



Project description

MASQUE

an African Opera



by Hans Huyssen and Ilija Trojanow



Who are we in the
mirror of others?



MASQUE



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Project Description

The opera MASQUE is an allegory and a vision of cultural dialogue between Africa and Europe.

"Let us look at the African continent with different eyes. It is a continent of the future," wrote the German President Horst Köhler on 1 June 2007 in the Frankfurter Rundschau, anticipating an open dialogue between Africa and Europe.

▶ Africa:
Continent of the
future

The theme of Africa is more topical than ever before. On the one hand, issues of humanitarian aid in the fields of hunger, AIDS and poverty are dominant for us as Europeans. On the other hand we marvel at the dynamism, power and colour of African culture.

▶ Assertive
openness
towards each
other's culture

by contrast, Hans Huyssen and Ilija Trojanow have created a daring and visionary concept for an encounter between Africa and Europe, free from pity, prejudice, fear, exotic clichés, envy or arrogant condescension. MASQUE represents a unique opportunity for Africa and Europe to revise their perspectives of each other's cultures while simultaneously reassessing their own. Through the idea of confrontation, both cultures are given the chance to consciously re-assess their *own* roots, creating a context in which a self-assured openness for each other's culture and a balanced dialogue are possible.

The project MASQUE takes on the challenge of a "cultural dialogue between equals" (cf. "Action Africa" of the German Department of Foreign Affairs).



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This is not only an artistic challenge. Considerable financial and organisational effort is necessary in order to bring African and European musicians together on the same stage as equals. A co-operation between several partners is therefore envisaged, with the aim of creating a complete new production of MASQUE for its European premiere. The idea of artistic exchange and an African-European co-production transports the notion of inter-cultural dialogue into the production itself.

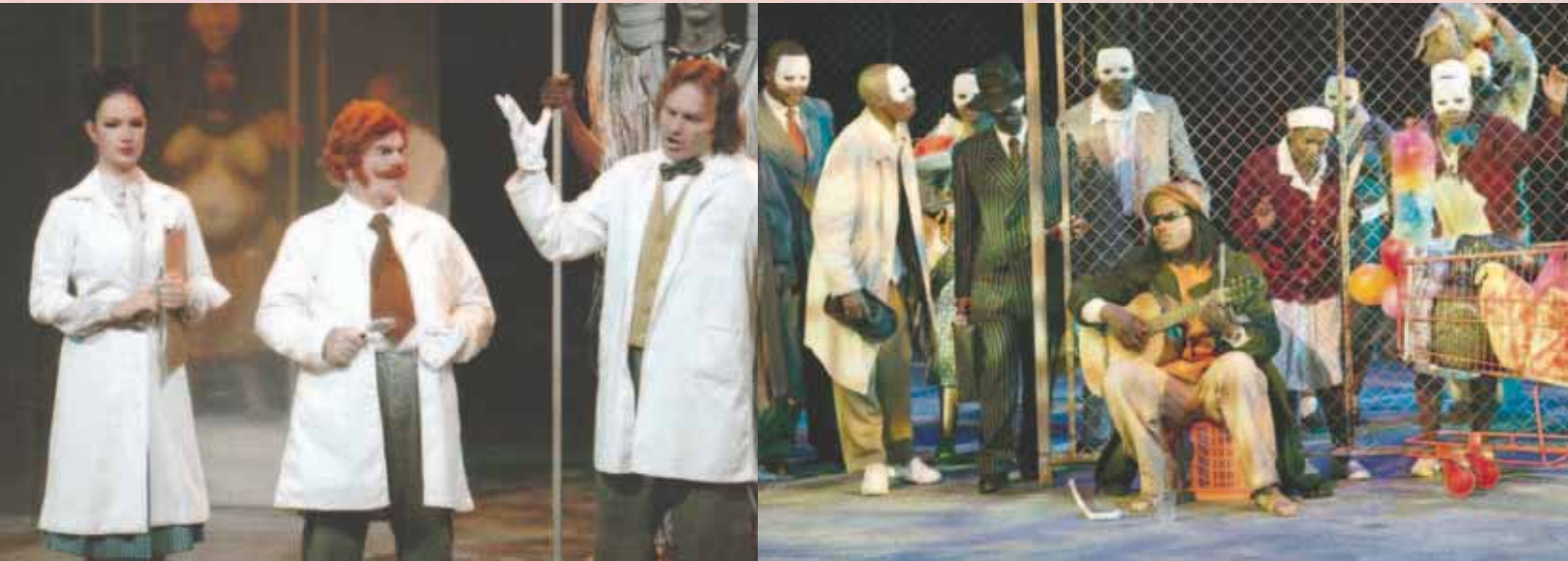
The Masque project enjoys the special support of German foreign minister Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier:

