

NAXOS

BARTÓK

Bluebeard's Castle

(Opera in One Act)

Andrea Meláth, Mezzo-soprano • Gustáv Beláček, Bass
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra • Marin Alsop



Béla
BARTÓK
(1881-1945)

Bluebeard's Castle, Op. 11

Opera in One Act • Libretto by Béla Balázs

Sung in Hungarian

Duke Bluebeard **Gustáv Beláček, Bass**
Judith **Andrea Meláth, Mezzo-soprano**

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra
(Leader: **Duncan Riddell**)
Marin Alsop

1	“Megérkeztünk” “ <i>We have arrived</i> ” (<i>Bluebeard</i>)	3:59
2	“Ez a Kékszszakállú vára!” “ <i>This is Bluebeard’s castle!</i> ” (<i>Judith</i>)	5:25
3	“Nagy csukott ajtókat látok” “ <i>I see large closed doors</i> ” (<i>Judith</i>)	5:23
4	First Door – “Jaj!” “ <i>Oh!</i> ” (<i>Judith</i>)	4:13
5	Second Door – “Mit látsz?” “ <i>What do you see?</i> ” (<i>Bluebeard</i>)	4:23
6	Third Door – “Oh, be sok kincs!” “ <i>Oh, how much treasure!</i> ” (<i>Judith</i>)	2:23
7	Fourth Door – “Oh, virágok!” “ <i>Oh, flowers!</i> ” (<i>Judith</i>)	4:39
8	Fifth Door – “Nézd hogy derül már a váram” “ <i>See how my castle brightens</i> ” (<i>Bluebeard</i>)	6:14
9	Sixth Door – “Csendes fehér tavat látok” “ <i>I see a silent white lake</i> ” (<i>Judith</i>)	4:42
10	“Az utolsót nem nyitom ki” “ <i>I won’t open the last one</i> ” (<i>Bluebeard</i>)	4:05
11	“Tudom, tudom, Kékszszakállú” “ <i>I know, I know, Bluebeard</i> ” (<i>Judith</i>)	3:32
12	“Lásd a régi asszonyokat” “ <i>Look at the women of the past</i> ” (<i>Bluebeard</i>)	8:46

Recorded in The Concert Hall, Lighthouse, Poole, UK, on 17th and 18th May, 2007
 Producer and editor: Andrew Walton (K&A Productions Ltd.)
 Sound engineer: Phil Rowlands

Recorded and edited at 24bit resolution

Publisher: Universal Edition

Producer’s note:

In this recording, the placement of Bluebeard and Judith within the stereo image is arranged to represent movement between the seven doors.

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Bluebeard's Castle, Op. 11

Kurt Weill, looking back at his 1927 opera *Mahagonny*, once said of that work that it was “very much an expression of the decade after the first world war” – a reference, presumably, to his opera’s sardonic critique of capitalist society values. In a similar way, Bartók’s one-act opera *Duke Bluebeard’s Castle* reflects the spirit of the era in which it was written. One could say this of most musical works, naturally, tethered as art always is to the social world in which its creators live. But some music – Beethoven’s late quartets, for example, or Mozart’s motet *Ave Verum* – stands slightly apart from its historical moment of origin, seemingly less tied to prevailing aesthetic ideologies than to the composer’s autonomous, internal vision. The moody mysticism of Bartók’s only opera, and its emotionally turbulent sound world, date the work firmly to the 1910s, as Europe was finding itself drawn towards a massive war that would devastate the continent.

At the time he wrote *Bluebeard’s Castle*, Bartók was thirty years old and had been teaching the piano at the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest for four years. Although respected in Hungary for his pianistic skills, he had already encountered difficulties trying to expand his performing career beyond Hungarian borders. He found himself gradually easing into the divided career situation he would maintain for the next two decades: teaching the piano at the Academy during the school year, and collecting folk-music across Eastern Europe during holiday periods and the summer. He composed during what time was left. Of *Bluebeard’s Castle*, he wrote simply, “It was simultaneously my first stage and first vocal work.” The opera received its premiere at the Royal Opera House in Budapest on 24th May, 1918.

Written to a text by Béla Balázs, a young Hungarian playwright who later became a prominent figure in the early film industry, *Bluebeard’s Castle* is a modern version of the old European folk-tale about the cruel, blue-bearded prince and his many disappearing wives. In the original tale, Bluebeard tells each new wife that she may open any door in his castle except one. He goes away on business. In his absence, each wife is driven by

curiosity to open the forbidden door, behind which she finds the gruesome remains of murdered former wives. Bluebeard chooses just this moment to return to his castle, and, finding his wife standing in disbelief before the awful chamber, promptly dispatches her as well. In a version of the tale made popular by the seventeenth-century French writer Charles Perrault, author of *Puss-in-Boots*, *Cinderella*, and other beloved classic fairy tales, Bluebeard’s last wife is saved from death by her brothers, who rush in at the last moment and kill Bluebeard instead.

