INSULA ORCHESTRA

bien dans son époque

2022 I 2023 SEASON

INSULA ORCHESTRA
PERIOD INSTRUMENTS
MUSICAL AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR LAURENCE EQUILBEY
ANTONIN BAUDRY STAGE DIRECTION



SCHUMANN

NIGHT OF KINGS

STAGED OR CONCERT VERSION
MAY 18 - 26 2023

insulaorchestra.fr

SCHUMANN, NIGHT OF KINGS
STAGED / CONCERT VERSION

Robert Schumann
Vom Pagen und der Königstochter (The Page and the King's daughter)
Des Sängers Fluch (The minstrel's curse)
Ludwig van Beethoven
Trauermarsch
Geistlicher Marsch
Robert Schumann
Nachtlied

1H45 without interval

Numbers: 6 soloists, 37 singers, 53 musicians

Concerts at La Seine Musicale: May 13, 15 and 16 2023

Diffusion: May 18 - 26 2023

Ric Furman, *the Page, the Young Man*
Rachel Frenkel, *the Reciter*
Daniel Schmutzhard, *the Harpist, the Triton*
Rafał Pawnuk, *the King*
Marie-Adeline Henry, *the Queen*
Adèle Clermont, *the Princess*
accentus
Insula orchestra
Laurence Equilbey, conductor
Antonin Baudry, stage direction
Anatole Levilain-Clément, video



ARTISTIC PROJECT

Schumann's last ballads were the work of two poets (Uhland and Geibel), both ardent advocates of freedom. The Middle Ages provided them with vehicles through which to express their Romanticism. The popular soul – the cement of national unity – was a strong ingredient. These poets were, likewise, driven by the causes of **Justice and the Republic**.

The Minstrel's Curse is taken from a poem by Ludwig Uhland, which Schumann fleshed out by mirroring the "real story" and the version told by the young singer. We encounter **Schumann's familiar obsessions in the form of symbolic murders** (that of the minstrel by the king), **impossible love** (between the queen and the young singer) and **anathema** (the final curse cast upon the king by the old harp player). The work is an uninterrupted flow, in which subtle transitions still allow strong, expressive contrasts. The king's violence, the simplicity of the Provençale song, a funereal tone, and a song of freedom in which **Schumann voices the concerns he shared with Beethoven**.

In The Page and the King's Daughter Schumann revisited favourite themes: impossible love (this time between the page and the king's daughter), paternal vengeance (the king discovers the truth; blind with rage he runs his sword through the page before throwing the body into the sea). The third section provides a chance for a detour into the world of aquatic nymphs that would become a stock-in-trade of Wagner's operas, and the merman, who uses the page's white bones to forge the magic harp that will **sow desolation as the work draws to its close**. Initially festive in mood, the atmosphere darkens gradually as the king's crime is revealed in the cold light of day, **as a tragic wedding** (a recurrent theme in Schumann's vocal works). "In the hall lies the pale bride, her heart has burst; the morning light gloomily illumines the windows, the merman's song has faded away".

These ballads are eminently theatrical, no less than acts from an opera. They are the dramatic link in the chain that leads us to Wagner and Mahler. Written in the same momentum and interconnected, they are truly breathless, **psycho-political thrillers**.

For these works, Laurence Equilbey conducts **the accentus and Insula orchestra ensembles**, with six top guest soloists, in association with film maker and theatrical producer Antonin Baudry, a virtuoso of imagery and high-tension climates.

From a text by Angèle Leroy

NOTE OF INTENTION - ANTONIN BAUDRY
WHAT ARE MUSICIANS FOR IN A DESTITUTE TIME?

Night of Kings brings together four works by Robert Schumann for orchestra, soloists and choir that **have never been performed in a theatrical production**. Four works composed from four texts of g**reat poetic and literary value**.

Two ballads inspired by the Middle Ages and elegies with strong Celtic overtones: *The Page and the King's Daughter* (text by Emanuel Geibel) and T*he Minstrel's Curse* (based on a poem by Ludwig Uhland), are magnificent illustrations of German lyrical Romanticism, and form a little known but essential link between Weber and Wagner. A counterpoint to these pieces, *Requiem for Mignon*, composed to a text by Goethe, the inception of which prefigured scenes in Faust, commemorates, through the murky character of Mignon, the death of both youth and music. The sumptuous *Nachtlied*, composed to a poem by Friedrich Hebbel, ends with a question about survival through death.

Against an unsettling backdrop of castles standing out against craggy landscapes and furious seas, vows of love are murmured, jealousies explode and murders are committed, to be redeemed by fantastic apparitions and implacable maledictions.

