



# Night Fairy Tales

23 November (Saturday) ——— 7.30 pm

Warsaw Philharmonic  
Concert Hall  
5 Jasna Street

All three pieces presented at the concert were created at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the era of modernism, which was characterised by the search for new means of expression and by exploring fantastic and exotic themes. Karol Szymanowski composed *Songs of a Fairy-Tale Princess* in 1915. The cycle, written for voice and piano, includes six musical poems written to texts by the composer's sister, Zofia, which evoke the atmosphere of *One Thousand and One Nights*. The version for voice and orchestra, featuring three selected songs, was created in 1933. Inspired by a poem by the Persian bard Jalal ad-Din Rumi, *Symphony No. 3 'Song of the Night'* (1914–1916) is Szymanowski's greatest work from the middle period of his oeuvre. It is distinguished by its ecstatic nature and reveals influences of Impressionism and Expressionism. Richard Strauss' *Salome's Dance* is, in turn, the most popular excerpt from the musical drama *Salome* (1905), composed to Oscar Wilde's libretto, which heralded the Expressionist opera.

## Concert programme

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**Richard Strauss (1864–1949)**

*Salome's Dance* from the musical  
drama *Salome*, Op. 54  
(1905)

**Karol Szymanowski (1882–1937)**

*Songs of a Fairy-Tale Princess*, Op. 31  
for soprano and orchestra  
(1915/1933)

*Symphony No. 3 'Song of the Night'*  
for solo voice, choir and orchestra  
(1914–1916)

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**Performers:**

**Iwona Sobotka**

soprano

**Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra**

**Warsaw Philharmonic Choir**

**Bartosz Michałowski**

choir director

**Michał Klauza**

conductor

## Night Fairy Tales

The most characteristic features of the music of the modernist era, that is at the turn of the twentieth century, include the search for a new musical language, the multiplicity and diversity of aesthetic movements and the opposition to the Romantic convention, back then considered obsolete. The culmination of the idea of correspondence of arts conceived in the Romantic era, which fell on modernism, contributed to the particular richness and multiplicity of artistic achievements. Modernism in music thus appears as an extremely capacious melting pot, in which numerous, often opposing compositional techniques and aesthetic attitudes meet. However, they share a common goal – to create new art, open to experiments, and discover hitherto unknown circles of inspiration. The expansion of the range of means of expression provided room for reaching into the world of fantasy, exoticism or even mysticism, which resulted in many truly original works, exuding great power of expression. Such effects can be seen in all three works presented at the concert, characterised by an aura of ‘nocturnal’ and fantastic mystery; at times, they are even of an ecstatic nature.

Szymanowski composed *Songs of a Fairy-Tale Princess*, Op. 31 in 1915. The cycle, created for voice and piano, includes six poems written to texts by the composer’s sister, Zofia, whom the work was dedicated to. In these short, aphoristic verses, we find numerous oriental props out of *One Thousand and One Nights*, such as roses, the moon, nightingales or princesses dancing in golden slippers. The style of Szymanowski’s miniatures fully brings out and emphasises the fairy-tale and exotic aura of the poems. In the solo part, we can hear characteristic, richly ornamented vocalisations, while the accompaniment is distinguished by complex

harmony, abounding in extended chords and ostinatos. Years later, in 1933, Szymanowski returned to the score of *Songs of a Fairy-Tale Princess* and arranged three pieces from the cycle for voice and orchestra: *The Lonely Moon*, *The Nightingale* and *The Dance*. The premiere of the new

version took place during the annual Polish European Concert organised by the Polish Radio on 7 April 1933 in the Warsaw Philharmonic Concert Hall. The solo part was performed by Ewa Bandrowska-Turska, while the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra was conducted by Grzegorz Fitelberg. The concert, hailed a success, turned into a genuine demonstration in honour of the composer. The audience applauded Szymanowski’s Symphony No. 4, performed with the participation of the artist himself at the piano, and then – as an anonymous reviewer wrote – ‘the demonstration began again after Bandrowska sang Szymanowski’s songs.’<sup>1</sup>