"I welcome your initiative to intensify the cultural exchange between Germany and Africa. It harmonises outstandingly well with the African political focal points set by the German government in the context of the G8 summit in Heiligendamm. The politics of cultural and educational foreign affairs for which I am responsible should not be a one-way street, and therefore the rooting of an awareness of Africa in the consciousness of the German public is an important matter to me."

A production of the opera MASQUE would thus constitute a valuable social contribution to the inter-cultural dialogue between Africa and Europe, as well as giving music theatre in Europe fresh inspiration and contributing to the further development of an independent African operatic culture.

◀◀ European premiere in tandem with a cultural exchange

◀ New inspiration for music theatre



Content & Synopsis

MASQUE is an intense and multi-faceted play with life-sized masks, dancers, and black and white singers in specific African and European roles. The work is scored for an orchestra in three separate parts: a chamber orchestra of conventional modern instruments; a group of traditional African musicians; and a European baroque ensemble on original instruments.

This work, composed for the Cape Town Opera, approaches the challenge of a cultural encounter in a unique manner. Conceived as the stringent antithesis of an intercultural melange, it sheds light on the differences between African and European music and provides space for the authentic representation of both sides. The tension between these worlds leaves room for contrasts which directly affect the course of the music drama. Instead of postulating a common denominator in advance, the piece creates a situation through which a point of intersection is created by default, subtly shaded by the comparisons through which mutual trust and understanding are established.





Blindness, Sleep, Worry and Death are displayed in large glass cases. They are African masks in a European museum, unique cultural treasures and trophies of a proud curator, though ultimately nothing more to him than artefacts. But to the Griot, an African Elder and storyteller, they mean a great deal more. He knows their stories, and when he looks at them, the masks come to life. He touches the masks one after another and in doing so frees them from the curse which had frozen them in the roles of lifeless figures. With the return of their powers, the masks consider it no longer appropriate to remain in the museum. They therefore decide to flee, and look for a way to return to their home country.

What follows is an odyssey through the anonymity of a large city. The masks make various acquaintances which become unexpectedly intense encounters, but these end with their arrest and real imprisonment, since they appear to be illegal immigrants. The threat of deportation brings their desire to be returned to their home unexpectedly closer. The curator, who has been summoned, offers vehement opposition, expressing the view that works of art are inalienable and belong to him and his collection. This continues until Phakade, the mask of continuous change, intervenes, and brings the altercation onto an altogether different level.

◀ Summary of the synopsis



Hans Huyssen

Hans Huyssen was born in 1964 and grew up in a German-speaking family in Pretoria, South Africa. He began his music studies in 1992 in the *University of Stellenbosch Conservatorium* with a double major in cello and composition. Upon graduating he moved to Salzburg (1986), where he continued his studies in both cello (Prof. Litschauer) and composition (Prof. Wimberger) at the *Salzburg Mozarteum* and received formative instruction in the field of historical performance practice in the seminars of Nikolaus Harnoncourt.

Masterclasses with Luciano Berio, George Crumb, William Pleeth, and Christophe Coin provided further inspiration. Between 1992 and 1995 he attended the composition masterclasses of Hans-Jürgen von Bose at the *Munich Academy*.

As a baroque cellist he undertook extensive international tours (Europe, the USA, Mexico, Cuba and Japan) with a range of

ensembles (including the Concilium Musicum), and participated in numerous radio and CD recordings. For Hans Huyssen composition is a search for the intersection between historical and contemporary performance practice. Thus his role as an interpreter of early music (the conscious search for means of expression specific to a particular time and their translation for the listeners of today) is inextricably linked to the composition of new music.

