

The Salzburg Festival Centenary – The Festival as a Work of Peace



1920: Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Jedermann* in Max Reinhardt's production. Audience seating for the first *Jedermann* was constructed from the wood of the barracks of a huge prisoner-of-war camp. In this image: Alexander Moissi (*Jedermann*), Johanna Terwin (*Paramour*), Werner Krauß (*Death*). Photo: Archive of the Salzburg Festival / Photo Ellinger

(SF, 20 December 2019) The Salzburg Festival was founded during times of abject misery as a daring project against the crisis. Between 1914 and 1918 all of Europe went down in ashes and ruins: monarchies disappeared, empires vanished, millions of people died. The survivors had to find new orientation in wounded societies.

In an appeal of the Festspielhaus Association during the first year of its existence, 1917, we read: "We (...) believe that the arts will be the true salvation of mankind from the misery of war."

In his Memorandum of 1917, Max Reinhardt wrote of "the ravages of this war", of the "terrible reality of these days", of the "incredible blaze consuming the world" – against which a festival in Salzburg could and should provide a bulwark. Building a festival theatre would be "one of the first works of peace". The fact that the audience seating for the first *Jedermann* performances would be built from the wood of the barracks of a huge prisoner-of-war camp outside Salzburg is only one practical proof of this theory – *Jedermann* as a peace project.

Max Reinhardt was convinced that only culture could reconcile the peoples who had been torn apart and become mortal enemies in the war. "I believe that because of its wonderful central location, the beauty of its landscape and architecture, its historical idiosyncrasies and memories and not least because of its unspoiled virginity, Salzburg is called to become a place of pilgrimage for innumerable people longing for the salvation of art amidst the bloody horrors of our times. More than any other, this war has proven that theatre is not merely a luxury for



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the rich and sated, but food for the needy.” – Art not as decoration, but as the food and meaning of life.

“On 22 August 1920, the cries of ‘Jedermann’ were first heard on Cathedral Square. No lost war, not an Austria that had shrunk from a Hapsburg empire spanning Europe to ‘L’Autriche c’est ce qui reste’, no lack of money, not even the sheer struggle to survive could dissuade our founding fathers from their plan. With the idea of a festival, our founding fathers – Max Reinhardt, that magician of stagecraft, the poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the composer Richard Strauss, the director of the Vienna Court Opera, Franz Schalk, and the wonderful stage designer Alfred Roller – sought to bring order after the spiritual and financial chaos of the war, and to help build a new, better world – what they had in mind was a first peace project,” says Festival President **Helga Rabl-Stadler**.

After World War II, the Salzburg Festival again played an eminently positive political role: only three months after Salzburg had surrendered without resistance – contrary to orders – on May 4, 1945, the American occupying forces supported the revival of the festival: although the city was severely damaged by bombing, although soldiers and refugees crowded the city and although there was a lack even of basic nourishment. As after World War I, the political mission of the festival came to the fore: General Mark Clark, the commander of the occupying American forces which governed Salzburg until the Treaty of 1955, chose the opening of the festival for his first public appearance in Austria, because he considered it a “celebration of the rebirth of cultural freedom”: “I am certain that this early introduction of your festival proves that the work undertaken jointly by the Austrian people and the United Nations, to restore a free, independent Austria, will soon be successful.”



The Directorate of the Salzburg Festival: Lukas Crepaz (Executive Director), Helga Rabl-Stadler (Festival President), Markus Hinterhäuser (Artistic Director). Photo: SF/Lydia Gorges



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Salzburg Festival 2020

“Pax – Peace” · Overture spirituelle

Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem* - Arnold Schoenberg’s *Friede auf Erden*

“The *Overture spirituelle* will be entitled ‘Pax’. In 2020 we begin with the *War Requiem* by Britten, preceded by *Frieden auf Erden*, Arnold Schoenberg’s choral work. Placing these at the beginning of the centenary edition of the Festival is a clear message. Altogether, the *Overture spirituelle* will contemplate the subject of ‘peace’ and conflict – for without conflict, there is no peace,” says Artistic Director **Markus Hinterhäuser**.

Entitled *Pax – Peace*, the *Overture spirituelle* continues the founding idea of the Festival – to create a European peace project from the spirit of art after World War I. It focuses on outer peace and inner peace, both of which are endangered by mankind itself. The value of peace is best experienced through its counterpart, war, which can be traced like a blood-stained line running through the centuries. On 19 July 2020, **Arnold Schoenberg’s *Friede auf Erden*** and **Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem*** of 1962 will be performed. Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla conducts her City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO), the CBSO Chorus and the Salzburger Festspiele und Theater Kinderchor. The solo parts will be sung by Elena Stikhina (soprano), Allan Clayton (tenor) and Florian Boesch (baritone). The work received its world premiere at the rebuilt Cathedral of Coventry, after the previous edifice had been destroyed during the German bombing of Coventry in World War II.

“*Friede auf Erden* was written before both world wars, and it evokes a utopia which was destroyed shortly thereafter by the great catastrophes of the 20th century. Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem* is a highly personal, haunting plea against war, which the composer had experienced as full of suffering,” says **Florian Wiegand**, Director of Concerts.

‘My subject is War, and the pity of War,
The Poetry is in the pity...
All a poet can do today is warn.’

