

## **Au Monde by Philippe Boesmans**

OPÉRA by Philippe Boesmans with a libretto by Joel Pommerat adapted from his homonymous play.

Premiered at the Théâtre Royal de La Monnaie, Brussels on 30 March 2014.



### **SYNOPSIS**

#### **Scene 1**

Ori, the youngest son of a large family, is to come back after five years of absence, giving up his career in the army. He is awaited by his old father, a great industrialist, his elder brother, his elder sister's husband and his second sister, a TV star.

#### **Scene 2**

Ori's three sisters meet again. Ori has decided to return because they all celebrate the youngest daughter's birthday. Being an adopted child, she replaced a girl who disappeared and she questions her own identity and status within the family.

#### **Scene 3**

The father does not understand why Ori left the army.

#### **Scene 4**

While the birthday celebration is about to begin, the youngest daughter turns on the TV, which annoys the second daughter. Asked to talk about his plans, Ori presents a book he wrote. Nobody dares to open it. A foreign woman appears, engaged by the eldest daughter's husband to attend her in her pregnancy.

#### **Scene 5**

The foreign woman lip-synchs an excerpt of My Way sung by a man - this might be a dream by the second daughter.

#### **Scene 6**

The elder daughters comfort the younger who wants her difference to be accepted.

#### **Scene 7**

The second daughter finds her elder sister together with Ori. She talks of her young sister's nightmares. Alone with Ori, the eldest daughter speaks of their childhood. They kiss each other.

#### **Scene 8**

The youngest daughter declares to her brother-in-law that she likes old age. He retorts that she should stop lying and that only he is capable of telling the truth. The second daughter demands that the TV be turned off.

#### **Scene 9**

The foreign woman embraces the youngest daughter tenderly - this might be a dream by the second daughter.

#### **Scene 10**

Cries have been heard by the second daughter. The eldest son is amazed to find his brother-in-law hidden in the dark. As his father appears, Ori goes out into the night.

**Scene 11**

While the father is asleep, the second daughter speaks with her sisters about three women murdered during the night. She is reassured at the idea that their father protects them. Distracted, Ori is back from his night out. The youngest daughter hints at his eye problems. The second daughter has read Ori's book but does not reveal its content. The foreign woman sings My Way - this might be a dream by the second daughter.

**Scene 12**

The sisters are worried by Ori's health. The father offers him to run his business. Ori hesitates and bumps against a wall on leaving. The three sisters are alone. The youngest speaks again of her uneasiness while the second appeals to the eldest because no one talks of her pregnancy.

**Scene****13**

The second daughter confesses to her elder sister that the foreign woman appears in her dreams. After a week of reflection, Ori still cannot respond to his father's offer. The second daughter claims that she saw blood on his face.

**Scene 14**

In a tense atmosphere, Ori confirms his indecision to the family.

**Scene 15**

The youngest daughter declares her fondness of her father and her taste for old age.

**Scene 16**

Ori tells the foreign woman that he knows who she is and is not afraid of her. He kills her - this might be a dream by the second daughter.

**Scene 17**

The foreign woman, naked, sings My Way - this might be a dream by the second daughter.

**Scene 18**

The two eldest daughters are anxious at screams from their younger sister. The father, who at first cannot be found, leaves the bedroom. The second daughter talks of rumors about pictures of Ori covered in blood. The foreign woman speaks to the eldest daughter's husband in her language.

**Scene 19**

The eldest daughter claims she does not know who her child's father is. The father announces with difficulty that Ori accepts to run the family business. The second daughter is glad to have been entrusted with a new program with animals.

**Scene 20**

The eldest daughter assures Ori, wearing black glasses, that she understands him. The family watches the new program but the father no longer recognizes his star daughter. While her sisters repeatedly tell her how beautiful and funny she is, she collapses.

## TO READ BEFORE THE SHOW

Although opera has readily adapted literary works – whether epic, tragic or romantic – to its singular dramaturgy, although the musical setting of genuine plays (*Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Salomé*) and the rallying of dramatic authors to the exercise of operatic libretti (Maeterlinck with Dukas, Hofmannsthal with Strauss, more recently Martin Crimp with George Benjamin) gave new life to musical creation, it was however necessary to convince a stage director writing his own productions and staging his own texts to collaborate with an experienced opera composer so as to accompany his universe into this change of scale... and to persuade a composer to address a contemporary subject and language with the author.

Joël Pommerat and Philippe Boesmans decided to try the experiment on the invitation of the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, where Boesmans is composer in residence.

It was a challenge for both with the *Au monde* project.

Philippe Boesmans has long been associated with drama. After having set plays by Schnitzler, Shakespeare, Strindberg and Gombrowicz to music with the collaboration of Luc Bondy, he succumbed to the deep consistency and the disturbing turn of Joël Pommerat's drama.

*Au monde* deals with a family and the individuals forming it, gathered around the patriarch in his home. Which of his children will be entrusted with the reins of his industrial empire? With eight characters behind closed doors, Joël Pommerat attempts to emphasize the inextricable ambivalence of family ties, their irresistible effect upon the construction of oneself, the inevitable combination of love and violence that shapes biographies.

As with Anton Chekhov, the family reunion at the time of farewell to a place or a person marks the acceleration of a revelatory process. As

with Maurice Maeterlinck, a form of truth can only emerge through those who, among the protagonists, say or see the least – and who are thereby closest to a mystery that does not unfold.

Joël Pommerat accepted to compress his dialogue, reconsider the ever important presence of music in his play and entrust the characters of *Au monde* – ten years after the play's premiere – to Philippe Boesmans, a true musical portraitist. In so doing, he also handed them down to new performers.

In all his plays, Joël Pommerat's drama is the result of a long and experiences shared with his actors. Thus, the singers of *Au monde* sing the roles shaped by their predecessors in a language reinvented by Philippe Boesmans. They represent a new generation of performers, just like a family in which the parts and dramas reoccur. The only remaining actor from the original cast, Ruth Olaizola, keeps her role of the foreign woman, written in a language inspired from Basque and performed as a departure from the lyric singing of the other performers.

Born from this double challenge, *Au monde* was premiered at La Monnaie in Brussels on 30 March 2014 as a co-production with the Opéra Comique.

This production is revived at the Salle Favart in 2015 as the Parisian premiere, with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France conducted by Patrick Davin. Except for Philippe Sly, who revives the part of Ori created by Stéphane Degout, the cast is that of the Brussels premiere: Yann Beuron, Charlotte Hellekant, Frode Olsen, Patricia Petibon, Werner Van Mechelen and Fflur Wyn.

The tableaux, lighting and scenery of *Au monde*, designed by Joël Pommerat, are those of the original play. The score transfigures its

atmosphere. Like Debussy with Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Philippe Boesmans gives a sonic substance to silence, dark and light, and brings resonance to the hidden meanings and secrets, without defining or revealing anything but by going deeply into the questioning and by opening up the doors of suggestion.

If the role of music was to give drama a fifth dimension, *Au monde* would demonstrate it at the Opéra Comique 113 years after the premiere of *Pelléas et Mélisande* there. Unlike the dissension between Maeterlinck and Debussy until the latter's death, the complicity between Joël Pommerat and Philippe Boesmans may usher in further artistic adventures of which *Au monde* would then be the heralding title.