

Arian | nairA – Looking for Caterina

Grave inscription

Inspice, lege, defle!

Catterina Martinella romana, quae vocis modulatione et flexu Sirenum cantus facile orbicumque [sic] caelestium melos praecellebat, insigni ea virtute morum suavitate, forma, lepore, ac venustate Ser. Vinc. Duci Mant. ap[p]rime chara, acerba heu morte sublata hoc tumulo beneficentiss. principis jussu, repentino adhuc casu moerentis aeternum quiescit. Nomen mundo, deo vivat anima. Obiit adolescentiae anno XVIII die IX Martij MDCVIII.

Look, read, weep!

Catterina Martinella from Rome, who with the sound and richness of her voice easily surpassed the song of the sirens and the spherical sounds of the heavens, was highly esteemed by His Serene Highness Duke Vincenzo of Mantua for the natural grace of her demeanor, her beauty, her dignity and her charm.

Snatched away, alas, by bitter death, she rests for all eternity in this tomb, commissioned by a generous prince who still mourns this stroke of fate. Let her name live on on earth and her soul with God. She died in the 19th year of her youth, on March 9, 1608.

Quelle: Carlo d' Arco: Iscrizioni che furono o sono in Mantova e nel Mantovano, ASM Archivio d'Arco, MSS228- 9, vol. I, p. 276, no. 34

Brief description

“Arian | nairA - Looking for Caterina” is a musical-theatrical adaptation of the life story of Caterina Martinelli, singer and muse of Claudio Monteverdi. The piece sets out in search of this extraordinary young woman, behind the historical sources and behind the one monumental event in her life: her early death. A commissioned composition by Basel composer Lukas Huber on letters and texts relating to Caterina's life and music by Claudio Monteverdi, which is closely linked to her fate, form the musical basis for the artistic exploration process. Highly associative and guided by the inspiration of each individual, it is an attempt to reconstruct a Caterina Martinelli as she never existed.

Extended program text

In the end, her grave lies there and what remains is the famous Sestina by Monteverdi, one of the most touching madrigal works in history. It bears the full title “Lagrime d'amante al sepolcro dell'amata” and is divided into six verses. Six words wander through the lines and create a second level of meaning. “Tomba” (grave), “cielo” (heaven), “terra” (earth), “seno” (breast), “pianto” (weeping), “Glauco” (glaucus).

These keywords organize the search for Caterina Martinelli. An arc is drawn from Marco da Gagliano's opera *Dafne*, in which she made her debut as Venus; via the *Lamento d'Arianna*, which was practically written for her by Monteverdi, to this very Sestina, which in turn was commissioned from Monteverdi by the Duke of Mantua on the occasion of her death. She must have been a very special young woman if all these personalities crowded around her.

A new musical work by Lukas Huber is at the center of the draft representation of this figure. Content and language come together here. Testimonies of letters from the time are spread out as a text surface and create a sound that arises entirely from the letters in which Martinelli's fate is negotiated.

As a young woman, she is initially the maneuvering mass of powerful men. A talented girl from Rome, her virginity is checked several times on the journey to Mantua; a stay in Florence is canceled for fear of her integrity. In Mantua, she is followed at every turn and is kept safe by Master Monteverdi, who has a family. Then she breaks out of her confinement. Shortly before her death, she celebrates exuberantly at the carnival, drinks heavy wine and perhaps catches smallpox there. The ensemble impatiently awaits her at the rehearsal for "L'Arianna", the Gonzaga royal family is constantly informed about her state of health and Monteverdi may have wondered whether he was not being too prophetic with his "lasciatemi morire", which opens the Lamento d'Arianna. She dies shortly afterwards. And with her death, she grows into a monument that will outlast time and place. Like the laurel tree in the myth of Dafne.

Prologue in German. Historical quotations are in the original Italian language or in English translation.

Sources: The text fragments used come from surviving letters relating to the arrival and death of Caterina Martinelli. The originals are in the Gonzaga archives in Mantua and are largely collected in an article by Edmond Strainchamps: The Life and Death of Caterina Martinelli: New Light on Monteverdi's «Arianna» Edmond Strainchamps in: Early Music History, 1985, Vol. 5.

