

## THE BREGENZ FESTIVAL

### Foundation, history and evolution

#### 1946

One year after the end of the Second World War, the first Bregenz Festival was held: the inaugural performance of Mozart's early work *Bastien et Bastienne* was staged upon two barges moored on Lake Constance, one carrying the stage structures, the other the orchestra. In a town that did not even possess a theater, the idea of mounting a festival seemed eccentric; but the initially makeshift solution of choosing the loveliest part of the town – the lake – as the stage proved to be a hugely successful one. Visitors from Austria, Germany, Switzerland and France made the Festival an international event in its very first year. The Festival orchestra from the outset was the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, which has made a major contribution to the evolution and success of the Festival.

#### 1950

The Bregenz Festival acquired its first home: an off-shore stage erected on wooden piles, on which mainly operettas and ballets were performed. The open-air auditorium had a capacity of 6,500 seats; in the event of rain, a sports' hall seating 1,000 people could be used instead. The previous year, 1949, had seen the foundation of the Patrons of the Bregenz Festival, a Bregenz residents organization which subsequently became the organizer of the annual Festival. Stage designer Walter von Hoesslin, with director Adolf Rott, took the first steps towards a distinct production style, a 'Bregenz style', in that he dispensed with the conventional proscenium stage when designing the Floating Stage. For him the lake was not just scenery, but an essential element of the productions.

#### 1955

Bregenz's first theater, the Kornmarkttheater, opened. The building was a converted granary, its former function being preserved in the theater's name ('corn market theater'). With seating for about 700 people, the small theater was conceived in such a way that opera and ballet could be performed there. As far as spoken theater is concerned, the Kornmarkttheater became the base of the Vorarlberg Regional Theater (Vorarlberger Landestheater) and it also hosted the Vienna Burgtheater, the Volkstheater, the Josefstadt Theater and a number of German theater companies on guest performances during the Festival. In music theater, Italian bel canto and light operas were staged here until the 1970s.

#### 1962

Thanks to strong public interest, the Festival became longer each year and its program became more varied. Starting in 1962 chamber music concerts and Haydn operas were performed in the Renaissance Palace at Hohenems. On the Floating Stage, ballet evenings were staged from 1960 onwards and were a great success.

**1972**

While two different music theater productions were mounted simultaneously on the Floating Stage (*Der Bettelstudent* and *Die Feenkönigin*), Martinsplatz, a square in the old quarter of Bregenz where occasional serenade concerts had been held in the 1960s, was discovered as a new venue for Festival events. Since 1972, open-air theater performances have been mounted in cooperation with the Theater für Vorarlberg. The double bill on the Floating Stage remained without sequel, however: in future only one production would be given on the Floating Stage per year.

**1979/80**

A long-cherished dream of the Festival came true with the opening of the Festival Opera House (a.k.a. the Festival and Congress Hall) in 1980. Although, after many discussions, only part of the original project was realized, it meant that the Festival had new capacity and new possibilities at its disposal. The Festival Opera House is connected to the Floating Stage, so if the weather suddenly turns bad, the performance can take place there instead. The House can seat about 1,700 of the 4,500 visitors and has the dimensions of international opera houses. A new Floating Stage was built in 1979. It has a concrete core in which the most important facilities and amenities are housed, along with the orchestra pit. The core is surrounded by wooden piles which support the foundations of the stage set.

**1985**

A new era for the Festival was ushered in by the triumphant success of *The Magic Flute* on the Floating Stage. From this year on, the Floating Stage productions have all run for two seasons. The stage constructions also became more stable because they now had to stay put throughout winter too. The development of a distinct Bregenz production style was intended above all to inhibit the huge growth in public demand and to enable the Festival to remain faithful to the idea of theater with high artistic standards that is all the same accessible to everybody. Bregenz emphasizes the visual element in its opera productions on the Floating Stage. This allows the works to be understood emotionally and makes them easier to comprehend, so that even people who rarely go to the opera can spontaneously understand what is happening in the work. It is this particular production style, the unique location, and the special atmosphere of open-air theater that accounts for the inimitable charm of the Bregenz Festival.

**1988**

The Festival also initiated change in the program of the Festival Opera House, where operatic rarities are staged to counterbalance the opulent productions on the Floating Stage. In modern productions of high artistic quality, operas that have been unjustly neglected are dusted down and given a chance to shine in the limelight. This branch of Bregenz Festival dramaturgy, with its own aesthetic style, came to be highly regarded internationally and consolidated the festival's reputation as being innovative.

**1993/94**

Public interest in the Floating Stage production of *Nabucco* exceeded all expectations; additional stands were erected for the audience and extra performances were scheduled, but still the demand could not be fully satisfied. Over 300,000 people saw Verdi's *Nabucco* on the Floating Stage in the summer of '93 and '94. After long discussions, sponsors approved construction of a rehearsal stage to be docked right next to the Festival Opera House. The stage

was intended to make production conditions considerably easier and thus more cost-effective too.

### 1995

The Bregenz Festival celebrated its fiftieth year. With Beethoven's *Fidelio* on the Floating Stage (conducted by Ulf Schirmer, directed by David Pountney, with sets by Stefanos Lazaridis) and Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh* (conducted by Vladimir Fedoseyev, directed by Harry Kupfer, with sets by Hans Schavernoeh) the Festival continued its policy of producing a popular work on the Floating Stage and an unknown work in the Festival Opera House.

### 1995/96

In its jubilee year the Bregenz Festival attracted a record number of visitors. Again, additional stands were erected for the audience and extra performances were scheduled, but the demand for tickets still could not be fully satisfied. With audiences totalling 318,000 *Fidelio* became the most visited Floating Stage production.