Twice, the lovers, whose only misdoing is to have loved each other, are sacrificed, once to violence and once to the authority of a King. Twice they are reincarnated in music. Hence the mourning, melancholy and hope. These recurring themes are undoubtedly underpinned by the obsessive extreme suffering experienced by Schumann and his wife Clara who an authoritarian father sought by every means to prize apart. Music was central to the impassioned love and life of Franz and Clara. It is the motive, the principle and the implicit subject of the four pieces that we bring together in this programme.

What can music do faced with the forces at play in the world? What can music achieve against Kings?

These were the questions that persuaded me to take up the gauntlet thrown down by Laurence Equilbey when she asked me to do a stage production of these works. Why? **Because, the issues here are not merely aesthetic, they are fundamentally political.** The political force of the music (that of a harp that does justice to a young page assassinated or of a singer turning the established order upside down) is at once limited and sovereign. Though it cannot overcome the King, nor, by its very essence, can it suffer his authority. It obeys another power. How can we represent or more crucially, how do we live this?

The text of these works is poetical. It tells how music, embodied by a series of fictional characters, triggers love and endures jealousy; prompts action and the backlash, and the maelstrom of murders, revolutions and maledictions; while having the last word in a future that remains suspended. For me, this narrative aspect of folk tale is essential – but it is located in the realm of dream and therefore imagery. The characters who face up to each other in this mythical past are mental evocations, ghosts, evanescent beings: I see imagery taken from a dream world, nourished by childhood, conjured up by music. I see images that are fragile, flickering, colours that melt suddenly into the transparency of a gossamer drape behind which the Singer and the King confront each other like characters in shadow theatre. **I see several areas on stage, several image systems that speak to each other.** Centre stage are the musicians and the conductor. The truly active forces: Schumann is there, with us, in front of us and through each musician, it is they who trigger the energy in every form: light, projected images, and what the soloists and the choir act out.

Schumann is there in front of us, creating, directing, trembling in front of the drama being played out. He shows us the strange force of music, but also reveals how absolutely fragile it is. This is what we mourn in *Requiem for Mignon*. It is music, defeated, whose sleep we must protect when night falls in Nachtlied. It is music that stands up to Kings and that conjures up images. It is life-giving yet constantly threatening to snap. When it does, the evil kings and violence take control; in other words, silence.

Why protect music again after each defeat? Can it really help us to live in a world reigned over by Kings? This is a question that is as intimate as it is political, a question that I hear in these late works by Schumann. It echoes Heidegger's question about Hölderlin and Rilke: *What are poets for in a destitute time?*

The question carries a high emotional charge, for Schuman and for us today. It is this emotion that I hope to share through this production.









THE WORD OF ANTONIN BAUDRY

What is your relationship with classical music?

Music is with me all the time and everywhere. I can't work without music. I can't play sports without music. I can't think without music. It is either in the air or in my head, but it is always there. I don't differentiate between classical and non-classical music, I don't compartmentalize. I just know what music I need at what moment to accompany me, to be happy, to aim right. In the four works of Night of Kings, there is such a variety of moods, of energy, of tone that I can always find the one I need - no need to look for it, it's the one that sticks in my mind: it goes from the deepest melancholy to the freest energy, from the tension that precedes a murder to the picaresque of Provence, from the contemplative to the political, from the sadness of mourning to the sweetness of childhood. This is what allows me to live for weeks and weeks with these works, without needing - for the moment! - to go and see elsewhere...

How was the Night of Kings project born?

Ha! That's pretty amazing. I was walking across the Brooklyn Bridge with my two best American friends. We hadn't seen each other for a long time because of the making of my first film, which was in theaters at the time, and they were asking me what I was going to do now - when we met I was a diplomat, when we met again I had left the diplomacy to make my film. I told them about my new film project, and then all of a sudden I told them that I was also going to do an opera show. I knew that it had no chance of happening, but it was a free desire expressed as a joke. They looked at each other a little puzzled, then realized it was a joke. On my way home after the walk on the bridge, I open my emails. Laurence Equilbey: «Dear Antonin Baudry, I like your work very much and I thought of proposing you a lyrical project to stage at La Seine Musicale on the Ile Seguin». My two friends never believed me when I told them that I had not seen this email before the Brooklyn Bridge. And yet it's true.

