

June 28th, 2010 | 7pm Paris | Théâtre du Rond-Point

PRIN

SO

Opera

LE

by Alessandro Baricco
in the french translation by Françoise Brun

Concert promotion

Reduced concert version:

7 solo singers / 2 pianists

Yves Prin

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Soie / Silk

Yves Prin

Monday, June 28, 2010 | 7:00 pm

Paris | Théâtre du Rond-Point | Salle Jean-Tardieu

Concert promotion | Reduced concert version:

7 solo singers / 2 pianists | Sung in French

Duration: 2 hrs. and 15 min. without intermission

Music and libretto **Yves Prin**

based on the novel *Seta* by **Alessandro Baricco**

in the french translation by Françoise Brun

Hervé Joncour, **Jean-Michel Ankaoua**, *baritone*

Hélène, **Françoise Masset**, *mezzo*

Hara Kei, **Virgile Ancely**, *bass*

Hara Kei's Young Wife, **Omo Bello**, *lyric soprano*

Madame Blanche, **Sylvie Althaparro**, *contralto*

Baldabiou, **Pierre Vaello**, *tenor*

The Messenger, **Akiko Suzuki**, *soprano*

Yann Ollivo, *vocal director, pianist*

Olivier Dauriat, *pianist*

with the participation of

Didier Sandre, *Narrator, voice recorded*

Christian Schiaretti, *Didascalìa reader*

Frédéric Prin, *Sound engineer*

Le Petit Opéra | Emmanuel Conquer, *Artistic Direction*

work composed and concert organized

*with the support of the **Association Beaumarchais | SACD***



Soie / Silk

Argument

Hervé Joncour seemed to have it all; he was loved and had a successful business as a silkworm retailer.

But in 1861, the pebrine plague threatened his industry and the economy of the entire city.

Pushed by his mentor, the eccentric and visionary Baldabiou, he begins an endless journey to Japan in order to bring back new precious silkworm.

There, in what was then the end of the world, he makes the acquaintance of Hara Kei, a powerful and wise Warlord.

His eyes meet the enigmatic master's Young Wife.

From this point on, his attraction to a woman with whom he never exchanges a word directly, the plot of his incredible return trips between France and Japan is woven.

Hervé Joncour, lost between a loving wife and the longing for a love he will never know, witnesses his own rise and fall, and then lets slip away, unable to seize it, the thread of his existence.

One will say softly "*Stay*" the other furtively would slip him a note on which is written "*Come back, or I'll die.*"

An unexpected letter in beautiful calligraphy will eventually reveal to Hervé Joncour that he had only one true love and that he had lost it twice.

Soie / Silk

Notes by the composer

SOIE / *Silk* is based on the eponymous novel by Alessandro Baricco. The libretto is drawn from the novel for the purpose of this opera. The French text comes from Françoise Brun's translation from the original Italian. All the words and sentences, with a few rare exceptions, are by the author.

The libretto has been organized in order to favour a logical sequence of events while taking into account the order of the chapters and the elliptical aspect of Baricco's writing. The tale of Joncour's journeys (the recorded voice being the narrative element) –willingly redundant and repetitive under the author's pen– has undergone transformations in order to give it very gradually a musical aspect.

As the plot keeps unfolding from one country (France) to the other (Japan), it appeared necessary to include orchestral interludes between scenes. These function like breaths and carry us either through an explanatory situation of the moment, or to the inner feelings of a character. The numerous themes progress and become more complex throughout the opera. The themes of the three women will be interchanged and weave a unique counterpoint, symbol of universality in contrast with the disappearance of Joncour's theme.

This opera calls for an eighty piece orchestra, a mixed chorus and dancers. The score uses concrete sounds inherent to the plot, the sounds of the koto and shakuhachi and synthetic sounds mixed with those of traditional instruments.

The work lasts two hours and fifteen minutes without intermission.