### 1997/98

The Bregenz Festival departed for new shores. This was demonstrated not only by the giant highway jutting out of the lake, scenery for a production of George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*; the new departure was also signalled by the opening of the Workshop Theater (Werkstattbühne), an experimental theater which allows totally new possibilities to be explored. Addition of the Workshop Theater to the two existing venues, the Floating Stage and the Great Hall of the Festival Opera House, means that in 1998 the Festival had a total capacity of 12,000 seats at its disposal. 1998 saw the world premiere of Georg Friedrich Haas's opera *Nacht* ('Night') in the Workshop Theater. The Bregenz Festival introduced a young people's program, *cross culture*, which manages to attract up to 10,000 young visitors each year. *Cross culture* was awarded the Austrian State Prize for Public Relations in 1998.

### 1999/2000

Giuseppe Verdi *A Masked Ball* was produced in 1999 on the Floating Stage for the first time in the history of the Bregenz Festival. The music, which brings together contrasts like Dance and Death, was accompanied by so spectacular a staging that pictures of it went round the world in the summer of 1999. Further highlights were provided by the operas staged in the Festival Opera House – in 1999, Bohuslav Martinů's *Greek Passion*, in 2000 *The Golden Cockerel* by Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov – and works produced in the Workshop Theater - the mono-opera *Das Tagebuch der Anne Frank* ('The Diary of Anne Frank') by Grigori Frid and the *fringe-festival* as well as in the year 2000 Astor Piazzolla's 'Tango Operita' *Maria de Buenos Aires*.

### 2001

Following the great success of Giuseppe Verdi's *A Masked Ball* on the Floating Stage, the British production duo Richard Jones and Antony McDonald were invited to return to the Bregenz Festival. This year they are producing Giacomo Puccini's highly popular opera *La bohème*, which focuses on the lives, emotions and aspirations of a group of young artists in Paris. The work to be staged in the Festival Opera House, Carlisle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* based on the famous novel by John Steinbeck, is also about dream worlds, the hopes and disillusionment of two outsiders. In summer 2001 the Bregenz Festival is also mounting contemporary art events:

the program *Kunst aus der Zeit* brings contemporary theater to the Workshop Theater in cooperation with Hamburg's Thalia Theater. A new artistic collaboration with the Kunsthhaus Bregenz is also devoted to the theme of "America of the 20<sup>th</sup> century".

## 2002

Puccini's *La Bohème* on the Floating Stage proved to be a magnet for audiences in its second season too. "Our outstanding interpretation of *La Bohème* represents a milestone in the production history of this Puccini opera. With it, we once again captivated a very large audience", said a delighted Alfred Wopmann, Artistic Director of the Festival. Bohuslav Martinu's *Julietta*, the Festival Opera House production directed by Katja Czellnik with set and costumes by Vera Bosen, proved to be a fascinating work about dreams and reality. "With *Julietta* we have successfully continued the Martinu renaissance we began in 1999. Our new German-language version is exemplary and was staged for the first time", says Wopmann. After a very successful inaugural year in 2001, the contemporary arts programme "KAZ" (*Kunst aus der Zeit*) was expanded this season, offering a varied programme that included two guest performances by Hamburg's Thalia Theatre.

## 2003

In what was Alfred Wopmann's final season as artistic director after many years, the Bregenz Festival staged Leonard Bernstein's hit musical *West Side Story* on the world's largest floating stage. Spectators were captivated by unforgettable songs like Maria, America and Tonight coupled with breath-taking dance sequences. The musical was directed by the American Francesca Zambello, choreographed by Richard Wherlock, and the stage set designed by George Tsypin. The Festival Opera House showed Leos Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*. As in Mozart's *Magic Flute*, the natural world and its eternal regenerative cycle play an important part in this popular opera, too. It was directed by Daniel Slater with sets and costumes by Robert Innes Hopkins. The festival's contemporary arts programme, KAZ, featured the world premiere of a new opera by Georg Friedrich Haas, *Die schöne Wunde*. At its guest appearance in summer 2003 the Thalia Theater company of Hamburg presented a premiere for the first time, an adaptation of Samuel Beckett called *Nacht und Träume*.

## 2004

Right at the start of the first festival season of new artistic director David Pountney, the newly designed opening ceremony brought an immediate wind of change: the smart and fast-moving ceremony was enthusiastically welcomed by audience, press and guest speakers alike. "Continuity and renewal is our credo for the 'Pountney era'. The 2004 season has shown that this concept has gone down as well as could be imagined," said festival president Günter Rhomberg. Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* turned out to be a runaway success with festival audiences also in its second season. In all there were 28 performances in summer 2004, every one of them sold out, which makes *West Side Story* the most successful show of all time on the Bregenz Floating Stage. The Festival Opera House production marked the start of the Kurt Weill showcase at this year's festival. Two of the composer's early works for the stage, *The Protagonist* and *Royal Palace*, were performed together for the first time in Bregenz. The inaugural production of the new operetta programme at the Kornmarkt Theater, Kurt Weill's satirical operetta *Der Kuhhandel*, was enthusiastically received by critics and audiences. The success of the production was impressive confirmation of the new artistic director's intention to raise the prestige of operetta again as an intelligent form of entertainment. The number of visitors to

events of the contemporary arts programme KAZ (Kunst aus der Zeit) exceeded all expectations in summer 2004. Expanded and enhanced by David Pountney, KAZ achieved capacity sales of 94 percent in its fourth season.

## 2005

David Pountney's decision to return to epic opera on the Floating Stage after the musical *West Side Story* was endorsed by the great success of the selected production, Giuseppe Verdi's *Il trovatore*: the first opera on the Floating Stage under his artistic direction and the most-seen opera since 1998, surpassing even the hugely popular *A Masked Ball* (1999) and *La Bohème* (2001). A total of 172,862 people attended a performance of Giuseppe Verdi's masterpiece directed by Robert Carsen in the spectacular refinery-cum-fortress set designed by Paul Steinberg. The Festival Opera House production and the orchestral concerts reflected the Carl Nielsen showcase at the festival in summer 2005. The Danish composer's opera *Maskerade* was very well received as the Festival Opera House production, confirming Pountney's concept of showcasing a single composer throughout the four weeks of the festival. There was praise not only for the choice of works, but also for David Pountney's spirited staging of Nielsen's humorous opera about a masked ball.

