

# THE PLAY OF THE NIGHT

20.-21. januar 2025 Studiescenen  
Kl. 17 og kl. 20

Opera i en akt af  
Britta Byström og  
Peter Bäckström

Operaen er støttet af A.P. Møller og Hustru Chastine  
Mc-Kinney Møllers Fond til almene Formaal



DET KONGELIGE DANSKE  
MUSIKKONSERVATORIUM

*A. P. Møller og Hustru  
Chastine Mc-Kinney Møllers Fond til almene Formaal*

dkdm.dk

# WELCOME

Welcome to the annual January project at The Royal Danish Academy of Music (RDAM) in which the voice department, the orchestra department and the conductors' class collaborate on a chamber opera production.

This year is very special in that we present the world premiere of Britta Byström's and Peter Bäckström's opera *The Play of the Night* commissioned by RDM with generous support from the A.P. Møller og Hustru Chastine McKinney Møllers Fond til almene Formaal. The title refers to Penelope's nightly dreams where she meets images, goddesses and people while waiting for her husband Odysseus. The opera has been under way for three years and is part of RDM's extensive MUSIPÆD project supported by the A.P. Møller Foundation, so it is with great admiration for all involved that we welcome the audience today.

A special thank you to RDM and Helene Gjerris for launching the project, to composer Britta Byström not only for her wonderful music but also for her presence and input during the rehearsal period, to librettist and director Peter Bäckström for his beautiful libretto and brilliant work with the singers, to conductor Ondřej Soukop for his tireless energy and inspired musical direction, to Sandra Åberg for lovely costumes and visual design, to Robert Follin for stunt coordination, to assistant director Dagmar Skovgaard Boas for her steadfast effort at keeping everybody happy, to production manager Tine Damsgaard-Sørensen for holding all the strings in such a positive way, to the RDM faculty, administration and technical staff for their support, and finally a big shoutout to all the students involved for your passionate dedication and hard work.

Eva Hess Thaysen, Professor

## **Peter Bäckström - Stage Director and Librettist**

Since his directorial debut in 1986, Peter Bäckström has worked as an opera director, playwright, librettist, dramaturge, educator, and theatre director in his homeland Sweden, as well as in Denmark, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy. He freelances as a director, librettist, playwright and coach, and holds the position of senior associate professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen.

## **Britta Byström - Composer**

Britta Byström (b. 1977 in Sweden) began her musical career as a trumpet player. From 1995 she studied composition at the Royal University of Music in Stockholm, where her main teachers were Pär Lindgren and Bent Sørensen. Byström has composed for most sizes of orchestras and contexts including chamber music, vocal music and opera, but the emphasis has been on orchestral music. Some of those who have performed her music are the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra and Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra. *Parallel Universes*, a piece commissioned by BBC Proms to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Royal Albert Hall, was first performed in 2021 with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor John Storgårds. During 2024, the violin concerto *Shortening Days*, written for Janine Jansen and co-commissioned by the NDR Elbphilharmonie and the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, had its world premiere. Since 2016, Britta Byström is a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music.

### **Ondřej Soukup - Conductor**

Czech conductor Ondřej Soukup has conducted the BBC SSO, Czech Chamber Philharmonic, Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic, Copenhagen Phil, Aarhus and Aalborg Symphony Orchestras, and others. This season, he conducts the Moldovan National Philharmonic, Helsingborg Symphony, and Magna Sinfonia (UK). Recent highlights include working with Sir Thomas Allen, Maxim Vengerov, stepping in for Martyn Brabbins, and with the Prague Summer Nights Festival at short notice. Ondřej was MD with King's College London Symphony Orchestra and recently graduated from London's Royal College of Music with distinction. [ondrej-soukup.com](http://ondrej-soukup.com).

### **Sandra Åberg - Costume Designer**

Sandra Åberg is a costume designer, set costumer and textile artist based in Malmö, Sweden. Inspiration for her work lays in building character, details and how colours work together. The starting point for the costumes in *The Play of the Night* was movement, simplicity and ancient history of the goddesses.

## **CHARACTERS**

### **Penelope**

Penelope is the wife of Odysseus, and she is the Queen of Ithaka. She married when she was fourteen years old, and less than a year later, she gave birth to a son. Then, her husband, Odysseus, went into the Trojan war, leaving her and their son behind. She has been waiting for Odysseus for the past twenty years, surrounded by young suitors who want her to remarry, as her husband is presumed dead.

### **Eurykleia**

Penelope's loyal servant. The wet-nurse of Telemakhos. About the same age as her mistress.

### **Telemakhos**

Penelope's and Odysseus' son. Aged twenty.

### **Odysseus**

King of Ithaka. Went into war as a young man, only twenty-one years old, leaving his wife and a newly born son behind. This was twenty years ago: After ten years at war, on the winning side, he left and has been on his way home for the past ten years.