Music pieces

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643):

«Sestina. Lagrime d'amante al sepolcro dell'amata» aus Il sesto libro de madrigali (1614) «Lamento d'Arianna » aus Il sesto libro de madrigali (1614)

«Io mi son Giovinetta» aus Il quarto libro de madrigali (1603)

«Damigella tutta bella» aus Scherzi musicali a tre voci (1607)

Marco da Gagliano (1582-1643):

«Chi da lacci d'amor» aus der Oper La Dafne (1608)

Giovanna Baviera (*1988):

«Variationen für Gambe» über Il ballo di Mantova (2019)

Orí Harmelin (*1981):

«Variationen für Theorbe» über La Monaca (2019)

Lukas Huber (*1990):

«Il Lamento di Caterina» (2023/2024)

Contributors

Lia Andres, Christina Boner (Soprano); Jan Thomer (Alto); Dan Dunkelblum, Andrés Montilla Acurero (Tenor); Tobias Wicky (Baritone); Joachim Höchbauer (Bass);

Giovanna Baviera (Viola da Gamba); Ori Harmelin (Theorbo); Vera Schnider (Harp)

Lukas Huber (Composition); Deda Cristina Colonna (Stage Direction); Aurore Gontard (Assistant Director); Tumasch Clalüna (Dramaturgy); Michael Kleine/Lisa Fütterer (Stage Management); Michael Kleine (Costumes); Mario Henkel (Lighting/Technology)

Technical specifications

Evening cast: 7 singers, 3 instrumentalists, 1 technician (light/audio) Technical requirements for the performance space: complete darkness, basic stage lighting, stage dimensions at least 12m (width) x 10m (depth) Duration: approx. 90 min

The premiere was on February 1, 2024 at Gare du Nord Basel, Switzerland.

Biographies

Since its foundation in 2012, **Voces Suaves** has specialized in music of the 16th and 17th centuries. The Basel vocal ensemble regularly performs at major festivals such as the Baroque Days of the Berlin State Opera and can call itself a renowned ensemble for early music throughout Europe. Various recordings have been released by renowned labels and have been awarded international prizes. Experts particularly appreciate the ensemble's extraordinary sound culture, gripping interpretations and sophisticated programs.

www.voces-suaves.ch

Lukas Huber lives in Basel and often works with bands as well as in music theater and theater contexts. He is part of unorthodoxukebox o. and Ufo and in recent years has worked at the Basel Theater, Schauspielhaus Vienna, Staatstheater Stuttgart and Kampnagel in Hamburg and has written music for orchestras of various sizes. As a composer of non-scenic music, he has worked with the Basel Sinfonietta, the Ensemble Phoenix Basel and the HYPER DUO, among others.

www.lukashuber.net

Deda Cristina Colonna is a director and choreographer. Her preferred repertoire is 17th and 18th century opera and contemporary music theater. Her work is strongly influenced by her own stage experience as a dancer and actress. Her particular expertise lies in baroque dance, rhetorical gestures and historically informed acting.

www.dedacristinacolonna.com

Tumasch Clalüna is a dramaturge, director and author. In his work, he mostly deals with ancient and contemporary myths and increasingly with questions about the future. He has been head of the Rümelingen Festival for New Music since 2015. He is a long-standing member of the a cappella formation The Glue, a member of the istituto svizzero di Roma and a scholarship holder of the Landis and Gyr Foundation.

Michael Kleine's practice includes stage and costume design, performances, concert productions, lighting design, object work and exhibition staging. As a director, his artistic language originally emerged from his involvement with opera theater and has since expanded into the fields of architecture and the visual arts.

www.michaelkleine.com

Press commentaries

“The seven singers of ‘Voces Suaves’ sing everything in flawless vocal ensemble sound culture at its finest, as we have known it from them for a long time, and as it can obviously be realized in an environment in which scenic requirements demand their attention.” - Musik & Theater, Februar 2024, Reinmar Wagner

“This is very touching music and Voces Suaves perform it really convincingly.” “His [Lukas Huber's] music fits really well into the sound world of the Renaissance pieces.” “Above all, I can tell that the musicians are fascinated by Caterina [Martinelli], and that really got through to me.” - Radio SRF2Kultur, 02.02.24, Besprechung von Patricia Moreno mit Elisabeth v. Kalnein