

## Press Text: Terrace Talk *Médée*



Simon Stone and Thomas Hengelbrock. Photos: SF/Anne Zeuner

(SF, 25 July 2019) The audience should feel that the action on stage has something to do with their own lives – says director Simon Stone, who is staging Luigi Cherubini's *Médée* at the Großes Festspielhaus this Festival summer. Therefore, he is transplanting the opera, which was first performed in 1797, into the present time, into our present society, he explains at the Terrace Talk. “It was very important to me to create spaces that correspond to the present and raise questions about this social drama.” – Why does a mother do something so unimaginable? – Is society blind to the fact that here is someone in need of help? – How does a person get to a state in which she can kill her own children?

Even though the opera dates to the 1790s, the conductor Thomas Hengelbrock calls it an extraordinarily modern and detail-rich score. The role of *Médée* has multiple facets, and from a psychological standpoint, she is a female figure of our times. “It is a long way from the loving but disappointed woman to a woman who begs the gods for the strength to do the worst possible thing to her husband,” says Thomas Hengelbrock. When Beethoven was asked whom he considered the most important composer of his time, his answer was: Cherubini. Thomas Hengelbrock explains that he had already wanted to do this extraordinary composer's *Médée* 20 years ago, but there had never been an opportunity until now.

He believes that the piece never joined the mainstream repertoire because of the genre of the *opéra comique*. “There are very long spoken dialogues in this opera. You have to find a solution for these French alexandrines, you cannot simply translate them into other languages,” the conductor says. How the two intend to solve this problem, however, was not revealed during the conversation. “I do feel that the piece still has the potential to become part of the mainstream repertoire today,” Thomas Hengelbrock adds.



Simon Stone and Thomas Hengelbrock.

The term ‘revenge’ is often used to explain the murder, says dramaturge Christian Arseni, who moderated the Terrace Talk. He asked the director whether Médée is an outcast from society from the very beginning. – “Médée is presumably the oldest immigrant drama in the world,” says Simon Stone. “If you no longer have access to justice because you are living in exile, you might have a stronger sense that you yourself have to see justice done.” To be robbed of one’s rights is the worst thing that can happen to a person, he adds. His production is about supporting what Cherubini already expressed in his music. The audience should have the feeling that the spirit of the music is part of the staging, and vice versa. Just how much the music already conveys is illustrated by the two duets of Médée and Jason. “The first duet is full of strength, full of accusations and anger,” Simon Stone explains. Cherubini interpolates another scene before the two continue their conversation in the second duet. This second one is full of love and passion. “It feels as if a couple is meeting again for coffee to talk about everything. Very modern,” says Simon Stone. Except that the farewells develop from a state of loving into a curse.

The conductor agrees with him: “Cherubini’s music takes the spoken word and its meaning and transforms them into immediate musical form.” This is some of the hardest music to play, and he considers himself very lucky to be able to work on it with the Vienna Philharmonic. “It was wonderful to see the musicians delving into this work, which was unknown to them,” he reports. The work is performed in the French original, but for the first time using a new version which takes into account Cherubini’s later changes to the orchestration and is more suitable to the Große Festspielhaus.

This is Simon Stone’s third opera production, as he primarily works in spoken theatre and film. “Those are three different art forms which only resemble each other superficially,” Simon Stone explains. In spoken theatre and film, he can sidestep problems, making cuts or rewriting. He describes this as liberating, yet burdensome at the same time. In opera, this is not possible; here he is forced to deal with a given framework and always find a solution. A solution that also

includes the conductor. During the rehearsal process, many problems were discussed; now the team has reached the orchestra rehearsals: "And suddenly, there is a world there," says Stone.



Simon Stone, Christian Arseni and Thomas Hengelbrock.

Press Office of the Salzburg Festival/Anne Zeuner

Photos can be found here:

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

The podcast is available here:

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

Luigi Cherubini (1760 - 1842)

## **Médée**

**Opéra in three acts (1797)**

Libretto by François-Benoît Hoffman

based on the tragedies *Medea* by Euripides and *Médée* by Pierre Corneille

New production

**Premiere: 30 July 2019**

**Further performances: 4, 7, 10, 16, 19 August 2019**

Großes Festspielhaus

**Thomas Hengelbrock** Conductor

**Simon Stone** Director

**Bob Cousins** Stage Sets

**Mel Page** Costumes

**Nick Schlieper** Lighting

**Christian Arseni** Dramaturgy

**Elena Štikhina** Médée

**Pavel Černoch** Jason

**Vitalij Kowaljow** Créon

**Rosa Feola** Dircé

**Alisa Kolosova** Nérès

**Tamara Bounazou** Première Femme/YSP Participant

**Marie-Andrée Bouchard-Lesieur** Deuxième Femme/YSP Participant

**Concert Association of the Vienna State Opera Chorus**

**Ernst Raffelsberger** Chorus Master

**Vienna Philharmonic**

Kind regards,

Press Office of the Salzburg Festival

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