His compositional activity stretches from chamber music through orchestral works to opera. It includes commissions from *SAMRO*, the *National Arts Council (South Africa)*, the *Audi Cultural Fund*, the *Siemens Music Foundation*, the *Munich Chamber Orchestra*, the *South African Heinrich Schütz Society*, *Pro Helvetica*, *Deutsche Welle*, *Cape Classic*, and *MIAGI*. His works have been performed by the *Austrian Ensemble for*



›Europe and Africa: Condemned to eternal misunderstanding?‹

New Music, the *Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra*, the *Munich Symphony Orchestra*, the Georgian Chamber *Orchestra*, the *Camerata Freden*, the *Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie*, the *Munich Chamber Orchestra*, the *Chamber Orchestra of South Africa (COSA)*, the *Sontonga Quartet*, the *Dresdener Kreuzchor*, the *South African National Youth Orchestra (SANYO)*, and *Ensemble Uthingo*. Radio recordings of his music have been produced by *ORF*, *SABC*, *BR*, and *Deutschlandradio Berlin*.

Traditional African music has become increasingly important to him. The ongoing examination of this field lead him to return to South Africa in 2000. Numerous major projects developed as a result, including the CDs *Fynbos Calling* and *Remember Dido*, a production of *Dido and Aeneas* set in Africa (Spier Arts Festival, 2002), The *Songs of Madosini* (ICMF 2002), *Ciacona & Tshikona* and the African opera *MASQUE* (Cape Town Opera, 2005).

Since 2005 he has taught at the *University of the Freestate in Bloemfontein*, South Africa.



Ilija Trojanow

Ilija Trojanow was born in Bulgaria in 1965. In 1971, shortly before beginning school, his parents fled with him via Yugoslavia and Italy to Germany, where they received political asylum in Germany. A year later, the family moved to Kenya. Between 1972 and 1984 Ilija Trojanow lived in Nairobi, with a three-year stay in Germany (1977-1981).

After an extended visit to Paris he studied law, cultural anthropology and damages at the *Maximilian University* in Munich. In 1989 he founded the *Marino Verlag*, specialising in the publication of African literature. In the early 1990s Trojanow travelled through Africa. His first book, *In Africa. Myths and the Everyday in East Africa* (Marino, 1993), in which he describes how his initial bewilderment turned into interest and affection for his Kenyan homeland. After *Natural Wonders of East Africa* (Frederking &

Thaler, 1994), *Custodians of the Sun. Encounter with the Elders of Zimbabwe* (Frederking & Thaler), which he wrote together with the author Chenjerai Hove, was published in 1996. In the same year his first novel, *The World is Big and Salvation Lurks Everywhere* (Carl Hanser), which tells of the experience of a family of exiled Balkans in an Italian home for asylum-seekers, was published.

In 1998 Trojanow moved to Bombay. From India he wrote reports and essays for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*. 1999 marked the publication of his essay *Dog Days. Return to a Foreign Land* (Carl Hanser), about his return to Bulgaria. In 2001, he undertook a three month journey on foot through Tanzania, in the footsteps of the English explorer and Orientalist Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890).



›Africa reveals itself by concealing itself‹

The Sadhu on the Devil's Wall (Frederking & Thaler) was published in the same year. After travelling along the Ganges from its estuary up to the major cities, Trojanow wrote *An den Inneren Ufern Indiens* (Hanser 2003, published by Penguin in 2005 as *Along the Ganga: To the Inner Shores of India*). Most recently, he completed the hajj, which he portrays in his book *Zu den heiligen Quellen des Islams. Als Pilger nach Mekka und Medina* (Piper 2004).

In March of 2006 his comprehensive novel *The Collector of Worlds* was published. It won the Leipziger Buchmesse prize and remained on the bestseller lists of Germany, Switzerland and Austria for several months. In May 2007 his collection of reports *Nomads on Four Continents* was published, and in autumn of the same year, *A war cancelled: Cultures do not fight one another; they flow together,*

written together with Indian journalist Ranjit Hoskoté, was published. In spring of 2008 *The Unleashed Planet* (Hanser) and *Yearning: Time to get moving* (Herder), written with Fatma Sagir, were published.

Trojanow has received many literary awards, including the *Bertelsmann-Literaturpreis* at the *Ingeborg-Bachmann-Wettbewerb* 1995, the *Marburger Literaturpreis* in 1996, the *Adalbert von Chamisso prize* in 2000, the *Preis der Leipziger Buchmesse* in 2006, and the *Berliner Literaturpreis* and *Mainzer Stadtschreiberpreis* in 2007.



