

**After The Storm
The Return of the
Salzburg Festival
2021 / 2022**

By **Elga Wimmer**

Following the success of last year's edition of the Salzburg Festival, deftly navigating pandemic restrictions, an emboldened and much larger audience turnout in 2021 saw attendance bounce back to near pre-Covid levels. Art lovers from around the world came out to support top quality performances, such as the premiere in August 2021, of Michael Sturminger's new production of Giacomo Puccini's splendid *Tosca*. The cast included Anna Netrebko as Floria Tosca, a Roman opera Star — very apropos — Yusif Eyvasov as Mario Cavaradossi, a painter, and French baritone Ludovic Tézier as the imposing and dangerous Barone Scarpia (Roman chief of police). The ever magnificent Vienna Philharmonics played under the musical direction of Marco Armiliato.

The story of the opera, *Tosca*, is a very contemporary one: A political refugee seeks shelter with his artist friend. While art and politics have long entwined, we see this especially in the last two centuries. Giacomo Puccini wrote *Tosca* shortly before the start of WWI, during the political upheaval at the turn of the century. Before Puccini turned it into a three-part opera, *La Tosca* started out as a five-act

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Whitsun Festival: Cecilia Bartoli. © Kristian Schuller Decca



Tosca 2021 . Mikeldi Atxalandabaso (Spoletta), Yusif Eyvasov (Mario Cavaradossi), Ludovic Tézier (Il Barone Scarpia), Ensemble. © SF / Matthias Horn

drama by French playwright Victorien Sardou, and was first performed on November 24, 1887 at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin in Paris. The original story dramatized the political intrigue and romance of life during the Napoleonic wars.

Under the direction of Michael Sturminger *Tosca* is set in the second half of the 20th Century. Floria Tosca sweeps on-stage, looking like a 1960's Diva in an ivory-colored knee-length coat (by costume designer Renate Martin), Jacqueline Kennedy sunglasses and a crystal-studded handbag (crystals by the Salzburg Festival's patron Swarovski).

We see her in three very different situations: Wearing an elegant coat in a Baroque church, later in the magnificent Palazzo Tornese, a large evening gown, coming straight from the stage after her concert, and finally in trousers and a leather jacket, fleeing with her lover.

Her wardrobe indicates her social position as an opera star, and also as a private and a public person. Anna Netrebko is very much in her element portraying Floria Tosca, celebrated operatic soprano, a woman in love, holding her own in a world of patriarchs and political despots. Dramatic tenor Yusif Eyvasov gives a memorable performance as the painter Mario Cavaradossi, in mortal danger for hiding a political prisoner, fated to die for love. An accomplished leading baritone, Ludovic Tézier as Il Barone Scarpia comes off, however, a bit overly theatrical and proves not entirely convincing as the great seducer.

Adolfo Hohenstein had already painted a costume design for *Tosca* in 1899 when the title role was to be played by the great Sarah Bernhard. Both the original play, as well as the opera version present a society in which mafia-like machinations reach into the highest echelons of church and state,

where blackmail and political intrigue abound.

The Premiere of *Tosca* in Rome (1900) had to be postponed because of threats of violence, due to its political content and seeming critique of authority figures.

Art imitates life once more, in today's tense political climate; Anna Netrebko and Yusif Eyvasov published a statement in early March, 2022 referencing the neo-Bolshvik Russia invasion of Ukraine. The couple decided to cancel their concert in Denmark, as a diplomatic protest stating: "These are very sad days and we are deeply concerned for the well-being of all people involved. Every war is a terrible tragedy!"

In the meantime the soprano will resume performing in late May, after announcing in the early days of the Ukraine invasion that she was taking "a step back" from the stage. The opera singer stated, "This is not a time for me to make music and perform."



Shakespeare im Park, *Elves and Errors* Tina Eberhardt
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The Salzburg Festival 2022 will nevertheless take place undiminished by the newest upheavals in the world at large, as it has over 100 years. A veritable temple of art, the annual event has evolved into a bigger-than-life institution that gives hope and inspiration, especially in difficult times.

One of the most unique performances, staged by the Salzburger Landestheater (Salzburg State Theatre) in 2020 and 2021 *Elves and Errors*, offered up a delightful and playful rendition of Shakespeare.