[Yves Prin]
April 2010

Soie / Silk

Cast of characters

IN FRANCE

HERVÉ JONCOUR, *baritone*

32 years old, buys and sells silkworms

HÉLÈNE, *mezzo-soprano*

Wife Hervé Joncour. They live in Lavilledieu

BALDABIOU, *tenor*

Implanted 20 years earlier the silkworm breeding industry in Lavilledieu

MADAME BLANCHE, *contralto*

Japanese courtesan in Nîmes

YOUNG GIRLS at Mme Blanche's house in Nîmes

IN JAPAN

HARA KEI, *bass*

Japanese warlord, master of what the world is able to export out of the Island

HARA KEI'S YOUNG WIFE, *lyric soprano*

Her eyes are not oriental-shaped, her face is that of a young girl

THE MESSENGER, *soprano*

14 years old, Messenger of love

COURT LADIES, Elegantly dressed in bright colours, their face powdered in white

DANCERS, ACROBATS, among which the Man who Makes You Laugh

THREE OLD LADIES, with wrinkled hands

TWO OLD LADIES, playing on stringed instruments

A YOUNG BOY who plays shakuhachi

MAN AND WOMAN of Hara Kei's village

Soie / Silk

Characters

HERVÉ JONCOUR, *baritone*

Silkworm breeder, 32 years old. Lavilledieu is the name of the town where he lives (Vivarais). Hélène, the name of his wife. They have no children. Hervé Joncour is the kind of man who likes to witness his own life, considering as out of place any ambition to really live it. 1861. As a pebrine plague is threatening silkworm eggs, he undertakes journeys to Japan in order to purchase healthy eggs. From the very first trip, he is overwhelmed by the enigmatic glance of a young woman. Their eyes will keep meeting and he will never cease longing for them...

HÉLÈNE, *mezzo-soprano*

Hervé Joncour's wife... They live in Lavilledieu, peaceful town in the Vivarais. They have no children. Hélène is a tall, slow-moving woman with long black hair which she never gathers round her head. Her voice is superb. 1861. For many years, she waits for her husband who has gone to Japan to buy silkworms, feeling in turn misgivings, hope and distress...

HARA KEI, *bass*

Japanese warlord. The most impregnable man in Japan, master of all that manages to be taken out of the Island... He wears a dark tunic and no jewelry. The only visible sign of his power, a woman lying next to him, her head on his lap... 1861. He is the one from whom Hervé Joncour buys silkworm eggs. He is the one who has the Messenger hanged for having brought Joncour on the Young Wife's trail when the civil war breaks out.

HARA KEI'S YOUNG WIFE, *lyric soprano*

She lives in Japan under the dominance of Hara Kei, Japanese warlord. Her eyes do not have an oriental shape and her face is that of a young girl. 1861. From Hervé Joncour's very first journey, she falls in love with the Frenchman who has come to negotiate the purchase of silkworms with Hara Kei. A forbidden and reciprocal love is born which will develop in a fantastical manner throughout Joncour's journeys.

BALDABIOU, *tenor*

Baldabiau originally implanted the silk industry in the Lavilledieu area. 1861. To cure the plague that is killing the silkworm eggs, he asks Joncour, whose mentor he is, to set out for Japan in order to bring back healthy eggs.

MADAME BLANCHE, *contralto*

1861. Japanese courtesan. She lives in Nîmes where she runs a whorehouse. She is dressed in a kimono made of light material, completely white, underneath which she wears nothing. Her skin is young and immaculately white. On her fingers, like rings, she wears little, intensely blue flowers. After two of his journeys to Japan, Hervé Joncour will travel to Nîmes to ask her to translate, first a note left in his hand by an unknown hand during a ritual bath, then a letter received by mail, apparently from Ostende.

THE MESSENGER, *boy soprano*

Young Japanese boy, in tatters, comes out of nowhere, in the midst of the 1863 civil war. He leads Joncour on the trail of Hara Kei's Young Wife. He will be found hanged for having committed one of the twelve fatal crimes: to bring a love message for a mistress.

Soie / Silk

Main locations

IN FRANCE

The Café “Chez Verdun”
A place in Hervé Joncour’s house in Lavilledieu
Hervé Joncour’s house in Lavilledieu
At Mme Blanche’s, in Nîmes

IN JAPAN

Hara Kei’s mansion (where the Tea ritual takes place)
By the lakeshore, with the aviary
Hervé Joncour’s Japanese house (where the Bath ritual takes place)
Hara Kei’s mansion (the large reception hall)
Hara Kei’s aviary
By the lakeshore, the aviary open and empty
Hara Kei’s camp in the mountains

Chronology

PROLOGUE

1861. Flaubert writes Salammbô...

[Recorded voice 1]

ACT I [~ 35 min.]

