



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Groundbreaking Fusion of Opera and Ballet

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The Volksoper Wien's recent production of "KaiserRequiem" stands as a groundbreaking fusion of opera and ballet, offering a profound and innovative exploration of human existence, mortality, and the resilience of the human spirit. This musico-dramatic dance evening masterfully intertwines Viktor Ullmann's chamber opera "Der Kaiser von Atlantis" with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Requiem in D minor, KV 626, creating a dialogue between two monumental works that, despite their distinct origins, converge on themes of life, death, and the quest for meaning.

Conceived by conductor Omer Meir Wellber, "KaiserRequiem" defies traditional boundaries by merging Ullmann's poignant opera, composed under the harrowing conditions of the Theresienstadt concentration camp, with Mozart's unfinished Requiem, a piece shrouded in mystery and associated with the composer's own mortality. This union is not merely a juxtaposition of two compositions but a seamless integration that allows for a continuous narrative flow, enhanced by the complementary strengths of opera and ballet.

Director and choreographer Andreas Heise brings this ambitious vision to life with a production that is both visually and emotionally compelling. Heise's approach ensures that singers, dancers, and the chorus interact in ways rarely seen in traditional music theater, creating a cohesive ensemble that blurs the lines between vocal performance and physical expression. The choreography is meticulously crafted to mirror the opera's themes, with dancers embodying abstract concepts and emotions, thereby providing a visceral representation of the narrative's psychological depth.

The cast delivers performances of exceptional caliber, with each artist contributing to the production's overall impact:

- Daniel Schmutzhard as Kaiser Overall: Schmutzhard portrays the tyrannical ruler with a commanding presence, capturing the character's descent into madness and eventual realization of his own mortality.
- Josef Wagner as Death: Wagner's portrayal is both haunting and empathetic, presenting Death not as a malevolent force but as a necessary counterbalance to life's chaos.
- Seiyong Kim as Harlequin: Kim brings a poignant blend of humor and pathos to the role, serving as a reminder of the enduring human spirit even in the face of despair.
- Rebecca Nelsen as Bubikopf and Wallis Giunta as The Drummer: Both performers deliver nuanced performances, their voices blending seamlessly with the orchestra while their interactions with the dancers

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add layers of meaning to the narrative.

The Vienna State Ballet deserves special commendation for their dynamic and evocative performances. The dancers not only execute Heise's complex choreography with precision but also imbue their movements with a depth of emotion that amplifies the opera's themes. Their ability to convey the narrative's intricacies through dance adds a profound dimension to the production.

Under Wellber's baton, the orchestra navigates the challenging score with both sensitivity and vigor. The transitions between Ullmann's modernist idioms and Mozart's classical motifs are handled with finesse, highlighting the thematic connections between the two works. The Volksoper Chorus delivers a powerful performance, their voices resonating with clarity and emotion, particularly during the Requiem segments.

The production's visual elements are both striking and symbolic. Set and costume designer Sascha Thomsen employs a minimalist aesthetic that allows the performers' movements and expressions to take center stage. The use of stark, monochromatic color schemes juxtaposed with occasional bursts of color serves to underscore the opera's themes of life, death, and the transient nature of existence. Lighting designer Johannes Schadl enhances this atmosphere with a nuanced lighting design that accentuates the emotional tone of each scene.

One of the most remarkable aspects of "KaiserRequiem" is its ability to unify various artistic disciplines into a cohesive whole. The integration of opera and ballet is so seamless that it becomes impossible to consider them as separate entities within the context of this production. This synthesis allows for a richer exploration of the narrative's themes, as the music, movement, and visual elements all work in concert to convey the story's emotional and philosophical depth.

The premiere of "KaiserRequiem" was met with enthusiastic acclaim from both critics and audiences. The Kurier lauded the production as "an evening full of surprises," noting the rare and effective interaction between singers, dancers, and the chorus. The APA described it as a "deadly-fulminant ballet evening," highlighting the captivating and vivid performances of the Vienna State Ballet. Die Presse praised the artistic integration of singers into the choreography and the dancers' versatility as performers. The Kronen Zeitung commended Wellber's leadership of the orchestra and chorus, noting the precision and drive of the musical performance.

"KaiserRequiem" is a triumph of innovative theater, offering a profound and moving experience that challenges and enriches its audience. By seamlessly blending the mediums of opera and ballet, and by daring to tackle themes of mortality and tyranny through the lens of history and art, this production not only honors the legacies of Ullmann and Mozart but also reaffirms the power of interdisciplinary collaboration

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in the performing arts. It stands as a testament to the Volksoper Wien's commitment to pushing artistic boundaries, creating a spectacle that is both intellectually stimulating and emotionally resonant. With its bold staging, evocative choreography, and masterful musical interpretation, KaiserRequiem is captivating.

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