Cast

Singers

African roles (7)

Griot (Storyteller)

Mask 1: Nomfama (Blindness)

Mask 2: Buthongwana (Sleep)

Mask 3: Ntsizi (Sorrow)

Mask 4: Nokufa (Death)

Mask 5: Phakade (Immortality, 'Eternity Of Change')

Sam (Street Musician)

Baritone
Mezzo Soprano
Bass
Baritone
Alto
Tenor
Baritone

European Roles (3)

Sonja, Prof. Dubuffet (Anthropologist)

Marius Liebenberg (Curator)

Prof. Hank-Svensson (Anthropologist) / A Policeman

Vocal Ensemble (Which May Be Cast From Soloists) (16)

S, Ms, A, T1, T2, Bar, B1, B2

Soprano
Tenor
Bass

Dancers (5)

Mask 1: Nomfama (Blindness)

Mask 2: Buthongwana (Sleep)

Mask 3: Ntsizi (Sorrow)

Mask 4: Nokufa (Death)

Mask 5: Phakade (Immortality, 'Eternity Of Change')



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Instrumentalists

African Instruments (10 Players)

2 Umtshingos, Mbira, Umrhubhe, Akadinda (2 Players), Uhadi, Djembe, Igubu, Umasenguane, Dununba, Kuduhorns (6), Shakers, Hosho, Bells

Baroque Ensemble (6-7 Players)

Baroque Violin, Recorder, 2 Cornetti, 2 Trombones, Bassoon, Tambourine

Conventional Orchestra (16 Players)

Flute, Oboe, Clarinet (Bass-Clarinet), Saxophone (Alto / Tenor), Bassoon, Horn, Timpani, Tam-Tam, Xylophone, Flexatone, Acoustic Guitar, Electric Bass-Guitar, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Cello, Double Bass, Drumset (Snare Drum, Cymbals, 4 Bongos, 4 Woodblocks)



Material

Score in A4-format

DVD video-recording of the premiere

CD audio-recording of the premiere

„Liberation of the Masques“ article about MASQUE from the
"Neue Musikzeitschrift" (new music-magazine)

www.huysen.de/Masqueblurb.html



MASQUE



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Press

The Cape Town Opera Studio and University of Cape Town Opera School deserve commendation for boldly staging the radical new opera by composer Hans Huyssen, *Masque*.

It's a 21st-century piece - mankind moves closer to achieving a universal consciousness and a more equitable world order based on understanding the historical interconnections of different traditions, rewriting the victor's history and questioning prejudiced Western perceptions of other cultures. Huyssen has combined European Baroque musicians playing chamber music with an African ensemble - all unfortunately hidden away in the conventional orchestra pit. In the second act, patrons shifted to the edges of their seats to glimpse the kudu horn ensemble.

Masque is still a fresh and unstable work, somewhat like a wet oil painting that has been framed and hung in a gallery before it has dried. The music itself is the strongest element and Huyssen has resplendently achieved his stated aims.... One is greatly encouraged that there is sufficient vision to stage a work of this nature. There are no shortcuts to the development of a talent such as Huyssen's. Will the full Cape Town Philharmonic also now venture outside their narrow classical canon?

Brent Meersman, Mail & Guardian

In the introductory programme notes to the world premiere of his opera *Masque* given by the Cape Town Opera School and University of Cape Town Opera School (Artscape Theatre, 28 October) the South African composer, Hans Huyssen laid a number of crucial problems before the audience. 'Would it be possible to imbue this form of art with a genuine African spirit and not only superficially touch it up with some exotic elements? Would it be possible to include traditional African music, without sacrificing its unassuming poetic qualities? Could one incorporate African instruments and closely bind them into an essentially dramatic form, yet do justice to their essentially non-dramatic idiom? Could one manage to create a forum in which exponents of different backgrounds would be able to contribute

their individual expression, without patronizing or compromising each other? Would one be able to accommodate contrasts, differences, contradictions and discrepancies, contradictions and discrepancies, yet create a unified expression?'

That he was largely successful in overcoming many of these problems is a tribute to the boldness of his vision in being prepared to tackle such a daunting task and also to the numerous sponsors who generously contributed towards the experiment. It is the kind of work that needed to be written despite the numerous artistic and financial risks involved. In this respect it proved an important stepping-stone if not a musical landmark...