In Bartók’s hands this well-known tale becomes a metaphor for the impossibility of complete love between a man and a woman. The opera is still permeated by the legend’s historic undertow of violence, but the central drama now occurs between the two characters, Bluebeard and his new wife Judith, as they move through the castle towards a new conclusion.

Musically the opera follows the form of a large arc, mirroring the progress of the drama. The opening musical idea, a slow cantabile melody in the strings first heard in total darkness, returns an hour later to conclude the opera, again in an atmosphere of total darkness. The dramatic highpoint occurs near the middle of the opera when Judith opens the Fifth Door to reveal the splendours of Bluebeard’s domains. Thrilling orchestral chords burst forth in C major, supported by a fortissimo organ part that Bartók writes into the score to emphasize the grandeur of this moment. Throughout, Bartók sets the vocal parts of Bluebeard and Judith in a freely declamatory style that permits the natural speech rhythms of the Hungarian language, with its unusual accentual patterns, to sound in a clear, unaffected manner. A vast orchestra, one of Bartók’s largest, supports the vocal lines, moving with Mahlerian deftness from moments of chamber-music-like delicacy to massive thunderheads of sound that underline the characters’ inner agony.

What the opera means is not easy to figure out. Bafflement is a common reaction to seeing this opera for the first time. Why are the former wives living at the

end? And why does Judith submit so willingly to entombment when the natural human reaction would be to flee? Unfortunately there are no ready answers to questions like these. The opera's creators clearly are striving to say something profound about the human condition. But when every action, every gesture, and every word is freighted with symbolic significance, the overall message quickly grows opaque, even as the story fascinates and draws us in.

Balázs was at this time an adherent of the symbolist dramatic style introduced and popularised by the Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck. In plays of this sort stage action is kept to a minimum. Silence, frequent repetition of words, uncomplicated sets, and carefully designed lighting effects create a more static drama. Balázs idealised those plays of Maeterlinck where, in his memorable turn of phrase, "nothing happens ... life happens". Such stylistic features permeate *Bluebeard's Castle*, where conventional dramatic conflict is minimised in favour of a conceptually simple design in which seven doors are opened, one by one, and then closed again. Little else happens on stage. Until the end, when the three former wives appear, the entire drama is centred around the contest of wills between Judith and Bluebeard. Visual distractions are few: even the splendid contents behind each door are not actually seen by the audience. Dialogue is halting and uncertain. Questions, if asked, may get no response, further giving the impression of two individuals who speak past each other, not *to* each other.

Through the misty haze of symbolist dramatic techniques, we slowly come to the realisation that this castle is no real castle, but instead a weighty metaphor for the human mind. The doors of the castle, then, represent aspects of the man's identity that he slowly reveals to the woman, who as she progresses finds Bluebeard both receptive to her advances, and, at times, stubbornly resistant. An early Hungarian staging of the opera, recognising how the opera dwells in the chiaroscuro shadows of the mind, subtly interwove nude female forms among the boulders lining the castle walls. Judith can agree to be entombed alive behind the seventh door because, in a sense, she was already a

living memory when she entered the opera.

One of the opera's more unusual features is found in the enigmatic figure of the bard, who steps forward before the curtain rises to introduce the opera. The bard is a speaking rôle, often taken in performances by the same man who will soon sing Bluebeard. He addresses the audience for two minutes in weird, incantatory phrases. He invites us to think about the metaphorical nature of the drama. "Where is the stage, Ladies and Gentlemen? Inside or out?" The events we are about to witness on stage, he suggests, could have been drawn as well from our own life experience.

"Love", Bertrand Russell writes, "is the principal means of escape from the loneliness which afflicts most men and women throughout the greater part of their lives." While *Bluebeard's Castle* certainly projects a bleak view of love's ability to redeem individuals from their fundamental loneliness, the opera also suggests that, as humans, even the most lonely among us can feel more alive if we at least seek out love and allow its warming solace to suffuse our souls. Bluebeard's castle comes to life as Judith opens the doors. "You are the light in my castle", Bluebeard sings lovingly to Judith before the fateful seventh door. "Kiss me, kiss me, ask me nothing." Tragically, however, the same act of seeking out love also returns Bluebeard and Judith to their own essential loneliness. The stage, brilliant white with light at the fifth door, returns to darkness at the end.

