



Oh, to Believe in Another World...

The premiere on 15 June 2022 of the topically relevant animated film by William Kentridge to Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony. The Shostakovich expert and chief conductor Michael Sanderling will conduct the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester at the KKL Luzern and the Pompeii Theatrum Mundi festival.



If there is one personality in the international cultural scene who deserves the title of “universal artist”, then it is certainly William Kentridge. Born in 1955 in Johannesburg, Kentridge studied politics, African studies and fine arts in his native city, attended the Jacques Lecoq theatre school in Paris and then worked as an actor, designer and theatre director. Since the 1990s, Kentridge's works have been shown in important museums and galleries throughout the world and his opera stagings performed at major concert venues.

Kentridge's parents were both anti-apartheid lawyers and civil rights activists, a political backdrop and family lineage important for Kentridge's future career as an artist. It is no coincidence that he also came into confrontation with such issues and later dealt with his experiences in his artistic work. Kentridge's film aesthetic draws on the history of the medium, from stop-motion animation to early special effects. Drawing, particularly the dynamics of erasure and re-drawing, has been an integral element of his numerous works in the fields of animation and film, in which layers of meaning are developed only during the process of their creation.

William Kentridge has already created a large number of opera stagings, including for Alban Berg's “Wozzeck” and Dmitri Shostakovich's first opera, “The Nose”. Now, at the behest of the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester, he has returned to Shostakovich and produced an animated film to go with the latter's Tenth Symphony.

The film is set in a seemingly abandoned Soviet museum that is really made out of cardboard and located on a table in an artist's studio. It takes a tour through the various rooms of the museum, which include a community theatre hall, a public swimming pool and a quarry. The central figures of the film are Mayakovsky, his lover Lilya Brik, Trotsky, Shostakovich as a student, his pupil Elmira Nasirova, Stalin and Lenin. These figures appear as puppets but are also played by actors in puppet guise. The form is that of a collage, and the underlying thesis is that history must also be understood





as a form of collage. Kentridge's collages remind one a little of the Dadaist Kurt Schwitters, for whom he has a high regard.

The Tenth Symphony plays a central role in Shostakovich's oeuvre, as it was written in 1953, directly after the death of the dictator Josef Stalin, and is regarded as one of the composer's most expressive works. Eight years had passed since he had composed his Ninth Symphony, making his return to the symphonic genre a major step. Everything in the four-movement work revolves around the recently deceased autocrat, according to the controversial memoirs of

Shostakovich as purportedly related to the musicologist Solomon Volkov: *“But I did depict Stalin in music in my next symphony, the Tenth. I wrote it right after Stalin’s death, and no one has yet guessed what the symphony is about. It’s about Stalin and the Stalin years. The second part, the scherzo, is a musical portrait of Stalin, roughly speaking.”* The third movement is also centred on destructive violence and human debasement. Shostakovich included in it a musical version of his initials – D-Es-C-H in the German scale, which translates to D-Eb-C-B –, symbolising his own suffering under Stalin's rule.

Despite all the scepticism about Volkov's book, it seems that the symphony's claimed reference to Stalin is no mere invention: the conductor Kurt Sanderling, the father of the chief conductor of the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester, Michael Sanderling, also spoke of a “Stalin theme” in the lurid, grotesque second movement. And he was well-placed to know, as he was close friends with Shostakovich. Michael Sanderling (b. 1967) experienced the composer only as a child, as Shostakovich died in 1975. He and his brothers were nonetheless influenced by the fact that their parents – their father as conductor and their mother as double bassist – recorded Shostakovich's symphonies with the Berlin Symphony Orchestra. *“This affinity with the music of Shostakovich arose there,” their mother, Barbara Sanderling, recalls, “especially with Michael, who has recorded all 15 symphonies with the Dresden Philharmonic.”*



Numa Bischof Ullmann, the artistic director of the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester and the initiator of the project, held first talks with William Kentridge back in 2019. *“The tragic events in Ukraine mean that history has de facto overtaken the project and given it an additional, extremely tangible urgency.”*

The imperialistic propaganda we are experiencing daily from Moscow makes the theme of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony, its reference to Stalin, almost painfully relevant. Stalin is being celebrated by the Kremlin as a war hero and the vanquisher of National Socialism, as well as the builder of a Russian empire. At the same time, the Russian government is trying to block out the image of Stalin as a mass murderer and despot.

Michael Sanderling will conduct the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester in Shostakovich's Tenth with the premiere of the film “Oh, to Believe in Another World” on June 15 at the KKL in Lucerne. Another concert there is planned for June 16. The dates have not been chosen at random, as the project's

timing and artistic concept fit in well with those of the art fair Art Basel, which runs from June 16 to June 19, with some pre-events already taking place from June 12.

Further performances of “Oh, to Believe in Another World” will be given on June 29 and 30 at a historic site in Italy: the Teatro Grande, which is in the midst of the ruins of Pompeii. The Shostakovich project is included there in the Pompeii Theatrum Mundi festival. This festival is run by the theatre in Naples and this year, against the background of the war in Ukraine, has the motto “*To cry for the dead is absurd and futile*”, a verse by the Greek poet Stesichorus.

Dates „Oh to Believe in Another World”

 Bettina Schimmer

[15. and 16. June 2022 | 19:30 h | Lucerne | KKL \(UA\)](#)

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906 – 1975) Symphony No. 10 op. 93

Luzerner Sinfonieorchester

Michael Sanderling, Musical director

William Kentridge, Director

Žana Marović and Janus Fouché, Video Editing

Greta Goiris, Costume design and puppets

Sabine Theunissen, Set design

Duško Marović, Camera

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Introduction with William Kentridge at 18:30 h

[29. and 30. June 2022 | 21:00 h | Pompeii | Teatro Grande | Theatrum Mundi Festival](#)

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