



Debussy

Pelléas et Mélisande, Met Opera, 1962



Performances of Claude Debussy's only opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Metropolitan Opera have been almost as elusive as the frail, mysterious Mélisande herself. Since its first Met performance on 21 March 1925, the opera has only been performed 114 times to date. That's a total of 93 years. Putting that into context using the ABCs of the opera world, *Aida*, *La Bohème* and *Carmen*, each reached their 114th performances 21, 12 and 15 years after their first performances at the Met, respectively.

Admittedly, *Pelléas et Mélisande* doesn't have the grand choruses and spectacle of *Aida*, the blossoming love of two young Bohemians on Christmas Eve in the Latin Quarter of Paris of *La Bohème* or the endless tunes of *Carmen* that audiences flock to see and hear year after year. But what it does have, an ethereal, almost time-evasive quality, is what makes the work so individual and special.

Interestingly, the work was immensely popular in New York from its first performance on 19 February 1908, barely six years after its world premiere at the Opéra-Comique on 30 April 1902. It was presented by the only company to give the Metropolitan Opera its only real competition during this time, the Manhattan Opera Company, run by Oscar Hammerstein I. Where Met General Manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza was able to offer the public truly grand opera with some of the greatest singers of the time, the Manhattan Opera Company drew its audiences with its own pool of great singers, but more significantly, somewhat more adventurous repertory, particularly with the French works that the Met was not programming.

No doubt, one of the reasons for the success of these early New York performances of *Pelléas et Mélisande* was the presence of the *Mélisande* of the world premiere, Mary Garden. Hammerstein was also able to secure the services of the first *Pelléas*, Jean Périer, Golaud, Hector Dufranne and Geneviève, Jeanne Gerville-Réache. Cleofonte Campanini conducted.

When the work finally arrived at the Met in 1925, it had its own star-studded cast, including Lucrezia Bori (wearing costumes specifically designed for her by the great Russian artist, Erté), Edward Johnson (who studied the role with the roles originator, Jean Périer and who would eventually become General Manager of the Met in 1935), Clarence Whitehill, Léon Rothier and Kathleen Howard. Louis Hasselmans conducted. The opera was performed 32 times in 11 consecutive seasons and has been in and out of the repertory sporadically ever since.

The first broadcast of the opera took place on 21 January 1933 but presented only Acts Two and Three. It featured the Met's first *Mélisande*, *Pelléas*, Arkel and conductor (Bori, Johnson, Rothier and Hasselmans), as well as Ezio Pinza as Golaud, a recording sadly lost to us.

The timing of this release could not be more appropriate as we acknowledge the centenary of Debussy's death. The 29 December 1962 broadcast presented here was only the sixth broadcast of the opera and features an equally illustrious cast including Anna Moffo, Nicolai Gedda, George London, Jerome Hines, Blanche Thebom and Teresa Stratas, who would herself become one of the great *Mélisande*'s of our generation. In the pit was the eminent 79-year old Swiss maestro, Ernest Ansermet, in his only Met broadcast. This broadcast also provides us with the only opportunity to hear Moffo and Gedda as the protagonists and Thebom as Geneviève. The next time we hear Stratas in the opera, it will be as *Mélisande*. Another interesting aspect of this broadcast is that Ansermet opens a small cut in Act Four thereby allowing us to hear for the first time on a broadcast of the opera a short scene for Yniold. After this broadcast, it would be a little over nine years before the radio audience would hear the opera again.

As a special bonus track on this recording, we hear Ansermet speaking to the radio audience prior to the start of the performance about the musical aspects of the opera.

Notes by Michael Scarola

A longer version of these notes can be found online.



pelléas et mélisande debussy

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- [1] **Act 1 - Scene 1** Je ne pourrai plus sortir de cette forêt (3:12)
- [2] Pourquoi pleures-tu? (6:13)
- [3] Je suis perdu aussi (3:08)
- [4] **Scene 2** Voici ce qu'il écrit à son frère Pelléas (2:44)
- [5] Qu'en dites-vous? (5:47)
- [6] Interlude (1:15)
- [7] **Scene 3** Il fait sombre dans les jardins (2:44)
- [8] Hoé! Hisse Hoé! (3:56)
- [9] **Act 2 - Scene 1** Vous ne savez pas où je vous ai menée? (3:38)
- [10] C'est au bord d'une fontaine (2:53)
- [11] Interlude (3:07)
- [12] **Scene 2** Ah! Ah! Tout va bien (8:23)
- [13] Voyons, donne-moi ta main (3:14)
- [14] Interlude (2:14)
- [15] **Scene 3** Oui, c'est ici, nous y sommes (4:36)
- [16] **Act 3 - Scene 1** Mes longs cheveux descendent jusqu'au seuil de la tour (6:17)
- [17] Je les tiens dans les mains (4:42)
- [18] Que faites-vous ici? (3:22)
- [19] **Scene 2** Prenez garde; par ici, par ici (3:20)
- [20] **Scene 3** Interlude - Ah! Je respire enfin! (4:42)

- [1] **Act 3 - Scene 3** Interlude (1:15)
- [2] **Scene 4** Viens, nous allons nous asseoir ici, Yniold (6:15)
- [3] Qu'ils s'embrassent, petit pere? (4:52)
- [4] **Act 4 - Scene 1** Ou vas-tu? (2:52)
- [5] **Scene 2** Maintenant que le pere de Pelleas est sauve (5:22)
- [6] Pelleas part ce soir (3:36)
- [7] Ne mettez pas ainsi votre main a la gorge (3:40)
- [8] Interlude (3:26)
- [9] **Scene 3** Oh! Cette pierre est lourde (3:51)
- [10] **Scene 4** C'est le dernier soir (3:37)
- [11] Nous sommes venus ici il y a bien longtemps (1:48)
- [12] On dirait que ta voix a passe sur la mer au printemps (3:47)
- [13] Quel est ce bruit? (4:14)
- [14] **Act 5 - Scene 1** Ce n'est pas de cette petite blessure (2:56)
- [15] Attention; je crois qu'elle s'eveille (5:10)
- [16] Melisande, as-tu pitie de moi comme j'ai pitie de toi? (2:47)
- [17] Non, non, nous n'avons pas ete coupables (2:07)
- [18] Qu'avez-vous fait? (2:36)
- [19] Qu'y a-t-il? (2:33)
- [20] Attention, attention. Il faut parler a voix basse (5:58)
- [21] Ansermet - Introduction to the opera (4:55)

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph of Anna Moffo and George London as Mélisande and Golaud

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