Symphony No. 3 ‘Song of the Night’, Op. 27 is considered to be Szymanowski’s most outstanding work from the middle period of his oeuvre, marked by the influences of Impressionism and Expressionism. A well-known Polish researcher of the composer’s legacy, Zofia Helman, metaphorically described this symphony-cantata as ‘a musical expression of a pantheistic vision of the world.’<sup>2</sup> For the verbal layer of the piece, written in the years 1912–1914, Szymanowski chose fragments of a poem by thirteenth-century Persian bard Rumi in the Polish translation by Tadeusz Miciński. The message of the work, evoking the exotic world of Muslim Sufism, can be described as a metaphysical experience of unity with the universe and as an act of understanding the mystery of God, taking place under a starry night sky. Symphony No. 3 is cast in one movement, which makes it resemble a symphonic poem; in this movement, one can distinguish three main phases – contrasted internally in terms of tempo and expression, the ones abounding in numerous climaxes and, last but not least, the ones with an impressive number of sound effects. The first fragment, to be performed by all instrumentalists and vocalists involved and kept in a slow tempo (for the most part), announces the initiation that is to take place ‘tonight’. It is dominated by two contrasting and elaborate themes; the first is introduced by the first violin, the second – by flutes and oboes. The middle section, referring to the form of rondo, resembles a dance intermezzo, evoking the atmosphere of oriental rituals. The continuous swirling is to reflect the movement



Karol Szymanowski

☐ author unknown, NAC

<sup>1</sup> Qtd. in: Zofia Helman, *Między romantyzmem a nową muzyką*, Warszawa 2013, p. 359.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.

of stars and planets and the rhythm of the day and year. In this phase, the solo part disappears; in the foreground, we can hear the orchestra, sparkling with various tone colours, while the choir – approached as an instrument – sings vocalisations without words. The illumination envisaged from the very beginning occurs only just in the last fragment, once again in a slow tempo – the mystical experience of the presence of God and the ecstatic union of the human being with the spirit of the universe. This final section is a quasi-recapitulation, since it features the first theme of the initial phase of the work. The entire composition closes with a triumphant chord in C major, a musical symbol of the Absolute.

Richard Strauss' *Salome's Dance*, called the *Dance of the Seven Veils*, is the most popular excerpt from the musical drama *Salome*, composed in 1905, considered to be a harbinger of the Expressionist opera. The author of the libretto –

referring to the Gospel story in which a beautiful and sensual princess of Judea demands the head of John the Baptist at the urging of her vengeful mother – was Oscar Wilde. The ecstatic dance of the title protagonist, performed in the darkness of the night, constitutes the climax of the work, which is characterised by an enormous power of musical and dramatic expression. The dramaturgy is determined here – in addition to the eventful plot – by the harmony, which is constantly tense, the consistently used technique of leitmotifs and rich and extensive instrumentation, requiring a large orchestra of almost one hundred musicians. Strauss himself said of the opera's music: 'It is the symphony in the medium of drama, and is psychological, like all music.'<sup>3</sup>

Tomasz Baranowski



Richard Strauss

author unknown,  
Polona / National Library

<sup>3</sup> Qtd. in: Ernst Krause, *Richard Strauss. The Man and His Work*, trans. by John Coombs, Boston 1969, p. 299.

## Iwona Sobotka – soprano



author unknown,  
Polona / National Library

Iwona Sobotka has gained international recognition as the grand prize winner of the Queen Elisabeth International Music Competition in Belgium. She has also been honoured with first

prize at the Warsaw Polish Art Song Competition and first prize at the East & West Artists International Auditions in New York, leading to her debut performance at Carnegie Hall. Highlights of previous seasons encompassed numerous symphonic programs with Sir Simon Rattle, including Beethoven's *Christ on the Mount of Olives* and his Symphony No. 9 with

the Berliner Philharmoniker, Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* with the Staatskapelle Berlin, Szymanowski's *Stabat Mater*, and Brahms' *German Requiem* with the London Symphony Orchestra. Elsewhere, she appeared with orchestras of note, including the Orchestre Philharmonique de Luxembourg, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, the Vienna Symphony, the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and the Nashville Symphony, among others, working with many of today's pre-eminent conductors, such as Sir Colin Davis, Marek Janowski, Vladimir Jurowski, Marco Armiliato, Teodor Currentzis, Jesús López Cobos, Juanjo Mena and Massimo Zanetti.

