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**Interview with director Kenza Koutchoukali on Béla Bartók’s Bluebeard’s Castle**

**TITLE:**
How far do the boundaries of love, secrets, and desires reach?

“How much can you truly open yourself up to another?”

 **In conversation with director Kenza Koutchoukali**

Director Kenza Koutchoukali delves into the psychological drama of Béla Bartók’s Bluebeard’s Castle. Bluebeard takes his bride Judith to his dark fortress. Despite his warnings, she asks him to open seven doors and let the light in. But does she really want to see him in his entirety?

**What is Bluebeard’s Castle about, in your view?**
“This story is about a love relationship between two people. It’s about getting to know one another, wanting to know everything about the other person, and how that can lead to revealing parts of yourself that you’d prefer to keep hidden, even from yourself. Above all, Bluebeard’s Castle is a deeply human and timeless story, about self-discovery and the question: ‘How much can you truly open yourself up to another person?’”

**Bartók wrote Bluebeard’s Castle at a time when symbolism, the subconscious, and an understanding of psychology were on the rise. How do you see this reflected in the opera?**
“It’s in the way Bartók wrote this music. The characters are pushed to their limits, but at just the right moment, they’re given a break—both literally and figuratively, a few bars of rest. In just one hour, Bartók delivers an incredibly rich psychological drama, both orchestrally and through the singing. It’s never rushed, never too slow, never overdone, and never needlessly emotional. I think it comes straight from Bartók’s own emotional world. I would almost say that this is how you experience a psychological drama yourself.”

**How does that manifest on stage?**
“I make extensive use of lighting, which for me plays an even more symbolic role than the contents of the seven rooms. Thanks to the lighting design, it’s not so much about Judith physically opening a door to a room, but more about her opening Bluebeard’s soul. The light, combined with the magnificent music, creates a grandeur that allows us to showcase the small, deeply human themes. To me, the castle could just as easily be a living room; we see a familiar, domestic setting where, at the same time, the most existential crises unfold.”

**So you like to search for humanity and relatability in your direction?**
“Yes, in that way, I hope to evoke empathy. I believe that’s something lacking in today’s society—the ability to understand other people’s stories. I think this can only happen if you show how human everything is. I consider myself part of the ‘Netflix generation’; I see naturalistic acting almost every day. That’s something I strive for in my own work too. By working closely with the actors to explore who a character is and how that manifests physically, we can create realistic, believable characters in great detail. That’s inherent in this piece too; you feel in everything that there’s room for these characters to be truly human.”

**Bluebeard’s Castleis inspired by a (gruesome) fairy tale, and fairy tales often have a clear moral. Is this something you focus on in this opera?**
“The moral aspect of fairy tales often serves to teach us the difference between good and evil. I prefer to focus on the grey area in between. People are complex and are essentially always in that grey area. We all have light and darkness within us. Bluebeard is hesitant to let the light in because it means Judith will see him in his entirety—who he really is. I think that’s something we can all relate to. It’s sometimes harder to show yourself fully—in the light—than to retreat into the shadows.”