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A Triumphant Revival: Follies at the Volksoper Wien

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The Volksoper Wien's 2025 production of Stephen Sondheim and James Goldman's Follies stands as a luminous achievement in musical theatre. Premiering on April 12, 2025, under the visionary direction of Martin G. Berger, this rendition masterfully intertwines nostalgia with innovation, offering audiences a profound exploration of memory, regret, and the passage of time.

Berger's direction breathes new life into Follies, presenting a "futuristic" aesthetic that juxtaposes the grandeur of the past with contemporary sensibilities. Set designer Sarah-Katharina Karl crafts a stage that oscillates between the decaying opulence of the Weismann Theatre and abstract representations of memory, while Alexander Djurkov Hotter's costumes blend vintage elegance with modern flair, reflecting the characters' internal conflicts between past and present. Vincent Stefan's video projections and Alex Brok's lighting design further enhance the dreamlike atmosphere, immersing the audience in a world where reality and reminiscence coalesce.

The cast delivers performances of remarkable depth and nuance. Ruth Brauer-Kvam's portrayal of Sally Durant Plummer is both vulnerable and resilient, capturing the character's longing for a bygone era. Drew Sarich embodies Benjamin Stone with stoic complexity, revealing the character's internal struggles with precision. Bettina Mönch's Phyllis Rogers Stone exudes sophistication and suppressed emotion, while Peter Lesiak's Buddy Plummer offers a poignant blend of humor and heartbreak.

The younger counterparts—Juliette Khalil (Young Sally), Oliver Liebl (Young Ben), Samuel Türksoy (Young Buddy), and Laura Goblirsch (Young Phyllis)—provide compelling performances that mirror and contrast their older selves, emphasizing the enduring impact of past choices. Under the baton of Michael Papadopoulos, the Volksoper orchestra navigates Sondheim's intricate score with finesse, capturing the emotional nuances of each number. Marie Christin Zeisset's choreography pays homage to classic Broadway styles while incorporating contemporary movements, creating dance sequences that are both nostalgic and fresh.

This production of Follies transcends the boundaries of mere performance; it emerges as a richly layered meditation on the emotional intricacies of aging, the bittersweet power of nostalgia, and the often-painful journey of reconciling past dreams with present realities. Through Martin G. Berger’s visionary direction and a cast that brings immense depth and humanity to each role, the Volksoper Wien breathes new life into

Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

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Stephen Sondheim's masterpiece. Rather than simply revisiting a beloved classic, this production reinterprets Follies with a bold and contemporary aesthetic, offering fresh insight while remaining true to its emotional core. Volksoper has crafted a deeply moving theatrical experience that speaks directly to modern audience.

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Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
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