SCENE 1: (The Café “Chez Verdun”)

The plague is spreading

[Duo recitative: Baldabiou, Hervé Joncour]

[Baldabiou’s aria]

Musical Interlude 1:

First journey to Japan (1) October 6th, 1861

[Recorded voice 2]

SCENE 2: (A place in Joncour’s house in Lavilledieu)

Hélène’s misgivings

[Hélène’s aria]

Interlude 2:

First journey to Japan (2) December 1861

[Recorded voice 3]

Musical Interlude 3:

Hara Kei, master of the world

SCENE 3: (Hara Kei’s mansion – the Tea House/1)

Hervé Joncour and Hara Kei get acquainted

[Hara Kei’s aria]

[Hervé Joncour’s aria]

[Duo recitative: Hara Kei, Hervé Joncour]

Musical Interlude 4:

Hara Kei’s Young Wife

SCENE 4: (Hara Kei’s mansion – the Tea House/2)

The Love of Hara Kei’s Young Wife

[Hara Kei’s Young Wife’s aria]

Interlude 5:

First return journey - January 1862

[Recorded voice 4]

Musical Interlude 5:

The bells of Lavilledieu, on Easter Day - April 1862

SCENE 5: (Hervé Joncour’s house in Lavilledieu)

Plans for building a park - Summer 1862

[Trio: Hélène, Baldabiou, Hervé Joncour]

ACT II [~ 53 min.]

Interlude 6:

Second journey to Japan - October 1st 1862

[Recorded voice 5]

Musical Interlude 6:

The Aviary (1)

SCENE 6: (On the lakeshore with the aviary)

1. The Birds flight - January 1863

[Duo recitative: Hara Kei, Hervé Joncour]

2. Hara Kei’s Aviary

[Duo: Hervé Joncour, Hara Kei’s Young Wife]

Musical Interlude 7:

The Birds

SCENE 7: (Hervé Joncour’s Japanese house)

1. Hervé Joncour’s ritual bath

[Hara Kei’s Young Wife’s aria]

2. The hand-written note from Hara Kei’s Young Wife

Interlude 8:

Second return trip - Avril 1863

[Recorded voice 6]

Musical Interlude 8:

The Journey to Nîmes

SCENE 8: (At Madame Blanche's, in Nîmes)

1. Dance with Russian flavour

[Music and dance]

2. "Come back or I'll die"

[Duo recitative: Madame Blanche, Hervé Joncour]
[Madame Blanche's aria]

3. Danse aux senteurs de Russie (2)

[Musique et danse]

Interlude 9:

Third journey to Japan - First days of October 1863
[Recorded voice 7]

Musical Interlude 9:

The reception at Hara Kei's

SCENE 9: (Hara Kei's mansion – The large reception hall)

The Acrobats - January 1864
[Music and dance]

1. Barefoot female dancer

2. The Man who makes you laugh

3. The Acrobats' Dance

Musical Interlude 10:

The Aviary (2)

SCENE 10 : (Hara Kei's aviary)

The empty aviary, symbol of infidelity

[Hara Kei's aria]
[Duo recitative: Hervé Joncour, Hara Kei]

SCENE 11: (On the lakeshore with the empty aviary)

Hara Kei is gone

[Duo recitative: Hervé Joncour, The Messenger]

ACT III [~ 47 min.]

Interlude 12:

Third return journey - First Sunday of April 1864
[Recorded voice 8]

Musical Interlude 12:

Summer evening in Lavilledieu

SCENE 12 : (Hervé Joncour's house in Lavilledieu)

1. Plans for constructing an aviary - Summer 1864
[Duo recitative: Héléne, Hervé Joncour]

2. Rumors of civil war in Japan

[Trio recitative: Baldabiau, Hervé Joncour, Héléne]

3. Héléne's distress

[Héléne's aria]

Interlude 13:

Fourth journey to Japan - December 1864

[Recorded voice 9]

Musical Interlude 13:

The Messenger of Love

SCENE 13: (Hara Kei's camp in the mountains/1)

1. "It will be too late to bring sound eggs back" - January 1865
[Hervé Joncour's aria]

2. "Who brought you here?"