Having got off to such a good start in 2004 with Weill's *Der Kuhhandel*, the operetta at the Kornmarkt managed to replicate its success in 2005 with Johann Strauss's forgotten operetta *Der Lustige Krieg*. All performances were completely sold out, showing how enthusiastically the festival audience welcomed artistic director David Pountney's original idea of using the Bregenz Kornmarkt Theatre for the rediscovery of rarely performed operettas.

The contemporary arts programme KAZ was consolidated and expanded in Pountney's second year, and an impressive number of tickets were sold - 3,751. This corresponds to 92 percent of capacity in the Kunsthaus Bregenz and 86 percent at the Workshop Theatre. The KAZ Pass, allowing reductions to all KAZ events, sold like hot cakes. Because of high demand, twice as many had been printed in 2004 as in the previous year, and in 2005 the number available had to be further increased by 40 percent; in July they were already sold out.

## 2006

The opera on the Floating Stage in 2005 and 2006, *Il trovatore*, took its place as one of the most successful operas produced there in the past ten years. A total of 301,573 people saw the spectacular production by Robert Carsen and Paul Steinberg in its two-season run. Therefore in the popularity stakes, Giuseppe Verdi's masterpiece proved to be equal to *A Masked Ball* (1999/2000) and next behind *La Bohème* (2001/2002). The contemporary programme KAZ and the orchestral concerts achieved record spectator numbers. In total the Bregenz Festival attracted 175,819 visitors in 2006.

For festival president Günter Rhomberg the refurbishment and enlargement of the Festival Opera House, completed in time for the 2006 festival, was a landmark event. "The most beautiful present on our 60th anniversary was without doubt the renovated Festival Opera House. This summer it was at last possible to present our programme to audiences in an infrastructure that is commensurate with the quality of the performances. As a result, the Bregenz Festival can now further consolidate its leading position on the European festival scene. I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks once again to all those who supported us in the financing of the renovation project and thus made possible such an



exceptional festival season as this last one was," Rhomberg said.

Artistic director David Pountney was highly satisfied by the record number of people who attended the events of the contemporary arts programme KAZ and the orchestral concerts. "In a year when the entire country was celebrating Mozart, our intention was to give due attention not only to one, but to a whole range of Austrian artists by showcasing Austrian music in the orchestral concerts and in *Art Of Our Times*. And our purpose has been emphatically endorsed by the festival audience, with new visitor records. For me personally, though, the highlight of this Austrian summer, as it were, was Friedrich Cerha's epic orchestral cycle *Spiegel* as the opening concert of the Bregenz Festival. That evening was not only a tribute to one of the finest living Austrian composers. In addition to that, the fact that the Bregenz Festival opened with a KAZ production for the first time was meant to be symbolic of the significance that the contemporary arts now have in our programming," Pountney said.

There was unanimous acclaim among critics and audience members for the Festival Opera House production, *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Claude Debussy. In what was the first opera production on the stage of the newly refurbished Festival Opera House, the recently completed one-act opera *The Fall of the House of Usher* was staged in a fascinating triple bill with Debussy's ballets *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and *Jeux*. In 2006, too, the operetta at the Kornmarkt was sold out before the first night: 3,053 visitors watched Jacques Offenbach's lively work *Bluebeard* in which the fairytale nobleman is transported by director Stephen Langridge and set designer George Souglides into a James Bond world and becomes a "serial monogamist".

## 2007

The 62nd season of the Bregenz Festival achieved very positive results: in all, around 200,000 seats were sold for the sixty scheduled events. The opera on the Floating Stage 2007/08, Giacomo Puccini's opera thriller *Tosca*, was seen by about 164,000 people. The production is therefore one of the most successful of the past ten years. As Franz Salzmann, the commercial director of the Bregenz Festival, commented, "*Tosca* has turned out to be an ideal choice for the Floating Stage. Not only the exciting production by Philipp Himmelmann and the spectacular set design by Johannes Leiacker, but also the emotional climaxes of this opera have cast a spell over audiences night after night." The new sound system BOA (Bregenz Open Acoustics) was widely praised: "For the first time the sound on the Floating Stage is every bit as spectacular as the set," wrote the *Münchener Merkur*. The *Mannheimer Morgen* commented that the Te Deum scene was an "operatic high mass of supreme power", adding "whoever doesn't get goose-bumps here doesn't like opera."

In summer 2007 the festival very much bore the signature of English composer Benjamin Britten, with both his first and his last work for the stage being performed in addition to several orchestral pieces. Yoshi Oida's elegantly austere production of Benjamin Britten's late work *Death in Venice* was hailed by critics. Tenor Alan Oke was singled out for special praise for his magnificent performance in the role of the author Gustav von Aschenbach. "I am very happy that the Britten and Britain showcase went down so well," said artistic director David Pountney. "England for a long time was seen as the land without music. And so it's all the more satisfying for me that this great composer has enthralled festival-goers in Bregenz."

There was also an enthusiastic reception for the second Britten rarity this season, the operetta

*Paul Bunyan* staged at the Kornmarkt Theatre. In particular the playing of the Vorarlberg Symphony Orchestra under the baton of the Britten specialist Stuart Bedford received positive reviews. The idea of reintroducing spoken theatre more centrally to the festival programme with guest performances by the Theater in der Josefstadt of Vienna (*Dangerous Liaisons*) and the Thalia Theater of Hamburg (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) was clearly appreciated by festival-goers.

"Made in Britain" was also the motto of KAZ, the contemporary programme of the Bregenz Festival. In addition to performances by the Gob Squad and four concerts which spotlighted contemporary British composers, two opera were particularly well received - *The Shops*, being given its first performance in Austria, and the football opera *Playing Away*, directed by David Pountney.

## 2008

The opera on the Floating Stage *Tosca* proved to be a great success with audiences in its second season revival. After being used in the filming of a James Bond movie and in live TV broadcasts of the football championships, the striking stage sculpture with the big blue *Tosca* Eye was able to revert to its original form as an opera set. The production sold 140,128 seats in 2008, making *Tosca* the most-seen revival of the past ten years with 93 percent of capacity sold.