Iwona Sobotka made her operatic debut at the National Opera in Paris in 2004, portraying roles of the First Lady in *The Magic Flute* and Ygraine in Dukas' *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*. She also participated in the Schleswig Holstein Musik Festival, taking on the title role in *Halka* and performing as Liù in *Turandot*. Her Osterfestspiele Baden-Baden debut saw her as a Blumenmädchen in Wagner's *Parsifal*, performing with the Berlin Philharmonic under the direction of Sir Simon Rattle. Notably, she portrayed Pamina in Barrie Kosky's renowned production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* at the Komische Oper Berlin, followed by an international tour across Australia, New Zealand, Macao and Taiwan.

## Bartosz Michałowski – choir director



Weronika Kosinśka

Bartosz Michałowski graduated with distinction in choral conducting from the Poznań Music Academy. Between 1998–2005, he was assistant to Stefan Stulgrosz and conductor of the Poznań

Nightingales Boys' and Men's Choir, with which he performed extensively in France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Sweden, Austria, Russia and Japan. He won first prize in the ninth Polish National Choral Conductors Competition in Poznań. In 2015, he won Orphée d'Or of the Académie du Disque Lyrique and was nominated for one of the Polish record industry's Fryderyk awards. In 2020,

he received Fryderyk for a recording of Szymanowski's opera *Hagith* (with the Warsaw Philharmonic Choir). He also received two nominations for the International Classical Music Awards in 2022. Bartosz Michałowski is the founder and artistic director of the Poznań Chamber Choir, one of the leading Polish ensembles of its kind. As director of the Warsaw Philharmonic Choir, he has conducted Szymanowski's *Kurpian Songs*, Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle*, Mozart's *Coronation Mass* and *Requiem*, Paulus by Mendelssohn, *Messiah* by Handel, *Christ on the Mount of Olives* by Beethoven and *Litanies of Ostra Brama* by Moniuszko. He prepared the ensemble for the first ever performance of Rubinstein's sacred opera *Moses* and for a performance and

the first ever recording of Moniuszko's opera *The Pariah* in Italian, and has also helped prepare vocal-instrumental concerts of the Warsaw Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra. In 2024, the Warsaw Philharmonic Choir under his direction recorded a new album – Paweł Łukaszewski. *The Adoration*. He has participated in renowned festivals and has collaborated regularly with esteemed institutions and ensembles. He has numerous first performances to his credit. In addition to gaining experience as a conductor, Bartosz Michałowski has spent many years working on enhancing his skills and knowledge in the field of voice production. He holds a PhD and is a lecturer at the Chopin University of Music.

## Michał Klauza – conductor



Michał Heller / OjFP

Michał Klauza is artistic director of the Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra. Between 2013–2015, he served as music director of the Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic in Białystok. He also

worked as associate conductor of the National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra in Katowice (2009–2015). Between 2004–2008, he served as associate conductor of the Welsh National Opera in Cardiff. In 2021, he prepared and conducted the premiere of Joanna Wnuk-Nazarowa's opera *Wanda* together with the ensembles of the Cracow Opera. In 2019, he prepared and conducted at the Polish National Opera in Warsaw the first ever Polish production of Britten's opera *Billy Budd*, and in 2023, he was invited back to conduct the premiere of a new production of Britten's *Peter Grimes*.

He has worked as guest conductor with numerous orchestras in Poland and abroad. Foreign tours have also taken him to France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Great Britain, Armenia, South Korea and the Persian Gulf countries. He has worked closely with the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk, the Opera Nova in Bydgoszcz, the Poznań Opera, and the Teatr Wielki – Polish National Opera in Warsaw (1998–2003). From 2016 until February 2022, he was guest conductor at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, where he conducted performances of Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, Weinberg's *The Idiot*, Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* and Shostakovich's *Katerina Izmailova*. He ended that artistic relation after Russia's barbaric military aggression against Ukraine. He has made numerous recordings for radio and television, including the first ever recording of Szymanowski's operetta *Lottery for Husbands* (with the National Polish Radio SO), released

by the Polish Radio and nominated for the Fryderyk 2019 award. Under his direction, the Polish Radio has released, among others, Szymanowski's opera *Hagith* recorded with the Polish Radio Orchestra (Fryderyk 2020 in the Album of the Year, Oratorio and Opera Music category), Henryk Wars' symphonic works, Moniuszko's masses and the album *Music of Polish Composers of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. He has recorded numerous film scores, including for the award-winning film *EO* by Jerzy Skolimowski. Michał Klauza is a graduate of the Fryderyk Chopin Academy of Music in Warsaw, where he studied conducting under Ryszard Dudek. He developed his skills as a postgraduate student of Ilya Musin at the Rimski-Korsakov Conservatory in St Petersburg. Since 2020, he has been pursuing a teaching career as a member of the Conducting Faculty at the Chopin University of Music in Warsaw.



