

Théâtre des
**BOUFFES
DU NORD**



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KATIA KABANOVA

Chamber version of **Leoš Janáček's opera**

stage direction **André Engel**

musical direction **Irène Kudela**

Production : C.I.C.T. / Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord

Coproduction : Le Vengeur Masqué, Fondation Royaumont,
Le Printemps des Comédiens, Théâtre National de Marseille - La Criée
KPMC are the patron of Unité scénique de la Fondation Royaumont.

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stage direction **André Engel**

musical direction **Irène Kudela**

artistic collaboration **Ruth Orthmann**

dramatist **Dominique Müller**

stage design **Nicky Rieti**

costumes **Chantal De la Coste-Messelière**

lighting **André Diot**

with:

voice **Jérôme Billy** (Koudriach), **José Canales** (Tichon), **Mathilde Cardon** (Clasa),
Elena Gabouri (Kabanicha), **Paul Caugler** (Boris), **Douglas Henderson** (Kuligin),
Michel Hermon (Dikoj), **Kelly Hodson** (Katia) et **Céline Laly** (Varvara)

piano (alternating) **Nicolas Chesneau** and **Martin Surot**

First presented at Bouffes du Nord Theatre from January 17 to February 4, 2012

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A BRIEF SUMMARY OF *KATIA KABANOVA*

As much in love with life as she is incapable of breaking the social ties that hold her prisoner, Katia Kabanova is a caged bird who dreams of spreading her wings to sample the pleasures of freedom. After an arranged marriage with a spineless husband, the attractive Kàtia must suffer the lack of love of a mother in law who runs the house with an iron hand. Having succumbed to the charms of a suitor during her husband's absence, she chooses suicide rather than to suffer the disgrace of an adulteress who must flee from home to build a new life for herself. We still remember Janáček's « The Clever Little Fox » directed by André Engel. A workshop with young opera singers at the Royaumont Foundation unites them again in « Kàtia Kabanovà », one of Janáček's most popular operas. More than just putting on a show, the aim of this production under musical direction of Irène Kudela, with piano as the only accompaniment, is to give us the sense of what an adventure it is for these young voices to take on a complete role for the first time. The freshness of the discovery of the others and of oneself at dawn of a life full of promises.



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"A WORK ON THE DIVIDING LINE BETWEEN OPERA AND THEATRE"

After his ideal production of *The Clever Little Fox* created at the Paris Opera, André Engel comes back to Leoš Janáček with *Katia Kabanova*, story of an unhappily married young woman who chooses suicide over leaving her husband to live a free life of her own. Engel's desire to work on this opera can be traced back to a master class that he gave for young singers in 2010 at the Royaumont Abbey where he collaborated with Irène Kudela who provided musical direction and who, for this particular occasion, adapted the score for one piano. «After a while, I took a liking to these annual Summer

visits to the beautiful setting of the Royaumont Abbey to work with a group of young singers» explains André Engel. «I feel their motivation and the demand because their academic training does not give them much opportunity to perform on stage. But it's also a good trade off. For me it is an opportunity to work on projects that I intend to stage in the near future, or to look closer at operas that tempt me and a possibility to prepare for a new production. So, apart from the pedagogical aspect, it is a method that is very valuable to the singers while it also helps me venture into new grounds.»

For André Engel, these rendezvous at Royaumont are a way of re-thinking the opera in a different manner, an opportunity to choose to confront an opera with a landscape and living nature or to give it a framework by incorporating it in the architecture of the place. «We settle down under the trees, in the park or the gardens next to ruins or facing a building. There is a real pleasure in taking the work out of the in camera readings in rehearsal halls. A new freedom that, at first, matches the certainty that what we shall experience in Royaumont will not be anything like what we can do on a stage.» And sometimes, a miracle happens, as it was the case with the work on Leos Janacek's *Katia Kabanova* where what was obtained in the workshop compelled the director to continue...«It deserved to be seen. At the end of our session that year we arrived at a result that made me say to myself that we were nearing a real show.»

Impressed by the quality of his performers and by the intensity of their commitment to the work, André Engel wished to continue the adventure and soon understood that it could find a place in the programming of Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord with whom he was already in touch. After the Royaumont experience, André Engel had staged «*Katia Kabanova*» at the Vienna Staatsoper in June 2011. However, Bouffes du Nord did not wish to make a «miniature» version of the Viennese show, but offered to create a new production.

