

Press Text: Terrace Talk *Elektra*



Krzysztof Warlikowski and Franz Welser-Möst. Photos: SF/Anne Zeuner

(SF, 29 July 2020) The danger of becoming inebriated with the opulence of sound and losing control is particularly great for a conductor in Richard Strauss' music, says Franz Welser-Möst after the main orchestra rehearsal for *Elektra* at the Salzburg Festival. It takes great discipline, he adds, to grasp the composer's genius when it came to orchestration. The closer he looks at the score, the more infinite details he notices. He professes sympathy with Karajan, who once said that one should not conduct *Elektra* past the age of 60. Fortunately, he is just this side of the curve, as he will celebrate his 60th birthday in Salzburg in August. The score demands everything from a triple *piano* to a triple *forte*, and the rapid changes are quite challenging.

Welser-Möst describes the collaboration with Ausrine Stundyte, who is singing the role of Elektra, as felicitous. "Ausrine is not a steely-voiced Elektra, which is so often the case. She is a fragile, child-like, vulnerable Elektra, a complex figure instead of a harpy," he says, describing her as a highly intelligent singer whose every fibre goes into embodying the role. "She has astounded me every day, bringing out facets in the score which I would not have dared to hope for," he adds. In Strauss' works, the libretto text is invariably complemented by a subtext delivered through the motifs and key signatures of the music. There are very few singers as skilled in understanding and internalizing this subtext as Ausrine Stundyte. The orchestra, in this case the Vienna Philharmonic, is also required to be very flexible, going to the extremes of expressivity and playing hot and cold in immediate succession.



Conductor Franz Welser-Möst.

When asked to describe his take on Strauss' music, director Krzysztof Warlikowski ponders the fragility of words and meanings, as well as the ambition to merge music and libretto. Hugo von Hofmannsthal added nothing but psychoanalysis to Greek mythology. Memory is an important element in this, he says, as the realities of past and present intertwine. In his production, his ambition is to introduce the figures not only when they enter the stage, but to prepare their entries. Strauss and Hofmannsthal assumed that the viewer would be familiar with Greek mythology and the family constellations of the House of Atreus. Warlikowski has added a prologue to the opera recounting the back story. However, he adds, it will not do any harm to refresh one's knowledge of Greek mythology in order to understand the deep need for revenge portrayed in the opera.

"I owe the discovery of how monolithic Elektra's feelings are to Franz Welser-Möst," says the director. Sometimes he has the feeling that Elektra is rather masculine, so loud and weighed down with the baggage of antiquity, but then the female element suddenly comes to the fore. Elektra may wear armour, but inside it she is very feminine, almost girl-like, says Warlikowski. Unlike Elektra, Chrysothemis, the role sung by Asmik Grigorian, is more alive and present, the more normal of the two. The sisters' mother, Clytemnestra, sung by Tanja Ariane Baumgartner, seems very close to death. Both she and Elektra are victims, but Elektra is also a perpetrator, he explains.

"It was impressive for me to see what Krzysztof Warlikowski is doing here," says conductor Franz Welser-Möst. "He tries to forge relations between these psychologically damaged figures, spinning very delicate threads between the figures with great sensitivity." He also offers short and bright insights into the inner life of the family – like lightning bolts illuminating the action, the conductor adds. *Elektra* is the 83rd opera premiere of his life. Welser-Möst finds working in Salzburg gratifying, praising the Festival's ability to create an almost familial atmosphere, enabling the artists to work on a great piece for weeks without interruption.



Director Krzysztof Warlikowski.

A happy end? – Yes, in a certain way, says Krzysztof Warlikowski, for the children's goal is achieved, revenge has been exacted. However, with it comes death. When Orestes has almost descended into a state of madness and is declared innocent toward the end of the piece, that puts an end to revenge, the director explains. It is the year zero, when forgiveness begins and humanity can make a fresh start.

Press Office of the Salzburg Festival/Anne Zeuner

Photographs are available at:

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

You can find the podcast here:

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

Elektra will be recorded by ORF, 3sat, ZDF/ARTE and UNITEL in collaboration with the Vienna Philharmonic and the Salzburg Festival and will be broadcast as followed:

- 01. August, 17:00 Uhr | Live at the Siemens Festival>Nights
- 01. August, 17:00 Uhr | Live in participating cinemas: www.salzburgimkino.de
- 01. August, 17:00 Uhr | Live on Mezzo
- 01. August, 19:30 Uhr | Live- time-delayed on Ö1
- 01. August, 20:30 Uhr | Live- time-delayed on ARTE Concert
- 10. August, 22:30 Uhr | ORF 2
- 14. August, 18:00 Uhr | Siemens Festival>Nights
- 15. August, 20:15 Uhr | 3sat

Richard Strauss (1864 - 1949)

Elektra

Tragödie in einem Aufzug op. 58 (1909)

Libretto von Hugo von Hofmannsthal nach der Tragödie des Sophokles

Neuinszenierung

Premiere: 01. August 2020

Weitere Vorstellungen: 06., 10., 16., 21., 24. August 2020

Felsenreitschule

Franz Welser-Möst Musikalische Leitung

Krzysztof Warlikowski Regie

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Claude Bardouil Choreografie

Christian Longchamp Dramaturgie

Tanja Ariane Baumgartner Klytämnestra

Ausrine Stundyte Elektra

Asmik Grigorian Chrysothemis

Michael Laurenz Ägisth

Derek Welton Orest

Tilmann Rönnebeck Der Pfleger des Orest

Verity Wingate Die Schleppträgerin

Valeriia Savinskaia Die Vertraute

Matthäus Schmidlechner Ein junger Diener

Jens Larsen Ein alter Diener

Sonja Šarić Die Aufseherin

Bonita Hyman, Katie Coventry, Deniz Uzun, Sinéad Campbell-Wallace, Natalia Tanasii
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Konzertvereinigung Wiener Staatsoperchor

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