[Duo recitative: Hara Kei, Hervé Joncour]

Musical Interlude 14:

The murder of the Messenger

SCENE 14: (Hara Kei's camp in the mountains/2)

The Messenger of Love condemned

[Chorus, duo Hara Kei, Hervé Joncour]

Musical Interlude 15:

Héléne, superb and generous lover

SCENE 15: (Hervé Joncour's house in Lavilledieu)

The Secret - Summer 1865
[Hervé Joncour's aria]

SCENE 16: (empty stage – neutral place)

The Letter

[Trio: Héléne, Madame Blanche, Hara Kei's Young Wife]

Soie / Silk

Synopsis

PROLOGUE

1861.
Flaubert is writing Salammbô.
Electrical light is still a hypothesis
and Abraham Lincoln, across the Ocean,
is waging a war of which he will not see the end.
Hervé Joncour is thirty-two years old.
He buys, and he sells.
Silkworms.
Lavilledieu is the name of the town where he lives.
Hélène, the name of his wife.
They have no children.

ACT I

SCENE 1: THE CAFÉ « CHEZ VERDUN »

The plague is spreading

The Café “Chez Verdun”, on an August night, after midnight. Chairs are upside down, in a row, on the tables. Crickets are heard. Hervé Joncour, with an extinguished cigarette between his lips, is listening to Baldabiou. He explains to him that the silkworm disease has spread everywhere and reached Asia. He fears for his silk factory. Then Baldabiou, who in the past implanted the silk production in the area, tells him there is one place on earth where healthy eggs can be found: Japan. However, it is dangerous to remove the cocoons from the island. Hervé Joncour is not discouraged and decides to leave soon thereafter.

INTERLUDE 1

First journey to Japan (1)

October 6th, 1861. Hervé Joncour sets out with eighty thousand gold francs, and the names of three men given by Baldabiou: a Chinese, a Dutchman and a Japanese. He crosses the border near Metz, goes through Wurtemberg and Bavaria, enters Austria, reaches Vienna by train, then Budapest and goes on until Kiev. He rides through two thousand kilometres of Russian steppe on horseback, crosses the Ural Mountains, enters Siberia, travels for forty days before reaching lake Baïkal, which local people call: **SEA**.

SCENE 2: A PLACE IN HERVÉ JONCOUR’S HOME IN LAVILLEDIEU

Hélène’s misgivings

Hervé Joncour has left for Japan. Hélène feels her anguish rise. She feels abandoned and sings out her love for her husband. Her fantasies will be her support as she awaits his return.

INTERLUDE 2

First Journey to Japan (2)

December 1861... in the meanwhile, Hervé Joncour travels down the river Amur, passes alongside the Chinese border all the way to the Ocean, stays eleven days in Sabirk harbour, waiting for a Dutch smugglers' ship to take him to Capo Terraya, on the west coast of Japan. By foot, walking on secondary roads, he crosses the districts of Ishikawa, Toyama, Niigata, enters the Fukushima district and nears the city of Shirakawa, which he bypasses by the east, then waits two days long for a black-dressed man who blindfolds him and takes him to a village in the hills where he spends the night. On the next day, he is introduced to the almighty warlord Hara Kei.

SCENE 3: HARA KEI'S MANSION – THE TEA HOUSE (1)

Hervé Joncour and Hara Kei get acquainted

January 1862... Hara Kei is seated on the floor, his legs crossed. He is dressed in a dark tunic and wears no jewelry. The only visible sign of his power: a woman lying on the floor next to him, her head on his lap, her eyes closed, and her arms hidden under a large red garment. Hara Kei caresses her hair gently. Hervé Joncour expects a sign from his host and sits in front of him. They remain silent, staring at each other. Hara Kei declares he is the Master of the World, that his fortune is huge and that he punishes anyone who would disobey him. He informs Hervé Joncour that he is interested in the deal: gold for silkworm cocoons. A servant enters unnoticed, sets before them two cups of tea, then disappears. Joncour listens, with his eyes staring at Hara Kei's. For a short moment, without even noticing it, he lowers his eyes on the woman's face. It is the face of a young girl whose eyes are not oriental-shaped. Their glances just meet. He looks away. One after the other, the two men bring their cup of tea to their lips. In a few words, Hervé Joncour tells of his happy life in the South of France, his journeys, his fears of the plague which is a real disaster. During this account, the young girl reaches for Joncour's cup. With her eyes half closed, she drinks a sip of tea at the exact place where he has drunk, then puts the cup down softly and puts her head on Hara Kei's lap, her eyes gazing at Hervé Joncour's. Hara Kei will be happy to sell his silkworms; Hervé Joncour will repay him when he is sure he can leave the island. He stands up, bows and walks out, while the young girl's eyes are still staring at him, perfectly silent.

