushniak (Dragon)

Oleksandr Pushniak graduated from the National Music Academy of Ukraine. He is award winner of the 7th International Wagner Competition in Karlsruhe and of the European Song Contest of the Austrian music festival styriarte, as well as finalist at the International Vocal Competition 's-Hertogenbosch and semifinalist at the Operalia competition in Paris. From 2008 to 2010, Oleksandr Pushniak performed at the Washington National Opera as a member of Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program and debuted in several roles. Shortly after, the young bass-baritone became member of the ensemble of the Staatstheater Braunschweig where he raised attention particularly in the role of Scarpa. In 2016, he successfully debuted in the title role of the *Flying Dutchman*. Further guest engagements led him to Hong Kong, the Nederlandse Reisopera and the Deutsche Oper am Rhein. Since December 2018, he is permanently engaged at the Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar.

Wolfgang Schwaninger (Mayor)

Law or singing? Wolfgang Schwaninger successfully studied both before deciding to become a singer. After engagements as a permanent ensemble member at the Staatstheater Meiningen and the Gärtnerplatztheater in Munich, he has been a freelance tenor since 2007.

Schwaninger has made a name for himself as a Wagner interpreter and has appeared as Walther von Stolzing (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*), Tristan as well as Siegmund (*Die Walküre*) and Erik (*Der Fliegende Holländer*). He shone in his signature role of Hoffman, for which he was nominated Best Singer in *Opernwelt* magazine in 2009. He has also appeared on stage as Peter Grimes and Jim Mahoney (*Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*), and has performed operas by contemporary composers including Benjamin Britten and Aribert Reimann.

audite



He has worked with renowned directors such as August Everding, John Dew, Lorient and Klaus Maria Brandauer and conductors including Herbert Blomstedt, Lawrence Foster and Gustav Kuhn. He has also performed in numerous radio concerts and productions at SWR, MDR and BR, as well as making guest appearances in films and on television.

Uwe Stickert (Heinrich)

Uwe Stickert began taking piano and singing lessons at the age of seven at the Musikgymnasium Schloss Belvedere in Weimar. He completed his vocal studies with distinction at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music with Mario Hoff.

His first engagements on the opera stage included the Komische Oper Berlin, the Aalto-Theater Essen, the Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar and the Nationaltheater Mannheim.

In recent years, Uwe Stickert has attracted international attention performing French repertoire as Gounod's *Faust* in Bern and as Raoul in Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* in Nice and Nuremberg, for which he was nominated Best Singer by *Opernwelt* magazine in 2015.

In concert, Stickert has also gained an excellent reputation: as an oratorio and lieder singer he has given much-acclaimed performances, including of the Bach Passions, in Israel, Italy, China, Switzerland and France.

Opera Chorus of DNT (Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar)

The Opera Chorus of the Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar is a permanent part of the company's music theatre arm and the venerable house's second-largest ensemble after the Staatskapelle Weimar. It is currently made up of forty-four male and female singers from nine different countries. Their varied duties also include concerts and productions of spoken plays. Some of its members additionally sing small and medium-sized solo parts.

The ladies and gentlemen of the Opera Chorus perform a wide-ranging repertoire extending from Classicism and German and Italian Romanticism to works by twentieth- and twenty-first-century composers. From 1968 to 1997 the Opera Chorus of the Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar was run by Eduard Lehmsstedt. Since 1997 his successors as chorus master have been Andreas Korn, Markus Oppeneiger (from 2005) and Jens Petereit (from 2018).

Choir of the Erfurt Theatre

The opera choir of the Erfurt Theatre was formed when the municipal theatre was founded in 1894. Since the establishment of the DomStufen Festival in Erfurt in 1994, the choir has been present not only in operas, operettas and musicals on the theatre's main stage, but also on the festival stage. At guest performances of the Erfurt Theatre in Amsterdam, London, Antibes and Shanghai the opera choir also gained international recognition. It is currently made up of 40 singers from 11 nations.

Children's choir schola cantorum weimar

The schola cantorum weimar is the largest children's and youth choir in Thuringia – a choral society for the advancement of children and young people interested in music, independently operated and open to all. Founded in 2002, it is now a permanent fixture in Weimar's cultural life, providing musical and artistic stimulation under the direction of choral conductor Cordula Fischer, since 2009 supported by Sebastian Göring as director of the youth chamber choir. Young singers from the choir, which has won several awards (including "Best Children's Choir 2018" at the German Choir Competition in Freiburg), also regularly take part in music theatre productions at the Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar (DNT).



Staatskapelle Weimar

Founded in 1491, the Staatskapelle Weimar is one of the oldest orchestras in Germany and among the most illustrious in the world. Its history is closely associated with some of the world's best-known musicians, including Johann Sebastian Bach, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Franz Liszt, and Richard Strauss. Established as the premier musical institution of classical Weimar and part of the Hoftheater Weimar, the orchestra continued to attract attention through the achievements of Liszt and Strauss during the 19th century. These two celebrated figures not only improved its quality and reputation, but also led the Hofkapelle in world premieres of numerous contemporary orchestral works and operas. These positive developments were brought to an abrupt end when the National Socialists seized power. After the calamitous events of World War II, conductor Hermann Abendroth re-established the Staatskapelle Weimar, restoring it to its former grandeur and quality.

Since the 1980s, conductors Peter Gülke, Oleg Caetani, and Hans-Peter Frank as well as the current honorary conductor George Alexander Albrecht, who led the orchestra from 1996 to 2002, have left a lasting mark. Kirill Karabits had taken the reins of Thuringia's only A-level orchestra from 2016-2019.

The ensemble has made guest appearances in Japan, Israel, Spain, Italy, Great Britain, Austria, Switzerland, and the US as well as in the major concert halls throughout Germany and at renowned festivals. Numerous recordings document the orchestra's diverse repertoire.

Dominik Beykirch (Music Director)

Dominik Beykirch has been directing the Deutsches Nationaltheater and the Staatskapelle Weimar as Music Theatre Chief Conductor since the 2020/21 season, having been engaged as Kapellmeister at this theatre steeped in tradition since 2015. With Paul Dessau's opera *Lanzelot*, revived for the first time in more than forty years, he celebrated great success (including "Rediscovery of the Year") and was nominated "Conductor of the Year" by *Opernwelt*.

Beykirch completed his musical studies at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music Weimar in the conducting classes of Nicolás Pasquet, Gunter Kahlert and Martin Hoff. At the same time, he received further artistic inspiration from numerous masterclasses with Bernard Haitink, Colin Metters, Jukka-Pekka Saraste and Ton Koopman. He now passes on his knowledge as a lecturer for the German Music Council and as a lecturer at the Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy Academy of Music and Theatre in Leipzig.

As a guest conductor, this multiple prizewinner has already worked with numerous renowned orchestras such as the symphony orchestras of the HR, MDR, WDR and SWR, the Staatskapelle Dresden, the Dresden Philharmonic and the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra.

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