«I wanted the work to be performed in a theatre where the audience would accept the presupposition that *Katia Kabanova* did not have to be an opera stricto sensu. A space open to a work on the dividing line between opera and theatre. For Bouffes du Nord that's not very original...But I hoped that in approaching it that way, I could modestly follow in Peter Brook's footsteps. Thinking of a work as an opera means accepting the constraint that it must be seen from afar... To imagine it in the framework of Bouffes du Nord allows one to consider it in a much closer relation to the audience. The same way that reducing the score to one piano only allows the performers to sing without having to compete with an orchestra, so that the theatricality of the work can also fully appear in a space that offers such intimate relationship with the audience.»

«We wished to share what we obtained in Royaumont.» The youth of his singers inspired André Engel to give evidence of a freshness and a spontaneity that, at equal talent, can easily wane as the career advances. So much potential to put at the service of a theatrical dimension that owes much to the veracity of the performers' play. «With Irène Kudela, who is of Czech origin, we did a lot of in-depth work on the text. I started off by asking the singers to say the text the same way that actors work. The aim was to obtain a real understanding of each word of the libretto as if we were dealing with a bilingual cast. There was a lot of acting before the singing began. That way one gets closer to the heart of theatre by testing the credibility of a feeling, of a grieving or a torment, that can then be transposed into singing, a vocal dimension typical for opera that, as a principle, is never realistic. Functioning as a sub-text, once found, this truthfulness is never completely lost and it continually nourishes the singer's performance.»

We still had to transpose to the interior what was discovered in Royaumont, to find a relationship with an enclosed space using it as a natural set. The architecture is very present in Bouffes du Nord theatre, and that gives an incomparable quality to the space. «With Nicky Rieti who worked on set and stage design, we started off with the idea of a heap of ruins. We are dealing with a collapse. I wanted to propose an extremely simple plot to portray a humanity that has almost nothing to cling to except desires and cravings. Costumes also tend towards abstraction with clean lines that allow us to stylize a group of humans each of whom is recognizable by their feelings only. As for

Katia, her own sense of moral prevents her from assuming her actions and confines her ever more in her feeling of guilt. We wanted to create conditions of this confinement in which the radiant Katia wastes away so magnificently»

This show is fruit of a collaboration with André Engel and Ruth Orthmann during a workshop in the Royaumont Abbey in 2010. I wanted to invite young singers to independence and a feeling of responsibility for their musical interpretation. Thus, I do not direct this production. The two pianists alternate in performing this piece written for orchestra with colours and the rhythmic base typical for Janáček. This richness of performance obtained at the cost of unremitting research, is a support and a permanent guide for the singers. Freed from the constraint of always having to keep an eye on the conductor, they can feed on the attentive listening to their different partners in order to constantly renew the dialogue. This way of assuming one's responsibility gives each performer a possibility of a much more dynamic quality of interpretation, and the creation of a private world of feelings and relationships justifies the term "Chamber Opera". The text, sung in Czech, has also been subject to in-depth work under my supervision in order that, thanks to the clarity of vocal intentions, the audience may understand, if not the words, at least the dramatic situations.

Irene Kudela

PRIZE

This performance of *Katia Kabanova* has been awarded the **Grand Prix (best opera of the year) by the Critics' Guild (Music category)** for the 2011/2012 season.

PRESS

«The show is remarkable. Directed by a master's hand, the extremely convincing singers slip superbly into their characters. Their voices are firm, resonant, their style as good as the work.»

Bruno Serrou, *La Croix*, 28-29 January 2012

« (...) the very moving *Katia Kabanova*, whose sobriety acts as an additional violence...»

Marie-Aude Roux, *Le Monde*, 20 January 2012

«Conceived and matured at Royaumont, this accomplished and intelligent show will be touring the next season. Do not miss it.»

Philippe Venturini, *Les Echos*, 20-21 January 2012

«André Engel adapts *Katia Kabanova* at Bouffes du Nord. (...) Janáček's piece gains in intensity.»

Judith Chaine, *Télérama*, 11-17 January 2012

«André Engel's staging of Janáček's *Katia Kabanova*, in the Bouffes du Nord in Paris, is a success. (...) We are offered a new reading of a classical work as a tragedy close to us, full of emotion.»

Maurice Ulrich, *L'Humanité*, 20-22 January 2012

«(...) you absolutely must see this magnificent and tragic *Katia Kabanova*»

Anne Dastaklan, *Marianne*, 26 January 2012



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TOURS

Tours 2013:

30 April	TAP/Poitiers
14-15 May	L'Espace/Besançon
29-30 May	Operadagen/Rotterdam
October	La Criée/Marseille
November	La Comédie de Clermont/Clermont-Ferrand