SCENE 4: HARA KEI'S MANSION – THE TEA HOUSE (2)

The Love of Hara Kei's Young Wife

Same place. The young woman is alone. She sings her love for Joncour. At the end of the aria, Hara Kei appears in the background; he has heard the young woman's last words.

INTERLUDE 5

First return trip

January 1862... Hervé Joncour goes back following the same itinerary. After a three month journey, he is at the gates of Lavilledieu, in time for Sunday Mass. He kisses his wife Hélène and gives her as a present a silk tunic.

SCENE 5: HERVÉ JONCOUR'S HOME IN LAVILLEDIEU

Plans for building a park

Summer 1862... In the sitting-room, Hervé Joncour makes drawings for a huge park. Along with Hélène and Baldabiou, he is happy that the silk industry is resuming thanks to the Japanese eggs. Baldabiou announces the opening of two news facilities, Hervé Joncour makes plans for a park around his home. Everyone brings his and her share to the dream. Baldabiou tells Hélène that her husband must leave again early October.

ACT II

INTERLUDE 6

Second journey to Japan

Identical to the first one until he reaches the lake Baïkal which the local people call this time: **THE DEVIL**.

SCENE 6: ON THE LAKESHORE WITH THE AVIARY

1. The Birds' flight

January 1863... A lake. Behind is Hara Kei's mansion. Halfway, an aviary full of birds. On the shore Hara Kei and a woman dressed in an orange dress, with her hair untied on her shoulders. She turns over slowly, so that her eyes meet Joncour's glance. Her eyes are not oriental-shaped and her face is that of a young girl. The sky is crossed by large blue-winged birds. As Joncour proceeds to the shore, Hara Kei is alone, still, dressed in black. Next to him, an abandoned orange dress on the ground and two straw sandals. The two men stare at the birds in the sky; Hara Kei says that people read the future in their flight. He speaks about his aviary that houses scores of birds of all kind and tells of his father who, one day, ordered him to shoot at one of these bird: "*Read the flight of your arrow, if you want to know your future*". Joncour then asks the Master to tell him who is that young girl. Hara Kei takes care not to answer ; he stands up and leaves.

2. Hara Kei's Aviary

Sunset. Hervé Joncour, in an imperceptible gesture, lets one of his gloves fall next to the orange dress, abandoned on the lakeshore. He then alludes to Hara Kei's aviary. The young woman appears and their voices mingle. The lovers do not see nor hear each other.

SCENE 7: HERVÉ JONCOUR'S JAPANESE HOUSE

1. The Ritual bath of Hervé Joncour

Hervé Joncour is in the place where the ritual bath takes place. Three elderly women, whose hands are rough yet very light, their faces covered with white make-up, help Joncour get undressed and settled on the stone table. His eyes closed, he dreams of the large aviary, extravagant token of love. One of the women covers his eyes with a wet cloth, then exits with the two others as Hara Kei's Young Wife enters. She has let her paper-lantern down by the threshold. He feels water flowing first on his legs, then along his arms and on his chest. He feels the lightness of a silk veil lying on him, the hands of a woman drying him while caressing his skin. As the young woman murmurs her love, he does not move a single moment, not even as he feels the hands going up from his shoulders to his neck, and the fingers – the silk, the fingers – reaching up to his lips, touching them lightly then disappear. The last sensation is a hand opening his own and laying something in it. The Young woman exits leaving her lantern behind.

2. The hand-written note of Hara Kei's Young Wife

Hervé Joncour remains still for a long while. He removes the wet cloth from his eyes. Almost no light left in the room. No one around. He stands up, takes his tunic, sets it over his shoulders and observes the trembling faint light inside the lantern. Carefully, he stops the walk of Time, for as long as he wishes. As if it were nothing, he opens his hand, and sees the note. Small. A few ideogramms one underneath the other. Black ink.

INTERLUDE 8

Second return journey

1863... Hervé Joncour is back since the first Sunday of April with thousands of silkworm eggs hidden in his luggage. He tells his wife Hélène that he has to go to Nîmes for business and that he will be back on the same day.

