

each winter with the Orchestre des Champs-Élysées (*Pelléas et Mélisande* and *Le Comte Ory* are followed by *Hamlet* and next year by *Fortunio*). ‘The house is an ideal size, since the audience is close to the singers, and that is something that has become very rare. The artistic team there is ideal too: you can dream together about projects and then think about finding the best ways of getting them under way.’

Debussy’s masterpiece had long held a special place in Langrée’s personal pantheon, but conducting it at the Opéra Comique, where it was premiered in 1902, deepened his connection with it. ‘When I was in the pit at the Opéra Comique I really became aware of certain truths about the work. It was an unforgettable experience. But, to tell the truth, every time I conduct *Pelléas* I discover new worlds in it—things that had never occurred to me, but which I actually knew all along. Just think about the family tree: Pelléas and Golaud are half-brothers—they have the same mother, Geneviève, but not the same father. They also have the same grandfather, Arkel, but Geneviève is not his daughter because in the first act she says to Mélisande, “I have lived here for nearly 40 years”. She must have come to Allemonde as a bride. The only way to explain this is that Pelléas’s father and Golaud’s father were brothers, so what happened with the previous generation is going to happen again with the current generation. You can imagine that Golaud’s father put his son on his shoulders, using him to spy on Geneviève and his brother. What’s more, Pelléas’s best friend is called Marcellus, which is also the

■ *One of Langrée’s key works: ‘Pelléas et Mélisande’ in the production he conducted at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées last year, with Jean-Sébastien Bou and Patricia Petibon in the title roles*



name of one of Hamlet’s friends. And we know how much Maeterlinck admired Shakespeare ...’

Another key opera for Langrée is *La Bohème*. ‘It was one of my specialties at Glyndebourne and also the work for my debut in Vienna, so I was both terribly nervous before the show and enormously happy afterwards. It has always brought me good luck and I absolutely adore it. It’s a work that demands absolute precision, a work full of rhythm. André Messager, who conducted the premiere of *Pelléas*, was a great admirer of Puccini. When you read Puccini’s scores, you realize that there is almost nothing to do—if you try and add something, you destabilize the piece in question.’ The third totemic opera for Langrée is *Onegin*. ‘It’s the only Russian opera that I conduct. I don’t speak Russian. I first conducted it when I had the time to learn it phonetically, phrase by phrase, word by word. If Tatyana were to listen to piano music, it would be Chopin or Schumann. If she were to read books, they would be by Stendhal—it’s more a Romantic work than a Russian work.’