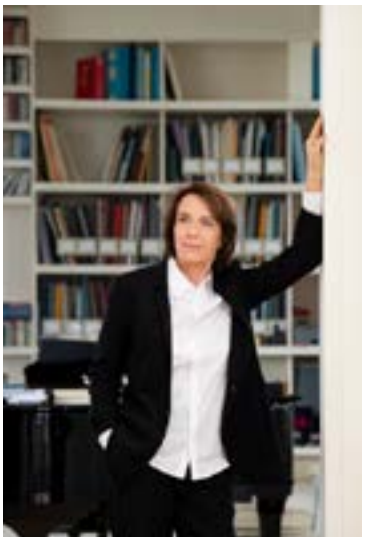
What is the main thread of your staging?

Night of Kings is above all a tale, «once upon a time....» A page in love with a princess under the jealous gaze of the king, thus a murder, etc. My staging aims to create this story universe. But instead of erasing the real universe that underlies it, the two intermingle: the orchestra is part of the universe of the story, the characters embodied by the soloists cross paths with images projected on a tulle, the universes overlap as in a dream. The unity of all this is the music. It is at the same time the breath of the characters, the source of the energy, and the heart of the drama: when two beings confront each other, and one is a musician and the other a king, what happens? How does it end?



LAURENCE EQUILBEY

Conductor, musical director of Insula orchestra and accentus, formations that she herself founded, Laurence Equilbey is acknowledged for her demanding approach and artistic open-mindedness. As a symphonic conductor she has worked with orchestras including the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Hessischer Rundfunk, the Philharmonic orchestras of Lyon, Bucharest, Liège, Leipzig, and Brussels, Café Zimmermann, Akademie für alte Musik Berlin, Concerto Köln, Camerata Salzburg, and Mozarteumorchester Salzburg.



In 2012, with the support of the local authorities (Département des Hauts-de-Seine), she founded Insula orchestra, an ensemble interpreting the classical and pre-Romantic repertory on period instruments. With the accentus choir, Laurence Equilbey continues to explore the great vocal music repertory.

Her many recordings with accentus have received wide critical acclaim. With Insula orchestra, she recorded Mozart's Requiem (naïve, 2014), followed by Gluck's Orfeo ed Euridice (Deutsche Grammophon, 2015). Her recordings of Mozart (Vesperae solennes de confessore / Coronation Mass) and Schubert's orchestrated Lieder, with Insula orchestra and accentus, were released in 2017. In 2018, she recorded two albums devoted to Beethoven with Insula orchestra for Warner Classics - Erato: firstly with Nicholas Angelich, then with accentus, Alexandra Conunova, Natalie Clein and David Kadouch.

ANTONIN BAUDRY



Antonin Baudry is an author and film director. A graduate of Ecole Polytechnique, he studied literature and philosophy at Ecole normale supérieure in 1998.

An advisor to the French Minister of the Interior, Dominique de Villepin, and then cultural affairs advisor to the French Prime Minister, he held positions as cultural advisor at the French Embassy in Madrid in 2006 then in New York in 2010.

Drawing on his personal experience of political circles, he published the first volume of his comic strip album *Quai d'Orsay : Chroniques diplomatiques* in 2010, illustrated by Christophe Blain, for which he won the Grand Prix RTL, the Micheluzzi Prize and the Fauve d'or (Wildcat award for best album) at the Angoulême International Comics Festival in 2013).

In 2017, he made the film *Le Chant du loup* (The Wolf's Call), a nail-biting thriller set on-board a nuclear submarine, starring Omar Sy, Reda Kateb, Mathieu Kassovitz and François Civil. This spectacularly dramatic debut movie drew critical acclaim and was a box-office success.

RIC FURMAN



American tenor Ric Furman, praised by the Frankfurter Allgemeine for his "luminous vocal power" and by Seen and Heard International for a «mellifluous tone," is currently one of opera's most exciting and critically-acclaimed young heldentenors.

Since his successful European debut, Furman has sung Florestan in Fidelio (Theatre Hagen, Weimar), Pinkerton in Puccini's Madama Butterfly (Hessiches Staatstheater, Theatre Hagen, Opernhaus Wuppertal), Erik in Der Fliegende Holländer (Hessisches Staatstheater, Budapest Wagner Days), Bürgermeister in Friedenstag (Hungarian National Philharmonic), Apollo in Daphne (Hungarian National Philharmonic), Dimitri in Boris Godunov (Hessisches Staatstheater), Alvaro in La Forza del Destino (Hessisches Staatstheater), Der Kaiser in Die Frau Ohne Schatten(Hessisches Staatstheater), Rodolfo in La Boheme (Hessisches Staatstheater) Siegmund in Die Walküre (Hessisches Staatstheater, Staatstheater Magdeburg), Mario Cavaradossi in Tosca (Hessisches Staatstheater), Prinz in Rusalka (Staatstheater Magdeburg), and Pollione in Norma (Hessisches Staatstheater), Anatol in Vanessa (Staatstheater Magdeburg), and Boris in Katja Kabanova (Scottish Opera).

