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Radiant Revival: Schön ist die Welt at Opera Graz

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Opera Graz's 2025 production of Franz Lehár's Schön ist die Welt, translated into English as The World is Beautiful, emerges as a luminous testament to the enduring charm and depth of operetta. Under the astute direction of Florian Kutej, this staging breathes new life into a work that, while often overshadowed by Lehár's more renowned compositions, proves to be a gem of the genre.

Set against the majestic backdrop of the Alps, the operetta unfolds the story of Princess Elisabeth and Crown Prince Georg, who, unbeknownst to their true identities, meet during a mountain excursion. Their encounter, initially a chance meeting, evolves into a profound connection, challenging the matrimonial plans orchestrated by their royal parents. This narrative, rich in romantic idealism, is further enhanced by Lehár's sumptuous score, which seamlessly weaves waltzes, tangos, and rumbas, reflecting the diverse musical influences of the early 20th century.

The cast delivers performances of remarkable depth and nuance. Sieglinde Feldhofer's portrayal of Princess Elisabeth is both regal and relatable, capturing the character's inner conflict between duty and desire. Her vocal prowess shines, particularly in the operetta's extended love duet, which stands as one of the longest in the genre's history. Opposite her, Richard Samek embodies Crown Prince Georg with a blend of charm and introspection, his tenor voice resonating with sincerity and passion.

Supporting roles are equally compelling. Ivan Orešcanin's Graf Sascha Karlowitz provides moments of levity, while Anna Brull's Mercedes exudes vivacity and wit. David McShane, as the King, brings gravitas to the production, grounding the whimsical narrative with a touch of solemnity. Isabel Toccafondi's set design transports audiences to alpine vistas, with panoramic backdrops and intricate details that evoke the serenity and grandeur of the mountains. Daria Kornysheva's costumes further enrich the visual experience, blending traditional royal attire with contemporary flair, reflecting the characters' personal journeys.

Musically, the production is a triumph. Under the baton of Marius Burkert, the orchestra navigates Lehár's intricate score with finesse, capturing the nuances of each musical style. Joe Monaghan's choreography infuses the stage with energy, particularly in ensemble numbers where dancers, including Brandon Carpio and Kirsty Clarke, execute routines with precision and enthusiasm. Schön ist die Welt, though rooted in the early 20th century, resonates with contemporary audiences through its exploration of personal freedom, love, and the tension between tradition and individuality.

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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Opera Graz's decision to stage this operetta, often relegated to concert performances, underscores the company's commitment to reviving and reimagining lesser-known works. This production of Schön ist die Welt stands as a testament to the operetta's enduring appeal and Opera Graz's dedication to artistic excellence. Through stellar performances, captivating visuals, and masterful musical direction, the production offers a poignant and entertaining experience, reaffirming the operetta's place in the modern repertoire.

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Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
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