

# SEEFESTSPIELE MÖRBISCH



## The Bat

12<sup>th</sup> July – 25<sup>th</sup> August 2012

The centre of the operetta world is located only sixty kilometres southeast of Vienna in the picturesque town of Mörbisch, on the shores of Lake Neusiedl. In front of a one-of-a-kind natural backdrop, masterpieces of classic operetta are performed on one of Europe's largest and loveliest open-air stages, boasting 3,600 m<sup>2</sup> of floor space.

With **Die Fledermaus**, Johann Strauß did not merely celebrate his greatest and most lasting success, but created a composition which is accepted worldwide as the masterpiece of Viennese operetta, as countless productions with leading artists bear witness. In 1874, the year of the work's première, at the Theater an der Wien there were triumphant first performances in Berlin and New York which spread the opera's fame like wildfire. Among famous conductors under whose direction **Die Fledermaus** was heard may be reckoned Gustav Mahler (1894, Hamburg, and three years later Vienna), Richard Strauss (1899, Berlin), Bruno Walter (1926, Salzburg, where Hans Moser took over the part of the prison warder Frosch) and Alexander von Zemlinsky (1928, Berlin). Finally Max Reinhardt, in association with Erich Korngold, reworked the operetta for a Berlin performance in 1929, adding extra Strauß waltzes to the original score, by way of local colour, and updating it with extra dialogue and songs in cheeky 1920s cabaret style. This version proved a hit in Paris, in 1929 and 1933, and then, with the collaboration of that contemporary mould-breaking choreographer George Balanchine, went on to be a hit in New York, too. The list of illustrious producers (including film producers) in the work's triumphal history could be continued almost indefinitely, but we are concerned here only with those aspects of the work which lie at the heart of its phenomenal triumph.

The operetta's irresistible effectiveness as a stage work is in large part based on its happy combination of the momentum of the dance with a logical and dramatically ingenious plot, full of touches of social satire and sharp political digs. Prince Orlofsky's party stands at the centre: everything leads up to it, to culminate in a piquantly dramatic whirlwind of continuous rôle changes which is at last disentangled in prison. Act II marks a special high point, where the whole cast abandon their private intrigues to unite in a dizzying round of waltzes, leaving everyday cares behind for the airy and intoxicating heights above. Only the striking of the clock can bring the enraptured company back to the hard ground of reality.

Quite apart from its masterly settings of dance tunes in waltz, polka or csárdas rhythm, *Fledermaus* yields countless examples of Strauß's sure mastery of traditional operatic styles: think of Dr. Blind's buffo-esque tongue-twisters in the quarreling trio (No. 2) of the first Act, or Alfred's infatuated serenade in 6/8 time, which irresistibly calls to mind Pedrillo's romance in Mozart's *Die Entführung*. The Trio (No. 4) in which Eisenstein takes his leave of Rosalinde and Adele as he departs for prison, has a lofty and solemn pathos proper to opera seria, thus neatly underscoring the theatrical irony. Sighing motives in the orchestra, lamenting melodic lines, contribute to a comedy of pretence in

which each character believes that he (or she) is the winner. The final winner, in the truest sense, is perhaps the chambermaid Adele –Strauß succeeds in characterising her musically as a smart girl of some refinement, who, unlike her employers, takes her destiny firmly into her own capable hands. Just listen to her high-spirited (but carefully-calculated) laughing coloratura, or the pert, waltzing lilt of „Mein Herr Marquis“ with which she leads her fellow actors around by the nose. Lastly she alone manages to use her masterly talents for play-acting to make her life’s dreams come true, while for the others, the illusory break from everyday reality looks like ending in total disaster – were it not that any blame for the unhappy turn of events can safely be laid at the feet of His Majesty, Champagne ...

Text: Flora Gilly (translated by Mike Yarrow)

**Info & bookings**

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