Although Furman is singing some of the most demanding dramatic and heldentenor roles in the opera canon, he also enjoys performing new, contemporary works. In addition to Barber's Vanessa, Furman has had success in Heggie's Dead Man Walking, Golijov's Ainadamar, Susa's The Dangerous Liaisons, Stravinsky's The Rake's Progress and two world premieres: Eve's Odds by Bruce Trinkley and A Stranger's Tale by Curtis Tucker.

Furman's early career included playing romantic tenor leads across the U.S. for top companies in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Portland, Brooklyn, Springfield, Mo., Dayton, Indianapolis, Omaha, and in New York's prestigious Carnegie Hall. He is a proud alumnus of The University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and Western Illinois University.

RAFAŁ PAWNUK



Polish bass Rafał Pawnuk studied at the Academy of Music in Bydgoszcz with Leszek Skrla and at the Academy of Music in Krakow with Marek Rzepka. Awards include first prize at the 13th International Vocal Competition Iuventus Canti in Slovakia.

Rafał Pawnuk is a former member of the Opera Studio of the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich, where his roles included Thierry/Dialogues des Carmélites, Brabantischer Edler/Lohengrin and Dr. Wilhelm Reischmann/Elegy for Young Lovers.

Most recent engagements include debuts at the Salzburger Festspiele as Mars in Barrie Kosky's new production of Offenbach's Orphee aux enfers and at Opera de Lille as Nourabad in a new production of Bizet's Les Pêcheurs de perles, Vodnik/Rusalka at Opéra de Limoges, Colline/ La bohème and Gremin/Eugene Onegin with Nederlandse Reisopera and staged concert works by Schumann with Choeur Accentus and Laurence Equilbey at the Philharmonie Paris.

Rafał Pawnuk is a regular guest at Castle Opera Szczecin in roles such Escamillo/Carmen, Guglielmo/Cosi fan tutte, Betto/Gianni Schicchi and Priest in Philipp Glass' The Trial. At National Theatre Brno he has appeared as Vodnik/ Rusalka, Il Re/Aida, Marchese d'Obigny/La Traviata and Banco/Macbeth.

Other projects include Cesare Angelotti in Tosca, alongside Bryn Terfel, with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and at Welsh National Opera, Dalremont in Donizetti's I pazzi per progetto at the Zurich Festival, Mozart's Coronation Mass with the NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover, conducted by Christopher Hogwood, at Pisa's Anima Mundi Festival, Mozart's Requiem in Bygoszcz, Handel's Messiah under Paul Esswood and Penderecki's Oratorio Kosmogonia with the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Alexander Liebreich.

Rafał Pawnuk has attended master classes with Brigitte Fassbaender, Edith Wiens, Prof. Rudolf Piernay, Margreet Honig, Rosemarie Landry, Prof. Eva Blahova and worked with conductors such as Vasily Petrenko, Marco Armiliato, Massimo Zanetti, Lothar Koenigs, Paolo Carignani and Kent Nagano.

ACCENTUS

accentus is a reference in the world of vocal music. The chamber choir, founded by Laurence Equilbey over twenty six years ago, is deeply committed to the a cappella repertory, original contemporary music, oratorio and opera. accentus performs in leading French and international concert venues and festivals, including the La Seine Musicale, Salzburg Mozart Week, the London Barbican, the Philharmonie Essen, the Grand Théâtre de Provence in Aix-en-Provence, the Royal Opera and Royal Chapel in Versailles, Vienna's Theater an der Wien, the Ludwigsburger Schlossfestspiele, the Elbphilharmonie of Hamburg, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and the Lincoln Center in New York.

accentus enjoys a close partnership with the Philharmonie de Paris and La Seine Musicale and is returning as resident choir to the Opéra de Rouen Normandie, where it will be performing a concert and operatic programme. Christophe Grapperon has been associate main conductor of the ensemble since 2013.
In 2017, accentus inaugurated a Paris-based resources centre with physical media and digital content, designed to promote choral art and share the working documents and expertise gathered since the choir's foundation. In 2018, accentus becomes the first Vocal Art National Center (Paris Île-de-France, Normandie), and reinforces its artistic and pedagogic missions.



