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GLARE

Music: Søren Nils Eichberg
Libretto: Hannah Dübgen

Lead commissioner: Royal Opera House Covent Garden, London
Production period: 2014

Duration: appr. 80 minutes

Instrumentation: Fl, Cl (=B.Cl), Bsn (=C.Bsn), Hn, Tbn, Perc, Pno (=Synth), Vln, Vla, Vlc, Cb

Brief Synopsis:

Glare is a psycho-drama chamber-play with elements of science-fiction which focuses on the relationships between four protagonists. As doubts surface about whether one of the characters is an artificial human, the opera debates reality and its perception, the authenticity of experience, and emotion. It asks what is real and how we can really know who we are.

Characters:

LEA, a young woman (Soprano), ALEX, a man in his prime (Tenor), CHRISTINA, Alex's ex-girlfriend (Mezzo), MICHAEL, Alex's older-brother-like friend (Baritone)

Overview:

Søren Nils Eichberg, winner of the prestigious Queen Elisabeth Competition and Danish National Symphony Orchestra's first composer in residence, has won widespread acclaim for his orchestral and chamber music. These include his award-winning *Qilaatersorneq* (2001) and the symphonies *'Stürzten wir uns ins Feuer'* (2005) and *'Before Heaven, Before Earth'* (2010). All his music is characterized by a powerful rhythmic drive and rich orchestral colour.

Eichberg's opera *Glare* is commissioned by the Royal Opera House, London, UK. German poet Hannah Dübgen provides an original libretto that explores a tense web of human relationships and leaves the audience startled and questioning its own observation of the world.

Full Synopsis:

Alex is waiting for Lea, his new girlfriend. Alex recalls what fascinates him about Lea: her perfect beauty and self-assurance, her non-ambiguous affection for him and the fact that they like the same things. When Lea arrives, they go to a party together.

At the party, Alex and Lea bump into Christina, Alex's ex-girlfriend. Alex introduces Lea to Christina. As the two women start talking, Alex notices in Lea's befriending of Christina certain „entangling“ patterns similar to when they first met. Alex is confused, and jealous that the two women get along so well.

Discovering more signs of strange behaviour in Lea, Alex turns to his friend Michael, asking for his advice. Michael, a scientist who works in a futurology laboratory, compliments Alex on his sharp perception. He confirms Alex's doubts about Lea's unnatural behaviour and reveals that Lea is in fact the test model of a highly advanced lust-machine. Michael apologises for not having told Alex, he just wanted to offer him some distraction after his break-up with Christina. Michael tells Alex about a test which „proves“ that Lea is an android. Michael then asks Alex to keep their conversation secret and leaves.

Alex is terrified: The woman he desires so much, who seems so real is actually an android, a machine?

When Alex and Lea next meet, Alex still desires her, but feels uneasy in her presence. Lea does not understand what suddenly burdens their relationship. She wants to know what the problem is, what has changed between them, but Alex does not answer those questions.

Out on the street, Lea happens to meet Christina. Christina asks Lea how things are going with Alex. Lea's uneasy, slightly unnatural answer makes Christina suspicious.

Alex is becoming more and more anxious. He asks himself questions: What do androids do at night? Do they have dreams? Does Lea turn herself off when he is not there?

When Alex accidentally meets Christina, he tells her about his doubts whether or not Lea is „authentic“, but without explicitly mentioning Michael's disclosure. Christina tells Alex off for being paranoid and urges him not to change Lea.

Christina enters the pub where Michael and Alex met. Christina runs into Michael who starts flirting with her. When Michael's flirting becomes too aggressive, Christina leaves. Michael is angry – and gets drunk. Still in the pub, Michael sees Lea standing at the bar. Michael approaches, abuses and eventually rapes Lea, insisting that „this is what she was made for“. When Christina comes along and interrupts, Michael flees the scene.

Christina calms down the trembling Lea. Drawing closer, Christina eventually kisses Lea. At first Lea lets it happen but then stiffens, claiming that “she was not made for this”. Christina is embarrassed and leaves.

Lea looks for Alex in his home. Alex can no longer hide his suspicion and confronts Lea directly: Are you real? Lea does not understand: Of course... Her feelings, her pain, her excitement, her fear – everything about her is real.

Alex gets angrier and angrier, Lea stays calm which adds to Alex's aggression, he feels manipulated by Lea.

Alex eventually performs the test Michael had told him about: He asks Lea to cut him with a knife. Lea refuses. Alex is furious, claiming that Lea is unable to hurt him because „that's how she is programmed“. Lea denies that and tries to calm down Alex. She asks him to trust her, but Alex gets only more and more aggressive in his demands. When he violently pressures Lea to cut him, they get into a fight in which Alex accidentally stabs Lea with the knife. Lea falls to the ground, she is dead.

Alex is shocked by what he has done. Michael finds him. asks about Lea. Alex murmurs: She is gone... In his desperation, Alex begs Michael to „build him a new Lea“. Michael's light-hearted reply makes Alex freeze and realise that Michael may never been serious about Lea being an android.

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