

**PER BOYE HANSEN**

Artistic Director of the National Theatre Opera and the State Opera

opera

## **Alexander Zemlinsky's comic opera *Kleider machen Leute* to return to the State Opera after 101 years**

**The captivating opera, straddling comedy and allegoric fairy tale, has been undertaken by the renowned Dutch stage director Jetske Mijnsen, while the esteemed Lithuanian conductor Giedrė Šlekytė has explored and prepared the music. Both artists are working with the National Theatre Opera and State Opera for the very first time. The production is part of the Musica non grata cycle, which since 2020 has revived the music by composers of the first half of the 20th century persecuted by the Nazis. By bringing Zemlinsky's opera back to the stage, the project, pursued with generous support from the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in the Czech Republic, has entered its final phase.**

"The opera *Kleider machen Leute* features an array of vivid, highly peculiar characters. Each of them believes that a mysterious Count will make them happy, but none has any inkling as to how they would benefit from the union. That is a theme still very topical at the present time. How many of us follow someone who cannot do anything for us yet we keep believing it will pay off?" says **Jetske Mijnsen**, whose productions in Berlin, Zurich, Dresden, Amsterdam, Brussels and other prestigious operas houses have earned plaudits on the part of the critics, who have praised her as an artist with the knack of "making music visible".

With the libretto created by Leo Feld, based on a novella from the Swiss author Gottfried Keller's collection *Die Leute von Seldwyla* (The People of Seldwyla), the story begins in earnest at the moment when on the square of Goldach, a provincial, and somewhat dreary, town, appears a mysterious, elegant coach with an even more mysterious stranger with romantic looks. "The opera, harbouring much of the Viennese esprit, certainly does not run in the 'saving mode', particularly in the fabulous interludes. Zemlinsky's music resembles fireworks: it is astonishingly colourful and charged with enormous energy. I for my part am really impressed by the charm of the individual characters, very well rendered in terms of the selection of voice types and tempos alike," says the conductor **Giedrė Šlekytė**. A prize-winner of competitions in Copenhagen and Cyprus, and a nominee for the Salzburg Festival Young Conductors Award (2015) and Newcomer of the Year at the International Opera Awards (2018), she has collaborated of late with the Staatsoper Berlin, the Bayerische Staatsoper and the Semperoper in Dresden, to name but a few.

The opera *Kleider machen Leute* is connected with the history of the Neues deutsches Theater (NDT, New German Theatre) in Prague. "The piece premiered at the Volksoper Wien in 1910, yet in the early 1920s Zemlinsky, at the time director of the Neues deutsches Theater opera company, revised it and presented the second version on 20 April 1922 at the venue today housing the State Opera. The lead role of Wenzel Strapinski was performed by the superb Czech tenor Richard Kubla, his beloved Nettchen was portrayed by the soprano Maria Müller, who would later on gain global fame, appearing at the Metropolitan Opera in New York and elsewhere," says **Jitka Slavíková**, a National Theatre Opera and State Opera dramaturge. The role of Strapinski in our new production has been assigned to the American tenor **Joseph Dennis**, a soloist of the Semperoper and winner of several prestigious competitions, including the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions (2015), who will be making his Czech debut. Appearing in the part of Nettchen will be the soprano **Jana Sibera**, a National Theatre Opera soloist, who recently received the coveted Czech Thalia Prize (2022). The sets have been created by the world-famous Austrian designer **Herbert Muraucr**, who has regularly collaborated with the Royal Opera House in London, the Bayerische Staatsoper, the Los Angeles Opera and the Glyndebourne Festival Opera. The costumes have been designed by **Julia Berndt**, who has previously worked to great acclaim on several Jetske Mijnsen productions.

"With regard to his fate, Alexander Zemlinsky is the central figure of the Musica non grata cycle. Moreover, he played a significant role in the history of the Neues deutsches Theater, today State Opera, where he worked for 16 years. During his tenure, from 1911 to 1927, he was instrumental in making Prague one of the major opera hubs in Europe, and composed the operas *Eine florentinische Tragödie* and *Der Zwerg*, as well as the *Lyrische Symphonie*, which he premiered at the NDT. The State Opera has honoured Zemlinsky's legacy over the long term – in 1993, it presented the one-acters *Eine florentinische Tragödie* and *Der Zwerg* (under the title *The Birthday of the Infanta*), and in 2000 staged the opera *Es was einmal*. In 2021, the *Zemlinsky 150* festival marked the 150th anniversary of the artist's birth. We are proud that the Musica non grata cycle now includes a new production of *Kleider machen Leute*, a scarcely performed Zemlinsky opera," adds **Per Boye Hansen**, artistic director of the National Theatre Opera and State Opera.

The new production of *Kleider machen Leute* will receive premiere performances on Friday 24 February and Sunday 26 February 2023 at the State Opera. Another six performances will be given by the end of June. The opera will be sung in the German original, with Czech and English surtitles. For more information about the production and tickets, visit [www.musicanongrata.cz](http://www.musicanongrata.cz) and [www.narodni-divadlo.cz](http://www.narodni-divadlo.cz).

**Kleider machen Leute** (Clothes Make the Man)

Music: **Alexander Zemlinsky** (1871–1942)

Libretto: **Leo Feld** (1869–1924), based on a novella by **Gottfried Keller** (1819–1890)

**Premiere performances: 24 and 26 February at the State Opera**

**Further performances:** 3 March / 9 March / 18 March / 21 May / 11 June / 18 June 2023

### **Staging team**

Conductor: Giedrė Šlekytė

Stage director: Jetske Mijnsen

Set designer: Herbert Muraue

Costume designer: Julia Berndt

Lighting designer: Bernd Purkrabek

Choreographer: Dustin Klein

Chorus master: Adolf Melichar

Dramaturge: Jitka Slavíková

### **Cast**

Wenzel Strapinski: Joseph Dennis

First tailor's apprentice: Daniel Matoušek

Second tailor's apprentice: Michal Marhold

Town administrator: Jaroslav Patočka

Nettchen: Jana Sibera

Melchior Böhni: Markus Butter

Adam Litumlei: Pavel Švingr

Mrs. Litumlei: Sylva Čmugrová

Polykarpus Federspiel: Jan M. Hájek

Häberlein: Philippe Castagner

Mrs. Häberlein: Stanislava Jirků

Pütschli-Nievergelt: Jan Hnyk

Innkeeper: Ivo Hrachovec

Landlady: Milena Stričević / Lucie Svačinková

Coachman: David Nykl

Cook: Kristina Kubová / Eliška Mourečková

Sommelier: Nenad Milanović / Zdeněk Haas

Bellboy: Lucia Bildová / Alžběta Frošová

**State Opera Orchestra**

**State Opera Chorus**

**National Theatre Opera Ballet**

**Photo gallery**

<https://1drv.ms/u/s!ApBE3x3pPyNihfJdl89Yz0XWj2CxGQ?e=ea0ls4>

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**Production information:** <https://bit.ly/3RRqzXG>

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