

Press Text: Terrace Talk *Orphée aux enfers*



Barrie Kosky (Director) and Enrique Mazzola (Conductor). Photos: SF/Anne Zeuner

(SF, 5 August 2019) The enchantment of Jacques Offenbach's music? – "You cannot hear it without smiling," says Barrie Kosky, whose production of *Orphée aux enfers* premieres at the Salzburg Festival on 14 August 2019. "That is his genius. No matter whether you understand the words or not, his music has a seductive quality," he says. With this *opéra-bouffon*, Jacques Offenbach not only paved the way for a renaissance of operetta. He also hearkened back to Geek theatre of antiquity. There, it was usual to offer a satyr play alongside three tragedies, as an interlude, so to speak. "Just like in real life, an intermezzo was needed amidst the tragedies, a little buffoonery about power and sex, and that was the birth of comedy," says Barrie Kosky.

That is exactly what Markus Hinterhäuser is doing this summer, the director adds. "He is interspersing the great myths of antiquity with a satyr play." In *Orphée aux enfers*, Offenbach deals with the antique tale of Orpheus, but he turns everything on its head, transforming the story into persiflage. "For thousands of years, Eurydice was only a muse, a woman without function," Kosky explains. "But in Offenbach's case, she is the main figure. Orfeo is a secondary figure, since Jupiter and Pluto have much more stage time than he does." Social criticism? – No, that is not what interests him in this piece. Certainly, the audience of the first performance in 1858, the French haute-bourgeoisie, knew that the piece was about itself, but on the other hand, Offenbach's genius made them understand that it was all a game.

The director focuses on two other aspects: "The piece is anything but an advertisement for Christian marriage," says Barrie Kosky. Instead, Offenbach turns the idea of matrimony on its head. All the marriages shown in the opera are broken and finished. "The second main theme is the production's image of women. Offenbach was ahead of his times by 60 or 70 years. He shows an emancipated woman, although during his era, women only appeared on stage as muses, victims of illness, madwomen or corpses. "And suddenly, the composer puts a modern

woman on stage, who knows what she wants, who despises her husband Orphée's music, who is not an object of art or a man's muse. "Such fantastic humour!" he says.



Director Barrie Kosky.

Chanson, revue, burlesque, slapstick, clowning – all that is contained in this piece, the director continues. Joy and ecstasy are very close to melancholy; the music always bears the shadow of death within. Conductor Enrique Mazzola is trying to tie all those elements together, as he says at the Terrace Talk. Combining satire and burlesque on stage requires great confidence in the director and also in the singers, he adds. From the very beginning, they agreed that speed is a central element, as is a tendency towards the extreme and excessive. "In Offenbach's music, tempi are very important," he says. He recognizes a lot of Rossini in the score, and Rossini influenced Offenbach profoundly. In Salzburg, the two-act version is performed.



Conductor Enrique Mazzola.

Enrique Mazzola smiles when he recalls his first rehearsal with the Vienna Philharmonic. The musicians were all earnest and serious – actually, *seriosissimi*, he says. However, by the second rehearsal he was already able to make them smile. "For example, there was a cellist, a wonderful musician," says Enrique Mazzola. "When he understood that he does not have to play accompaniment all the time, he relaxed, and now he smiles while playing."

In preparation, he studied various critical editions of the score, so that the version shown in Salzburg now reflects all the versions. Offenbach wrote very quickly, adapting the score to the

audience's tastes even after the premiere. In contrast to other operas, this means that here there is no definitive *urtext*, the conductor explains.

One challenge of this production, says director Barrie Kosky, was the treatment of language. The protagonists are singing in French, the original language, but he did not want to have the dialogues spoken in German or French by non-native speakers. "We have now found a wonderful solution, which also corresponds well with Offenbach, who was so profoundly influenced by Germany and France." John Styx, the figure of Death embodied by Max Hopp, speaks all the dialogues in German. The singers thus move their lips as if they were speaking, but Styx speaks all roles for them in the language of death. "This results in a strange, theatrical language," says Barrie Kosky. However, he believes it is an excellent solution for Offenbach, since it reflects his biography so well.

Press Office of the Salzburg Festival/Anne Zeuner

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<https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/presse/fotoservice>

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<https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/presse>

Jacques Offenbach (1819 - 1880)

Orphée aux enfers

Opéra-bouffon in two acts and four scenes (1858)

Libretto by Hector Crémieux and Ludovic Halévy

New production

Premiere: 14 August 2019

Additional performances: 17, 21, 23, 26 and 30 August 2019

Haus für Mozart

Enrique Mazzola Conductor

Barrie Kosky Director

Rufus Didwizus Sets

Victoria Behr Costumes

Franck Evin Lighting

Otto Pichler Choreography

Susanna Goldberg Dramaturgy

Anne Sofie von Otter L'Opinion publique

Kathryn Lewek Eurydice

Joel Prieto Orphée

Marcel Beekman Aristée / Pluton

Nadine Weissmann Cupidon

Lea Desandre Vénus

Martin Winkler Jupiter

Frances Pappas Junon

Rafał Pawnuk Mars

Vasilisa Berzhanskaya Diane

Peter Renz Mercure

Max Hopp John Styx

Alessandra Bizzarri, Martina Borroni, Kai Braithwaite, Damian Czarnecki, Shane

Dickson, Michael Fernandez, Claudia Greco, Merry Holden, Daniel Ojeda, Marcell Prét,

Tara Randell, Lorenzo Soragni Dancer

Vocalconsort Berlin

David Cavelius Chorus Master

Vienna Philharmonic

Coproduction with Komische Oper Berlin and Deutsche Oper am Rhein

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