

PRESENTATIONPACK

CREATION 21 • 22

CONTEMPORARYMUSIC

Zu unseren Schwestern, zu unseren Brüdern

DIPTYCH

Concept & staging **Stéphane Ghislain Roussel**

En vertu de...

NEW WORK

Music **Eugene Birman**
Libretto **Stéphane Ghislain Roussel**

Der Kaiser von Atlantis

ONE-ACT CHAMBER OPERA

Music **Viktor Ullmann**
Libretto **Viktor Ullmann & Peter Kien**



Zu unseren Schwestern, zu unseren Brüdern

CRÉATION

En vertu de...

NEW WORK

Music **Eugene Birman**

Libretto (adaptation of the European Convention on Human Rights) **Stéphane Ghislain Roussel**

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Premiere on 20 January 2022 in Luxembourg

Concept & staging **Stéphane Ghislain Roussel***

Composer **Eugene Birman***

Musical direction **Corinna Niemeyer**

Dramaturgy **Sandra Pocceschi***

Scenography & costume design **Peggy Wurth**

Assistant to the musical director

Stella Souppaya

Assistant director **Daliah Kentges**

Stage management **Johannes Haider**

Sound engineer **Gilles Heinisch**

Make-up **Carole Descamps**

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Baritone **Michel de Souza**

Soloists of l'Orchestre de Chambre du Luxembourg:

Aniela Stoffels flute(s)

Max Mausen clarinet(s)

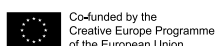
Andreas Mader saxophone

Production **Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg**

Co-production **Staatstheater Saarbrücken; Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel; Opera Ballet Vlaanderen; Grand Théâtre de Genève**

With the support of **enoa** (**enoa** laboratory in May 2021 at the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel in Waterloo) & Creative Europe Programme of the European Union & LOD music theatre

enoa



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Premiere on 20 January 2022 at the Studio of the Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg

(First part of the evening taking place at the Hemicycle of the European Convention Center Luxembourg)

Additional performance on 25 January 2022

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Available for touring in spring 2026.

Der Kaiser von Atlantis

ONE-ACT CHAMBER OPERA

Music **Viktor Ullmann**

Libretto **Viktor Ullmann & Peter Kien**

•

Premiere on 16 December 1975 in Amsterdam

Concept & staging **Stéphane Ghislain Roussel***

Musical direction **Corinna Niemeyer**

Dramaturgy **Sandra Pocceschi***

Scenography & costume design **Peggy Wurth**

Lighting design **Jean-Pierre Michel**

Pianists, choir masters & assistants to the musical director **Stella Souppaya, Emmanuelle Bizien**

Assistant director **Daliah Kentges**

Stage management **Johannes Haider**

Make-up **Carole Descamps**

•

Orchestra **Orchestre de Chambre du Luxembourg**

•

Kaiser Overall (baritone) **Michel de Souza**

Der Tod (bass) **Julien Ségol**

Harlekin (tenor) **Benjamin Alunni***

Der Trommler (mezzosoprano) **Raphaële Green**

Der Lautsprecher (baritone-bass)

Jean-Christophe Fillol

Bubikopf (soprano) **Margaux de Valensart**

Ein Soldat (tenor) **Alexander Gebhard**

* Artists of the Academy of the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence

About the work

En vertu de...

Constructed as a collage of different articles from the European Convention on Human Rights, the text of *En vertu de...* takes the form of a political speech. Far from being a classic libretto or narration, it adopts a deliberately juridical tone and comes across as a reflection on the present meaning of a treaty which is supposed to create unity, but which in the final analysis leaves the door open to divergences from its original intention. Since it is only the English and French versions of the European Convention on Human Rights that are authentic and authoritative, those two idioms used in *En vertu de...* are, as it were, infested by interjections in other languages. The non-linear dramaturgy, the theme of the selected articles, the assemblage and different processes involved, such as playing around with repetition, highlight the fragility of the European project, at a time when we are seeing a worrying rise in extremism in Europe. The characteristic coldness of the constitutional articles, unprecedented for an opera libretto, contrasts intentionally with the poetry of the libretto of *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, but the two parts are intended to resonate with each other, creating in the end the cyclical effect of a time loop destined perpetually to start up over again.