The music of the Austrian composer Ernst Krenek was showcased in summer 2008, with a number of his works appearing on the festival programme. The orchestral concerts of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra and the Vorarlberg Symphony Orchestra revolved around the theme of "Power and Music" and featured gods, kings and party chairmen. In its second year at the festival, spoken theatre received some rave reviews: the highlights were two sold-out theatre productions – *Buddenbrooks* at the Kornmarkt, a dramatisation of the Thomas Mann novel by John von Düffel staged by Vienna's Theater in der Josefstadt, and René Pollesch's *Die Welt zu Gast bei reichen Eltern* in Shed8, a production by Hamburg's Thalia Theater. Three world premieres were staged at the Workshop Theatre as part of the contemporary programme KAZ, while the young people's programme crossculture set new records in the number of visitors and participants with its most extensive programme of events since its inception.

## James Bond in the Eye of *Tosca*

Not only audiences at Bregenz were enthusiastic about the spectacular staging of Puccini's opera *Tosca* last summer. In July 2007 a team from EON Productions, the production company responsible for the James Bond movies, visited one of the last rehearsals for *Tosca*. Producer Barbara Broccoli and director Marc Forster were impressed – by the unique location on the shore of Lake Constance, the imposing stage set with its hi-tech capabilities, and by the modern architecture of the Festival Opera House. In the first week of May a film crew came to shoot scenes for the new Bond movie *Quantum of Solace* and stayed for ten days. In the film Bond discovers his adversary for the first time during a performance of *Tosca* during a seven-and-a-half-minute, high-action sequence shot in the Festival Opera House and on the Floating Stage. Director Marc Forster has incorporated the opera intriguingly into the action of the film: the chase through the Festival Opera House is at the end like an apocalyptic silent film – interspersed with dramatic scenes from the Bregenz *Tosca*.

### **The Floating Stage - "9th stadium" of the EURO 2008**

The Tosca Eye coloured orange instead of blue, the Mexican wave sweeping across the lakeside auditorium, a sea of flags, and peaceful fans - that was the 2008 European Football Championships in Bregenz. The three-week festival of football was attended by more than 160,000 supporters in the auditorium, which had been converted into a public viewing "stadium" in front of the TV studio on the Floating Stage, while the plaza in front of the Festival House had been made into a yard with goal walls for fans to practice at. The Baden-Württemberg soccer exhibition was also well attended. The TV studio, dubbed the "ZDF arena", was used for live broadcasts hosted by Johannes B. Kerner with expert commentary by Jürgen Klopp and Urs Meier. "That was grand opera for great sport," as Franz Salzmann, commercial director of the Bregenz Festival, commented about the highly successful event.

### **2009**

For the opera on the lake stage, director Graham Vick and designer Paul Brown decided to set Verdi's monumental desert opera *Aida* on the water, and their original interpretation earned them the enthusiastic acclaim of audiences and critics alike. Singers and extras performed in a variety of locations not only on, but also in the water. The stage set, consisting of a ruined statue, was assembled every evening before the spectators' eyes by means of two gigantic cranes. In its first summer on Lake Constance, *Aida* became the most attended opera production on the Seebühne stage, only slightly behind the musical *West Side Story* from 2003.

The opera *King Roger* by the Polish composer Karol Szymanowski was staged in the Festspielhaus. Both the production by the artistic director of the festival David Pountney (in sets designed by Raimund Bauer) and the musical interpretation by Sir Mark Elder conducting the Vienna Symphony Orchestra were praised as "marvellous" performances constituting a real festival event.

Thanks to the energetic commitment of Opera North from Leeds there wasn't one operetta at the Festspielhaus in 2009 but three: Shostakovich's zany housing estate comedy *Cheryomushki*, George Gershwin's presidential satire *Of Thee I Sing*, and *Skin Deep* by the English composer David Sawer.

Art of Our Times for the first time fully bore the signature of its new artistic director, Laura Berman. Among the productions were the latest works by British composer Sir Harrison Birtwistle (*Semper Dowland & The Corridor*) and by the Berlin-based theatre group Nico and the Navigators in collaboration with the Franui orchestra (*Anaesthesia*). Three international composers were commissioned to explore the sound-world of the region of Vorarlberg in the concert *My Musig*.

### **2010**

A cool summer, a very well attended opera on the lake stage, and an acclaimed showcase: that's how the 2010 Bregenz Festival could be summed up. In its two summer seasons, Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* – staged without pyramids but with giant blue feet, a copper elephant and towering cranes – drew by far the biggest number of spectators to the Seebühne stage in the festival's history.

In a programme section called "In der Fremde / In Foreign Lands" the Bregenz Festival presented a retrospective of works by the forgotten Polish-Russian composer Mieczysław



Weinberg (1919 - 1996). Highlights were the stage premiere of his opera *The Passenger* in the Festspielhaus, the first performance in Austria of *The Portrait* at the Kornmarkt Theatre plus a symposium devoted to the composer's life and works. *The Passenger* – an opera about the unexpected re-encounter between a former SS camp warden and a prisoner at Auschwitz, based on a novella by the Polish author Zofia Posmysz (born 1923), herself an Auschwitz survivor – demonstrated convincingly how a supposedly "difficult" work can be a crowd-puller. In October 2011, *The Passenger* was named "Rediscovery of the Year" by Opernwelt, the specialist opera magazine published in Berlin.

In addition, films for which Weinberg wrote the music were screened locally during the Bregenz Festival Film Week in June. In the Lake Studio, a programme section called "Musik&Poesie" twinned chamber music by Weinberg with readings of Russian poetry on the theme "In Foreign Lands".

Deutsches Theater Berlin, responsible for so many memorable evenings of theatre at the festival in the 1990s, returned to Bregenz in 2010 under its new artistic director Ulrich Khuon (incidentally the former director of Thalia Theater, another ensemble that's very well known in Bregenz). The Berlin company brought its productions of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Lukas Bärfuss's *Oil*, to Lake Constance.

