

With Ursula

With ursula hath no man a house of good stone
each block cut smooth and well fitting
that design might cover their face
with ursula
hath no man a painted paradise on his church wall
harpez et luz
or where virgin received message
and halo projects form incision
....

CANTO XLV

EZRA
a chamber opera



Peter Laugesen, Rebecca Forsberg and Trygve Bjerkø

Introduction

The American poet Ezra Pound (1885-1972) was one of the most controversial and most important poets of the twentieth century. In many ways, he incarnates the cultural history of the century; right from the outset of his literary career, his work was situated at the forefront of avant-garde trends. In fact, in the 1930s, Pound formulated the credo of the avant-garde: *Make it new*.

Pound lived in Italy from the end of the twenties right through World War II. He was attracted by Mussolini's ideas and became a fascist. In 1944 he was arrested by the American army, tortured and put in an open cage outside Pisa. He was sent back to the States as a prisoner, and spent twelve years in a hospital for the criminally insane.

Pound's fascist sympathies contrasted with other aspects of his personality. The poet was also a sensitive humanist, who had studied classic and medieval languages, and felt no conflict with the fact of having many Jewish intellectuals and artists as friends. The major conflict that he experienced, was that of his private life. Although on the one hand, he was married to the English Dorothy Shakespear, on the other, he had a lifelong relationship with the American violinist Olga Rudge. He had a child with each of them, but was unable to take care of the upbringing of any of his two children. Ezra Pound's life and work presents great dramatic potential which has constituted the focus of this work.

The chamber opera EZRA is a ritual performance in which singers and musicians act as what they are: singers and musicians, who let the rhythm of the words, the music, the pictures and the movements provide the essential as well as the challenge to expose the personal, political and cultural conflicts. Within the opera, there is an ongoing discussion about the totalitarian ideologies of the 20th century and their connections which throws light upon the way a politically incorrect dissident thought, wrote and behaved in a historical moment where his actions and beliefs had heavy consequences.

Libretto – Cantos and the story about Ezra

The Danish poet Peter Laugesen has written the libretto in collaboration with the composer. The starting point is to be found in Ezra Pound's life and work. Laugesen has concentrated on Ezra Pound's main work, the long poem CANTOS and a narrative text for a young girl, who represents Pound's daughter Maria.



Peter Laugesen, Sigrid Emborg

Part One - The poet in his cage.

At the opening a radio is transmitting one the speeches from Radio Roma that Pound delivered during World War II.

The storyteller switches off the radio, and the Peter Laugesen, as the poet on stage recites a prelude.

Dorothy and Ezra meet, fall in love and marry.

Ezra falls in love with the violinist Olga Rudge. This brings the conflict to the stage.

Part Two – the poet's personae

Ulysses meets Teresias in the land of death, Kung-fu-tse meets his disciples, Cvalcanti is a warrior and dissident. The different personae mirror the life and reality of Pound, his love life, his relation to his daughter, his political mistakes.

Epilogue – the poet in his cage

Pound is caught by two former fascists and taken to the American military authorities. He resumes the dreams of his life: *I have tried to write Paradise*.

Singers

Baritone Jakob Bloch and mezzosoprano Rebecca Forsberg sing texts taken from from Pound's CANTOS. On stage the violinist of the Ensemble Midt Vest Malin Nyström represents Olga Rudge. The poet Peter Laugesen is on stage representing the poet in his cage. A French speaking girl between 13 – 17 years will be the narrator. She will be on stage representing the daughter of Ezra Pound and Olga Rudge.

Music

The music is composed by Frans Winther and played by a string quartet and a woodwind quintet from *Ensemble Midtvest*, a young ensemble of talented international musicians. It is inspired by music from the Japanese No theatre, medieval songs and Vivaldi's violin concertos. Pound introduced No theatre into Europe as from 1913, and it is thanks to him and Olga Rudge that a large of Vivaldi's music was brought to light. The couple found the scores in private library in North Italy and produced it in performance.

Production

EZRA is produced in a collaboration between *Ensemble MidtVest* and *Odin Teatret*.

The production is supported by the National Art Council of Denmark, the Wilhelm Hansen foundation and the Beckett foundation.

Premiere

Ezra was premiered in Holstebro, Denmark in August 2005 and will be played at the Royal Danish Theatre in 2008 – 2009.

Frans Winther – July 2007

frans@odinteatret.dk

tlf: +45 9742 4777

tlf: +45 5133 9981