



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Vision of the Eternal: Schubert, für immer und ewig

Sommerspiele Perchtoldsdorf, 28.06.2025 [ENA]

On a warm summer evening beneath the open sky of the Perchtoldsdorf castle courtyard, audiences were treated to the world premiere of *Schubert, für immer und ewig*, a new "play with music" by Peter Turrini. This daring theatrical meditation on the life, art, and interior world of Franz Schubert, staged as part of the Sommerspiele Perchtoldsdorf 2025, was much more than a biographical piece.

It was a sensuous, philosophical, and deeply moving Gesamtkunstwerk, fusing spoken drama, live music, and poetic reflection into a resonant theatrical experience.

Directed with visionary sensitivity by Alexander Paul Kubelka, who also serves as the festival's artistic director, this production is an ambitious, multi-layered journey through Schubert's emotional landscape. It explores not only the external circumstances of the composer's life, but also the fragile and haunted terrain of his inner world—his longings, his friendships, his brush with death, and his enduring faith in the power of music and art.

Peter Turrini's text avoids the easy traps of historical reenactment or didactic biography. Instead, it offers a poetic and associative exploration of Schubert's psyche. With deft language that oscillates between lyrical introspection and raw existential questioning, Turrini asks: what does it mean to live as an artist? To create beauty amid decay? To write music that outlives the self? "Is it not the essence of art to make the dead live again?" asks one of the characters—a line that functions as the production's quiet thesis. It is a play not about facts but about essence.

Schubert is brought to life by the exceptional Stephan Bieker, whose performance is the evening's magnetic core. Bieker's Schubert is neither saint nor martyr, but a fully human figure: vulnerable, haunted, occasionally humorous, and always profoundly aware of his own impermanence. Bieker never indulges in sentimentality—his portrayal is lean, intelligent, and inwardly charged. His face often seems to listen more than speak, and his silences are as eloquent as his lines.

Integral to the production is the music, which spans not only Schubert's own works, but new compositions by pianist Clara Frühstück and Naked Lunch frontman Oliver Welter. This musical triad creates a rich and layered sonic environment that refuses to be mere accompaniment; instead, music is treated as an equal dramatic voice.

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Clara Frühstück's performance—both as pianist and stage presence—is nothing short of hypnotic. Her interpretations of Schubert's piano music are intimate and emotionally nuanced, weaving threads of melancholy and ecstasy into the dramatic texture. Her own musical contributions blend seamlessly into Schubert's legacy, creating a temporal dialogue that collapses the distance between then and now.

Oliver Welter, playing both the allegorical figures of "Death" and "Nepomuk Feder" (a fictional friend or mirror image of Schubert), brings a striking vocal presence and physical gravitas to the stage. His songs, delivered in a husky baritone infused with existential weariness, function like modern-day lieder—raw, haunting, and soaked in post-romantic angst. His presence adds a jarring, necessary contrast to the elegance of Frühstück's piano and underscores the darker themes of decay and mortality. The supporting ensemble further anchors the production in a space between memory and dream.

Lenya Gramß, as Josepha von Weisborn, evokes tenderness and strength; Andrei Viorel Tacu (Leopold Kupelwieser), Felix Oitzinger (Franz von Tassié), Fanny Holzer (Dorothea Tumpel), and Lisa Schrammel (Louise Lautner) all offer precise and deeply felt performances. Each character seems to embody a facet of Schubert's emotional world—love, regret, companionship, and artistic striving.

These roles are not drawn in the conventional narrative mode, but function almost like memories or hallucinations—visitors from a soul's theatre, reminding Schubert (and us) of the unbearable beauty and fragility of human connection.

Alexander Paul Kubelka's set design is stark and evocative, conjuring shifting spaces that suggest both a decaying Viennese salon and a dreamscape of the mind. The minimalist visual language allows the performers to inhabit both historical and metaphysical spaces, underscored by Lukas Schöffel's elegant lighting. Together, they create a sense of poetic timelessness.

What is perhaps most remarkable is how seamlessly Kubelka integrates Turrini's text, the musical elements, and the ensemble work into a coherent whole. His direction is quiet but exacting, allowing the material to breathe while guiding the audience through a complex emotional and temporal journey.

At no point does the piece feel static or indulgent. Every moment is infused with purpose, with the sense that we are being invited not to observe history but to experience memory, transformation, and catharsis. Schubert, für immer und ewig is a piece about death, yes—but more importantly, about art's power to transmute death into something radiant. Schubert's short and often tormented life becomes a lens through which we contemplate our own relationship to beauty, mortality, and legacy. It is a celebration of the ephemeral and a defiant affirmation of what endures.

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The production's refusal to resolve Schubert's life into neat answers is one of its greatest strengths.

There is no redemptive arc, no false triumph. Instead, we are left with the ache of his music and the resonance of his silences, echoing through time. This world premiere at the Sommerspiele Perchtoldsdorf affirms the festival's commitment to bold, intelligent, and emotionally resonant theatre. Schubert, für immer und ewig is not merely a tribute to a composer—it is a testament to the enduring necessity of art in a fractured world. It invites us to listen, to feel, and to remember that even in the shadow of death, the human spirit sings.

A triumph of form and feeling, this production will undoubtedly leave its mark—not only on the summer theatre season but on the hearts of those fortunate enough to witness it.

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https://culture.en-a.eu/kunst_kultur_und_musik/vision_of_the_eternal_schubert_fuer_immer_und_ewig-91689/

Redaktion und Verantwortlichkeit:

V.i.S.d.P. und gem. § 6 MDStV: Dr. Nadejda Komendantova

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European News Agency**

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