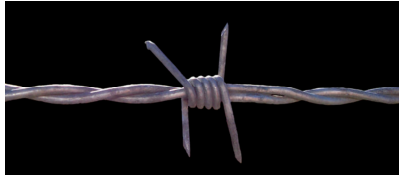




## The Emperor of Atlantis



# MEDIA RELEASE

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**Media Contact: Kevin Dale McKeown**  
778.228.2548 / [marketing@cityoperavancouver.com](mailto:marketing@cityoperavancouver.com)

### In This Release:

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## A Timeless Operatic Satire of Totalitarianism

*The Creators Died at Auschwitz ~ Only A Masterpiece Survives*

### The Emperor of Atlantis

**Dates & Times:** Feb. 01 at 2pm / Feb. 04, 07, 09 and 11 at 8 pm

**Venue:** The Norman Rothstein Theatre (950 West 41st Avenue at Oak)

**Admission:** \$40   **Tickets:** At 604.684.2787, [www.ticketstonight.com](http://www.ticketstonight.com), Tom Lee Music, Sikora's Classical Records and the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.

### ANNOUNCING AN EXTRAORDINARY MASTERWORK

In 1944, at the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp, a unique chamber opera was created. When the Nazis finally realized the real meaning of *The Emperor of Atlantis*, they shipped its entire company to Auschwitz. Among those killed were composer Viktor Ullmann and librettist Petr Kien.

In February of 2009 City Opera Vancouver will co-present, with the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, the British Columbia premiere of this unique and deeply moving work, *The Emperor of Atlantis*.

Atlantis is Ullmann's unquestioned masterpiece. Influenced by Bach, Mahler, Berg and Kurt Weill, it is a direct, tonal, and immensely powerful chamber opera. It is also a 20th Century morality play, with spoken passages in the style of a singspiel, like Mozart's Magic Flute or Weill's City of Mahagonny. The opera speaks both to transformation and recurrence. It speaks from the nadir of the 20th century to the continued violence and despair of the 21st. Ullmann and Kien, together with their colleagues at Thereisenstadt, created a masterwork.

Among seven characters, two are principal: Death, and The Emperor. Horrified by the murderousness of the Emperor and his regime, Death goes on strike. People are killed but do not die. The Emperor demands that Death resume his business. Death finally agrees, but on one extraordinary condition ...

"This story is unique in music history," said Dr Nora Kelly, president of City Opera Vancouver. "So are the circumstances of its creation. We are deeply honoured to give its BC premiere, and in partnership with the Vancouver Holocaust Information Centre."

"Along with the millions of lives lost during the Holocaust, an entire culture disappeared," said Frieda Miller, executive director of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. "And yet, some fragments did survive. The miracle of the The Emperor of Atlantis is that it speaks to the miracle of the human spirit. There are no words to express the pride that we take in this production. It is a first in so many ways."

The City Opera Vancouver and Holocaust Centre co-production of The Emperor of Atlantis will star Andrew Greenwood in the title role, John Minágro as Death, and Robyn Dreidger Klassen, Megan Morrison, William George, Stephen Aberle and Samuel Chung.

Directed by Peter Jorgensen, The Emperor of Atlantis will be presented in the original German, with seven singers and a 12-piece orchestra led by City Opera's artistic director Dr Charles Barber. A new translation, with English supertitles, has been written by Dr. Harvey De Roo.

Stage and costume design is by Marti Wright, and lighting design by Adrian Muir. Janet Lea is the producer, and Nora Kelly the associate producer.

### **TICKETS NOW ON SALE**

The Vancouver production of The Emperor of Atlantis will have five performances at the Norman Rothstein Theatre (950 West 41st Avenue at Oak): February 01, 2009 at 2 pm and February 04, 07, 09 and 11 at 8 pm.

Tickets to The Emperor of Atlantis are now on sale by phone at 604.684.2787, online [www.ticketstonight.com](http://www.ticketstonight.com), Tom Lee Music, Sikora's Classical Records and the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.

