



100 JAHRE

SALZBURG FESTIVAL
18 July – 30 August 2020

In 2020 the Salzburg Festival begins with a work which played a major role in the lives of all three Festival founders – Richard Strauss, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Max Reinhardt.

The 2020 Salzburg Festival opens with *Elektra* by Richard Strauss.

Asmik Grigorian is Chrysothemis



Hugo von Hofmannsthal's eponymous drama, based on the tragedy by Sophocles, was first performed in Berlin in 1903, directed by Max Reinhardt. Richard Strauss was in the audience, and he felt the encounter with Hofmannsthal to be guided by fate. In a letter in 1906, he asked Hofmannsthal to 'give me the right of first refusal for anything in your hand that lends itself to composition. Your manner corresponds so closely to my own, we were born for one another and shall certainly produce something beautiful together, if you remain faithful to me'.

That same year, Richard Strauss began to compose his one-act opera. Three years later, on 25 January 1909, the world premiere took place in Dresden, with resounding success.

The Festival production is directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski, who made his successful Salzburg Festival debut in 2018 with Hans Werner Henze's *The Bassarids*. Franz Welser-Möst, to whom the Salzburg Festival owes many unforgettable performances of Richard Strauss' works, conducts the Vienna Philharmonie and the Concert Association of the Vienna State Opera Chorus. The role of Elektra will be embodied by the Lithuanian rising star Aušrine Stundyte. Tanja Ariane Baumgartner sings the role of Clytemnestra, Michael Laurenz that of Aegisthus and Derek Welton appears as Orestes. Chrysothemis will be sung by Asmik Grigorian, who won the audience and critics over as Salome in 2018. For the centenary, she returns for another Strauss opera at the Felsenreitschule. The premiere takes place on 27 July 2020.

Interview with Asmik Grigorian, who will embody the role of Elektra's sister Chrysothemis in the summer of 2020:

Let us start with a general question: what defines a good singer?

A truly good singer is strong. He or she must work hard at improving, have a good sense of humour and be able to deal with failure or negative reviews. The strength is needed most of all to remain true to oneself.

What is the relationship between the feeling good singers must have and their technique?

When I began, my feelings were way superior to my technique. That got me into many difficult situations. Many young singers have the same experience. I lose 99 percent of myself in a role, my own control is only about one percent. This year in Salzburg, however, where I was allowed to sing Salome again, was a different experience, and that made me very happy.



Would you tell us about it?

It felt as if Asmik and Salome were merging. There was no border. To me that was a whole new feeling, and therefore it is difficult to talk about it. I held the reins 100 percent, but at the same time I was Salome 100 percent. I loved it.

It reminds me of the demands Lee Strasberg made of actors. They were to merge completely with their role. The problem is, how do you find your way into a role and then out again? After the performance, you are no longer Madame Butterfly or Salome, but Asmik Grigorian. That is the most difficult part of our profession. You can only do it if you manage to distance yourself again from a role. You cannot go through life as Salome. I need a lot of energy to manage that transition. It is hard work.



How come you managed to put so much emotion into your roles from the very beginning?

All my life, I have had a nickname: Princess of Feelings. I have always been very emotional, which was not always easy, but I would not have wanted it any other way. To me it is the only way I can live, and the only way I can sing. The good thing is that I can trust my feelings; they show me the right way.

Two years ago, the Salzburg Salome catapulted you into the absolute world elite. Has your life changed since this success?

Of course much has changed since that time, but some things haven't. I still work like I used to, that is very important to me. The success with Salome brought me the privilege of making my own choices about what to do and what not. But now I must also deal with the great responsibility I bear. So far, I have

managed well; let's hope it stays that way. Success is a wonderful, but also a dangerous gift.

Audiences coming to hear you in a concert or opera performance expect an Asmik Grigorian in top form. However, that is not something one can deliver every time.

Of course not. My problem, however, is not the others, but myself. I do not have to prove to you what I can do. The audience comes with an open heart; they look forward to seeing me. At the same time, my own expectations of myself keep rising. I always try to give my best, and sometimes even a little bit more than that. With Salome, I went to my utter limits. And now I ask myself: what is the next step?

Which singer role models did your parents offer you by their own example?

I am very fortunate, for the two of them were totally different. I was always confronted with two very different attitudes of what it means to be a singer. From my mother I inherited discipline and the certainty that I can trust my intuition. My father gave me something very different, and that is probably the reason I became a singer.

Do tell us more!

He was an outstanding opera singer, but he also knew how to enjoy life. He told me: you have to be good on stage, Asmik, but the most important thing in life is your family, friends, life, sunshine. If he had not shown me what it means to be a really good singer and to enjoy life at the same time, I would not have chosen this profession.

Was it easier to enjoy life after Salome?

