Editorial

sacrifice - Opfer - victim

SALZBURG WHITSUN FESTIVAL
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Cleopatra – the legendary woman of a thousand faces:
what an intriguing theme for a festival!
As we know from 19th-century accounts, the audience at the Milan premiere of Bellini’s *Norma* in 1831 was quite surprised by this unusual opera. Would we surprise an audience of today similarly, I wonder, if we gave it a chance to relive this experience in a staging that restitutes the original form of the work, that is based on a close reading of the reconstructed orchestral score and is executed according to our latest insights into period practice?

Today, those principles go without saying where music from the Baroque and Classical period is concerned. And Claudio Abbado totally changed our perception when in the 1970ies and 80ies he began to blow the heavy dust from Rossini’s scores. We would like to follow his and others’ example and shed the same kind of new-old light onto Bellini’s masterpiece for its first-ever staging at the Salzburg Festival. Above all, we will use a new critical edition which restores countless details and annotations made by Bellini in various autograph manuscripts.

Also, the vocality of the three main characters will be shifted back to their original range and quality: The title role had been written for Giuditta Pasta, whose versatile voice let her sing Bellini’s Romeo or Rossini’s Cenerentola, Tancredi or Arsace – that is, parts which are nowadays considered for mezzo-soprano. The same applies to the other roles: the young novice Adalgisa was sung by Giulia Grisi, who must have been a high and light soprano since she created Donizetti’s Norina and Elvira in Bellini’s *I puritani*. Pollione, on the other hand, was entrusted to Domenico Donzelli, a hugely successful protagonist in Rossini operas such as *Tancredi*, *La Cenerentola*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *Otello*.

But also, *Norma* is often misjudged from the point-of-view of its plot. A careful staging will show, however, that the gripping events unfold in a stringent and linear way, reflecting how the heroine develops emotionally until the conscious final step towards her self-sacrifice at the stake.

And indeed this tragic conflict between her duties and that towards which her heart is drawn is a struggle to which many women are exposed sooner or later. Too often, women give up what is most valuable to them, but too often they themselves are made into victims. Norma tries to escape from such restraints by sacrificing that which is most dear to her: first her children, then her love and finally her life.

From this fundamental conflict I drew the theme for the 2013 Whitsun Festival: in fact, the German word “Opfer” signifies both: the sacrifice and the victim. And is it indeed not merely a matter of perspective? After all, there cannot be a sacrifice without a victim, it only depends on which side you find yourself.

But there are so many different aspects of “sacrifice” and “victim”. There is the pagan ritual of human sacrifice, which leads us from the druid priestess Norma to Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, the 100th birthday of which we celebrate during our festival. Here too, we present a reconstructed original version: the powerful Nijinsky choreography, which still remains one of the most original and impressive stagings of this ballet today.

This wonderful ballet is presented together with other splendid masterpieces from the heritage of the Ballets Russes.
Since most ancient times, sacrifices always formed the core of religious identity, and a great sacrifice is of course at the core of the Christian belief as well. The life that Christ gave to his followers brings them redemption and hope – themes that inspired music in countless ways. I have chosen contrasting works by Haydn, Jommelli and Brahms to show how differently musicians have treated those concepts that form the basis of our Western culture: Haydn in an abstract sound-painting of the last words of Christ, Jommelli in an impressive, virtually theatrical rendering of the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac. And Brahms in an extremely personal view of the Death of the Lord, seen as a source of consolation and restoration for our minds, that goes far beyond the boundaries of a church service.

Of course, there are also other kinds of sacrifices: Bach would have probably felt he sacrificed part of his artistic integrity when King Frederic the Great put him on trial by giving him an immensely difficult theme to improvise on – later he called this work – *Das Musikalische Opfer*.

The word “Opfer” and the term “Offertorium” are in fact derived from the Latin “offerre”: the offertory, when during church service wine and bread – symbols of Christ’s sacrifice – are brought to the altar. So when Sofia Gubaidulina wrote her violin concerto Offertorium and decided to use Bach/King Frederic’s theme as a basis, she carried that tune across into a spiritual, religious sphere. Amongst others, this work speaks to us about death and resurrection, but of course no work by Gubaidulina can be thought of without the implications of the artist as a victim of a political regime. This ties it together with one of the greatest and most moving works of the 20th century, which at once pays homage to the Jewish victims during World War II and at the same time to all people who suffered and suffer under a dictatorship: Shostakovich’s 13th Symphony.

re-rite, on the other hand, is a fascinating kind of interactive multi-media exhibition where you will find yourself inside an orchestra performing Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*. You may even play a part yourself if you like! I do hope that particularly young people and children will enjoy this unique musical experience.

And finally we will continue our collaboration with DAS KINO and screen Andrei Tarkovsky’s last film *The Sacrifice*, a philosophical rendering of the questions of sacrifice and redemption and a film from which the images in this programme are taken.

* Cecilia Bartoli