## **OPERA SYNOPSIS**

Viktor Ullmann's breathtaking satire on fascism is set in Atlantis, where Emperor Uberall advocates total war against all, and even Death wishes to retire from his duties. The score is full of ironic brilliance, humour, poignancy, and an intriguing code of musical quotations from blues to "Deutschland über Alles" in the style of a Bach chorale.

The following is a synopsis of the story and action.

**Scene One:** The Loudspeaker introduces every character and is answered by an orchestral interlude. Harlekin sings an aria of dissatisfaction at the way the world is going.

Death joins him in a duet about the loss of meaning in the present day and then sings mournfully of the time when he was young and war was an activity of glory rather than the current senseless slaughter. Death is interrupted by the Drummer Girl, companion to the Emperor, who conveys the monarch's call for all-out war in a parody of the German national anthem. Death refuses to acquiesce.

**Scene Two:** A Dance of Death introduces the Emperor, who demands information from the front. Loudspeaker provides the news on behalf of the military and government ministries. The Emperor learns that people are being killed – but do not die. 'Some bizarre disease has broken out. The soldiers aren't able to die.' The Emperor is horrified and issues a proclamation that turns the situation to his advantage, claiming credit for everyone's 'immunity' to death. There follows a second Dance of Death.

**Scene Three:** We meet Bubikopf, the quintessential 'Aryan' maiden, and a soldier. They skirmish and he overpowers her. Bubikopf begs to be shot, but the soldier has fallen in love with her as does she with him a moment later. She sings of this epiphany as the Drummer Girl exhorts her to return to the service of the Emperor. All three then sing of love, war, and pride, Bubikopf and the soldier choosing love. The scene closes with a Dance for the Living Dead.

**Scene Four:** Loudspeaker advises the Emperor that rebel forces are gaining ground. There occurs an announcement from 'another station' that a dread physician has 'healed our blindness' and that a terrible retribution for horrendous acts will be exacted. At this, the Emperor, Harlekin, and the Drummer Girl, in a trio, ask what they have accomplished and what it is to be human. Death appears in the Emperor's mirror, depicting himself as a gardener maintaining natural order against the bloody projects of the Emperor. At the penultimate moment, the Emperor asks that Death return to his work. Death agrees, but on one condition.... The opera ends with the Emperor's farewell, and a four-part apostrophe in a Chorale of forgiveness drawn from JS Bach's Ein Feste Burg. One shocking surprise remains.

## **REVIEWS FROM PREVIOUS PRODUCTIONS**

Everything about the work, from its subject to its quirky part-classical, part-cabaret instrumentation, was determined by Ullmann's presence in Theresienstadt. Yet it must also be said that "Der Kaiser von Atlantis" is also a remarkable, affecting work in purely musical and dramatic terms. Just under an hour long, it tells a complex story in a concise, direct way and in an omnivorous musical language that draws on both classical and popular styles.

*-- Allan Kozinn, New York Times*

The music is full of dark lyricism and tart dissonance, a brew of high and low styles indebted to Schoenberg, Berg, Mahler, and Weill, but with an impressive integrity all its own. And in case Kien's allegory needed underlining, Ullmann deploys a set of thinly veiled musical references including a satirized version of the anthem of the Third Reich.

*-- Jeremy Eichler, Boston Globe*

## **A VANCOUVER CONNECTION**

There is an extraordinary Vancouver connection to The Emperor of Atlantis.

Two members of the Theresienstadt orchestra, also shipped to Auschwitz in 1944, managed to make their escape six months later. Thirty years later, Pavel Kling rose to become chair of the School of Music at the University of Victoria, and a violin teacher at UBC.

Prof Kling was well-known to the music community of Vancouver – but virtually no one knew that he had been an inmate of Theresienstadt, a survivor of Auschwitz, and a player at what would have been the world premiere of The Emperor of Atlantis.