Synopsis

All is dark on stage as the opera begins. Over the course of the next hour, Bluebeard permits Judith to open, one by one, the seven large doors that loom before them in the darkened confines. Before the first door opens, Judith confesses why she has come to the castle. "I'll warm the cold stone", she sings. "I'll warm it with my body / so it will be free, Bluebeard." She envisions sunlight and fresh breezes blowing through the dank halls. Suddenly the castle sighs, causing her to shudder and weep. Bluebeard opens the first door. A beam of red light shoots forth. Within she beholds cruel instruments of torture. At that point Judith notices that the castle's walls are bleeding. "Are you afraid?" Bluebeard

responds. Mastering her fears, Judith presses onward to the next doors, convinced that she will be able to bring daylight to the castle. The second door opens to show her a vast weapon chamber. The third opens upon a breath-taking pile of jewels, gold, and diamonds. Judith is troubled, however, when she sees blood again, this time staining the most beautiful crown. The fourth door opens – a beautiful garden.

For each of these door openings Bartók provides music that represents in vivid orchestral colour the contents Judith beholds. The orchestra shimmers, gently glowing, when Bluebeard's immense treasury is revealed. No scene is more vividly portrayed, though, or more memorable, than the moment when Judith opens the fifth door to behold a vista looking out over all his domains. This is one of the great moments in twentieth-century opera. A violently dissonant wave of sound transforms, in an instant, to a massive C major chord in the full orchestra. By this point, however, Judith no

longer seems impressed with Bluebeard's riches and possessions. She is more concerned with the blood that seems to surface everywhere the more she looks. "The clouds have a bloody shadow", she remarks. Bluebeard, sensing her trepidation, grows less interested in letting her proceed further. She forces him to hand her the remaining keys. When the sixth door opens to reveal a lake of tears, the stage begins to grow darker. Eventually, to her surprise (and to ours), from behind the seventh and last door step three *living* women that Bluebeard identifies as his former wives. Wordlessly, the women come forward one by one to receive his praises. Judith realises that her fate, too, is to be entombed within Bluebeard's castle as a living memory. She joins the former wives behind the seventh door as a grief-stricken Bluebeard quietly intones, "Now it will be night forever", and the stage fades back to darkness.

Carl Leafstedt

Andrea Meláth

The mezzo-soprano Andrea Meláth studied at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, where she received her diploma in 1995. She had an active professional career while studying at the academy, and participated in numerous festivals in Hungary and abroad alongside her studies. In 1997 she was elected as Singer of the Year in Madeira, and won the Third Prize at the Wigmore Hall International Song Competition in 1999. In both 1996 and 1998 Andrea Meláth was awarded the Annie Fisher Scholarship of Hungary to Bayreuth. For her excellent interpretations of contemporary music she has been awarded the Artisjus Award on no fewer than six separate occasions. She has performed and given premières of several contemporary works, including compositions by György Ligeti, Peter Eötvös, György Orban, Peter Nogradi, Janos Vajda and David Newbold. Since 1998 she has been a permanent guest artist at the Hungarian State Opera House in Budapest, where her rôles have included Cherubino, Sesto in *La clemenza di Tito*, Octavian, Stephano in *Romeo and Juliet*, Carmen, Paulina in *The Queen of Spades*, Donna Elvira, Santuzza, and Leonora in *La Favorita*. In 2001 she was granted the Franz Liszt Music Award from the Ministry of Natural Cultural Heritage. In the same year she also received the Best Young Artist Award from the State Opera House in Budapest. Since her 2001 performance of Judit in *Bluebeard's Castle* in Budapest, she has performed the same rôle in many countries. In March 2007 Andrea Meláth was awarded the most important musical prize in Hungary: the Bartók-Pásztory Prize, an award established by Bartók himself, and bestowed by a jury of Hungary's leading musicians and musicologists on an artist who has excelled in the performance and promotion of Bartók's music.

Gustáv Beláček

The Slovak bass Gustáv Beláček graduated at the Bratislava Academy of Music with Eva Blahová, at the Mozart Academy in Prague and at the International Bach Academy in Stuttgart. He has been a prize winner at the Rocca delle Macie International Opera Competition in Siena, at the International Dvořák Competition and at the Belvedere Singing Competition in Vienna. He is a resident soloist at the Slovak National Opera in Bratislava, performing rôles including the Water Gnome, Gremin, Thibaud, Ramfis, Raimondo, Walter, Leporello, Dulcamara, and Bluebeard. Gustáv Beláček has appeared at opera houses throughout Europe, including the Grand Théâtre de Genève, the Théâtre de la Monnaie, the Théâtre du Rhin Strasbourg, the State Theatre and National Theatre in Prague, the Teatro Massimo in Palermo and elsewhere, performing with companies in Brazil (Palacio des Artes in Belo Horizonte), the United States (Berkshire Opera Festival) and Canada (Canadian Opera Company in Toronto). He is a regular soloist with the Slovak and Czech Philharmonic Orchestras and has performed with with the Dresden Philharmonic, the Orchestre National de France, the Bruckner Orchester Linz, the Munich Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Radio Symphony Orchestra in Vienna, the London Philharmonic, Montreal Symphony, and San Francisco Symphony. Gustáv Beláček has recorded for Opus, Supraphon, Slovart, Czech Radio and LPO productions. The CD of Dvořák's *Requiem* with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra conducted by Zdeněk Mácal released by the Delos label was honoured with a Grammy Award.