Well, I am completely booked out until 2024, that is when my daughter turns seven and will go to school. I am currently wondering which country to send her to school in, and to which school. That will also change many things for me. But don't worry: I already know how to enjoy life, certainly also in Salzburg this coming summer.



You will sing the role of Chrysothemis in Richard Strauss' Elektra. Do Strauss' emotional outbursts suit your voice?

My voice loves Strauss. There are roles which require a lot of effort; that is a problem I never had with Strauss. I think it is the colour of my voice that suits Strauss so well, but that is something others must judge.

You are performing the role of Chrysothemis for the first time on the opera stage; so far you have only sung it in concert. The role is quite different from Salome.

Yes, both technically and regarding the emotional level. But I am looking forward to it – Chrysothemis is a fighter. Like Salome, she is a woman who must make decisions in a difficult situation, decisions that might make her a different person. Sometimes I think that all my roles have this point in common – as if I were always playing the same role.

How do you deal with the psychological, even psychoanalytical grounding of the opera? Have you studied this?

No, I don't do that. I do everything from my gut, from my feeling. I don't try to understand what Verdi or Strauss were trying to say. I know how I feel in a role, and that is what I offer.

Does your imagination work more visually? The director of Salome, Romeo Castellucci, is known for his powerful imagery.

No, that is not the decisive factor either. I am more strongly guided by the music than the visuals.

After Romeo Castellucci in the case of Salome, in Elektra you are working with another extremely interesting director, Krzysztof Warlikowski, who is known for his interpretations which can be radical. How do you deal with powerful production concepts?

I have no problem with powerful concepts; in the end the question is whether the performance works or not. That is why I don't like the term *Regietheater*, or director's theatre – interpretations are simply a part of opera. I am an open-minded person, I think a director has the right to tell his story. As a singer, I am part of a team that tells his story, and of course my own as well.

You are spending your fourth summer in a row this coming season in Salzburg. Apart from opera, is there something you are particularly looking forward to?

I am looking forward to everything. Salzburg has become such an important place in my life; it has even become a home. There are many people there whom I feel close to. My heart is alive in Salzburg.



Aušrine Stundyte
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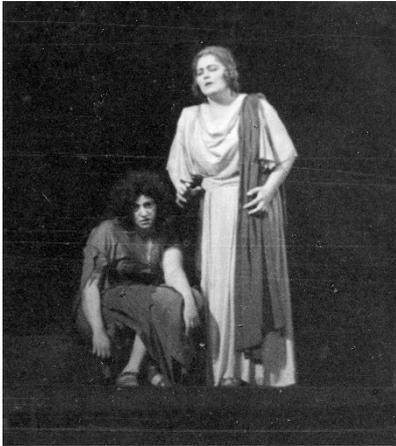


Krzysztof Warlikowski
© SF / Anne Zeuner



Franz Welser-Möst
© SF / Marco Borrelli

PERFORMERS of CHRYSOTHEMIS in the Opera *ELEKTRA* at the Salzburg Festival



Viorica Ursuleac (right), 1934
© Rothmaier



Hilde Konetzni, 1937
© Ellinger



Lisa Della Casa (right), 1957
© Ellinger



Hildegard Hillebrecht (right), 1964/65
© Hildegard Steinmetz



Cheryl Studer (below), 1989
© Harry Weber
(That season, the role was also sung by Elizabeth Connell)



Karen Huffstodt (left), 1996
© Bernd Uhlig



Eva-Maria Westbroek (right), 2010
© Hermann and Clärchen Baus

Richard Strauss (1864 - 1949)

ELEKTRA

Tragedy in one act Op. 58 (1909)

Libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal based on his eponymous drama based on Sophocles' tragedy

New production

Mon 27 July - Mon 24 August

7 performances

CREATIVE TEAM

Franz Welser-Möst Conductor

Krzysztof Warlikowski Director

Małgorzata Szczyński Sets and Costumes

Felice Ross Lighting

Denis Guéguin Video

Claude Bardouil Choreography

Christian Longchamp Dramaturgy

CAST

Tanja Ariane Baumgartner Klytämnestra

Aušrine Stundyte Elektra

Asmik Grigorian Chrysothemis

Michael Laurenz Aegisth

Derek Welton Orest

Tilmann Rönnebeck Orest's Tutor

Matthäus Schmidlechner A Young Servant

Sonja Šarić The Overseer

Bonita Hyman First Maidservant

Evgenia Asanova* Second Maidservant

Deniz Uzun Third Maidservant

Sinéad Campbell-Wallace Fourth Maidservant

Natalia Tanasii Fifth Maidservant

ENSEMBLES

Concert Association of the Vienna State Opera Chorus

Ernst Raffelsberger Chorus Master

Vienna Philharmonic

* Participant of the Young Singers Project – supported by the KÜHNE FOUNDATION

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Photos: Richard Strauss circa 1909 © Richard Strauss Archive / Richard Strauss Institute
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