

Klaipėda Music Theatre

Giedrius Kuprevičius

## THE PRUSSIANS

An Opera in Two Acts

Libretto by G. Kuprevičius

based on the tragedy "HERKUS MANTAS," by Juozas Grušas presented by

Conductor - STASYS DOMARKAS

Director - NERIJUS PETROKAS

Set Designer - VIRGINIJA IDZELYTĖ

Chorus Director - VLADIMIRAS KONSTANTINOVAS

Choreographer - JURIJUS SMORIGINAS

### CHARACTERS AND CAST:

**Herkus Mantas**, the leader of Notanga- VIRGILIJUS NOREIKA / ALGIRDAS JANUTAS

**Kristina**, Mantas' betrothed- VALERIJA BALSYTĖ, ASTA KRIKŠČIŪNAITĖ

**Ragūnas**, a viting - MINDAUGAS GYLYS, VIAČESLAVAS TARASOVAS

**Nomeda**, Mantas' sister - NIDA GIGALAVIČIŪTĖ, RITA PETRAUSKAITĖ

**Koltis**, a viting - VYTAUTAS GABRĖNAS, KĘSTUTIS NEVULIS

**Samilis**, a viting - MINDAUGAS GYLYS, ŠARŪNAS JUŠKEVIČIUS

**Eisutis**, a young warrior - ROMUALDAS VAZBYS, VYTAUTAS VIRGANAVIČIUS

**Lauma**, a middle-aged woman - VITALIJA KIRSTUKAITĖ, DALIA KUŽMARSKYTĖ

**Krivis (A Pagan Priest)** - VYTAUTAS KLIUKINSKAS, ARTŪRAS KOZLOVSKIS

**Sachsė**, the German commander - ARTŪRAS KOZLOVSKIS, KĘSTUTIS NEVULIS

**Ditrich**, his attendant- DALIA KUŽMARSKYTĖ, SVETLANA LEŽNIOVA

**Hirchalsas**, a knight - STEPONAS GUDMANAS, RAMŪNAS KAUBRYS

**A Servant** - ROMUALDAS BUTKEVIČIUS, STASYS REZGEVIČIUS

**The Narrator** - VITALIJA KIRSTUKAITĖ, VIRGIS PUPŠYS

Prussian vittings (noblemen), warriors, Crusaders, monks,  
pilgrims, courtiers - singers and dancers

### PLOT

The action of the opera takes place during the Great Prussian Uprising (1260-74)

### Act I

From a hill some Prussians watch a battle with the Crusaders and glorify their god Perkūnas. The Prussian leader Herkus Mantas appears, and his people hail him for his victory. Upon catching sight of his sister Nomeda in the crowd, he rejoices over her gentle hands, which have

healed many warriors. Lauma appeals to Mantas and demands revenge for her son, whom the enemy blinded. Mantas reveals to the viting Ragūnas a plan for an attack on Karaliaučius: he will announce that he is leaving for Kulm but will actually lead his warriors to Karaliaučius. The viting Samilis and the young warrior Eisutis soon appear with a quarrel. The latter of the two defended a German woman, who begged to be taken to Mantas. In his heart Mantas feels that the woman is his betrothed Kristina. She tells Herkus that they have a son, who is now in Karaliaučius, in the Crusader castle with Sachse, and begs him in the name of their son not to attack Karaliaučius. Mantas promises to rescue their son and gives his betrothed an amber amulet. The Prussians celebrate their victory; mead flows; they sing and dance. During their feast Samilis accuses Mantas of loving Kristina, who is a German and a Christian. A pagan priest tries to dampen the leaders' quarrel with a hymn about the sun. At this time, some warriors demand that one of the Crusaders be sacrificed to the gods.

Three times the lots drawn condemn to death the knight Hirschals, who is Kristina's brother and was Herkus' protector and teacher. Mantas commands that Samilis, who falsified the lots, be punished with imprisonment. While the altar is burning, Eisutis announces that Samilis has fled.

## Act II

### Scene One

Monks are praying in Karaliaučius castle. In another corner of the castle actors are performing an allegory about the godless leper Heinrich. The performance is cut short by Ditrich, who announces that the Prussian viting Samilis has arrived and wants to betray his leader. Sachse commands that Samilis be given as many men as he wants. After they have left, he begins reading a papal bull. Sachse accuses Kristina, who is in the castle, of lying and hiding Mantas. Separated from Mantas and her son, she laments her cruel fate. Some Crusaders bring Mantas in in chains. Sachse commands the traitor Samilis to be hanged, and Kristina runs out to tell the Prussians that the siege is over. The leader of the Prussians asks to have his hands freed; he claims that he wants to write a letter of truce. Then he knocks over the candle and flees in the darkness.