Parallels to Weinberg could be found in the Art of Our Times section: the opera *Jacob's Room* by the American electronic music pioneer Morton Subotnick was long neglected like Weinberg's *The Passenger*. Composed in the 1970s, the multimedia work *Jacob's Room* simply lay on the shelves until it was rediscovered and given its first stage performance – to great acclaim – at the Bregenz Festival (Werkstattbühne) in August 2010.

The other "festival within the festival" – crossculture – presented a wide-ranging and highly varied programme for young people, featuring the Children's Festival, opera and band workshops, concerts for families and school groups (*rocky roccoco* and *Saiten!*) as well as an Aida crossculture night.

## 2011

In the wet and cold summer of 2011, the Bregenz Festival presented a little known opera on the lake stage and, for the first time, an opera commissioned by the festival was staged at the Festspielhaus.

From "operatic miracle" to "colossal spectacle", from "Hollywood music theatre" to "staggering production" – such were the accolades showered on the Bregenz production of Umberto Giordano's *André Chénier*. For the opera, which is set during the French Revolution, director Keith Warner and stage designer David Fielding chose *The Death of Marat*, an iconic painting by the revolutionary artist Jacques-Louis David, as the inspiration and symbol of their staging of *André Chénier*. It was the first time that a historical painting had served as the basis for a stage set on Lake Constance. The famous image shows the radical revolutionary leader Jean Paul Marat dead in his bath tub, stabbed by a political opponent in 1793.

Creation was the theme of the festival programme. A central position was taken up by a showcase of music by the contemporary British composer Judith Weir. Highlights included the first ever world premiere of an opera at the Festspielhaus, Weir's latest work *Achterbahn*, as well as the opera at the Kornmarkt Theatre, *Blond Eckbert*, also composed by Weir. Besides that

there were many orchestral concerts which went down very well with audiences and focused on creative minds such as Byron and Michelangelo, Shakespeare and Goethe.

In the spoken theatre section, guest appearances were made by Deutsches Theater Berlin and Schauspielhaus Wien. While the latter company's production of *Orphans* by the English playwright Dennis Kelly chiefly explored the betrayal of our basic values, questions of ignorance, powerlessness and responsibility lay at the heart of the Deutsches Theater Berlin productions of Gorky's *Children of the Sun* and Schimmelpfennig's *Peggy Pickit Sees the Face of God*.

"Nothing is New" was the response of Art of Our Times to the theme of the 2011 festival. The contemporary arts programme included *Home Work*, the latest work by the French multimedia specialist François Sarhan, the dance performance *As If Stranger* by the American Richard Siegal, and *Black Tie*, the first guest performance in Bregenz by the well known theatre collective Rimini Protokoll.

Crossculture offered traditional fixtures like crossculture night and the Children's Festival as well as another instalment of crossculture week. The family concert entitled *The magical sound and the scoundrels* showed how, with the help of music, you can overcome your biggest fears and how you can keep your trembling knee under control with a little rhythm.

## 2012

"Grandiose production", "a realm of operatic magic that can hardly be copied" and "encore, please!" were just a few of the many accolades that appeared in press coverage of the Bregenz Festival in its 67th year. The 2012 season of the festival ended with a total of approx. 147,000 visitors. Of those, 108,338 attended a performance of the opera on the lake stage, *André Chénier*.

Courageous and innovative: in two years, around 230,000 visitors saw the opera *André Chénier* by the Italian composer Umberto Giordano. No opera house or festival has ever presented this work to so many visitors in a comparable span of time. The Bregenz Festival has thus demonstrated that even less well known operas can draw large audiences.

Under the motto "Memories of the Future" the 2012 Bregenz Festival not only dazzled and delighted audiences and critics with *André Chénier*, but also impressed with its world premiere staging of the opera *Solaris* by contemporary composer Detlev Glanert, whose works also featured prominently in other sections of the festival programme.

Highlights of the contemporary arts programme "KAZ" were two concerts at the Kunsthaus Bregenz and in the Lake Studio of the Festspielhaus as well as a repeat visit by the Berlin theatre group *Nico and the Navigators*. In the drama section, the Vienna Schauspielhaus returned to Bregenz, giving guest performances of the play *Makulatur* by the well-known Austrian child psychiatrist and prose author Paulus Hochgatterer.

In the crossculture project 2012, Smetana's *Die Moldau* (Vltava) was crossed with a masterclass of young composers as well as an open community dance project, *Panta rhei – everything flows!* The Werkstattbühne production was a big hit for the amateur dancers and the musicians and was completely sold out.

## 2013

The performances on the lake stage were completely sold out and there was not one cancellation due to rain. The 68th season of the Bregenz Festival was an exceptional success, with audience figures totalling 259,425. The opera on the lake stage, *The Magic Flute*, was virtually sold out shortly after its premiere on 17 July and attracted in all 202,663 spectators at its 28 performances. This puts the Mozart opera more or less on the same level as *Aida* from 2009 as the most often visited opera. Only the musical *West Side Story* drew a larger total audience back in 2003.

And it was not only the opera on the lake stage that met the high expectations in both artistic and economic respects: another highlight of the festival programme, under the motto *Towards the Light*, was the world-premiere staging of the opera *The Merchant of Venice*, continuing the Bregenz Festival's series of mounting productions of never played works at the Festspielhaus. In all, 3,795 people attended a performance of the opera, which was written by the Polish composer André Tchaikowsky (1935-1982) in the 1970s and 80s.

Beside the traditional operas on the lake stage and at the Festspielhaus, the festival staged the world premiere of *The Wasp Factory* and the first performance in Austria of *American Lulu*, each with two sold-out performances, in addition to enthusiastically received orchestral concerts and an extensive programme of events for children and young people.