SCENE 8: AT MADAME BLANCHE'S IN NÎMES

1. Dance with a Russian flavor (1)

12,rue Moscat, in Nîmes. On the first floor, above the textile shop, musicians are playing a Russian-like tune. The girls are all French and young. They joke, laugh a lot and dance together in a frenzy and up to a breathtaking point. Madame Blanche is seated in a large armchair, not far from the window. Her dark hair is shiny, her oriental face perfect. She is dressed in a white kimono made of a light, almost transparent fabric. On her fingers, like as many rings, she wears small intensely blue little flowers. She is barefoot.

2. “Come back or I’ll die”

Hervé Joncour pushes his way through the crowd to Madame Blanche. The girls leave, then the musicians. He asks her to translate the note from Hara Kei’s Young Wife. She has no reason in the world to do it. Yet she takes the sheet of paper. As she leans to hand it back to him, her kimono opens slightly on her chest. Hervé Joncour notices that she is wearing nothing underneath and that her skin is young and immaculately white. Without showing any sign of emotion, she gives him the translation of the few Japanese words: “Come back or I’ll die”. As she remains alone, Madame Blanche lets herself taken by a feeling of frustration toward Hervé Joncour. She too, was madly in love, she too suffered. If she now sells her charms, it is in order to forget her lost love. All she has left are these little blue flowers as a token of a henceforth needless fidelity.

3. Dance with a Russian flavor (2)

All girls and musicians re-enter for the final dance.

INTERLUDE 9

Third journey to Japan

October 1863 ... Journey identical to the earlier ones. When he arrives at Lake Baikal, the local people call it: **THE LAST**.

SCENE 9: HARA KEI’S MANSION (THE LARGE RECEPTION HALL)

The Acrobats

A few men from the village, and elegantly dressed woman, their faces powdered in white and bright colors. Sake is being drunk, long wooden pipes stuffed with dazing tobacco are being smoked. Two elderly women play on stringed instruments, grinning ceaselessly, a young boy blows in a shakuhachi while a barefoot female dancer is improvising. It is like a sad, secret and helpless dance. There follows the performance of a man who makes people laugh by imitating men and animals. The party goes on with the Acrobats’ Dance. Hara Kei is seated at the chief’s place, dressed in black, barefoot. In a splendid silk dress, the woman with the young girl’s face is seated next to him. A thousand times, Hervé Joncour seeks her eyes, and a thousand times, she finds his. Before leaving, he looks at her one last time. She looks at him, with perfectly mute eyes, centuries away from there.

SCENE 10: HARA KEI’S AVIARY

The Empty Aviary, symbol of infidelity

The huge aviary, its doors wide open, absolutely empty. In front of the aviary stands Hara Kei’s Young Wife. Hervé Joncour enters, walks toward her, holds out his hand and opens it. In his palm, a hand-written note, four-folded. The young girl sees it and shows a broad smile. She puts her hand on Hervé Joncour’s hand, holds it softly, remains a while, then takes it back, keeping between her fingers the note that has travelled around the world. Hardly has she hidden it in her dress, that the voice of Hara Kei is heard. Dark kimono, black hair perfectly tied at the nape of the neck. He welcomes his French friend. He then approaches and begins examining the aviary, looking at the wide-open doors one after the other. He explains that infidelity is short-lived and that the birds will come back, but also that it is always hard to resist the temptation to return. Hervé Joncour tells the young woman he hopes to see her again soon whereupon Hara Kei says she does not understand his language.

SCENE 11: ON THE LAKESHORE WITHOUT THE AVIARY

Hara Kei is gone

The following morning. The transaction place. By daybreak. Hara Kei's Messenger enters. He keeps blowing in a small reed instrument from which he draws the cries of all the birds of the world. He has with him fifteen mulberry tree leaves, entirely covered with tiny, ivory-coloured eggs. Hervé Joncour looks over each leaf carefully, then negotiates the price and pays with golden chips. Birds can be heard in the distance. The young boy says the birds are back, which means the young woman has remained true to her Master. Hervé Joncour asks to see Hara Kei. The Messenger answers that he is gone with all his retinue and that no one knows when he will come back.

ACT III

INTERLUDE 12

Third return journey

First Sunday of April 1864. After a three month journey, Hervé Joncour arrives at the gates of Lavilledieu – in time for Sunday Mass. He stops his carriage, steps down and goes on walking, step after step, with an infinite weariness.

