



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

## Frost-Bitten Revelation: Der Schneesturm

Salzburg Festival, 26.08.2025 [ENA]

In the heated expanse of summer 2025, the Salzburg Festival delivered a performance of chilling emotional power: *Der Schneesturm*, a haunting, visionary adaptation of Vladimir Sorokin's post-apocalyptic fable, brought to stage by Kirill Serebrennikov. This production—part theatrical epic, part existential odyssey—stands as both a bold creative triumph and a luminous tribute to art's enduring potency amid uncertainty.

At first glance, the snowstorm is more than a backdrop—it is the beating heart and main protagonist. As Sorokin explains, his story casts an unforgiving, boundless Russian expanse that imposes itself fundamentally on its inhabitants, a metaphor for metaphysical trial in a frozen void. This theatrical scope frames the narrative of Dr. Garin, his stoic Kutscher, and their desperate mission: traversing a frozen wasteland to deliver a vaccine against a zombie-like plague. When the storm finally overtakes them, we experience the raw poetry and existential starkness that Serebrennikov so chillingly animates.

With August Diehl delivering a visceral portrayal of Dr. Garin, and Filipp Avdeev bringing his Kutscher to life (remarkably with a phonetic mastery of German), the performance pulses with gritty physicality and psychological depth. Avdeev's efforts to navigate language and embody trauma in a language not his own is particularly arresting. Audience members reported being mesmerized by the duo's emotive embodiment of fear, fragility, and frozen resolve.

Serebrennikov's production design reinforces the narrative's disorientation: a rotating carousel-like stage propels forward the surreal sled ride; llama-sized "Pferdis" power a grotesque snow-machine; glass helmets project fragmented faces; miniatures reenact the long, doomed journey via live-feed atop a runway-like table. These bold, kinetic elements heighten the tragic absurdity and push us ever deeper into the narrative's uncanny fabric. The production maintains Sorokin's magical realism, preserving bizarre encounters—the seductive miller, a drug-induced pyramid trip, a giant's corpse with a sleigh runner rammed into its nostril—while capturing the melancholic lyricism of a journey with no final destination.

Even as the doctor and his exhausted companion succumb, the narrative's sting arrives with haunting clarity: in the end, they are retrieved not by heroes, but scavenging Chinese figures, half-amusing, half-ominous—collectors in a world forsaken by meaning, abandoned to the falling snow. One of the most arresting qualities of this production is its refusal of gratuitous messaging and the work resists didacticism.

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It instead asserts art's transcendent responsibility—to endure and illuminate, not just to reflect the present. It insists on beauty, narrative, and moral resonance even when the world is unraveling.

As the Salzburg Festival's final theatrical offering of the season, *Der Schneesturm* struck with timely gravitas, culminating a series of daring premieres with thought-provoking artistry. It stood among a wave of sombre operatic pieces—from a dystopian *Giulio Cesare* to *One Morning Turns into an Eternity*—marked by brooding philosophical inquiry and visual audacity. Yet this performance shone not in spite of its darkness but because it embraced it, transforming despair into potent, communal catharsis. The applause was thunderous—and long deserved: the company, Serebrennikov, and Sorokin received bows for a work that defied convention and stirred something indelible in its audience.

As an opera expert, I view *Der Schneesturm* not merely as a theater piece, but as a parable of artistic resilience. A richly textured exploration of metaphysical winter, cultural exile, and existential vulnerability, it offers a vision both bleak and luminous. Serebrennikov's staging is audacious yet disciplined; the performances, raw yet nuanced. The production's refusal to surrender to despair, its insistence on narrative and spectacle, offers a soaring testament to the redemptive, unquenchable power of art itself. In a world where storms—literal and metaphorical—rage unbidden, this opera reminds us that meaning, empathy, and creativity remain our greatest defiance. *Der Schneesturm* stands as a bold, unforgettable high point of festival.

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