



Press Release of the Salzburg Festival: Obituary for Alfred Brendel



Markus Hinterhäuser, Alfred Brendel, Hans Neuenfels © SF

(SF, 18 June 2025) "Alfred Brendel was a living legend. Gifted with an astounding talent and truly universal erudition, he set incomparable standards as a pianist, a brilliant essayist, a thinker and speaker about music. Intellect and sensitivity were not a contradiction to Alfred Brendel; instead, they were the aggregate state of a life that was one enormous declaration of his love for music," thus Markus Hinterhäuser expressed his grief at the death of Alfred Brendel, who was also a personal friend to him.

For almost five decades, Alfred Brendel was deeply connected to the Salzburg Festival. Hardly another pianist left his mark on the Salzburg Festival to such an extent.

On 21 August 1960, he made his acclaimed Festival debut during a concert by the Vienna Philharmonic conducted by Heinz Wallberg, performing Ernst Krenek's Piano Concerto No. 2.

During the following years, it was the Mozart Matinees with Bernhard Paumgartner through which he conquered the hearts of Salzburg audiences.

It was not until an all-Schubert programme in 1977, however, that he performed a solo recital at the Festival. This fact was eloquently decried by Andrea Seeböhm in the newspaper *Kurier*: "Brendel's Schubert interpretations are doubtlessly among the greatest

and most exciting of our times, which have produced such a rich trove of creative masterworks. It seems like a bad joke that this man had to wait until this past Saturday to give his first solo evening in Salzburg, while far younger and more conventional pianists had long enjoyed this opportunity."

Alfred Brendel performed 70 times at the Salzburg Festival: 28 times as a soloist, 22 times during orchestral concerts, 8 times during Mozart Matinees and 8 times in song recitals, for example as a congenial partner to Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. Most recently – after taking his leave from the concert podium in 2008 – he appeared several times as a witty, humorous and erudite speaker, offering the Festival audience his "School of Listening".

The music of the First Viennese School – the still-underestimated piano sonatas of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, whose piano works he was the first to present a complete recording of – was dear to his heart. His intense study of Franz Schubert's piano oeuvre made interpretation history. He delivered highly acclaimed recordings of Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt and Johannes Brahms, and his championing of Arnold Schoenberg's piano works cannot be praised highly enough.

Alfred Brendel was not a virtuoso in the conventional sense; to him, technique was merely a means to an end. His *Musical Thoughts and Afterthoughts*, as he entitled his first volume of essays published in 1976, was the germ cell of his unique art of interpretation.

"The Salzburg Festival bows in enormous gratitude to Alfred Brendel, a great artist, an incomparable pianist, and a true friend," thus Markus Hinterhäuser.