SCENE 12: HERVÉ JONCOUR'S HOME IN LAVILLEDIEU

1. Plans for building an aviary

Summer 1864... at Hervé Joncour's. He is melancholic and drinks. He explains to Hélène that he is no longer drawing plans for a park but for a huge aviary. It would be full of birds. When something good would happen, the doors would be opened wide and everyone would look at the birds flying out. Hélène does not understand, as she considers that the construction of a park would have meant work for everyone. Remaining alone, Hervé Joncour admits the weakness of human beings.

2. Rumours of civil war in Japan

Baldabiou reports the outbreak of war in Japan, with the British standing by the government while the Dutch back the rebels. He tells of massacres, of foreigners slaughtered like sheep. Hélène says that silkworm industrials in Lavilledieu think it is madness to send Joncour over there, but the former replies that the expedition is already paid for! The scene becomes still to emphasize Hélène's sudden distress.

3. Hélène's distress

It is a cry of distress and despair. What mysterious reason pushes Joncour to make her suffer? She can't bear this nor can she overcome her anguish. Hélène wishes to die in order to forget.

INTERLUDE 13

Fourth journey to Japan

Identical to the three others. When he arrives at Lake Baïkal, the local people call it **THE SAINT**.

December 1864... When Joncour reaches Shirakawa, he finds the city half-destroyed. He wanders for several days, until he eventually finds Hara Kei's village burned to ashes. No living soul. Hervé Joncour sees what he believed invisible: the end of the world.

SCENE 13: HARA KEI'S CAMP IN THE MOUNTAINS (1)

1. "It will be too late to bring back healthy eggs"

Only the tattered Messenger is seen, then Hervé Joncour. He is exhausted after hours of trek in the mountain. After a while, he puts down his luggage. The young boy stares at his with anxiety. They stay there motionless, a few meters away from each other. Then the boy comes closer, trembling, and hands Joncour the glove he let fall the previous year close to the dress of Hara Kei's Young Wife. He promptly disappears. Hervé Joncour laments about the lost hours that compromise his stock of eggs, meaning they will hatch prematurely and transform themselves into dead larvae before he reaches Lavilledieu. The young woman's face is an absolute obsession.

2. “Who brought you here?”

The stage slowly lightens up. Mountains at sunset. Hara Kei’s tent is seen along with the hand carriage shut with thousands of coloured silk shades. Not a single opening in this magnificent nest. Hung at each corner, small cages full of birds and in the night breeze, tiny, lightly twinkling golden bells. Hara Kei suddenly bursts out of the dark. He asks Joncour who brought him here. The former does not answer, for fear of betraying the Messenger. He shows Hara Kei his golden chips to prove him he is here for the usual transaction. Hara Kei replies “*There is nothing for you here ; Only war. Go away!*” He turns around and exits.

SCENE 14: HARA KEI’S CAMP IN THE MOUNTAINS (2)

The Love Messenger condemned

The next morning. Same place, except that Hara Kei’s tent has disappeared. The hand carriage is left, opened. Hung to a branch, the young boy who brought him here. Joncour approaches and remains there, staring at him, as if hypnotized. He recovers the body, lays it on the ground and kneels down. Men in arms and women mix their voices with Joncour’s. He is crushed. He wonders how such a crime is possible. Hara Kei explains that there are twelve crimes for which it is allowed to condemn a man to death: one of them is having accepted to carry a message of love. Hervé Joncour insists there was no love message. “*He was a love message*” answers the Japanese warlord. Hara Kei then puts his gun on Joncour’s nape forcing him to keep his eyes down. At this moment, Hara Kei’s Young Wife slowly steps into the hand carriage. All exit slowly as the twinkling of thousands of tiny bells accompanies the escaping procession. Golden rumour. Hervé Joncour does not perceive the (inner) explosion that brings his life down. He feels the gun moving away. He remains on his knees. The young boy’s body laying in front of him.

SCENE 15: HERVÉ JONCOUR’S HOME IN LAVILLEDIEU

The Secret

Summer 1865... Hervé Joncour, on his knees and prostrate as in preceding scene. In the background, Hélène, standing still is hardly seen in the shadow of the stage. She holds tight against her chest, a large mustard-coloured envelope. Carefully, she walks to Joncour and hands it to him. Then walks back, half hidden at the back of the stage, observing her husband attentively. Hervé Joncour, thinking he is alone, feverishly unseals the envelope. Seven paper sheets fall out covered in dense and geometric hand-writing : black ink, Japanese ideograms. What meaning could it have? He then recalls his first meeting with Hara Kei’s Young Wife, her face. To die of nostalgia for something he will never know. Hervé Joncour remains prostrate, motionless. The scenery unravels under our eyes and reveals an empty, neutral space. He vanishes with the scenery. Hélène is haloed by an intense light, as Madame Blanche and Hara Kei’s Young Wife appear.

