

Kaija Saariaho - L'amour de Loin (2001)

Written by bluesever

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1. Act 1
2. Act 2
3. Act 3
4. Act 4
5. Act 5

Performers:

Jaufré Rudel, Prince de Blaye: Gerald Finley
Le Pèlerin: Lilli Paasikivi
Clémence, Countess of Tripoli: Dawn Upshaw
Orchestre de Paris
Choeur de chambre Accentus

Kent Nagano – conductor

Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris
26, 29 November, 2 December 2001

After death and taxes, the third thing that one can be relatively sure of in life is that an opera will have a preposterous storyline, and Kaija Saariaho's first, *L'amour de loin* (2000), fits the mould.

Jaufré Rudel, Prince of Blaye, falls madly in love with a woman he has only ever heard of: Clémence, Countess of Tripoli. When she hears the songs he has composed in her honour, she falls in love with him. However, as he travels to Tripoli to realise their love, he becomes so ill with the fear of their meeting that upon arrival he is near death's door. All the couple have time for before he dies is a brief love duet, after which a grief-stricken Clémence vows to enter a

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convent. It's a classic tale of idealistic love retaining its perfection only through death; a bit like whether Romeo and Juliet would have made it to their diamond anniversary had they had time to discover that Romeo left the toilet seat up and Juliet overspent on clothes.

Saariaho's fluidly structured score constantly hints at the intangibility of this strange 'love'. There's an ethereal lack of distinction between instrumental timbre and harmony. Modal inflections suggest antiquity, snippets of eastern scales recall the Orient, but it's hard to put a finger on what the harmonic sum of all these parts actually is, other than an atmospheric, illustrative palette of colours. There are no obvious musical or dramatic events.

The success of such a score, then, rests entirely on the sense of atmospheric tension the orchestra is able to create. Happily, Kent Nagano's interpretation here makes the most of every nuance. --- Charlotte Gardner, BBC Review

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