Britten prefaced his score with these words by the British poet Wilfred Owen.



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“These words also apply to many of the other works which will be played as part of the 2020 *Ouverture spirituelle*, musically contemplating war and suffering, peace and redemption, fear and hope,” **Florian Wiegand** explains.

The **City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO)** also celebrates its centenary in 2020. In a series of special events, premieres and concerts, the orchestra explores its connections with composers, conductors, artists and its hometown. Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, who won the Salzburg Festival Young Conductors Award at the 2012 Festival, conducts the first concert of the *Ouverture spirituelle* and thus of the 2020 Salzburg Festival. In 2016 she took on the position of chief conductor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra at the age of only 29.

Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla

What does Salzburg mean to you?

It is the city of music and one of my hometowns.

How would you describe the importance of Benjamin Britten and his War Requiem for you?

Britten was a pacifist. You might think this would be the only option for musicians – but there are other examples in music history, for example Brahms, who praised the King of Prussia after the Franco-German War. Like his composer colleague Michael Tippett, Britten wanted to take a stand for peace and dedicated his work as a composer to it.

The influence his *War Requiem* had on his contemporaries is astonishing. Shostakovich showed this score to his students in lessons. To Weinberg, it was a lifetime companion, which is reflected in his compositions. When I was in school in Lithuania, I was fortunate to learn parts of it and conduct it in my lessons.

When planning our first anniversary season (like the Salzburg Festival, the CBSO also celebrates its 100th birthday in 2020) in Birmingham, we looked for an appropriate opera. We considered many options, and of course Britten's operas were also in the running. Ultimately, nothing seemed more convincing than the possibility of performing the *War Requiem* instead of an opera. After all, the CBSO played its world premiere at Coventry Cathedral, and it has been part of its core repertoire ever since.

In searching for a way to understand what is foreign and searching for peace instead of hatred, the *War Requiem* remains a uniting force.

What defines peace for you?

A wise friend of mine once said: when people drink tea together, the world is already good. It is even better when they make music together. I cannot put it more wisely – somewhere between shared tea and shared music-making is peace.



Elena Stikhina

What does it mean to you to return to Salzburg after your success as Médée?

Salzburg is a magical place to me; I feel as if I am in a fairy-tale. I am happy and honoured to be invited to perform during the Festival's centenary. This will be my second collaboration with Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, and I am very much looking forward to it. Our first production together was *Carmen* at the Salzburg Landestheater in 2015. So much has happened since then!

What does Benjamin Britten mean to you?

I admire him greatly and I think his music should reach a much broader audience, especially the *War Requiem*. It offers a perfect balance between poetry and music. If we recall the origins and details of the first performance, the work gains an even deeper meaning. It becomes a unique tool for peace, it speaks for itself around the entire world.

Do you have a special relationship with the War Requiem?

The *War Requiem* is the first and so far the only requiem in my repertoire. It was my debut with the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam. I am very glad to have started with it. In today's world, every performance of this work is valuable and necessary.

What defines peace for you?

I can define it simply as love, respect and learning from your neighbours and your surroundings. Peace lives and grows through love and the arts. I often think of Tosca and her philosophy of life, of her words "Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore".





Wolfgang Götz, the director of the Salzburger Festspiele und Theater Kinderchor, is responsible for rehearsing the children's choir parts.

“To me, Benjamin Britten is one of the three greatest composers. He plays with the listeners' expectations, and the way he treats melodies shows his genius. One can hear this music an infinite number of times and still discover new things. The children's choir part in this work has a lot of challenges! The children's voices reflect the world of the hereafter, and there are a few spots where the children sing all alone. Therefore, it is my task to make every child feel as if they were a soloist on stage; that is the only way to achieve a great overall sound. In my work, it is important to me to give the children a lot of context in the

beginning. I explain the background, history and key terms to them, and I revert to them throughout our work. In order to achieve the desired sound, I work with the children using energy and emotions. The *War Requiem* is such an archaic work; its message and its effect on the audience are unambiguous. It places shock and agitation alongside hope, and shows that even during terrible times such as war, very human things can happen,” says Wolfram Götz, director of the Salzburger Festspiele und Theater Kinderchor.



The *Ouverture spirituelle* is made possible thanks to generous support from Prof. Dr. h.c. mult. Reinhold Würth and the Würth Group.

“Congratulations on 100 years of the Salzburg Festival! For the centenary and the coming 100 years, I wish the Festival successful further development in times of peace and freedom,” says Prof. Dr. h.c. mult. Reinhold Würth.

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CONCERT

GUEST ORCHESTRAS · OUVERTURE SPIRITUELLE · PAX

Sunday, 19 July 2020, Felsenreitschule

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG *Friede auf Erden* Op. 13

BENJAMIN BRITTEN *War Requiem* Op. 66

Elena Stikhina *Soprano*

Allan Clayton *Tenor*

Florian Boesch *Baritone*

Salzburger Festspiele und Theater Kinderchor

Wolfgang Götz *Chorus Master*

CBSO Chorus

Simon Halsey *Chorus Master*

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla *Conductor*



Merry Christmas! – The Salzburg Festival wishes you a peaceful holiday season and all the best for the New Year.

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