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

Founded in 1893 by Sir Dan Godfrey, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra has had among its Principal Conductors some of the finest musicians in the world, including Rudolf Schwarz, Constantin Silvestri, Sir Charles Groves and Paavo Berglund. More recently Andrew Litton raised the orchestra's standards to new levels, crowning its centenary season with a triumphant début tour of the United States in April 1994, followed by Yakov Kreizberg and débuts at the Musikverein, Vienna, the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, and Carnegie Hall, New York. Marin Alsop took up the position in October 2002 and has already helped raise the profile of the BSO still further, including concerts at the Philharmonie, Berlin, and in Madrid, Prague, Bruges and a return trip to Vienna. The name of the orchestra is internationally known through over three hundred recordings, including the award-winning Naxos release of Anthony Payne's sketches for Elgar's *Symphony No. 3* (8.554719) with Paul Daniel, the symphonies of Vaughan Williams with the former Chief Guest Conductor Kees Bakels and Paul Daniel, and recordings of works by Philip Glass (8.559202), Leonard Bernstein (8.559245), and John Adams (8.559031) under Marin Alsop for Naxos, this last chosen as Editor's Choice in the November 2004 issue of *The Gramophone* Magazine. The Naxos BSO/Serebrier Mussorgsky recording (8.557645) reached No. 2 in the top twenty Classical Chart, and was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2006. In addition to its recording and international touring commitments, the BSO is dedicated to providing orchestral music across the South and West of Britain, enhanced by a programme of educational and community projects, and makes regular appearances in major festivals and concert-halls throughout the United Kingdom.

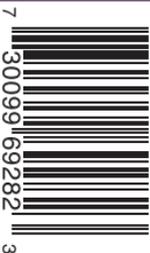
Marin Alsop

Marin Alsop is Music Director of the Baltimore Symphony from the 2007/08 season, and has been Principal Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra since 2002. She won the Royal Philharmonic Society Conductor of the Year award in 2002 and Radio 3 Listeners' Award in 2006, and was named *The Gramophone* magazine's Artist of the Year in 2003. She regularly conducts the Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and Los Angeles Philharmonic, and recent guest engagements include the Boston Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. Marin Alsop studied at Yale and at the Juilliard School and won the Koussevitzky Conducting Prize at Tanglewood, where she studied with Leonard Bernstein and Seiji Ozawa. Her recordings for Naxos include the Brahms *Symphonies* and *Overtures* with the London Philharmonic, the complete orchestral works of Samuel Barber with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and many acclaimed recordings with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, notably *Carmina Burana* (8.570033) and works by Adams (8.559031), Bernstein, Glass (8.559202), Takemitsu (8.557760), Weill (8.557481) and Bartók (8.557433).



DDD

8.660928

Playing Time
57:45

© & © 2007 Naxos Rights International Ltd.
Booklet notes and synopsis in English

Made in Canada

www.naxos.com

A modern version of the old European folk-tale about the cruel, blue-bearded prince and his many disappearing wives, Bartók's opera *Bluebeard's Castle* is a metaphor for the impossibility of complete love between a man and a woman. A vast orchestra, one of Bartók's largest, supports the vocal lines, moving deftly from moments of chamber-music-like delicacy to massive thunderheads of sound that underline the characters' inner agony. No scene is more vividly portrayed, though, or more memorable, than the moment when Judith opens the fifth door to behold a vista looking out over all Bluebeard's domains. One of the most spine-tingling moments in twentieth-century opera, a violently dissonant wave of sound transforms, in an instant, to a massive C major chord in the full orchestra.

This recording was made after the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra's end-of-season concert, described by *The Times* as 'a spectacular finale... A knockout dramatic punch; feverishly beautiful orchestral playing; two characters, the Duke and his new wife Judith, tactile and writhing, deeply felt... Also inspired the Bournemouth players to excel'.



Béla
BARTÓK
(1881-1945)

Bluebeard's Castle

(Opera in One Act - Libretto by Béla Balázs)
Sung in Hungarian

Duke Bluebeard Gustáv Beláček, Bass
Judith Andrea Meláth, Mezzo-soprano

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra
Marin Alsop

Supported by BSO Endowment Trust

A detailed track list can be found on page 3 of the booklet
Recorded in The Concert Hall, Lighthouse, Poole, UK, on 17th and 18th May, 2007
Producer and editor: Andrew Walton (K&A Productions Ltd.) • Sound engineer: Phil Rowlands
Booklet notes: Carl Leafstedt and Cris Posslac

Cover: Unused stage design by Wilhelm Matenaar, Berlin, 1984,
for Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* (akg-images)