Der Kaiser von Atlantis

After a prologue, in which the Loud-Speaker introduces the various characters (Harlequin, Death, The Drum, The Emperor Overall, The Girl and The Soldier), four tableaux follow one another telling the story: following The Emperor's announcement declaring a war of everyone against everyone, Death decides to go on strike, and no one dies any more. Various eclectic episodes lead to the denouement: Death tells the Emperor that he is willing to resume his duties, but on the express condition that the Emperor should be the first to die. Overall accepts, thus allowing for a redemptive resolution.

A protean and condensed image of a society under dictatorship, the story told in the opera *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* appears in a way to be a mirror of life as it was in Theresienstadt and the authoritarian grip of the Third Reich. The end of oppression, the absurdity of war, the death penalty, freedom and freedom of expression are some of the many themes permeating the story which, in the aftermath of the Second World War, would form the very foundation of the European Union and the first Treaties, of which the European Convention on Human Rights, signed in 1950, is a milestone.

«Une proposition étonnante, mais musicalement accomplie dans la partition d'Eugene Birman [...]. Le compositeur a, dans une partition aux tonalités contrastées et conjuguées, magnifiquement réussi à restituer les réactions fortes nées de la découverte de textes juridiques évolutifs.»

Stéphane GILBART, Luxemburger Wort

«Stéphane Ghislain Roussel joue le jeu de la farce tragique, avec des personnages saisis dans le stéréotypes de leurs représentations (la faux de la mort. Le costume d'Arlequin, le grand manteau de l'Empereur). Son illustration est au service de sa démonstration. Mais au-delà des apparences, c'est leur chant, superbement assumé par chacun de ces personnages dans sa réalité fabulesque, dans sa réalité humaniste.»

Stéphane GILBART, Luxemburger Wort

Director's Note

The act of creating in the face of horror, violence and hostility

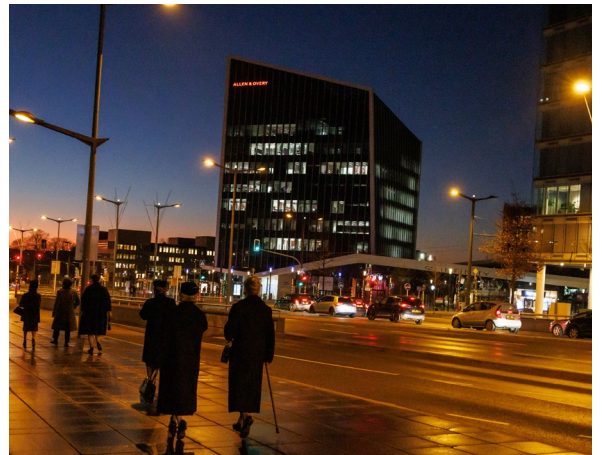
The world premiere of *En vertu de...*, conceived as forming, in conjunction with *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, a true diptych, will examine the current meaning of the European Convention on Human Rights, in light of the rise of extremism in various countries of the European Union. The relationship with space plays a key role here, in both symbolic and acoustic terms. In this first part, a political figure sings the Convention (signed at the time to avoid repeating the terrible errors of the Second World War), surrounded by the parliamentary members embodied by the musicians. The further he goes in his speech, the more blurred the meaning of democracy becomes, until in the end there is only one step towards dictatorship, which could be that of the Kaiser von Atlantis.

The opera *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, rediscovered in 1975, was composed by Viktor Ullmann in 1943 in the Theresienstadt concentration camp, a place to which nearly 144,000 people were deported, 33,000 of whom died there; located in a fortress town, the Theresienstadt concentration camp is notorious for having held the entire Jewish intelligentsia from the countries occupied by the dictatorship of the Third Reich, including numerous artists, some of them eminent. Despite the appalling living conditions in the camp, it was at the same time a hive of artistic activity. A showcase camp, a propaganda tool designed to deceive international opinion about the fate of the Jews, cultural life was encouraged and flourished there, making Terezin a place contrived in a unique way. It was the subject of an inspection visit by the Red Cross, which submitted a report attesting to "good living conditions" there. That report was subsequently condemned as a blatant failure to assist persons in danger.

What does a creative act signify when one knows that one is doomed, when death is everywhere, and horror is absolute? The premiere of *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* never took place in the camp, because, following the dress rehearsal, the authorities withdrew permission for its

performance. It is the singular atrocity of this event that I wish to take as my starting point, referring to some of the material, historical and aesthetic conditions in which the work was created at the time and daily life in the camp, where imposture, pretence, hope and unlimited violence created a hallucinated and diffracted reality. The question of the play within the play is here essential. Oscillating between bitter poverty and expressionist as well as surrealist tableaux, the iconography of the "Dance of the Dead" acts as a leitmotif, resonating with the score. Finally, the almost systematic use of recycled materials marks, above and beyond an aesthetic choice reflecting the times, an affirmed commitment to environmental responsibility.