The season was an all-round success, as many print media commentators agreed: "At the Bregenz Festival, David Pountney fills the coffers with Mozart's *Magic Flute*, while with André Tchaikowsky's *The Merchant of Venice* he gives a further demonstration of his keen instinct for worthwhile rarities," wrote Opernwelt magazine. Above all it was the impressive stage set with its technical wizardry and the highly original production that stayed in the minds of the visitors: "The Bregenz Festival's *Magic Flute* musters a fabulous array of materiel. And the spectacle makes good sense too," the newspaper Frankfurter Rundschau commented. "Hi-tech stage" was the title of a review in Vorarlberger Nachrichten and "a child's dream made into opera: the marvellous *Magic Flute* of the Bregenz Festival," wrote Süddeutsche Zeitung.

## 2014

2014 was record season at the Bregenz Festival with audience figures totalling approximately 264,000. Of those, around 204,000 people attended a performance of the opera on the lake stage, *The Magic Flute*, which played to 100 per cent capacity. The Mozart opera, shown in a staging by the festival's artistic director David Pountney, is consequently the most popular opera production since the festival was founded in 1946. Attracting a total of 406,000 spectators in its two-season run, it even outstripped the musical *West Side Story*, which was seen by 405,314 people in 2003 and 2004. In total, about 523,000 tickets to Bregenz Festival events were sold in the 2013 and 2014 seasons, more than ever before.

After eleven years at the helm David Pountney took his leave as artistic director of the Bregenz Festival with a multifaceted programme that included four music theatre and three chamber music world premieres. Under the motto *Vienna bitter-sweet* the festival presented a showcase of the Austrian composer Heinz Karl Gruber, staging the specially commissioned opera *Tales from the Vienna Woods* at the Festspielhaus and the satirical opera *Gloria von Jaxtberg* (*Gloria - A Pig Tale*) at the Kornmarkt Theater. In addition to that there was a new opera genre and lots of contemporary music: the newly inaugurated Family Opera consisting of two operas played

back to back, *Le Rossignol* ('The Nightingale') and *L'Hirondelle inattendue* ('The Unexpected Swallow'), was jubilantly received by a multigenerational audience in the virtually full stalls of the Great Hall.

Meanwhile at the Werkstattbühne, the Lake Studio, Kunsthaus Bregenz and Theater Kosmos, the contemporary arts section KAZ showed that contemporary music theatre, concert music and puppetry was capable of drawing an audience this summer too. Ticket sales stood at 94 per cent. There was widespread acclaim for the concert series by the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, which opened with Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*, and also for the Music&Poetry events in the Lake Studio of the Festspielhaus. For his own farewell concert performed by the Vorarlberg Symphony Orchestra David Pountney chose works by Leonard Bernstein as well as *Der Schauspieldirektor* ('The Impresario'), a *singspiel* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in an adaptation by Pountney himself.

"David Pountney's final season is the highly successful close of a sensational eleven-year era as artistic director, in which the festival has developed substantially and has created many artistic achievements and magic moments. My thanks go not only to David Pountney, however, but to all the artists and the personnel too," said the president of the festival, Hans-Peter Metzler.

### **Festival book *Der fliegende Engländer***

The past eleven years of the festival are the subject of a new festival book published a few weeks before the 2014 season opened. Entitled *Der fliegende Engländer* ('The Flying Englishman'), the 360 page book offers an illuminating review of David Pountney's term as artistic director and reveals a number of unknown details from behind the scenes and in front of them too. Edited by Axel Renner and Dorothee Schaeffer, the book consists of 103 episodes in which artists or other people directly associated with the festival have their say, affording some fascinating insights into the inner life of the cultural institution. David Pountney is not only frequently discussed, he is also the contributor of many of the book's articles. The book's 291 illustrations offer a visually lavish retrospective of the festival's productions.

### **2015**

The Bregenz Festival's 70th season ended with 98 per cent of tickets to the lake stage production sold. More than 171,000 of the total audience figure of 228,000 attended a performance of *Turandot*, the final opera by Italian composer Giacomo Puccini. Directed and designed by Marco Arturo Marelli and conducted by Paolo Carignani and Giuseppe Finzi, the production was well received by audiences and critics alike. The opera in the Festspielhaus was *The Tales of Hoffmann* by Jacques Offenbach, directed by Stefan Herheim with Johannes Debus as the music director. The opera was seen by over 7,500 visitors, corresponding to 98 per cent of capacity.

The composers of the two operas staged in the 2015 season were also represented in the concerts given by the Vienna Symphony Orchestra: Giacomo Puccini with his *Messa di Gloria*, Jacques Offenbach with his Concerto for Cello and Orchestra. Miroslav Srnka's latest work for orchestra, *No Night No Land No Sky*, received its first performance in Austria, having premiered in Cologne in May 2014. The concert series additionally included works by Luciano Berio, Johannes Brahms, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Franz Schubert. The Vorarlberg Symphony Orchestra played Richard Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder* and Johannes Brahms' Symphony No. 4 in E minor.

### **New: Opera Studio and Opera Workshop**

In the newly established Opera Studio, six young singers performed in the debut production of *Così fan tutte* at the Bregenz Kornmarkttheater. Another novelty was the festival's Opera Workshop, which took place in May at the Kunsthau Bregenz and afforded inspiring insights into the process of creating a new work of music theatre. The new work is scheduled to have its world premiere in summer 2017. The programme of the 70th season of the Bregenz Festival also included events in the Music & Poetry section and the first performance in Austria of *The Golden Dragon*.

Crossculture, the programme for children and young people, was 20 years old this summer. The participants, numbering around 2,000, enjoyed a wide selection of events comprising crossculture night at *Turandot*, workshops, the Children's Festival, *Brass meets Banda* and other events in which they were encouraged not only to look and listen but also to get involved.

### **One million TV viewers**

There was a special kind of premiere when the Bregenz Festival's staging of *Turandot* was broadcast live on television in three countries: Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The channels SWR, SRF and ORF not only broadcast the opera simultaneously but also took viewers behind the scenes and spoke to people involved in the production. In addition, there was live transmission of the stage action on the channel 3sat. More than one million viewers watched the event. Never before have so many people watched a Bregenz opera production on television.

