



SALZBURGER  
FESTSPIELE  
18. JULI - 31. AUGUST 2025

## **“A multitude of emotions”**

### **Press Text: Terrace Talk about the New Production of George Frideric Handel’s Opera *Giulio Cesare in Egitto***



Emmanuelle Haïm (conductor) and director Dmitri Tcherniakov

(SF, 8 July 2025) The conductor Emmanuelle Haïm and the director Dmitri Tcherniakov are both working in Salzburg for the first time this summer. Both are satisfied with the rehearsals for this year’s opening premiere so far. Emmanuelle Haïm: “It is always very challenging to stage such a work, with its frequent changes between da capo arias and recitatives, but it is all going very well. At the moment, we are involving the singers within the actions on stage.” Dmitri Tcherniakov added: “We are working with a wonderful team; they are making it very easy for those of us working on a baroque opera for the first time.”

Haïm has conducted many Handel operas, and she described her enthusiasm for his works thus: “What I particularly like about Handel’s musical idiom is its directness and the multitude of emotions it is able to describe. This means that the characters have great depth, which is true in particular, for example, for the subtle portrayal of feelings Cleopatra experiences. Handel’s instinct for theatrical drama and dramaturgical structure is apparent from his early works, such as *Il trionfo del tempo e del disinganno*, all the way to his late operas, such as *Teodora*.” She explained that her work with her own ensemble, Le Concert d’Astrée, which she founded 25 years ago, is helpful: “We all have the same training and the same repertoire, we are all specialized in Early Music and speak a shared language. That means our connection is very close,” she emphasized the advantages of this partnership. She described working with Tcherniakov as very demanding: together, they are trying to

find “the essence of the piece, striking the ideal combination between singers, sets and orchestra.”

Asked about his concept for the opera, Tcherniakov answered: “I don’t want to reveal too much in advance. What I can say, however, is that the eight characters we see here have very different relationships with one another. They are locked in a continuous struggle, which is about power – a lot of power. All the hierarchies of the past become blurred, everything is reset, reduced to zero, which sharpens individual confrontations. We see animosity between them – something that can ultimately be part of human existence and interaction. This raises the question: are we protected from such animosity?”

The whole production, Tcherniakov explained, is a kind of experiment in which the differences between the characters are also reflected in the concrete stage sets. The space they inhabit is brought very close to the audience, almost to the orchestra pit itself. The viewers are only a few metres away from the artists, who therefore have nowhere to hide.

Asked about the success that baroque music is enjoying – according to Christophe Dumaux, the performer of Giulio Cesare, also increasingly among young people – Emmanuelle Haïm said: “Yes, that is certainly true. In the very broad baroque repertoire with its vibrant dimension of improvisation, I can see parallels with pop music. This ensemble, which is collectively very communicative, has the ability to speak to young people too. We are delighted to have all these fantastic singers in our production.”



Emmanuelle Haïm (conductor) and director Dmitri Tcherniakov

About his impressions of the cast, Tcherniakov said: “Of the eight performers, I have previously worked with about half of them, including Olga Kulchynska, Yuriy Mynenko and Andrey Zhilikhovsky – but so far, only in the Slavic repertoire. I am very much looking forward to working with them on a baroque opera now. They are all willing to throw themselves into anything one asks of them, without reservations. That is very impressive.”

Until now, Tcherniakov has directed mainly 20<sup>th</sup>-century Russian musical drama. Asked how he would deal with the unfamiliar interruption to the musical flow posed by recitatives and da capo arias in this Handel opera, he said: “As an artist, to me this means an opportunity to discover something now, and it is this precise musical organization that also symbolizes the

course of our lives. Emmanuelle Haïm is helping me prevent the structure of the work from falling apart into individual bits and pieces, so that it doesn't lose its flow."

Casting for the three central male roles has varied over the course of music history, he added. Thus, casting three countertenors is not so unusual. "Our focus in this production was to work practically while also creating a credible narration, and to portray the relationship between the sexes as accurately as we can."

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