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BIOGRAPHIES

André Engel, *director*

Born in France, André Engel has studied and then taught philosophy until 1969. He begins his career as theatre director in 1972, in Théâtre de l'Espérance, together with Jean-Pierre Vincent before moving to Théâtre National de Strasbourg. From 1982 on, he works as an independent theatre director. His repertoire is not limited to theatrical texts. He crossbreeds classical and contemporary texts and ventures onto unexplored paths. He moves theatre out of theatre grounds into unusual places: a hangar, a stud farm, a hotel, a mine – for example *Dell'inferno*, a piece played in a disused factory in Plaine Saint-Denis in collaboration with Théâtre Gérard Philipe in 1982. In 1988 he creates the Bilateral Center for Theatrical and Cinematographic Creation (Centre Bilatéral de Création Théâtrale et Cinématographique) financed by the Ministry of Culture and Communication, that allows him to coproduce most of his shows. Among others, he directs *Lulu au Bataclan*, after Wedekind (Bataclan, Théâtre des Amandiers, 1983), Molière's *Le Misanthrope* (Maison de la Culture de Bobigny) *La nuit des chasseurs* (*Hunters' Night*), after Büchner's *Woyzeck* (Théâtre National de la Colline, 1988). In 1997 he takes the direction of Centre Dramatique National de Savoie where, amongst other plays, he directs *The Force of Habit* by Thomas Bernhard. The adventure of Centre Dramatique National de Savoie ends for Engel on June 30 2004 after which he starts his own theatre company «Le Vengeur Masqué» (The Masked Avenger). Georges Lavaudant invites him to join him at l'Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe in the quality of an associated artist. There Engel creates a *King Lear* with Michel Piccoli in January 2006. His collaboration with l'Odéon ends with the nomination of a new director. In parallel to theatre work, André Engel pursues his career of opera director that started in 1988 with Strauss' *Salomé* at the Welsh National Opera in Cardiff. There he successively directs *Der Freischütz* and *Carmen*. For the very first season of Opéra National de Paris-Bastille, he creates *Lady Macbeth of Zmentsk* by Chostakovitch. More recently he directed a *Don Giovanni* (Opéra de Lausanne, 1996, restaged for Théâtre des Champs Elysées in 2006), *The Rake's Progress* (Opéra de Lausanne, 1999; Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, 2001), *The Clever Little Fox* by Janáček (Opéra de Lyon, 2000; Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, 2002), *K*, after Kafka's *Trial*, adapted by Philippe Manoury (Opéra National de Paris; revived in April-May 2003). In 2005 he stages Paul Hindemith's *Cardillac* at the Opéra de Paris, revived in 2008, as well as *Louise* by Gustave Charpentier, created in March 2007. And again Janáček's *The Clever Little Fox* that he adapts for Opéra National de Paris-Bastille in 2008. Revived in 2010. In 2010 he directs *Ariane at Naxos* at the Opéra National du Rhin in Strasbourg. In June 2011 André Engel staged Janáček's *Katja Kabanova* at Viennese National Opera.



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Irène Kudela, *musical direction*

After piano studies in Prague, Irene Kudela is awarded the 1st Prize for chamber music accompaniment at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique in Paris. She will become an assistant for singing classes for vocal ensembles and opera, then professor of role study at the same Conservatory from 1980 to 1994. Since 1979, she divides her time between opera where she assists conductors such as Pierre Boulez, Mstislav Rostropovitch, Charles Mackerras, Simon Rattle, Myung-Whun Chung...and recitals where she accompanies singers such as Barbara Hendricks, Camille Maurane, Calina Vischnievskaia, Alain Vanzo... The fact that she is fluent in seven languages soon opens doors for Irène Kudela to direct music and linguistic studies in Philadelphia, Washington, New-York, Rome, Brussels, Munich, Helsinki, Göteborg, and in Paris Théâtre du Châtelet, Radio-France, Opéra National de Paris... as well as festivals in Salzburg, Glyndebourne, Savonlinna, Bregenz, Badlbeck, Aix-en-Provence... Since 1983 she regularly collaborates on productions of the Paris Opera, mainly for Russian and Czech works, but also as harpsichord player for operas by Mozart and Rossini. Irène Kudela has also been assistant choir master at the Paris Opera during the 1999-2000 season. Since then she has often collaborated with the Radio-France choir and the choir of Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Winner in 1992 of the Yehudi Menuhin Foundation Award, she travelled world-wide to give concerts in Paris, London, Tokyo, Helsinki, Belgrade, Aix-en-Provence, Orange. Irène Kudela also often participates in television and radio broadcasts. She has recorded for record companies such as Emi, Erato, Hungaroton, Teldec and Maguelone. Her activities also comprise translations and sub-titling of Russian and Czech operas, articles in the magazine L'Avant-Scène and Ok Opéra. She was film music consultant for Daniel Toscan du Plantier. She teaches at Atelier Lyrique de l'Opéra de Paris, National Opera Studio of London, Hochschule in Frankfurt and the Royaumont Foundation.