### **2016**

Unprecedented in its 70 year history, the curtain went up on the jubilee season of Bregenz Festival the evening before the official opening ceremony. For the first time, also, two lake stages were vying for visitors' attention, though they were very different in scale. There was the towering set for *Turandot* ready for the second season premiere, and located right next to it, a floating stage of more modest proportions. On a barge in the municipal marina, the festival mounted a performance of Mozart's singspiel *Bastien und Bastienne* to commemorate the founding of the opera on the lake at Bregenz back in 1946, when the same work was staged at the same location. The opera was performed free of charge and drew a large audience estimated at 1,800.

*Turandot*, Puccini's opera with the world-famous aria "Nessun dorma", sold 159,172 tickets, corresponding to 94 per cent of capacity; one performance was transferred to the Festspielhaus owing to bad weather. Total visitor figures for the 2016 festival stood at 211,314.

On the evening the festival opened, the long-forgotten opera *Hamlet* received its first ever performance in Austria. It was greeted with lengthy and sometimes frenetic applause at the Festspielhaus. On its three-evening run *Hamlet* played to 100 per cent capacity and was seen by a total of 4,612 opera fans. There was also high attendance and enthusiastic applause for the three orchestral concerts given by the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. Ticket sales for the concert series reached 5,711.

The Kornmarkt Theater was once again sold out for the performances by the Opera Studio in the second year of its existence. It staged *Don Giovanni*. The small but high-carat series Music & Poetry also met with an enthusiastic response in its new venue, the Lake Studio in the Bregenz



Festspielhaus.

The contemporary music programme at the Workshop Theatre demonstrated that a modern theatre premiere can attract a large audience. Demand for tickets to *Staatsoperette - Die Austrotragödie* was so strong that the dress rehearsal was opened to the public at short notice. In the end nearly 1,000 people saw the stage adaptation of the TV film *Staatsoperette*. Audiences were also enthralled by *Make no noise*, a chamber opera about two traumatised individuals which was staged for the first time in Austria. At a concert in the Kunsthaus Bregenz, the Opera Workshop offered its fourth successive insight into the process of creating an opera that will be given its world premiere at the 2017 festival in the Workshop Theatre, *To the Lighthouse*.

A retrospective of 70 years of the Bregenz Festival was offered by an exhibition of stage set models from the period between 1985 and 2016. The exhibition charted the evolution of the major cultural festival in Vorarlberg and was organised in association with Vorarlberg Museum. It was accompanied by publication of a 76 page booklet detailing the genesis of the festival, above all the early years leading up to the mid 1980s, the time of the festival's artistic reorientation, which is still being adhered to today.

## 2017

The 2017 season ended with total audience figures of approx. 257,000. The lake stage production of *Carmen* played to a 100% capacity and was seen by 193,642 people in all (including the dress rehearsal and crossculture night).

The festival began earlier than ever this year, with a public masterclass in February offered by Brigitte Fassbaender in the Festspielhaus, Bregenz. The award winning *Kammersängerin* coached the young singers of the Opera Studio – now in its third year – in preparation for their roles in *The Marriage of Figaro*. Staged in August, the opera concluded the Da Ponte cycle begun in 2015.

This year's Festspielhaus production, *Moses in Egypt*, staged by director Lotte de Beer with the theatre company Hotel Modern, played to capacity audiences of over 4,600. Gioachino Rossini's biblical opera now transfers to Oper Köln, opening on 8 April 2018.

There was exotic opera on a totally different scale in *The Ring in 90 Minutes*, which was created by the same Dutch theatre company and performed by puppet insects. The Workshop Theatre performances were seen by 714 people in total.

After a four-year absence, spoken theatre returned to the festival, with a guest appearance by Berlin's Maxim Gorki Theater. *The Situation*, voted Play of the Year in 2016, was performed on two evenings at the Kornmarkttheater, with 87 per cent of tickets sold and a total audience of 930. The play inaugurated a series of spoken theatre productions to be staged annually over the coming years.

More than three years in the making, the opera *To the Lighthouse*, commissioned by the festival, received its world premiere in the Opera Workshop. The two performances were sold out. The Vienna Symphony Orchestra's concerts and the matinee by the SOV were seen by a total audience of nearly 6,000. In all, 847 people attended the four evening events in the Music & Poetry series.

## 2018

The season began at the end of May with a *Carmen for Kids* in the Great Hall of the Festspielhaus, where more than 3,000 school pupils took part in a hands-on opera production that was virtually sold out for all three performances.

The enthusiasm of the smalls in the Festspielhaus was more than matched by the grown-ups in the open-air auditorium, who enjoyed Kasper Holten's staging of *Carmen* on a set by Es Devlin. Nearly 206,000 visitors saw the 2018 opera on the lake – more than ever before in one season (including dress rehearsal and crossculture night).

For the second time only since the festival was founded in 1946, there were 29 performances of the lake show in a single summer season. Only the productions of *The Magic Flute* in the years 2013 & 2014 and *West Side Story* in 2003 & 2004 were seen by more people. One performance was cancelled due to rain.

The summer festival opened with the Austrian premiere of *Beatrice Cenci* by composer Berthold Goldschmidt as the opera at the Festspielhaus. Based on a true story of human violence and church corruption, the opera was staged by Johannes Erath and was seen by a total of 4,135 people over three evenings, playing to a capacity of 89 percent.

The Workshop Theatre staged the world premiere of a piece of music theatre that was almost six years in the making: *The Hunting Gun*, composed by Thomas Larcher. The production, by Karl Markovics, was seen by 1,133 visitors.

There were standing ovations after the premiere of *The Barber of Seville* at the Kornmarkttheater in Bregenz, venue for the fourth year running of the Opera Studio established by artistic director Elisabeth Sobotka in summer 2015. The young ensemble was directed by Brigitte Fassbaender, the celebrated *kammersängerin*, who once again worked as coach during the Opera Studio masterclass in Bregenz.