The final result proved to be something of a witch's brew: not many would have been convinced by the thought of the Cape Philharmonic Chamber Ensemble, an early music group (in this case the imported Marini Consort Innsbruck) and the Todi Ensemble (of African instruments) playing in tandem, nor would they completely understand the seemingly bizarre amalgam of styles ranging from Baroque fugal and sequential effects, the 'flatt mournfull trumpets' effects of Purcell, music-hall, an on-stage guitarist, and plenty of atonal and African elements. But this was part of Huyssen's daring experiment as he blazed some kind of trail in his quest to find a possible future for opera in South Africa...

Barry Smith for Opera Magazine (UK)

Masque takes a solid step forward in the continuing search for a unique South African opera style.

No informed person would still dare to call opera "eurocentric" (as if that was a cuss-word in the first place). Operatic productions in Cape Town the past ten years have changed that forever. Among the foremost of these are Temmingh's "Enoch: Prophet of God", Duiguid and Hamilton's "earthdiving", and Louis Van Dijk's adaption of Verdi's "Macbeth"...

"*Masque*" goes beyond these works in that it is not just based on an African creation legend, but in that it also seeks to unite a western chamber orchestra, Baroque period instruments and traditional African instruments. It acknowledges the different musical



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heritages of Europe and Africa and presents them on an equal footing. It also seeks to deal honestly with the different cultural perspectives of Europeans and Africans. It is within this dramatic realm - spiritual masks on display in a clinical museum - that the opera seeks a resolution. It pokes fun at the snobbish curators, who miss the whole point of the masks, but also calls to mind how African chiefs often abused their privileged status.

Musically, the work is a montage of various styles and sounds. Composer Hans Huyssen is at pains to point out that no "fusion" between the two continental styles is attempted in the work. Yet kudu horns and saxophone are not the impossible bedfellows one would initially assume them to be. And period instruments with their fewer overtones link nicely with the percussive African sounds. Huyssen has wisely avoided using a rich string sonority in his orchestral writing. The result is a sparser, leaner sound more akin to both the period instruments of the Baroque (Marini Consort Innsbruck, led by Johannes Giesinger) and the African (Todi, led by Kgaladi Thema) ensembles. Furthermore, his fragmented and rather amelodic style of writing is a good companion to the Baroque and African elements...

What was particularly gratifying to note on opening night was the obvious sense of pride among Black members of the audience. There was an ownership of the work and an appreciation for traditional African culture not only being recognised, but also valued as a worthy counterpart to Western traditions.

Masque is definitely worth seeing. It is not an easy listen, but it is a satisfying theatrical experience. Cape Town Opera and UCT Opera School have been bold enough to mount this exciting production. Now let's see if Cape Town audiences will match their enthusiasm for something new...

Carl Fourie, Cape Argus

Face off: Masque, a new South African opera written by Hans Huyssen and directed by Geoff Hyland, features Illka Louw's striking African masks.

With only a handful of home-grown South African operas to the country's credit, the world premiere of Masque on Friday saw the launch of a significant treasure, reflecting the country's layered and rich cultural seams.

Written and conducted by Hans Huyssen, the pioneering work breaks with Western operatic tradition, melding a vibrant cross of Baroque, symphonic and Africa sounds, with dance, to produce something uniquely African. Briefly, Masque plays on the metaphor of masks, striking African masks created by UCT alumnus Illka Louw... "It's a big beast," Hyland said of the opera... But in liberating the art form from its predominantly Western parentage, the production offers a composite that is textured and layered to reflect its African wellspring, and with more than a few surprises in its execution and composition. Hyland uses the word "magical" several times to describe the fusion of Western and African traditions.

Huyssen's music (incorporating UCT's African music students) is dense and complex and the singers, have been asked to infuse their singing with traditional African voice techniques, something Hyland expects will "raise eyebrows" among the purists. Nothing like this has been done before, he notes. "It's a tremendously important piece of work." Opera is an art form that has fascinated and drawn him for many years. "At times during the process of birthing this new work I've felt overwhelmed by its delicate and multifaceted intricacy."

UCT Monday Paper

At the conclusion of the evening one was left with an overwhelming sense of having attended an event which had great artistic significance, not merely for opera in South Africa, but for a larger and wider musical world. Cape Town Opera can take credit for its backing of this work; Huyssen, naturally, gets the laurel.

Deon Irish, Cape Times

›Do not forget the fate of Africa.<



MASQUE