Stéphane Ghislain Roussel (December 2021)





Biographies

Eugene Birman

COMPOSER

A composer of music of "high drama" and "intense emotion" (BBC), "at once, ingenious, hypnotic, brave, and beautiful" (Festival Internationale A.F. Lavagnino), Eugene Birman (b. 1987) has written for symphony orchestras (London Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Orquestra Gulbenkian), choirs (BBC Singers, Latvian Radio Choir, Eric Ericsons Kammarkör), and leading ensembles and soloists (Maxim Vengerov, Maurizio Ben Omar, etc.) across four continents in venues ranging from London's Southbank Centre to Carnegie Hall to above the Arctic Circle. His highly public career, with appearances on CNN, BBC World TV, Radio France, Deutsche Welle, and others, is characterised by a fearless focus on socially relevant large-scale compositions covering the financial crisis, Russian border treaties, and more. Commissioners and partners for Birman's work extend beyond the concert hall to major international bodies such as the European Union, the Austrian Foreign Ministry, and the Hong Kong SAR, as well as through prominent fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation (2018) and the US Department of State's Fulbright Program (2010–11). Most recently, he was awarded the 2017 Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Prize, leading to a season-long residency at the Southbank Centre and world premiere with the Philharmonia Orchestra at Royal Festival Hall, and appointed the sole Artist-in-Residence of the 2018 Helsinki Festival, Finland's biggest yearly cultural event. The forthcoming concert seasons will see collaborations with the Berlin Philharmonic, Theatre of Voices, EXAUDI, and a virtual-reality opera with the Osage Art Foundation in Hong Kong. A D.Phil recipient from the University of Oxford, he also holds degrees from Columbia University, the Juilliard School, and the Accademia Musicale Chigiana.

Viktor Ullmann

COMPOSER

Viktor Ullmann, who was born in 1898 in Teschen (Austria-Hungary, now Český Těšín in the Czech Republic) and who died in 1944 in Auschwitz-Birkenau, was an Austrian pianist and composer. His parents were from families of Jewish descent, but had converted to Catholicism. His musical talents and inclinations soon made him closer to Arnold Schönberg, with whom he studied composition. In 1942 he was deported to Terezin, where he organised musical concerts, for which he composed numerous works. Most of his compositions were lost during World War II. He was also a music critic, and served as Director of the Aussig Opera and a conductor at the New German Theatre. His best-known compositions include *Sieben Lieder mit Klavier* (1923), the *5 Variations for piano on a theme by Schönberg* (1925), the *Concerto for piano*, Opus 25 (1939), and the operas *Peer Gynt* (1928), *Der Sturz des Antichrists* (1935) and *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* or *The Disobedience of Death* (1944).

Stéphane Ghislain Roussel

CONCEPT & STAGING

The Belgian-Luxembourg stage director Stéphane Ghislain Roussel was born in 1974. He studied the violin and musicology at the Luxembourg Conservatoire, the Conservatoires Royaux de Musique in Liège and Brussels, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London and the CNR in Paris. After being awarded First Prize for violin, chamber music, music theory and the history of music, he carried out research into the relationship between music and the visual arts in the 20th century and worked for many years as a researcher, exhibition curator and programmer at the Musée de la musique/Cité de la musique in Paris, the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Louvre Museum. He lectured at numerous conferences and wrote articles on the subject of artistic interdisciplinarity, opera, and the corpus and concept of total artwork, and thereafter worked as a dramatist with various