Also at the Kornmarkttheater, a few days after the festival opened, director and puppet maker Nikolaus Habjan shed light upon the contradictory personality of Karl Böhm, who was represented on stage by a puppet along with virtually all the other characters.

At the Workshop Theatre there was a revival of *María de Buenos Aires*. The *tango operita* sold out on both evenings, playing to a total audience of 780. The three traditional concerts by the Vienna Symphony Orchestra together with the matinee concert by the Vorarlberg Symphony Orchestra (SOV) were attended by 5,652 guests in all. Gérard Korsten bowed out this summer as chief conductor of the Vorarlberg orchestra. The two events in the Musik & Poesie series (instead of the three originally planned) drew a combined audience of 453 people.

In early April, the first *Insight* session of the second Opera Workshop cycle took place at the Kunsthaus Bregenz. It offered an opportunity for the general public to follow the creation of a new work of music theatre with the composer Alexander Moosbrugger and others involved in the project. The as yet untitled opera will be premiered at the festival in the summer of 2020.

## 2019

The 74<sup>th</sup> festival season ended with total audience figures of approx. 250,000 visitors. Approx. 180,000 people have seen the sold out Bregenz production. *Rigoletto* has played indoors in the Festspielhaus three times.

On the second evening of the festival the curtain went up on *Don Quichotte*, the opera at the Festspielhaus. Mariame Clément's dazzling production cast new light on what may be the best known figure of world literature, probing what heroism is in today's world as well as exploring masculinity and new gender roles. The opera was seen by 4,603 people, playing to a 99 per cent capacity audience.

Cervantes' famous figure also appeared at the Kornmarkttheater in a genuine premiere – a spoken theatre adaptation of the classic novel *Don Quixote*. This co-production with Deutsches Theater Berlin was directed by Jan Bosse and starred Ulrich Matthes and Wolfram Koch. They demonstrated how unconventional, how entertaining and how compelling dramatic art can be even without elaborate stage decor and props.

In the popular series Musik & Poesie Michael Köhlmeier, a writer from Vorarlberg, presented a gallery of fools and jesters, with particular reference to the figures *Rigoletto* and *Don Quixote*. Also in the Lake Studio, two other soirées offering literary-musical gems were very well attended, with 98 per cent of tickets sold.

In its fifth year the Bregenz Opera Studio has transformed the stage of the Kornmarkttheater into an inhospitable natural landscape of marsh, moor and grassland. Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* is being staged here by Jan Eklinger as an investigation into emotional states and interpersonal relationships, set in a place that doesn't necessarily have to be in Russia.

Both Philippe Jordan and Fabio Luisi – the current chief conductor and his predecessor – stood on the rostrum in the three traditional orchestral concerts with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. All four symphonies by Johannes Brahms were played on two successive days. The orchestral concert series was launched by a performance of Giuseppe Verdi's opulent Requiem.

The Workshop Theatre has once again hosted contemporary music theatre. *La Ronde*, based on the play by Arthur Schnitzler, received its first performances in Austria on the two last days of July. It was a co-production of the Bregenz Festival and Neue Oper Wien. Also a world premiere took place on two consecutive evenings and with different performances: *Wunderwandelwelt*, a music theatre installation created by François Sarhan.

## 2020

Standing ovations plus a polka as an encore brought to a close the eight-day series of artistic events called *Festtage im Festspielhaus* on 22 August. The final concert by the Vienna Philharmonic under conductor Philippe Jordan was enthusiastically received by the audience in the sold-out Great Hall of the Festspielhaus.

After cancellation of the 2020 Bregenz Festival on 15 May the management decided to send out a “strong artistic signal” by presenting a short programme of events, the *Festtage im Festspielhaus*. The Festival proper was called off on account of the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this there's good news for Bregenz Festival fans: the hugely popular *Rigoletto* will be returning

for a second run on the lake stage in summer 2021.

The nine events of the *Festtage* drew a total audience of 3,422. The programme offered a wide artistic range, comprising concerts with four different orchestras, a concert at the KUB, two events in the Musik & Poesie series and the world premiere of a new piece of music theatre, *Impresario Dotcom*. The comic opera composed by Ľubica Čekovská, which had been scheduled for the Theater am Kornmarkt, was given its premiere in a “version for Bregenz 2020” in the Great Hall of the Festspielhaus.

Apart from these events the Bregenz Festival offered guided tours behind the scenes on the lake stage. There was also a sequence of audio recordings broadcast on the lake stage auditorium three times a day. Entitled “Denk ich an *Rigoletto*...” (“If I think of Rigoletto”), it featured the thoughts and feelings of people involved in the Bregenz production of the opera.

## 2021

After an interval of one year necessitated by the corona pandemic, the Bregenz Festival brought *Rigoletto* back to the lake stage. This decision went down well with the festival audience. With tickets selling to 99% of capacity, the management were delighted by a successful second run for Philipp Stölzl’s production.

The summer festival opened with a rarely performed work, *Nero* by the composer and librettist Arrigo Boito. The opera, about one of the most notorious figures in history, had a three-evening run in the Festspielhaus. Olivier Tambosi’s spectacular production was seen by 3,840 visitors, which corresponds to 83 percent capacity.

An interdisciplinary film opera entitled *Upload* – an international co-production – received its first performance in Austria at the Werkstattbühne. In it the composer, librettist and director Michel van der Aa explores the question of uploading one’s consciousness in order to carry on living after death, and probes what implications that might have.

In July, Festival-goers were able to discover a new perspective on Heinrich von Kleist’s historical novella *Michael Kohlhaas*. The production by Andreas Kriegenburg was experienced by a total of 1,280 visitors.

The latest play by the Vienna-born author Bernhard Studlar links up characters and places in a fast-paced, witty and surprising way. The play, *Lohn der Nacht* (“wages of the night”), was named winner of the Austrian Theatre Alliance competition and was very positively received in Bregenz.

The all-round audio-visual experience was presented in the Werkstattbühne in a performance space designed by artist Flaka Haliti with 172 organ pipes. Alexander Moosbrugger’s opera *Wind* was premiered in this setting.