

ARVUSTUSED / REVIEWS

Eduard Tubin. *Complete Works*. Series VII: Stage works and incidental music. Volumes XXIX, XXX: *Barbara von Tisenhusen*. Opera in three acts and nine scenes. Score, Piano score, edited by Mart Humal and Reet Marttila, Tallinn/Stockholm: International Eduard Tubin Society / Gehrman's Musikförlag, 2016

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"They talk about it even in Germany!"¹ That is how the nobility talks about Barbara's dress in the first scene of Eduard Tubin's opera *Barbara von Tisenhusen*. Hopefully it will not be long before the opera itself attracts similar attention beyond Estonia's borders. At least the way is now paved: nearly fifty years after its premiere, the *Eduard Tubin Complete Works* (ETCW) series has published the work for the first time.

Although it is Tubin's first opera, *Barbara von Tisenhusen* is a late work. His earlier attempts in the genre remained incomplete as a result of World War II and the composer's escape to Sweden. In 1967, when Tubin began working on the opera, he was already well known as a composer of symphonies. Following the principles of his symphonic concept, the musical structure of the opera is more symphonic than dramatic, emphasizing thematic transformation in the orchestra rather than the vocal lines. This may be one reason why the work is still overshadowed by the well-known symphonies, despite the great success of its premiere. One can only hope that the current edition will promote the international dissemination of one of Estonia's most important operas from the past, and one considered worthy of global recognition. If nothing else, everything is now in place to enable conductors and scholars to get to know this major work of art. Thanks to this publication, it can be studied and can thus exist at least virtually in the minds of its readers.

After the 100th anniversary of the Estonian National Opera in 2006 and the third staging of *Barbara von Tisenhusen* (premiered in 2004),²

the International Eduard Tubin Society began to edit the ETCW, which will one day encompass all of Tubin's compositions. Since then, eighteen of the planned thirty-plus volumes have been published. First to be published was the piano music, followed by the symphonies, solo concertos, other orchestral works, and some chamber music. Even though the first version of *Barbara von Tisenhusen* had already been prepared in 2008, its release was put on hold until 2016, by which time a large part of the instrumental music had already been issued. This suggests that ETCW's aim was to begin with the publication of those compositions which were already present in the international repertoire. As in all the previous volumes, the XXIXth and XXXth include a general preface to ETCW, an introductory essay on the opera by Mart Humal, and a critical commentary on the score. The musical notation was edited by Reet Marttila, while Mart Humal established and implemented the editorial principles. Well aware of the importance of the initial issue of this work, ETCW attempts, according to the general preface, to fulfil various tasks in presenting an edition that works in both a practical sense and in terms of critical discourse. The aim of this edition is to reach a large international audience and draw worldwide attention to the opera, and ETCW uses a technically enhanced style of publication to meet all of these requirements, using the Internet as a storage location.³ In doing so, space is created for an extensive scholarly attachment and to separate parts of the text from the printed volumes so as to make them easier to handle. Further information

¹ This is how a noble lady actually talks about Barbara's dress in the first scene of the opera. Quoted in: Eduard Tubin / Jaan Kross. *Barbara von Tisenhusen*. *Libretto*. Translated by Eino Tubin, ed. Mart Humal and Avo Sömer, International Eduard Tubin Society, http://www.tubinsociety.com/WP/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Tubin_Barbara_libretto_web_ENGL_9.06.2017_valmis.pdf (13.08.2018).

² Stage director Endrik Kerge, conductor Arvo Volmer (before that, the opera was staged in 1969 and 1990).

³ http://www.tubinsociety.com/?page_id=759&lang=en (30.07.2018).

on the genesis and historical background of the libretto, as well as longer debates on ambiguous passages in the score, can be read online, as well as an English translation of the libretto by Eino Tubin, the composer's son.

While maintaining the classic layout of such a series of publications, this type of edition has a number of disadvantages. This is the result of modifying an internationally accepted idea with small enhancements. While using the Internet as additional storage location for the attachments allows more space for extra information, it also makes it necessary to separate some of this information from the score, hence the difficulty is an appropriate distribution of the attachments between the different media. By using two types of media for one edition, ETCW puts itself, paradoxically enough, in the situation of having to deal with limited space, as the aim is to reduce the size of the printed volumes. The same struggle arises as with dictionary articles: the problem of emphasizing information by its positioning (or by how it is included). The allocation of parts of the introduction between the media not only facilitates the use of the volumes – which is without doubt the greatest advantage of this sort of edition – but also creates a hierarchy of information. However, there is the risk that an unfavourable allocation of the text between the two media can serve to make using the score more complicated, owing to the constant switching between the printed book and the Internet.