institutions and companies. He subsequently took up activities as a stage director and artistic director, and founded his own creative studio in Luxembourg, PROJETEN, which has been supported since 2019 by the Luxembourg Ministry of Culture, whilst continuing his activities as a researcher and curator. His creations for the stage include the play *Monocle*, portrait de S. von Harden, a monologue inspired by a picture by Otto Dix (2010–2020); *Golden Shower*, portraying the grandeur and decline of a television diva (2013); and *Le cri du lustre*, for string quartet (2015–2021). He has also produced numerous works for museums, including in particular a catalogue of performances with the cellist Julie Läderach, in homage to Charlotte Moorman (*AVC, le petit théâtre sonore et privé de Rebecca von Stahl*) and (*Fluxus*) *Variations in Time and Space* (2012–2018). In 2016 he directed Marguerite Duras' *Savannah Bay* at the Théâtre National du Luxembourg, and then staged the world premiere of Brice Pauset's opera *Wonderful Deluxe* at the Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg. This was followed in June 2019, at the Rotondes in Luxembourg, by *Drawing on Steve Reich*, a ritual of colour performed by children to a live rendition of Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*; and in November 2019, at the MÉCA, Bordeaux, as part of the FACTS Biennale, he created *Snowball*, an interdisciplinary, immersive arts and sciences project. Since eco-responsibility issues form a major element of PROJETEN's activities, he is currently engaged in writing a manifesto/monologue examining the relationships between Nordic myths and the Anthropocene era, which he will be staging at the Théâtre du Centaure in Luxembourg in the autumn of 2022. Since 2018 he has been a visiting artist at the Academy of the Aix-en-Provence Festival d'Art Lyrique. Having previously been awarded various writing bursaries, he was, in 2020, the first person to receive the author's bursary granted by FOCUNA for a residency at the Academia Belgica in Rome. Stéphane Ghislain Roussel is regularly invited to speak at conferences and taught for ten years at the University of Essen-Duisburg; he currently teaches at the École Supérieure des Arts de Lorraine.

He has organised several events, including the major thematic exhibition "*Opéra Monde, la quête d'un art total*" held in the Centre Pompidou, Metz (June 2019–January 2020) to mark the 350th anniversary of the Opéra National de Paris. Together with the curator Julien Ribeiro, he is currently preparing an exhibition on "Le Cri"..

Corinna Niemeyer

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Corinna Niemeyer has been the Artistic and Musical Director of the Luxembourg Chamber Orchestra since September 2020. Her appointment to that post followed a two-year tenure as Assistant Conductor with the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra in 2018–19 and 2019–20. Corinna's passion for conveying music in innovative ways, combined with an in-depth approach to all the repertoire she conducts, is reflected in the breadth of her activities as a conductor, which include period music ensembles, contemporary works, cross-disciplinary projects and opera, as well as symphonic music performances. She has established a reputation for her ability to connect with audiences of all age groups and for her creative approach to presenting concerts. In the 2020–21 season, guest conducting engagements include projects with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, the Orchestre National des Pays de la Loire, the Orchestre Padeloup, the Beethoven Orchester Bonn, the Bremen Philharmonic, the Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, the Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra, the Nordic Chamber Orchestra and the Orquesta Sinfonica del Principado de Asturias. Corinna is also making her mark as an opera conductor. In May–June 2019 she made an acclaimed debut at the Theater St. Gallen in Switzerland with a new production and Swiss premiere of Ernst Krenek's original take on Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, in which she was praised for her "sensitive and committed interpretation" (Deutschlandfunk). Her debut at the Cologne Opera in May 2017, conducting *Le Nozze di Figaro*, led to two further engagements in 2017/18, including performances of *La traviata*.

In 2016, she led a contemporary production of Udo Zimmermann's *Weißer Rose* at the Theater Augsburg, praised as "moving" (BR-Klassik) and of "great intensity" (a3Kultur). She was awarded the "Prix de l'Amitié franco-allemande" in 2018 by the German Consulate-General in Strasbourg for her cross-border cultural commitment.

Sandra Pocceschi

DRAMATURGY

After completing her training in contemporary dance and her studies in philosophy, Sandra Pocceschi worked as a dancer in Paris, Brussels and Madrid. In 2004 she began her operatic career as a stage manager at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, the Opéra de Rouen, and then, for two seasons, the Opéra National du Rhin. From 2007 to 2009 she worked as an assistant director with Renaud Doucet, and collaborated for the first time as a choreographer with Philippe Arlaud and Jean-Marie Villégier at the Opéra National du Rhin and the Opéra National de Bordeaux. At the end of 2009, with the support of Renaud Doucet and in collaboration with André Barbe (stage sets and costumes), she directed *Suor Angelica* and *Pagliacci* at the Florida Grand Opera. Since 2010 she has worked as an assistant director alongside Mariame Clément, as well as on the lyrical productions of Romeo Castellucci (*Parsifal*, *Orphée et Eurydice*, *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher*), and, since 2014, with Alex Ollé (La Fura dels Baus). Her collaboration with theatres and opera houses such as the Opéra National de Paris, the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie and the Théâtre du Capitole has also afforded her the opportunity from time to time to assist other directors, in particular Krzysztof Warlikowski, Nicolas Joël, Claus Guth, Mariusz Treliński and Damiano Michieletto. In 2014 she reached the semi-final of the Ring Award competition with her project for *Der Freischütz*, designed in collaboration with Cristina Nyffeler (stage sets and costumes). In 2018 she participated in the "Opéra en Création" workshop at the Academy of the Aix-en-Provence Festival. In her capacity as a stage director, she now works

