



Left to right: **Yana Ross** Director, **Bettina Hering** Director of Drama © SF/Ömer Karakus

“A Polyphony of Desire”

In 1896/97, Arthur Schnitzler wrote the first version of his *Reigen*, followed by an unauthorized world premiere in Budapest and an authorized one in Berlin in 1920. This led to a theatrical scandal so luridly sensational that Schnitzler himself banned performances of his piece, an interdiction only lifted in 1982.

This year, director Yana Ross is staging a new version in Salzburg, based on Schnitzler’s *Reigen*. Ten European authors were asked to rewrite one of the original scenes for our present times. The basic idea is to create a polyphony of desire and love – combined with the question: is there a way out of this “round dance”, in which Schnitzler portrayed a society marked by social imbalance and injustice?

Bettina Hering, Director of Drama, asked Yana Ross to describe the current artistic state since the start of rehearsals. “I think it is a snapshot. One week before the premiere, everything is still pretty fragile, everything is exposed and very vulnerable.” Due to the pandemic, the genesis of the work occupied a much longer period than planned, she explained; originally the completion had been scheduled for 2021. In the meantime, many radical changes have occurred. The challenge, she added, was to react to this new reality with new writing. “That is the gift and the great responsibility inherent in this project,” Yana Ross said.

Yana Ross considers her task to actually create a “round dance” out of these ten scenes: “The challenge remains the same. As a director, I have to find a holistic perspective, combining ten authors describing a certain point here and now.” Over the past two years, she has been in continuous touch with them, trying to identify the subject this play is ultimately about. Some of it concerns “subjects we don’t discuss as a society”, a facet it has in common with Schnitzler’s original version. Taboos existing 100 years ago have shifted, she pointed

out. Today's version by these authors has no dots, which in Schnitzler's version indicated sexual intercourse. However, the taboos of today include „performance anxiety, the fear of loneliness and of showing one's true face, the continuous questioning: am I good enough?"



Yana Ross © SF/Ömer Karakus

Asked to pinpoint the connection between the scenes, she also highlighted this element as the quintessence of the play.

Another overarching artistic aspect is the paralyzing situation which has caused the world to come unhinged. "While we are programmed to proclaim the progress of human values, we have now reached a point where these are proving inauthentic. Numerous ills we have closed our eyes to are now surfacing. That makes it so difficult to leave behind this notion of human progress, the fact that we have to recall such basics as the rule that human beings should not kill one another. We who constitute humanity must redefine our values and remind ourselves of the value of a human life."

Bettina Hering asked how the dramaturgical form of Schnitzler's *Reigen* was maintained in concrete terms. From the beginning, it was clear to Yana Ross that we must view the play from today's vantage point. Schnitzler's concept of a "carousel" is expanded here to encompass various constellations, which might even include three or five persons dancing with each other. "To me, it was important to maintain the aspect of movement from Schnitzler's *Reigen*," Yana Ross emphasized. In a certain way, the piece is a jigsaw puzzle for the audience – an invitation to spectators to recount their own story for themselves.

She continued by pointing out that recent developments were accurately reflected in the work of the Russian contemporary author Mikhail Durnenkov. His new, utterly unexpected life situation – having to emigrate to Finland due to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine – is reflected in the play, as the author has now rewritten his scene. She felt herself unable to describe how this might affect the production as a whole, one week before the premiere – she herself is intrigued to see the outcome. Yana Ross said she had been particularly delighted when a Ukrainian intern declared that this scene by the Russian author was the most important one to her.

Bettina Hering's final question was whether continuity was an important factor in working with actors. Yana Ross replied that she herself was continuously moving beyond cultural borders,

having a preference for large theatres and ensembles. To her, working with actors who are unknown to her is part of her daily experience. However, she values her work with familiar colleagues equally. She called it a combination of both – a mix of curiosity and trust.

She described her debut at the Salzburg Festival as a dream come true, given her classical theatrical education, running the gamut of the entire literary and dramaturgical canon, including Hofmannsthal and, when training to be a director, also Reinhardt's work. She described the history of the Festival and its artists, many of whom tried to change circumstances and strive towards the future, as a source of continuous inspiration. Therefore, she considers it a great honour to be working in Salzburg.

Portrait photos of the artists can be found here:

<https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/en/photos/reigen-2022>

Production photographs of *Reigen* will be available from 26 July.

The podcast is available here:

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

Premiere: 28 July, SZENE Salzburg

Further performances:

31 July, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 11 August

Kind regards,

Press Office of the Salzburg Festival

www.salzburgerfestspiele.at

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