

## Henze's Phaedra – beginning of Present Voices 2010

On 17 January conductor **Michael Boder** and **Ensemble Modern** give the UK premiere of **Hans Werner Henze's** 'concert opera in two-acts' *Phaedra* – marking the opening performance of the Barbican's contemporary opera series *Present Voices*. The plot centers on the mythological tale of Phaedra, wife of Theseus, who's forbidden love for her stepson Hippolytus sets in motion a series of events that drives the characters on a path of jealousy, shame, violence and desperation towards a transcendental climax. Christian Lehnert's libretto for *Phaedra* adds to a rich heritage of retellings of the myth from throughout history, ranging from Euripides and Ovid to Racine and Sarah Kane.

Michael Boder and Ensemble Modern are joined by singers such as Swiss mezzo-soprano **Maria Riccarda Wesseling** (Phaedra), British tenor **John Mark Ainsley** (Hippolytus) and German countertenor **Axel Köhler** (Artemis), all of whom reprise the same roles that they appeared in, alongside Ensemble Modern and Boder, at the 2007 premiere of the work in Berlin. The opera draws to a dramatic close the Barbican's *Henze Weekend* that starts on 16 January with BBC Symphony Orchestra's Total Immersion: Hans Werner Henze day. The weekend, which includes a series of concerts, films and talks, celebrates 64 years of Henze's music.

*Present Voices* continues on 26 March with the UK premiere of Hungarian composer **Peter Eötvös'** opera *Angels in America* which is based on Tony Kushner's Pulitzer Prize-winning play. The original 7-hour monumental drama was restructured by librettist Mari Mezei and the opera had its premiere in 2004 in Paris. At the Barbican it is performed by the **BBC Symphony Orchestra** and **David Robertson**. The third and last opera of this season's *Present Voices* is *After Life* by Dutch composer **Michel van der Aa** (born 1970). "What was the most decisive moment in your life?" is the essential question of the opera. Based on the film of the same name by Hirokazu Kore-Eda, who also wrote the libretto, the opera introduces us to characters that are at a station between Heaven and Earth. The UK premiere of the opera is performed at the Barbican by **ASKO/Schoenberg Ensemble** conducted by **Otto Tausk**, who also premiered the work in Amsterdam in 2006.

For further information, please visit: <http://www.barbican.org.uk/music/series.asp?id=687>