

## Press Release of the Salzburg Festival

# The Salzburg Festival Mourns the Death of Jessye Norman



1995: Jessye Norman in Schoenberg's monodrama *Erwartung*. Photos © Salzburg Festival/ Ruth Walz

“Over the long period of more than 40 years, Jessye Norman managed to make each of her performances an event that radiated profoundly throughout daily life for a long time. These were not superficial events: in opera and concerts alike, here was an artist who always gave everything she had to convey the full power of art to her audience. The Festival is eternally grateful for all the golden moments she gave us,” thus Festival President **Helga Rabi-Stadler** expressed her grief at the death of Jessye Norman.

For more than 40 years, **Jessye Norman** graced the world's great stages. Her Salzburg Festival debut took place on 21 August 1977 with the Vienna Philharmonic under James Levine's baton at the Großes Festspielhaus. The programme featured works by Wolfgang A. Mozart and Gustav Mahler. She performed 42 times altogether at the Salzburg Festival, receiving rave reviews from the critics until 2002:

In 1987 she sang Isolde's *Liebestod* under Herbert von Karajan. “When Jessye Norman finally appears to sing Isolde's *Liebestod*, the audience can hardly contain its jubilation. Karajan hangs upon the singer's every utterance, shaping the most sumptuous orchestral carpet of sound under her vocal lines with sparse gestures,” Wilhelm Sinkovicz wrote on 17 August 1987 in *Die Presse*. The artist, whose unique, radiant and comfortingly melodious voice enabled her to sing everything from the contralto range to dizzying heights, mesmerized the reviewers.

Her repertoire ranged from Schubert, Brahms and Mahler to Berg, Ravel and Tippett. Her opera roles were equally broad-ranging, from Mozart, Haydn, Purcell and Gluck via Wagner, Verdi and Strauss all the way to Schoenberg. Until 1994 Jessye Norman was heard at the Salzburg Festival almost exclusively in song recitals and orchestral concerts, collaborating with conductors such as Claudio Abbado and Riccardo Muti.

In 1995 she appeared in the role of the Woman in Robert Wilson's interpretation of Schoenberg's monodrama *Erwartung*, a performance that followed immediately after Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*. Thomas Vogt reviewed this in the journal *Opernwelt*: “When Jessye Norman enters the stage with quick steps [...] that may still be Wilson's direction, but it is clearly charged with highly dramatic energy. This is not an artificial figure, but a singer

determined to portray a woman's fate." The marble bench that was part of this interpretation of *Erwartung* still welcomes guests to the Salzburg Festival inside the Faistauer Foyer.

From 1997 to 2000 she performed six solo recitals with the pianist Mark Markham. In 1999 she appeared with the Vienna Philharmonic under Seiji Ozawa in a concert commemorating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Herbert von Karajan's death.

Jessye Norman is considered one of the world's pre-eminent opera and song performers. She was born on 15 September 1945 in Augusta in the USA and completed her music studies at Howard University in Washington DC. In 1968 she won the International ARD Music Competition, making her debut the following year at the Deutsche Oper Berlin in the role of Elisabeth in Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. Her international breakthrough came with her debuts under Claudio Abbado's baton in London and Milan. Ever since, the singer enthralled audiences worldwide with her highly diverse repertoire. She won five Grammy Awards and received the First-Class Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and the Arts in 2008.

