

**Claude Debussy**, Pelléas et Mélisande (1887-89) – first performance 1902 –

The libretto is an adaptation of the play of the same name by Maurice Maeterlinck. Transcription for soli (off-chorus ad lib.) and small orchestra op. 79 by Eberhard Kloke

#### Short version of the work report

The idea of producing a chamber version of Pelléas et Mélisande cropped up in the context of the transcription of Parsifal for soli and small orchestra ([http://www.musikakzente.de/pdf/Wagner\\_Parsifal\\_Fassung\\_Kloke\\_english.pdf](http://www.musikakzente.de/pdf/Wagner_Parsifal_Fassung_Kloke_english.pdf)). Debussy was still very much under the influence of the music and style of Parsifal and its effect on him. The actual initial impulse was however the visit of the first performance of Maeterlinck's drama Pelléas et Mélisande in May 1893 in the Bouffes Parisiens. In August 1893, Debussy received Maeterlinck's word-of-mouth permission to set the text to music.

The compact score preoccupied him until 1895; in the same year the opera was accepted for its first performance at the Opéra Comique, which was performed in 1902.

“While the networking of the musical development in Wagner leads to an at least potential over-determination, Debussy' balancing of musical information signals and textual-scenic reality tends towards a method of decomposition” (Ulrich Schreiber in: *Die Geschichte des Musiktheaters*, Das 20. Jahrhundert II). In other words: Debussy does indeed avoid a kind of *leitmotif* technique à la Wagner, but uses a comparable network of thematic and motif-oriented configurations.

The material increasingly frees itself from unequivocal assignments of meaning. Since Maeterlinck's text is prose that is scarcely distinguishable from everyday speech, Debussy can thus dispense with the pathos of general opera texts. Keeping this interface in mind, it was an exciting challenge to devote my energy to transcribing the two works one after the other, especially as they were composed so close in time to each other.

At the latest since the radical reduction by Marius Constant to a setting for soli and two pianos for Peter Brook's production *Impressions de Pelléas* (1981) it was clear that Debussy's composition is thoroughly suitable to be reduced to a thrifty orchestral setting and to be concentrated into a chamber music substrate.

Thus my adaptation of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, apart from a few exceptions, has exactly the same orchestral ensemble as my *Parsifal* version.

The following sources were available:

- 1 Facsimile of Debussy's autograph score, 1902 (Conservatoire de Musique, Bibliothèque)
- 2 Conductor's score by Dover Publications, Inc. (1985), als reprint: originally published: E. Fromont, Paris 1904
- 3 Piano score Éditions Durand, Paris 1902-1907

Duration: approx. 2h 30'

## Ensemble, small orchestra:

Flute 1

Flute 2 (also alto flute in G and piccolo)

Oboe 1

Oboe 2 (also cor anglais)

Clarinet 1 in B/A

Clarinet 2 in B/A (also bass clarinet)

Bassoon (also contrabassoon)

3 horns in F, 2. horn also bass tuba in F

1 trumpet in B/F

1 tenor bass trombone

Timpani/Perc (vibraphone, Xylorimba, tubular bells, Tibetan bells; cymbales antiques, cymbal, tamtam, gran cassa (bass drum), snare drum, triangle): 2 musicians;

Harp = 15 woodwind and brass, perc, harp

Strings: 3-3-3-3-2 = 14

total: 29 musicians

(Eberhard Kloke, Berlin, status: 05.03.2017)

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