as a team with Giacomo Strada. In February 2015, they designed and staged *L'enfant et les sortilèges* as part of the "Opéra Junior" programme at the Opéra National de Montpellier. Their collaboration with the Opéra de Montpellier continued with a production, in December 2015, of Simon Laks' *L'hirondelle inattendue*, forming a diptych with a revival of *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, and a staging of Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* in February 2017, followed by Schumann's *Manfred* in December 2017. In March 2018 they presented a stage version of Grieg's *Peer Gynt* at the Auditorium de Lyon. In December 2018 they directed an opera aimed at young audiences, Leonard Evers' *The Boy and the Magic Fish*, for the Opéra National du Rhin.

Peggy Wurth

SCENOGRAPHY & COSTUME DESIGN

Peggy studied at the Wimbledon School of Art in London and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, and obtained her degree in Theatre Design: Costume Interpretation in 2003. Her projects include: *La maison de Bernarda Alba*, *Tout le monde veut vivre*, *Weird Scenes Inside the Gold Mine*, *Yvonne Princesse de Bourgogne* (Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, Compagnie du Grand Boube), *Dance-What about noise*, *Wilhelm B.* (CarréRotondes Traffo), *Minidramen* (Kasemattentheater), *Bopebistro Tour*, *Hämmelsmarsch* (MASKÉNADA), and *Histoires de famille* (Théâtre d'Esch).

Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg

Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, consisting of the Grand Théâtre and the Théâtre des Capucins, are under one single management since 2011 and present an eclectic programme covering opera, dance and theatre. Fully aware of their responsibility to respond to the needs of its ever-growing cultural sector and cosmopolitan audience, the Théâtres de la Ville strive to present a high-quality and diverse programme. Furthermore, both venues constantly develop their role as a major facilitator by increasing their active contribution to the professional development of Luxembourg's cultural scene by involving local talent in international co-productions and placing increased emphasis on producing, touring and talent development. Fully aware of their responsibility to respond to the needs of its ever-growing cultural sector and cosmopolitan audience, the Théâtres de la Ville strive to present a high-quality and diverse programme and to develop the dialogue and exchange with its audiences by offering a season of post-show discussions, open rehearsals and conferences, which focus on current topics and are complimentary to the artistic programme.

The TalentLAB, a project laboratory and multidisciplinary festival, was a first initiative born in 2016 to further expand their support to local artists and promote international exchange. It has since developed into a vibrant platform for upcoming artists where experimenting in a safe environment is given valuable space and time. Through the establishment of the residency Capucins Libre in 2018, the Théâtres de la Ville wanted to assist and to accompany artists and companies during the final weeks of their creation by offering them the necessary time, space and support to premiere their work.

Finally, the Théâtres de la Ville continue to nurture and develop international partnerships with other European venues and engage in discussions about a different co-production model based on exchange and training. This strategy of blending in-house creations with international co-productions and strong support for artists has enabled the Théâtres de la Ville to increase their visibility as a producing venue both in the Greater Region and beyond and creating ever more meaningful relationships with its partners.

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Technical information

For the first part of the diptych, *En vertu de...*, a second venue (or another space than the one used for the opera *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*) is required. The creation of *En vertu de...* took place in the Hemicycle of the European Convention Center in Luxembourg.

Technical specifications for *En vertu de...*

Audience capacity: bigger or equal to the capacity for *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*

Stage dimensions – *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*

Minimum length: 16 m

Minimum width: 17.5 m

Minimum height: 7 m

DIPTYCH

Schedule (turnkey show)

D-2: Set-up

D-1: Set-up & Rehearsals

D-0: Performance

D+1: Strike out

n.b. The schedule will be adapted in each venue. In case of a performance revival with a new cast, 15 additional days of rehearsals will be required.

Duration

En vertu de... 30 minutes

Break

Der Kaiser von Atlantis: 1 hour

Crew on tour (turnkey show)

Technical crew: 4 people

Production team: 1 person

Artistic team (without orchestra): 21 people

In case of a revival, the soloists, extras and orchestra can be engaged directly by the host venue. The main soloist Michel de Souza is essential for the first part of the diptych *En vertu de...*

Link to the trailer:

<https://youtu.be/MhbdeRT9ANc>