In addition to taking the professions of potential users into account, it is important also to acknowledge the background of the potential audience, as well as any possible associations they may have with Eduard Tubin as a composer or with *Barbara von Tisenhusen* as a topic. Although Tubin is seen as one of Estonia's most important composers, it is very likely that the majority of the people whom this edition might reach may have no prior knowledge of Tubin or of the historical context of his music. The essay provided online, with its extensive information regarding

the historical background, helps one understand the national dimensions of the plot. However, no information is provided about the composer Eduard Tubin, his music, or its importance for Estonia. This applies as much to general information as to more specific aspects such as the post-war years, the Swedish situation, and the politics of the 1950s and 1960s. The introductory material allows for a proper familiarization with the work, but does not help to contextualize it, either with regard to other operas of the same region and time period, or in terms of Tubin's biography. This problem may be a result of the broader context of a series of publications. However, by failing to highlight individual works, ETCW perpetuates the current reception of Tubin as a symphonist, since it implies that in order to be able to contextualize *Barbara von Tisenhusen*, it is necessary to be familiar with the symphonies beforehand. Thus, there is the risk that the work contained in these new volumes will remain overshadowed by the better-known works. It may be a basic challenge of any series of complete works not to push individual compositions into the background while aiming at a comprehensive presentation of the whole oeuvre, but it is one that is even more evident when some of the collected works are appearing for the very first time. It is perhaps wise for a series of editions that includes never-before-published works to offer a similarly purposeful and broad introduction to both the compositions and to their composer by the specialists responsible for the scores. The lack of such a general essay on Tubin may prove to be a weak-point in this edition. The most widely known music encyclopedias usually focus on Tubin as a symphonic composer (*Grove*,⁴ *MGG*⁵), sometimes merely mentioning the single opera *Barbara von Tisenhusen* (*Pipers*)⁶. An introduction that covers both the composer and his oeuvre would be helpful to set and get to know the work in its context.

However, special mention should be made of the fact of bringing together the Swedish and Estonian libretti. Even before the premiere of the

⁴ Arved Ashby 2001. Tubin, Eduard. – *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Vol. 25, ed. by Stanley Sadie, London: Macmillan Publishers, pp. 865–866.

⁵ Hans-Gunter Lock 2006. Tubin, Eduard. – *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Personenteil, Vol. 16, ed. by Ludwig Finscher, Kassel/Stuttgart: Bärenreiter/Metzler, col. 1094–1097.

⁶ Kristel Pappel 1997. Eduard Tubin. *Barbara von Tisenhusen*. – *Pipers Enzyklopädie des Musiktheaters*. Vol. 6, ed. by Carl Dahlhaus and Sieghart Döhring, München: Piper, pp. 352–354.

opera, Ilmar Laaban created a Swedish version of the text to allow performances in Northern Europe. However, since all the performances so far have been given by the Estonian National Opera (with special guest performances outside Estonia, but always given in the Estonian language), the Swedish version has remained superfluous until today. Hence the translation still exists merely as an adjunct by Laaban in the second version of the piano score, subsequently adjusted by Tubin in the third version of the same. Tubin, in fact, never rearranged the full score to take account of the small changes he made in the musical structure to fit the Swedish libretto. The current edition consequently adopts Tubin's changes and combines both versions in the score, thus paving the way for stagings of the work in Scandinavia. However, as laudable as the management of the Swedish and Estonian libretti may be, the integration of the English text leaves much to be desired. Admittedly, the English introduction guarantees a proper acquaintance with the opera, but a further examination of the score is impossible without using the additional material on the Internet. Why, one wonders, is the English translation of the libretto provided only online? Since neither Swedish nor Estonian are internationally prevalent languages, it would certainly be helpful for the wider market and music libraries beyond the North-East of the Baltic region if the English libretto were enclosed in the printed volumes. The volumes' manageability would certainly benefit more from including the English translation than from eliminating its 17 pages out of a desire to make it less bulky. Captioning the scenes with short English summaries of the plot would be an easy way to facilitate understanding, and one that would aid practical usage as well as scholarly work.

That said, the volumes' practical usage for performance is definitely eased by reducing the amount of extra material in the printed volumes. In this way they are indeed less bulky (and less expensive to produce), even with the solid but short introduction to the work that they contain. Furthermore, the conductor's work is eased by the decision to dispense with irritating remarks within the musical text. All the comments are collected in the critical commentary, either at the end of the volumes or in its online extension. The splitting of the critical commentary is not necessarily to

the detriment of scholarly work: the printed score and the online resources may be used simultaneously, allowing for quite convenient research. The online feature is especially beneficial for an examination of the ambiguous passages, since one does not have to deal with annoying page turning between the score and the relevant comment.

From a scholarly point of view, a more extensive presentation of the manuscript and the other sources used would have been desirable. Theoretically, there are almost no limits to the extent of the online attachments, or, at least, none that are production-related such as those caused by printing costs. The critical commentary, which at first glance seems rather short, is in fact very well prepared. Tubin's clear handwriting allows very little room for speculation. Hence there are only a few inconsistencies between the four sources of the score, which results in a relatively short critical commentary. Many comments are the result of adjustments made to fit the Swedish libretto into the full score. Since the opera has not been edited before, the critical commentary obviously contains no remarks relating to other editions, typically a reason for complex commentaries in the critical editions of more famous works.

The engraving is precise and beautiful. Performers as well as scholars may benefit from the online additions as these facilitate both practical handling and critical research. In any case, a more specific introduction to Tubin's biography and the inclusion of the English libretto in the printed volumes would have been desirable from the point of view of a worldwide audience. Essays and critical commentary would, as always, have profited from additional and more thorough proof-reading. All in all, however, the current edition of Eduard Tubin's opera *Barbara von Tisenhusen* is a substantial contribution to Tubin research, one which impresses with its effortless handling of the digital diversification of the classic type of series publication, but which also misses the chance to optimize the conditions for even wider international dissemination. In their ambition to create an edition of a previously unpublished score that would work well for both scholarly and practical use, the editors have succeeded in providing a result that meets their objectives, even if in its realization there is still much room for improvement.