



High Tech Know-How and Gene Scissors - the new Currency of the Gods in Richard Wagner's "The Ring of the Nibelung"

On the 28th of March 2020 the State Theatre of Saarbrücken will host the premiere of an entirely novel production of Richard Wagner's "Das Rheingold" by Alexandra Szemerédy and Magdolna Parditka



The director duo comprising Alexandra Szemerédy and Magdolna Parditka has delivered a stunning transformation of Wagner's "Das Rheingold", making the production at the State Theatre of Saarbrücken a truly topical opera experience. The two Hungarian directors have "kept pace with current times" (SaarbrückerZeitung) and address an array of current societal questions surrounding self-optimisation, genetic engineering and the ethical boundaries of science. As such, Wotan, father of the Gods, takes on the role of "knowledge manager" and high tech know-how becomes the new currency.

Double womanpower, exponentiated through close cooperation - that description most accurately sums up the careers of Alexandra Szemerédy and Magdolna Parditka to the present day. After having completed their studies at the Béla Bartók Conservatory in Budapest they began developing stage and production concepts for European opera houses in 2006. During this time they not only directed, but also designed the stage sets and costumes for their projects. They are well in touch with the pulse of time and consistently leave audiences in awe of their work. This feat resulted in a nomination for the most esteemed German theatre prize "DER FAUST" and is constantly reaffirmed by the enthusiastic reactions to their productions. "Rarely is time-travel such a coherent experience" (Der Opernfreund in a review of "Salome"), and the two directors "free the work with at times drastic, but correct scenic incursions of false romanticism. [...] It is a both visually compelling and brilliant solution." (Opernglas in a review of "Tosca"). In addition, they manage to evoke a "scenic analysis of the music that excites viewers and provides a reason to rewatch the production because of the many details one may miss the first time." (Kultura-Extra in a review of "Written on Skin"). They have truly impressed international critics, who time and time again praise the "unapologetic interpretations" and "inner consistency" (Opera Magazine) of their productions. Alexandra Szemerédy and Magdolna Parditka, whose productions are "neither meant to nor allow a casual theatre experience" (Opernglas), have a history of directing works by Richard Wagner. Upon invitation and under the musical direction of Adam Fischer, the duo presented their productions of "Parsifal" (2006, the production was then revived again in 2017) and "Tristan and Isolde" (2010, 2011) at the Budapest Wagner Days. During her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Magdolna Parditka won the "Ring Award" of the international competition of the Wagner Forum for Musical Theatre.

As such, the invitation extended by the State Theatre of Saarbrücken to develop productions for the entire "Ring" cycle by Richard Wagner should come as no surprise. The theatre's General Manager Bodo Busse has also already previously worked with the director duo at the State Theatre of Coburg. Busse fondly remembers the cooperation and remarked that "both artists distinguish themselves through their strong, at times exaggerated, but still realistic imagery, their psychological depth of focus and exact

characterisations. Their conceptual, yet at the same time demanding ideas are both determined and inherently logical.“ Their “experimental handwriting“ and “unconventional access“ (Bodo Busse) can also be expected to stand out in their interpretation of “Das Rheingold“, the first part of the tetralogy “Der Ring“ - a work regarded by many as musical theatre par excellence. Nothing about this production is approximate, let alone vague. The Hungarian duo rubs salt into contemporary wounds and deliberately paints the picture of a dystopian reality. “What happens to a society, in which only the privileged few have access to forms of self-optimisation such as genetic engineering and artificial intelligence? What if designer babies become the new norm?“ These are the questions that Alexandra Szemerédy wants to encourage people to think about in watching their production of Wagner’s “Das Rheingold“. Magdolna Parditka adds that their production pushes listeners to think about “the limitations of being human, the rapid development of science and the almighty nature of technology. How will this world be - this world that we are currently developing for ourselves?“ Alexandra Szemerédy questions: What will happen if we are able to artificially produce life? Does that mean that we are Gods? Wotans experiment is relevant to all of us. His missing eye demonstrates the sacrifices we are willing to make for new knowledge.“

The rapid shift in our system of values and the extensive influence of virtual processes on our real day to day lives, the opportunities and threats of genetic research, biohacking and artificial intelligence are fundamental questions of the here and now, all of which are addressed in the “Ring“ production by Alexandra Szemerédy and Magdolna Parditka. How should and will we as a society deal with these questions? The duo points out that “the next Wotans and Alberichs will always find new ways to control others. And Erda’s warning cry to ‘Avoid the Ring!’ slowly fades to nothingness.“ Saarbrücken can look forward to a lesson in modern director’s theatre without the patronizing waving of a finger; and all of this with the prospect of three further exciting Wagner opera productions in the upcoming seasons (“Die Walküre“ 2020/21, “Siegfried“ 2021/22 and “Götterdämmerung“ 2022/23).

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