### **Eurymakhos**

A young man, and one of Penelope's suitors.

### **Amphinomos**

Another young man, and one of Penelope's suitors.

### **Antinoos**

Another young man, and one of Penelope's suitors. There seems to be a sort of attraction between him and Penelope.

## **Melantho**

A servant girl.

## **THE GODDESSES**

### **Artemis**

Independent and self-governed, with no need of men, she goes hunting in the moonlight. She is good at taking care of herself, but can be destructive and cause others great suffering. Quick to anger.

### **Athena**

Goddess of wisdom and knowledge. She is strategic, can judge any situation, reflects, and has a lot of self-control. She lacks sympathy with other women, is very much focused on herself, and without friends. And yet she has great sympathy for Odysseus.

### **Hestia**

Goddess of the domestic hearth. She has a calm inner centre. She represents relation and connection and integrity. She emphasizes the importance and value of being your own person. She meditates. She is introspective. She looks to her own needs. She is intuitive. She realizes the essentials of any situation. She seeks solitude and develops herself. She has no experience of love-affaires.

### **Hera**

Goddess of married life. For Hera, the husband is the centre of life. She lacks any relation to other women. She is hostile towards Aphrodite. She can easily feel anger towards other women. Dissatisfied with one's marriage or not, being married is still of importance. If her husband is unfaithful, her anger is pointed to the other woman, not to her husband.

### **Demeter**

Motherly. The most generous of the goddesses. She takes care of others. She is caring, supporting, helpful and open-handed. Being a mother is more important than marriage.

### **Persephone**

Passive, inactive and governed by others. She can move in any direction. She has obliging manners. She is calm, well-mannered, amenable and vague. She is not sure about the idea of marriage.

### **Aphrodite**

Goddess of love. She is invulnerable. She is never victimized. She is committed to what seems to be important at any given time. She feels great joy at love and beauty. She has an appetite for life. She lives only in time present.

# SYNOPSIS

The action takes place during five days, five nights and one dawn, in Penelope's house

## **Scene 1 Promises DAY**

Penelope is weaving; she has promised her suitors that she will marry one of them when the weave, that she has been working on for the past three years, is completed.

## **Scene 2 Images of a dream NIGHT**

With help from Eurykleia, Penelope unravels the weave, delaying her work, trying to avoid having to choose any of the suitors. In a dream she meets with seven goddesses, and with Odysseus, her husband.

## **Scene 3 Who will she choose? DAY**

The suitors press in upon Penelope, but she keeps them at a distance.

## **Scene 4 Ambivalence NIGHT**

In a dream the seven goddesses reveal Penelope's inner conflict: continue to wait for Odysseus, or seek a lover among the suitors? In her dream she meets with Odysseus, and she questions herself and her waiting. Waking up, she unravels the weave.

## **Scene 5 Treason DAY**

Melantho, one of the servant girls, has discovered that Penelope secretly unravels the weave. The servant girls threaten to tell the suitors of Penelope's betrayal, and Penelope has to agree to let her son, Telemakhos, spend the night with Melantho. Antinoos, one of the suitors, tries to convince Penelope that her husband, Odysseus, is dead.

## **Scene 6 After all she is human NIGHT**

In a dream Penelope reflects on memories of her husband, and their marriage. The goddesses suggest that Penelope remarries. Eurykleia tries to wake her up with news of her husband. Finally, while awake, Penelope unravels the weave.

## **Scene 7 I know not yet myself DAY**

Penelope's and Odysseus' son, Telemakhos, wants his mother to return to her parents and marry again, making him the new master of the house. It upsets her to realize that not even her son is on her side. The suitors demand an answer from her, but she refuses to answer and makes them leave.

## **Scene 8 Remember NIGHT**

In a dream the goddesses remind Penelope of her childhood. She was then a self-governed young person, not influenced by others, and innocent. But aged fourteen she was given away by her parents to marry Odysseus. In the dream she meets her husband and questions their marriage.

### **Scene 9      Betrayal of promise      DAY**

Telemakhos, Penelope's son, enters, regretting his harsh words. The suitors want Penelope to decide, and the servant girls want another night with Telemakhos, using their knowledge of how Penelope unravels the weave as a threat. When Penelope refuses to agree on their terms, they expose Penelope's betrayal to the suitors. The suitors demand that Penelope marries. Telemakhos defends his mother.

### **Scene 10      Penelope I am no longer      NIGHT**

Penelope wants the night and the goddesses to arrive. In a dream the goddesses make her reflect on her life, and she admits and accepts that she is in pain and under too much pressure. When she meets with Odysseus, in her dream, she takes leave of him.

### **Scene 11      Killing them all      DAWN**

Penelope wants to be left alone. Suddenly, she hears a sound, coming from the house. Eurykleia enters and triumphantly announces that Odysseus has returned. He has killed all the suitors and all the servant girls. Penelope and Eurykleia run to The Great Hall. After twenty years of waiting, finally, Penelope meets her husband, Odysseus.

