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Radiant Revival of Baroque Splendor

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In the verdant elegance of Schloss Hof—the grandest estate in Austria—the Teatro Barocco Festival, under the visionary leadership of Prof. Bernd R. Bienert, delivered a triumphant declaration of Baroque opera's timeless allure. Set against the frescoed halls and historic ambiance that once echoed with the courtly arts of Maria Theresa’s court, this year's festival was not merely a series of performances.

It was a deeply immersive journey into the music, gesture, and aesthetics of the 18th century. Bienert’s concept—described aptly as Ein Fest für alle Sinne—rings true in every detail of the program. With historically informed direction, designs, and performance practice, Teatro Barocco reanimated two long-silent masterpieces in the exact place they first rang out: Gluck’s Le Cinesi, premiering in 1754 at Schloss Hof, and Bonno’s Il vero Omaggio, unperformed since 1780. These works returned home not only restored, but revived with theatrical enchantment. The meticulous reconstruction of period gestures, combined with luxury of costume and clarity of vocal delivery, rendered the performances vivid and joyous.

It was as though the courtly salons had awakened, inviting us into an unfolding page of history brought to vibrant, theatrical life. Central to this triumph is Bienert himself. As founder, artistic director, and stage visionary, he has crafted productions that resonate not only as performances, but as cultural archaeology—deciphering and redeploying the aesthetic codes of Maria Theresa’s epoch. In 2025, his festival reaffirmed that Teatro Barocco is more than repertoire; it is a continuing act of cultural reclamation and celebration, deeply rooted in scholarship and stylistic authenticity.

Reinvigorating Le Cinesi—a satirical, short-glimpsed work by Gluck featuring dancers as exotic “Chinese”—set the tone. Though early in his career, Gluck’s invention of the “Chinese pantheon” and the comedic subversions of courtly expectations emerged with expressive clarity. Likewise, Bonno’s Il vero Omaggio—with its courtly elegance and lyrical grace—offered listeners a rare insight into Habsburg-era aesthetics and the gentle, formal intimacy of late-18th-century Viennese music. These revivals were not pale reconstructions, but living articulations of a refined courtly expressive language.

At the core of these performances stood a roster of singers who seamlessly navigated the stylistic demands of Baroque elegance. Alina Dragnea, taking on both Lisinga in Le Cinesi and Dafne in Il vero Omaggio, translated Gluck and Bonno with shimmering clarity, deft ornamentation, and dramatic charm. Her stage

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presence, informed by sustained historically-informed training, spoke directly to 18th-century sensibilities while resonating with modern sensibilities. Meanwhile, Nuri Park, Haohan Yu, Anna Manske, and Kun Chen Shih delivered roles with vocal refinement and stage poise, enriching each ensemble moment with genuine theatrical warmth.

The festival's performances unfolded within Schloss Hof's majestic architecture—frescoed ceilings, mirrored galleries, and gilded opulence echoing with the voices of musicians on historical instruments. Such staged authenticity is rare, and yet here it was organic. Historical lighting, period-appropriate costumes, and authentic stagecraft transformed the estate into a working Baroque theater. The acoustic architecture—the resonance of voices in frescoed chambers—became an instrument unto itself. Every trill, recitative, and ensemble emerged as a stroke in a living tableau, drawing us into the sensual world of 18th-century courtly sound.

Teatro Barocco's identity stands on the ground laid by its earlier successes, such as the restaging of Hasse's Antonio e Cleopatra (2023) and the world premiere revival of Benda's Philon und Theone. Each program anchors the company's mission: historically sensitive revivals of obscure yet vital works. In that context, the 2025 festival represents another shining peak—a statement of continuity and expansion. It is not idle nostalgia that defines Teatro Barocco's strength; rather, it is the reanimation of a bygone era in present tense. Gesture, movement, vocal delivery, and audience interaction were crafted with archival fidelity, yes—but also with imaginative resonance.

As one critic aptly observed, Bienert's performances awaken not just sound, but a kind of Körperrede—a body-language rehearsal that speaks across centuries. Festival-goers were swept into a baroque oeuvre both grand and intimate. Applause was enthusiastic, but more importantly, deeply felt—audiences participated in a renewed cultural ritual, not merely observed it. The immersive programming—the inclusion of gardens access before the opera, for instance—invited spectators to slow down, breathe history, and step into an 18th-century sensibility shaped by both sonic art and spatial grandeur.

In the landscape of historical performance, Teatro Barocco belongs to the vanguard. It is neither a re-enactment nor a novelty: it is a living art form reconceived with passion, scholarship, and theatrical conviction. The 2025 festival proved that early opera, interpreted with authenticity and staged with elegance, resonates not only aesthetically but emotionally—connects us across time with clarity and wonder. For lovers of Baroque opera, historical theater, and immersive cultural experiences, the 2025 Teatro Barocco Festival at Schloss Hof was an unparalleled highlight. It reaffirmed that when artistry meets authenticity, and performance meets place, the result is not just music—but a vibrant portal between eras.

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