Scene Two The Prussian camp near Karaliaučius. The vittings Koltis and Ragūnas ponder who could have betrayed Mantas. Kristina appears and announces that the traitor was Samilis. Eisutis runs in and announces that Mantas has escaped. Distrustful of Mantas' betrothed, the vittings suspect her of serving other gods and decide to burn her. Clutching to her heart the amulet Herkus gave her, she says goodbye. Mantas appears. He asks where Kristina is. "Sacrificed to the gods," answer the warriors. As the Crusaders surround the Prussians ever more closely, Mantas and his comrades grieve for the fate of their people.

---

Giedrius Kuprevicius wrote:

*To remember those who have disappeared,  
to warn those who are disappearing*

*The Prussians. . . . Why do we keep returning  
to the theme of their fate? Are we stirred*

*perhaps by the uncertainty of the future,  
an uncertainty born of the present state of  
human behavior, perhaps by the turmoil of  
historical conscience, or perhaps by fear that  
our own nation may disappear?*

*Whatever the reason, three sources of inspiration  
led to "The Prussians": the drama "Herkus Mantas"  
by Juozas Grusas; the film of the same name, by  
Marijonas Giedrys, in which my music was used;  
and Stasys Domarkas' often repeated words: "We  
need an important theme".*

Opera "Prusai" ("The Prussians")  
has been written specially for Klaipeda Music Theatre.

Juozas Grusas, Lithuanian writer, 1901-1986

In 1924 Juozas Grusas entered the Faculty  
of Theology and Philosophy of Kaunas Vytautas  
Magnus University. After graduating from  
studies in 1931 he taught Lithuanian language  
at the Jewish school-teachers pedagogical  
courses in Kaunas, and later until 1939 he  
was an editor of the Catholic daily "Musu  
laikrastis" ("Our Newspaper").

## To remember those who have disappeared, to warn those who are disappearing

The Prussians. . . . Why do we keep returning to the theme of their fate? Are we stirred perhaps by the uncertainty of the future, an uncertainty born of the present state of human behavior, perhaps by the turmoil of historical conscience, or perhaps by fear that our own nation may disappear?

Whatever the reason, three sources of inspiration led to "The Prussians": the drama "Herkus Mantas," by Juozas Grušas; the film of the same name, by Marijonas Giedrys, in which my music was used; and Stasys Domarkas' often repeated words: "We need an important theme."

The Prussians became this theme; through them I could seek ties with my contemporaries, the past, and our descendants. The tragedy of Mantas' true patriotism, Samilis' betrayals, which push the nation toward destruction, Kristina's hopeless wavering between two faiths, between love of idols and of the living, the unbelievable ferocity of interests and ideology: I have attempted to express all these things by means of heightened intonation, veristic style, passion, and excitement.

Who knows? Perhaps for at least one day we will have warned each other: let us keep watch at the altar of nations.

---

## **FROM THE HISTORY OF THE PRUSSIANS**

Prussia is a land, southeast of the Baltic Sea, that was inhabited by Prussians and western Lithuanians. Today, this part of East Prussia is sometimes called Lithuania Minor. The Prussians were one of the Baltic nations. For thousands of years the Balts formed a strong community bound together by ties of blood and kinship. From these Baltic tribes, at the end of the first millennium and the beginning of the second, there began to evolve the Prussian, Yotvingian, Lithuanian, and Latvian nations, of which only the last two were fated to survive. The Prussians were pagans who worshiped their own god, who lived in the sky, Perkunas the Thunderer, as well as the Sun, the Moon, and other deities. For religious rites they gathered at altars in groves. Because of constant warfare (they were attacked by Swedish and Danish vikings, Poles, and Russians) the Prussians were not able to establish their own state. In 1217 the Pope declared a Crusade against this nation. At the beginning of this war, each tribe, under the leadership of its own chief, defended itself separately. However, when one of the most famous chiefs, Herkus Mantas of Notanga, began to lead all the rebel tribes during the Great Uprising (1260-74), the Crusaders met with especially strong resistance. Mantas, who had lived for ten years as a hostage in Magdeburg, where he had become acquainted with the military art of the Crusaders and been baptized, fought for about twelve years. Although the Prussians resisted furiously under his leadership, by the end of the 13th century Prussia was finally conquered. Many Prussians were killed in battle; many others died during the two plagues that devastated their country. In the lands they had conquered and subjugated, the Crusaders established their own state - the Duchy of Prussia, which existed for about 200 years. It is thought that the last speakers of Prussian died out in the middle of the 18th century.

PREMIERE - SEPTEMBER 1, 1997, KLAIPEDA

Theatre Manager - Senior Conductor STASYS DOMARKAS