

Press Release of the Salzburg Festival, 29. March 2020

Mourning the Death of Krzysztof Penderecki



Krzysztof Penderecki © Bruno Fidrych

“One of the truly great figures of European music history is dead. We would like to express our profound sympathy to his wife Elżbieta. In life and work, she was his ideal partner and also accompanied him on his last visit to Salzburg in 2018,” said Festival President **Helga Rabi-Stadler**, expressing her grief at the great composer’s death.

“Krzysztof Penderecki and his work were important to the Salzburg Festival, and the Festival was important for him and his international recognition as a composer. The world premiere of *Die schwarze Maske* in 1986 was a high point in music history, as both critics and audience agreed,” the Festival’s Artistic Director **Markus Hinterhäuser** underlines the stature of the deceased composer.

Krzysztof Penderecki was born in Debica near Cracow on November 23, 1933, the son of a music-loving lawyer. Early on, he received violin and piano lessons, going on to study composition at the Cracow State Academy. He caused a stir at the Warsaw Competition for Young Polish Composers in 1959, where he entered three pieces anonymously and won all three available prizes.

The Salzburg Festival took the founding of the ORF Symphony Orchestra in 1969 as a welcome occasion to host a systematic and methodical presentation of works by contemporary composers. The highlight of the first concert series in Salzburg was the performance of Krzysztof Penderecki’s *St. Luke Passion* under the baton of Milan Horvath at the Salzburg Cathedral. In this monumental work, the Polish composer used techniques of 20th-century avant-garde music to lend the Latin account of the suffering and death of Jesus contemporary credibility and directness. First performed in 1966 in Münster, Westphalia, it was a step towards reconciliation between Poland and Germany and also a sign of easing tension between the Catholic church and the Communist regime in Poland. This convinced the Salzburg Cathedral Chapter to consent to the performance at the Salzburg Cathedral.



Salzburg Festival, Felsenreitschule: *St. Luke Passion* by Krzysztof Penderecki. Opening Concert of the 2018 *Ouverture spirituelle*.

Left: Singers Matthew Rose, Sarah Wegener, Lucas Meachem and the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal thank the composer Krzysztof Penderecki.

Right: Conductor Kent Nagano with Krzysztof Penderecki and the singers: Teresa Majka-Pacanek, Sławomir Holland and Matthew Rose as well as the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal.

© Salzburg Festival / Marco Borrelli

On the occasion of the 1,200-year anniversary of the Salzburg Cathedral four years later, Penderecki's *Magnificat* for bass solo, vocal ensemble, double choir, boys' choir and orchestra, commissioned by the ORF, was first performed at the same place under the composer's baton in the summer of 1974.

1979 saw the world premiere of another Penderecki work at the Festival: under its chief conductor Leif Segerstam, the ORF Symphony Orchestra performed his concert suite *Das verlorene Paradies*, which the composer had compiled especially for the Salzburg Festival, at the Felsenreitschule.

In 1986, the world premiere already mentioned above took place at the Kleines Festspielhaus: Penderecki's opera *Die schwarze Maske* was a triumph among critics and audience alike. In a production directed by Harry Kupfer, Woldemar Nelsson conducted the Vienna Philharmonic while Josephine Barstow (Benigna) and Walter Raffeiner (Silvanus Schuller) sang the main roles. The French newspaper *Le Monde* praised the Salzburg world premiere for the "organic unity of text, music and staging by Harry Kupfer... His close collaboration with Penderecki even when compiling the libretto is the explanation for this gigantic concentration of all forces: one hundred minutes of building up towards the absolute climax, without even a single moment of rest."

For Heinz Josef Herbort in *Die Zeit*, Penderecki had proved with this composition based on a text by Gerhart Hauptmann and commissioned by the Salzburg Festival that the genre of the "literary opera" is more than music accompanying a play: "In the way it complements and heightens, even interweaves the literary model with texts by other authors which are by no means homogeneous, and by accommodating them with appropriately structured music, the work has established a new category with an independent value all its own."

Struck by Penderecki's death, Daniel Froschauer, who is part of the Vienna Philharmonic's Executive Committee today and was a new recruit to the orchestra then, recalls this epochal performance: "I will never forget the deep impression this work made upon us, from the very first rehearsal onwards."

In 2018, Artistic Director Markus Hinterhäuser invited Krzysztof Penderecki to open the Festival with his *St. Luke Passion* at the Felsenreitschule. In a way, this brought things full circle. Under the baton of Kent Nagano, the work unfolded the full power of its message, in the presence and to the delight of its creator.

“And there he stands on stage at the Felsenreitschule, accepting the ovations of an enthusiastic audience: Krzysztof Penderecki, 84 years old and creator of one of the most monumental sacred works in music history. Half a century has passed since the Polish composer’s *St. Luke Passion* was first performed at the Cathedral in Münster in 1966. On Friday evening, the work seemed an ideal beginning for this year’s Salzburg Festival, whose ‘Overture spirituelle’ is dedicated to the theme of Passion.” Florian Oberhammer, *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 28. July 2018

Kind regards,

Press Office of the Salzburg Festival
+43-662-8045-351
presse@salzburgfestival.at
www.salzburgerfestspiele.at

If you prefer not to receive our emails in the future, please send us an email to presse@salzburgfestival.at. Our General Terms and Conditions and Privacy Policy are available anytime from our Press Office and are online at <https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/en/terms-conditions> and <https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/en/privacy-policy>.