

Press Text: Lunch Talk *Orfeo ed Euridice* Can Death be Overcome?



Christof Loy, Cecilia Bartoli, Gianluca Capuano © SF/Jan Friese

Greeting and introduction by Cecilia Bartoli, Artistic Director of the Salzburg Whitsun Festival:

“Welcome to the 2023 Salzburg Whitsun Festival! This year we explore a myth which is particularly close to my heart as a musician. After all, Orpheus overcame death with his singing. However, it’s also interesting how his story is about human, all too human frailty: shortly after accomplishing this feat, on the way back from the underworld, Orpheus loses his beloved Eurydice a second time – due to his carelessness, perhaps even a certain hubris. So you can’t trick fate after all.

I think it’s fantastic that as an artistic director, I can illuminate such fundamental themes at the Salzburg Whitsun Festival through different artistic formats – this year, the opera productions are flanked by unusual interpretations, one by a renowned ballet company and one by a traditional Italian puppet ensemble. As a stage artist, I love being able to slip from one work into the other during a very intense period, exulting in their differences, for these works allow us get to know each of them more intensely and learn how to differentiate our interpretations even further.

It is always my wish that you too will experience the awe we do, faced with these masterworks, and that in the end you will share the joy of these experiences with us.”

Christof Loy and Gianluca Capuano in Conversation:

(SF, 9 May 2023) Rehearsals for Christoph Willibald Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* have been ongoing for two weeks. Neither director Christof Loy nor conductor Gianluca Capuano are

working on this tale for the first time. Loy has directed the French version of the story by Berlioz; Capuano has already conducted several works by Gluck, including his *Orfeo*.

Dance plays an important role in the concept of his second joint work in Salzburg with Cecilia Bartoli, Loy explained. The point of departure for his own study of this art form was his production of the Paris version of *Tannhäuser* in Amsterdam. Since then, he has intensified his choreographic work over the years: "I start by improvising with the dancers. In doing so, I describe psychological journeys, and if necessary I also work with an assistant ballet master." He has known the dancers he has brought to this production for many years. "It is actually time to officially found this company," he said about this artistic relationship that has grown continuously over time.



Christof Loy © SF/Jan Friese

Gianluca Capuano commented on the specifics of the "Parma version" of *Orfeo* being performed at Whitsun. This was created seven years after the first performance, and the most important difference is that the role of Orfeo is scored for a mezzo-soprano – as if predestined for Cecilia Bartoli. Another characteristic feature of this version is that it foregoes the structuring element of acts; unlike the three-act Viennese version, this version consists of seven scenes. Capuano also finds the reworking interesting regarding historical casting: thus, for the Parma version Gluck had different singers with varying vocal ranges available, unlike in Vienna. Capuano explained that he had long suggested the Parma version to Cecilia Bartoli, as both the range and the treatment of keys and ornamentations is most suitable for her. Together with Christof Loy, he added elements of the third existing version, the Paris version, such as the "Dance of the Furies" – in the spirit of Gluck, as both are convinced.

Christof Loy also finds that the transposition creates a figure which is perfect for Cecilia Bartoli: "The central point of the production is this concentration on the Orfeo figure – everything happens from his perspective." Orfeo's entire journey to the underworld and his encounter with Euridice, he explained, were conceived by Gluck in such a manner that his own artistic sentiment is in the foreground. Discussing dance as an essential element, he added: "Gluck himself created a newly developed genre with his reform opera. To him, it was important to develop expressive possibilities further. Thus, the moments in which Orpheus – whether for artistic or emotional reasons – does not express himself vocally can be portrayed non-verbally and sensually by the dancers." Gianluca Capuano agreed: "The result of the reforms was a unified art form, which was then also taken up by Richard Wagner."



Gianluca Capuano, Christof Loy © SF/Jan Frieese

Christof Loy also commented on the role of Amor, embodied by Madison Nonoa from New Zealand at the Whitsun Festival: “I have portrayed this figure not as a god, but as love. To me, it was clear that Orfeo needs a muse to help him out of his crisis”. This, however, does not mean that there is a “lieto fine”. Ultimately, it all boils down to the impossible attempt at fighting death. In this sense, the artist’s drama is only a point of departure, merely a backdrop for action in reality. In the end, the piece is also the drama of our own human life, asking: what is the boundary between death and life? What changes at the moment we lose our dearest people, how do we portray death as a central, overwhelming theme?



Gianluca Capuano © SF/Jan Frieese

Regarding the scene in which Orfeo and Euridice meet and she hurls bitter recriminations at him, Loy said: “That is the ingenious surprise about the piece: after we have witnessed the

egocentrism and exceptional appearance of Orpheus as an artist for a long time, he is suddenly confronted with a human being. That is the modern dialogue of a married couple, which might also be taken from an Ingmar Bergman film.”

Regarding the stage sets created by Johannes Leiacker, it was important to Loy to create a unified space, in the spirit of the theatrical architecture of Greek antiquity, uniting the elements of chorus, orchestra and dance. He was also inspired by a photograph of the production by Margarete Wallmann, who directed the piece at the 1931 Salzburg Festival, with Bruno Walter conducting. “This performance at the Karl-Böhm-Saal with its wooden panelling influenced us.”

Gianluca Capuano also spoke about the musical challenges: “Les Musiciens du Prince – Monaco play original instruments. However, we cannot go back to a traditional performance practice, as we can in the case of Haydn or Mozart. To me, Gluck is proto-romantic and highly psychological on stage. We are consciously trying to leave behind traditional Gluck interpretation, with its monumental, static images and intentionally slow music.”



Cecilia Bartoli, Christof Loy, Gianluca Capuano, Méliсса Petit and dancers in a rehearsal break
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The talk was moderated by the Viennese cultural journalist Monika Mertl.