One of his students is the conductor of our production.

## **THE COMPANY**

### **The Cast**

- The Emperor of Atlantis: Andrew Greenwood
- Death: John Minágro
- Harlekin: William George
- Loudspeaker: Stephen Aberle
- Bubikopf: Robyn Dreidger-Klassen
- Soldier: Samuel Chung
- Drummer Girl: Megan Morrison
- Dancer: Alisha Suitor

### **The Orchestra**

- Flute / Piccolo: Anne-Elise Keefer
- Oboe: Tony Nickels
- Clarinet / Saxophone: David Branter
- Trumpet: Jim Littleford
- Banjo / Guitar: Edward Henderson
- Keyboard: TBC
- Percussion: Philip Crewe
- First Violin: Nancy DiNovo
- Second Violin: Carolyn Cole
- Viola: Martina Smazal
- Violoncello: Dianne Berthelsdorf
- Kontrabass: Les Kasprzak
- Librarian: Demetrius Phaleron
- Contractor: Jim Littleford

### **The Production Team**

- Producer: Janet Lea
- Associate Producer: Nora Kelly
- Production Advisor: Robert Eberle
- Stage Director: Peter Jorgensen
- Associate Stage Director and Stage Manager: Chris Allan
- Music Director: Charles Barber
- Set and Costume Designer: Marti Wright
- Lighting Designer: Adrian Muir
- Technical Director: Jayson Mclean
- Translation and Titles: Harvey De Roo

### **SPECIAL THANKS**

Special thanks are due to the many public and private patrons of *The Emperor of Atlantis*, and for the special assistance offered by the Vancouver Musicians' Association (Local 145, American Federation of Musicians), the Canadian Actors Equity Association, and the Norman Rothstein Theatre.

In addition, we are deeply grateful to 2010 Legacies Now and the Province of British Columbia for their significant investment in this premiere. This production of *The Emperor of Atlantis* would not be possible without their help.

## THE PRESENTERS

**The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre** was founded in 1983 by survivors of the Holocaust, leaving a permanent legacy in a major centre devoted to Holocaust based anti-racism education. Since then, genocide has taken place in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Sudan. The challenge of preventing and responding to genocide remains urgent.

The VHEC is an internationally recognized teaching museum and the leading provider of Holocaust education in British Columbia, reaching over 20,000 students and teachers and thousands of members of the public annually. VHEC produces teaching exhibits and innovative school programs, and delivers Holocaust symposia and cultural and commemorative events. In 2008 it co-presented *Brundibár* at the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts at the University of British Columbia.

The VHEC will present Holocaust Survivors at pre-show sessions, and publicize production to schools, and develop downloadable classroom support materials and make them accessible online through the VHEC and City Opera websites. These resources will support student learning about the "model ghetto" of Theresienstadt, the life and musical career of Victor Ullmann, and the concept of art as resistance. [www.vhec.org](http://www.vhec.org).

**City Opera Vancouver** is responsible for the artistic production of *The Emperor of Atlantis*. COV is a professional chamber opera company which has commissioned *Pauline* (libretto by Margaret Atwood, music by Christos Hatzis, starring Judith Forst).

COV has a special commitment to the Downtown Eastside, giving numerous recitals and lecture-demonstrations there since 2005, and will be in residence at the restored and historic Pantages Theatre. City Opera Vancouver operates in ongoing partnership with the Community Arts Council of Vancouver. [www.cityoperavancouver.com](http://www.cityoperavancouver.com)

## THE CREATORS

**Viktor Ullmann** was a pianist, choirmaster, conductor and music critic, born on January 1st 1898 in Těšín, (on the Czech Republic-Poland border) where he also began his musical studies. He died at age 46 in Auschwitz.

From 1914 Ullmann lived in Vienna, and between 1918 and 1919 studied in Schonberg's composition classes. From 1920 until 1927 Ullmann was one of Alexander Zemlinsky's assistants in the New German Theatre in Prague (now the State Opera Prague).

