

90 Years of the Salzburg Festival

2010 is an anniversary year for us as we celebrate 90 years of the Salzburg Festival. The programme of operas, concerts and plays will revolve around mythological themes. Over the past nine decades the Salzburg Festival has itself assumed a mythical aura. Is this burdensome or does it provide inspiration for the present and future?

From the very beginning the Salzburg Festival was founded with the intention of counteracting the crisis, the crisis of meaning, the loss in values, the identity crisis of the individual, as well as of entire nations.

In the midst of the First World War, when nations were raging against each other, the founding fathers Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Max Reinhardt, Richard Strauss, Alfred Roller and Franz Schalk evolved the idea of bringing reconciliation by means of a festival and by creating a unifying aim.

Peace and the belief in Europe, “in European thinking such as fulfilled and enlightened the period from 1750 to 1850”, were the principles of the “first appeal for the plan to found the Salzburg Festival” (1919), formulated incomparably by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Which other festival can, indeed must fulfill such a timelessly valid founding mission?

In line with our ideals we succeeded in this in 2009 when Daniel Barenboim performed the opera of liberation *Fidelio* with his West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. In 2010 Valery Gergiev will present an important evening in the Salzburg Festival with the World Orchestra for Peace which was founded by the unforgettable Sir Georg Solti. He was convinced that “politicians do their job, but musicians are able to be the most potent voices. Music doesn’t have borders – it is immediate, effective and very truthful.”

In choosing our Poet in Residence we obviously had a wonderful premonition. Claudio Magris, who was awarded the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in the Church of St. Paul in Frankfurt in October 2009, will live and work in Salzburg during the coming festival summer. A quote from the speech he gave on receiving the award is also very suitable for us to keep in mind as we plan the festival, “Many Utopias of a Paradise on earth have evaporated, yet the demand has not evaporated that the world not only has to be administered but must, above all, be changed. ‘Change the world, it needs it!’ demanded Bertolt Brecht. Change it even when everything urges you to believe that it is impossible.”

The political message in the festival plan was formulated very clearly but as regards the dramatic concept, it was comparably terse: “opera and plays of the highest standard”. Nevertheless, this formulation proved to be very fortunate – it gives those who are responsible for planning the programme the necessary freedom while striving to maintain supreme quality.

In the summer of 2010 an exhibition running parallel to the festival will show with what subject matter artistic directors, boards of directors, artists have written festival history over the past 90 years. From July 17th, in keeping with Max Reinhardt’s ideals, we intend to make the entire city a stage.

We are very pleased that several institutions in Salzburg have taken up our idea and enriched it. A series of exhibitions entitled “The Great World Theatre” will therefore show the changing history of the most important festival in the world, not only in our own buildings, but it will also be documented in a major multi-media show, for instance in the Salzburg Museum, in the Residenzgalerie, in St. Peter’s Abbey and in Mozart’s Birthplace.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote that “all developments occur in spirals.” We hope that especially in 2010 we will succeed in creating a fascinating soaring spiral of magnificent listening experiences, interesting ideas and impressive pictures.

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