## Warsaw Philharmonic Choir

The Warsaw Philharmonic Choir began its professional artistic activity in 1953 under the direction of Zbigniew Soja. The next directors of the choir were Roman Kuklewicz (1955–1971), Józef Bok (1971–1974) Antoni Szaliński (1974–1978), and Henryk Wojnarowski (1978–2016). Since 2017, the position of the director of the choir has been held by Bartosz Michałowski.

The ensemble has given concerts in the most important music venues in Europe, cooperating with outstanding orchestras, including the Berliner Philharmoniker (2013). Some of the highlights of the choir's history include participation in opera performances in La Scala (Milan), Teatro La Fenice (Venice) and opera theatres in Pesaro, Palermo and Paris. The choir took part

in gala concerts organised for John Paul II in the Vatican three times. The ensemble has been conducted by outstanding Polish and foreign maestros, including Gary Bertini, Andrzej Boreyko, Sergiu Comissiona, Henryk Czyż, Jacek Kasprzyk, Kazimierz Kord, Jan Krenz, Lorin Maazel, Jerzy Maksymiuk, Zubin Mehta, Grzegorz Nowak, Seiji Ozawa, Krzysztof Penderecki, Sir Simon Rattle, Witold Rowicki, Jerzy Semkow, Giuseppe Sinopoli, Stanisław Skrowaczewski, Leopold Stokowski, Igor Stravinsky, Stanisław Wislocki, Antoni Wit and Bohdan Wodiczko.

The enormous repertoire of the choir covers several hundred oratorios and a cappella works from different eras – from the Middle Ages to the present day. Polish music, especially

the output of Krzysztof Penderecki, is of particular importance: the ensemble performs all his oratorio and a cappella pieces. The 2016 album *Penderecki Conducts Penderecki* (vol. 1) was honoured with the most prestigious award of the world recording industry – a Grammy in 2017. The choir's albums had previously received six other nominations for that award (five nominations for Penderecki's works, one for Szymanowski's). The recordings of Moniuszko's complete masses were awarded with Fryderyk (2009, part I) and the Golden Orpheus – Arturo Toscanini Award by the French Académie du Disque Lyrique (2010, part II). The ensemble also won Fryderyk for its recording achievements in 2011, 2018 and 2020.







## Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra

The Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra gave its first concert on 5 November 1901 at the newly built Philharmonic Hall. The orchestra was conducted by Emil Młynarski, the Philharmonic's co-founder, first music director and principal conductor, while the soloist was Ignacy Jan Paderewski. Even before World War I and in the interwar period, the Warsaw Philharmonic was the heart of Polish musical life and one of the most important musical institutions in Europe. In the first years after World War II, the orchestra's concerts would take place in theatres and sports halls. On 21 February 1955, a new building for the Philharmonic at Jasna Street was inaugurated, erected on the site of its former headquarters, which was destroyed during German

airstrikes. On that day, the Warsaw Philharmonic received the title of a national institution. Under the leadership of Witold Rowicki, the orchestra regained its status as the leading symphony ensemble in Poland. Between 1955–1958, it was Bohdan Wodiczko who held the position of artistic director, which he later handed over to Rowicki. In 1977, the position was taken over by Kazimierz Kord, and from 2002 to 2013, it was Antoni Wit who served as the chief and artistic director of the Warsaw Philharmonic. From the 2013/2014 to the 2019/2020 season, the post of artistic director – responsible for the ensembles' development, the repertoire and selection of guest artists – was held by Jacek Kaspszyk, and he was followed by Andrzej Boreyko, who was the artistic director

until the end of the 2023/2024 season. As of 1 September 2024, Krzysztof Urbański took over this function. Today, the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra enjoys worldwide popularity and acclaim. It has made over one hundred and fifty concert tours on five continents, appearing in all of the world's major concert halls and participated in many prestigious music events and international festivals. The ensemble records for the Polish Radio and TVP, as well as for Polish and foreign record labels and film companies. The orchestra has frequently received prestigious awards, including a Grammy, Diapason d'Or, and a Fryderyk award from the Polish Phonographic Academy. In 2016, the orchestra also launched regular online streaming of selected concerts.