SCENE 16: EMPTY STAGE – NEUTRAL PLACE

The Letter

Hélène holds the letter she gave Madame Blanche for translation in Japanese, then begins to read. Gradually, she breaks away from the text, dropping the leaflets on the floor. She wrote this letter of breath-taking eroticism, having probably discovered her husband’s impossible love for a distant young woman. The consuming passion and intense love she feels for her husband dictated to her this act of total self-sacrifice. Madame Blanche and Hara Kei’s Young Wife blend their voices with Hélène’s. Either of them could have written the letter.

YVES PRIN, *composer*

Born in 1933 in Sainte-Savine (Aube) France. Musical studies at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris.

1968-1969 | Assistant to Bruno Maderna at the Salzburg Mozarteum.

1968-1973 | Guest conductor of the orchestras of The Hague and Haarlem in the Netherlands.

1970-1974 | Musical director of the Orchestre Philharmonique des Pays-de-la-Loire.

1974-1980 | musical director at the Atelier Lyrique du Rhin.

1978 | Follows at the Ircam, Paris, the first seminars for modern technologies and research, in order to familiarize himself with sound synthesis by computer.

1981-1983 | Musical director of Radio-France's Nouvel Orchestre Philharmonique.

1983-1986 | Coordinates contemporary music and musical theater at Radio-France.

1983-1992 | Producer at Radio-France of contemporary music concert series, successively: "Musique au Présent", "Musiques en Perspectives", "Musiques du xx^e siècle".

1992-1999 | Artistic director of the festival "Présences" produced by Radio-France and centered on creation.

Yves Nat and Bruno Maderna deeply influenced and oriented Yves Prin's musical career. After following a classical path, devoting himself to the repertoire as both pianist and conductor, he chose to dedicate himself totally to creation. Thus, he conducted numerous world premieres, whether symphonic, instrumental or lyric, some of them being recorded for radio broadcast, CDs or television.

His musical commitment expresses itself in his own works which bear the stamp of a specifically lyrical language. His catalogue is made up of some fifty works, among them five concertos, eight song cycles as well as incidental music.

Yves Prin was awarded in 1997 the Florent-Schmitt Prize from the Académie des Beaux-Arts. He is Officer in the Ordre des Arts et Lettres. Since 1999, he devotes himself entirely to composition.

ALESSANDRO BARICCO, *novelist*

Alessandro Baricco was born in 1958 in Turin (Piedmont). He is a popular Italian writer, director and performer. His novels have been translated into a wide number of languages. After receiving degrees in philosophy (under Gianni Vattimo) and piano, he published essays on music criticism: "Il genio in fuga on Gioachino Rossini", 1988 and "L'anima di Hegel e le mucche del Wisconsin" ("Hegel's Soul and the Cows of Wisconsin", 1992) on the relation between music and modernity. He subsequently worked as musical critic for La Repubblica and La Stampa, and hosted talk shows on Rai Tre.

Alessandro Baricco published his first novel, "Castelli di rabbia" ("Lands of Glass") (Prix Médicis étranger, France) in 1991. In 1993 he co-founded a creative writing school in Turin, Scuola Holden, named after Holden Caulfield, the hero of J. D. Salinger's novel "The Catcher in the Rye". The Scuola Holden hosts a variety of courses on narrative techniques including screenwriting, journalism, videogames, novels and short stories.

In the following years his fame grew enormously throughout Europe, with his works topping the Italian and French best-seller lists. Larger recognition followed the adaptation of his theatrical monologue "Novecento" into the movie "The Legend of 1900", directed by Academy Award-winning director Giuseppe Tornatore.

In 2001, He has also worked with the French band Air, releasing "City Reading", a mix of the band's music with Baricco's reading of his novel "City".

In 2007, "Seta" was adapted as a motion picture by director François Girard: "Silk". In 2008, he wrote and directed his first film, "Lezione 21".

In Italy, Alessandro Baricco was awarded the Premio Viareggio, the Premio Selezione Campiello and the Premio Palazzo al Bosco.