Artistic collaboration and long-time personal friendship with Zemlinsky provided Ullmann with a wealth of personal and artistic experiences.

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In the season 1927-28 Viktor Ullmann served as head of the opera company in Ústí nad Labem. Together with local and invited artists, Ullmann managed to stage a truly impressive repertoire (including operas by Richard Strauss, Krenek and others).

He also became involved in the anthroposophic movement, his new-found interests taking him to Zurich and later to Stuttgart. Nazi persecution forced Ullmann to leave Germany in 1933 and so returned to Prague, embarking on the uneasy road of a freelance musician. He worked with the department of music at Czechoslovak Radio, wrote book and music reviews for various magazines, including the Prague-based Bohemian newspaper, lectured to educational groups, gave private lessons and was actively involved in the programme of the Czechoslovak Society for Music Education. At about that time Ullmann made friends with the composer Alois Haba. Ullmann enrolled at Prague's Conservatoire of Music and studied there with Haba and others for two years (1935-1937).

Viktor Ullmann was a leading figure in a circle of Czech and German friends for whom he gave private music performances, chamber concerts, and parties. On September 8th 1942 Viktor Ullmann was deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto. Even in such extremely difficult conditions he succeeded in maintaining artistic activity.

Together with Karel Ančerl (who would become conductor of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra), Rafael Schachter, Gideon Klein, Hans Krasa and others, he wrote a glorious chapter in the camp's cultural life. Ullmann was deported to the Auschwitz death camp, where he died in a gas chamber, probably on October 15, 1944.

Only part of Viktor Ullmann's work has been found so far. Before the outbreak of the Second World War Ullmann wrote some forty works, mostly orchestral, chamber and piano, and two operas. In stylistic terms, Ullmann's early compositions bear traces of Schönberg's influences; his works from the 1930s are polytonal in the classical formal framework, while Mahlerian inspiration is discernible in Ullmann's remarkable songs. *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* is, beyond question, his masterpiece.

**Frantisek Petr Kien** was born in Varnsdorf, Czechoslovakia on January 1, 1919, and died at the age of twenty-five in Auschwitz, October 1944.

His visual and literary works reflected his experiences in the concentration camp at Theresienstadt (Terezin), where he too was imprisoned during World War II. Kien's watercolour drawings, created in secret on stolen paper, vividly depict the brutality of daily life in a camp the Nazis portrayed to the world as a "model Jewish community". As an author he is best known for his libretto for *The Emperor of Atlantis*.

Much earlier Petr Kien studied in Brno, and entered the Prague Art Academy in 1936. He continued to study privately after the Germans shut down Czechoslovakia's universities and art schools in 1939, and found inspiration in Expressionism and Kafka.

In December 1941 Kien was deported to Theresienstadt. Assigned as a draftsman to the 'Technical Office of Self-Administration', he took part in the camp's bustling cultural scene by sketching portraits and writing poetry; his documentary drawings, shown only to a trusted few, would have gotten him shot had they been discovered.

Kien's verse cycle *Town of Plague* (1943) and satirical play *Puppets* (1943, now lost) led to an invitation from composer Viktor Ullmann to collaborate on *The Emperor of Atlantis*. Accounts differ, but it may have received one rehearsal in the spring of 1944 before being banned for its veiled attack on Hitler.

The author and Ullmann decided their next project would be an opera about Joan of Arc. The Nazis decided otherwise. On October 16, 1944 Kien, his wife and parents were among the thousands put on a transport to Auschwitz. He was not sent to the gas chambers but died from disease, probably typhus, at the end of the month. He was 25. His family also perished.

*(Ullmann and Kien notes, edited, courtesy Long Beach Opera)*

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**Media Contact**

Kevin Dale McKeown

778.228.2548

marketing@cityoperavancouver.com