## **WHAT IS THE OPERA REALLY ABOUT**

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

From: Four Quartets, Little Gidding, V, by T. S. Eliot, 1943

**THE PLAY OF THE NIGHT** is an opera about a person's individuation process. Penelope has been waiting for her husband, Odysseus, who has been at war, for the past twenty years. She imagines that her husband is still alive, avoiding answering the men that want her to remarry. They, on their hand, suggest that her husband is dead, and that he shall never return.

In her nightly dreams Penelope meets seven goddesses, and their presence form a great weave of psychic factors. Scenes, images and the same characters return night after night.

In her dreams she meets Odysseus, her husband, but she also meets Antinoos, one of the suitors that wants to marry her. They are both important images, and represent, each in their own way, her animus.

During the opera Penelope undergoes a process of change and maturity through psychological growth. The inner centre from which this process operates is her inner self, the true core of her mind and psyche. In order to establish her inner individuation in an outer reality, Penelope has to make decisions about how to live her life. The questions are: Is she the waiting wife and a mother – only? What is Penelope's true self? Who will she become?

Peter Bäckström

# CAST

<b>Penelope</b>	Elisabeth Rosenberg
<b>Eurykleia</b>	Berte Wiggers Lyneborg
<b>Odysseus</b>	Jo Angeloff
<b>Telemakhos</b>	Joseph Mossop
<b>Melantho</b>	Karen Sofie Nilsen Hafskjold
<b>Antinoos</b>	Per Svenson
<b>Amphinomos</b>	Anton Josef Puscha
<b>Eurymakhos</b>	Zoe Kaznelson
<b>The suitors</b>	Thor Huttunen, William Tarrach, Marcel Slakonja, Magnus Mariegaard, Nikolaj Høybye, Tuomas Pääkkönen, Mikkel Zielinski Ajslev
<b>The servant girls</b>	Yinuo Niu, Xiaoya Shi, Indigo Laurén, Dafne Stilund Nielsen, Mathea Kvalvåg-Andersen, Ida Dreisig Sarnar, Therese Schoder-Larsen, Ingrid Rydh, Victoria Elmas, Marie Borup, Signe Haugaard Lauridsen, Inga Lohne-Otterstad, Anna Christine Bauer, Astrid Elise Thomsen, Klara Kofod Lauridsen, Anna Gerda Sylvest

## THE GODDESSES

<b>Artemis</b>	Veronika Pervan
<b>Aphrodite</b>	Steinunn María Pormar
<b>Hestia</b>	Anna Zedníčková
<b>Demeter</b>	Martine Johanne Olsen
<b>Athena</b>	Magnus Bille Fought Kristensen
<b>Persephone</b>	Johan Kullander
<b>Hera</b>	Darnell Boddie

## ORCHESTRA

<b>Conductor</b>	Ondřej Soukup
<b>Violin 1</b>	Cassandra Andrea Juul
<b>Violin 2</b>	Olga Larsson
<b>Viola</b>	Viktorija Viktorova
<b>Cello</b>	Arthur Daems
<b>Bass</b>	Leo Klintman
<b>Flute</b>	Sille Amalie Enevoldsen
<b>Oboe</b>	Ioana Lavinia Opris
<b>Clarinet</b>	Kristopher Nash
<b>Bassoon</b>	Nanna Else Johansen
<b>Horn</b>	Magne Christiansen Meyer
<b>Trumpet</b>	Preben Zijlstra
<b>Trombone</b>	Elias Fridolfsson
<b>Percussion</b>	Zheng Cao
<b>Piano</b>	Denisa Irina Pîrvulescu
<b>Harp</b>	Steaph Chaimbeul

## PRODUCTION TEAM

<b>Stage director</b>	Peter Bäckström
<b>Costume designer</b>	Sandra Åberg
<b>Assistant director</b>	Dagmar Skovgaard Boas
<b>Stunt consultant</b>	Robert Follin
<b>Lighting master</b>	Rasmus Ammitzbøll Egegaard Sørensen
<b>Lighting assistant, visuals</b>	Gabriel Bäckström
<b>Technical assistance</b>	Jacob Due
<b>Dresser</b>	Therese Schoder-Larsen
<b>Graphics</b>	Klara Kofod Lauridsen
<b>Translation consultants</b>	Lene and Max Rognmo Bäckström
<b>Casting</b>	Tuva Semmingsen, Eva Hess Thaysen, Jan Lund, Peter Bäckström
<b>Musical coaching</b>	Erik Karlberg
<b>Pianists</b>	Merel Beelen, Denisa Irina Pîrvulescu, Sebastian Nawrocki, Eirik Stave, Manuel Esperilla
<b>Head of Voice Department</b>	Eva Hess Thaysen
<b>Production manager</b>	Tine Damsgaard-Sørensen
<b>Programme book</b>	Anne Heide