Held in the gardens of the Max Reinhardt Castle, Schloss Leopoldskron, visitors were enticed to follow a group of actors around the grounds alongside a picture-perfect

lake. The interactive performance was reminiscent of scenes from the film, *Shakespeare in Love*, in its whimsical dialogue, taking place under the trees, in an amphitheater, on a lawn.

The staging by Carl Philip von Maldeghem presents in *Elves and Errors* characters from some of Shakespeare's most loved works, with a young cast. And as if by magic, the signature rainy Salzburg weather (called "Schnuerlregen" by locals) gave way to let the sun smile on this play of love, suffering and lust.

A look ahead for 2022: The Whitsun Festival (June 3-6, 2022) will take place under the artistic direction of Italian Cecilia Bartoli, with a Seville theme. Ms. Bartoli, mezzo-soprano opera singer and recital-

ist, performed for the first time in her career as Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (The Barber of Seville by Rossini) in Seville. The city's vibrant cultural scene, a mix of Arabic and Spanish, has inspired numerous operas, plays and musical compositions over the centuries. The festival will include, of course, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and Cecilia Bartoli as Rosina, as well as an evening of piano concerts by Spanish composers Enrique Granados, Manuel de Falla and Isaac Albéniz.

Seville's landmark, la torre de oro (the golden tower), is a namesake to Saturday night's concert at the Haus für Mozart (Mozart House) that same weekend, where there will be a presentation of traditional music, ending with a roster of opera luminaries, including Plácido Domingo, John Osborn, Rebeca Olivera, Maria Agresta, Cecilia Bartoli, as well as duets and ensembles, with Gianluca Campano conducting Les Musiciens du Prince-Monaco.

Then there is the Salzburg Festival's Youth Program JUNG UND JEDE* R, which exposes young audiences to operas and plays, including young people, 8-14 years old, and children as young as 6. The opera, *Der Teufel mit den Drei Goldenen Haaren* (The Devil with the Three Golden Hair) caters to children, for example, while the performances *Wut* (Anger) and *Ich liebe Dich* (I love You) speak to young adults, addressing complicated feelings. Composer Gordon Kampe and Director Sebastian Bauer are the leading creative forces behind the program which will take place from the end of July through August 2022.

From July 28 to August 11, the Landestheater is presenting Arthur Schnitzler's *Reigen*. The Austrian author and dramatist scrutinizes the sexual morality and class ideology of his day,

the 1800s (published 1900), through successive encounters between pairs of characters. It remains to be seen how the protagonists of this updated version of the play transcend present time.

A 1950's French film version of *Reigen*, called *La Ronde* featured actors Simone Signoret as the prostitute who meets up with a soldier played by Serge Reggiani, who later becomes involved with a maid, played by Simone Simon. The merry-go-round continues until it comes back to the beginning, making for an intriguing tale of love and infidelity.

Another innovative highlight of the Salzburg Festival 2022 is the pairing of Bela Bartok's opera *Herzog Blaubarts Burg* (Bluebeard's Castle), and Carl Orff's *De Temporum Fine Comoedia*, a libretto with texts from sibylline prophecies and Orphic Hymns, presented in old Greek, Latin and German.

Dante's medieval classic poem, *The Divine Comedy* (1321),



Ich lieb dich Imke Siebert (Lia), Ludwig Wendelin Weißenberger (Julian)
© SF / Erika Mayer

may have served as the point of departure for the juxtaposition of the two works: Bluebeard's doomed Castle, portrayed as a psychological drama, concentrating on the Maiden-Killer's last victim Judith, and Orff's sonorous reinterpretation of *The Last Supper*, where evil is good, and Lucifer transforms into the "bearer of light."

The daring juxtaposition of both compositions here presents an

intriguing deep dive into psychological drama on one hand, and spiritual oratorio.

The Salzburg Festival's unique strength has always been to reshuffle the deck, to present opera, musical concerts and theatre in a new light each year, insuring that even work from past centuries are fresh again for successive generations of the young and old alike. **M**



Tosca 2021. Anna Netrebko (Flora Tosca) and Ludovic Tézier (Il Barone Scarpia)
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