INSULA ORCHESTRA : INSTRUMENTS OF THEN SPIRIT OF TODAY



Insula orchestra's artistic project is built around a repertory ranging mainly from Classicism to Romanticism, including symphonic — also with choir and soloists — and lyrical works. Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Weber form the core of the repertory. The orchestra plays on period instruments, developing a sound quality that fits all the leading French and international concert halls.

Insula orchestra was founded in 2012 by Laurence Equilbey with the support of the Département des Hauts-de-Seine, and, in 2017, inaugurated the brand new concert venue, La Seine Musicale, designed by architects Shigeru Ban and Jean de Gastines. The orchestra is responsible for part of the programming for the 1,150-seater auditorium, in which it enjoys a residency on the île Seguin island in the Seine, just downstream from Paris. Insula orchestra also performs in France and internationally at leading venues and in prestigious festivals: Philharmonie de Paris, Ludwigsburg Schlossfestspiele, Basel Stadtcasino, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Essen Philharmonie, London's Barbican Centre, and at the official inauguration of the Abu Dhabi Louvre in 2017.

The orchestra develops a comprehensive and innovative programme of cultural and educational initiatives across the whole of the Hauts-de-Seine department. The orchestra revisits the formats and conventions of classical music to win over new audiences, creating a constant dialogue between symphonic music, and the spatial and stage dimensions.

PRESS REVIEW

About Night ok Kings (Insula orchestra / Laurence Equilbey / Antonin Baudry), may 2021 at La Seine Musicale:

«Antonin Baudry (author of the comic strip Quai d'Orsay) signs his first production and creates a legendary universe a legendary universe mixing reality and dreamlike. The singing characters evolve in several dimensions, on the front of the stage or behind a tulle on which are projected video images. These images are perfectly adapted to the enchantment of the story and are viewed like illustrations in a children's book (silhouettes, stylized drawings, shadow puppets). Omnipresent, the video is wonderfully integrated into the show by following the dramaturgy and by marrying the vibrating and shimmering movements of the music.»

«Instigator of the project, Laurence Equlbiey expresses her joy to welcome back the public to La Seine Musicale, home of her Insula Orchestra. Under her baton, the ensemble sounds precise and clear. She favors incisiveness (appropriate for the straddles) and a beautiful palette of nuances.»

Frédérique Epin, *Olyrix,* may 2021

« Laurence Equilbey conducts, with sensitivity and freshness, these works that often remind us of Weber and Wagner's Lohengrin. At the head of her Insula Orchestra, she makes the evening a sort of great dream, the pieces following one another without interruption. The accentus choir is for a lot in the smoothness and the delicacy of the musical line, with a whole palette of nuances in the various interventions. It remains to salute the soloists, several of whom are former members of the Atelier Lyrique of the Opéra National de Paris. From Ric Furman to Anna Lucia Richter, through Marie-Adeline Henry, Adèle Clermont, Alexandre Duhamel and Rafal Pawnuk, all are fully committed to the defense of this repertoire, which we are happy to discover.»

Patrick Scemama, *Opéra Magazine,* july-august 2021

VIDEO RECORD

La Nuit des Rois, recording of the concert at the Auditorium of La Seine Musicale, May 2021

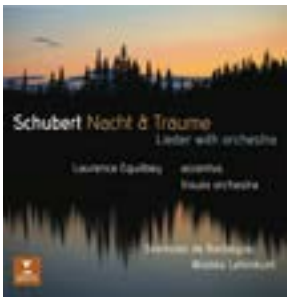
DISCOGRAPHY



NAXOS - DVD
HAYDN, DIE SCHÖPFUNG
2018

« An Insula orchestra on soft and fruity old instruments.» *Diapason*

Mari Eriksmoen, Martin Mitterutzner, Daniel Schmutzhard, Laurence Equilbey, accentus, Insula orchestra, La Fura dels Baus



WARNER CLASSICS – ERATO
SCHUBERT NACHT & TRÄUME
2017

« The Schubert's Lieder take a fabulous tour on the conducting of Laurence Equilbey. » *Télérama*

Stanislas de Barbeyrac, Wiebke Lehmkuhl, Laurence Equilbey, accentus, Insula orchestra



WARNER CLASSICS – ERATO
BEETHOVEN, PIANO CONCERTOS 4 & 5 « EMPEROR »
2018

« Laurence Equilbey's approach bings warm brightness to round timbres of Nicholas Angelich. » *Pianiste*

Nicholas Angelich, Laurence Equilbey, Insula orchestra

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