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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

## Der Zarewitsch: Volksoper Wien's Enchanted Revival

Volksoper, 18.04.2026 [ENA]

Der Zarewitsch at Volksoper Wien is a beautifully inventive new production that gives Franz Lehár's operetta a fresh visual life without losing its lyrical melancholy. In Steef de Jong's hands, who is responsible for direction, set, and costumes, the work becomes an enchanted theatrical film on stage: part operetta, part live-animation fantasy, and wholly its own poetic world.

What makes the evening so engaging is the clarity of its concept. De Jong moves the story away from its originally Russian setting and into a universal fairytale landscape, allowing the emotional core of the piece to come forward with unusual tenderness. Instead of overburdening the operetta with realism, he lets it breathe in a world of drawings, projections, and theatrical imagination, and this gives the performance a rare blend of delicacy and wit.

At the center stands David Kerber as the Zarewitsch, singing and acting with a touching inwardness that suits the role perfectly. He does not play the title character as a grand imperial figure, but as a lonely young successor whose emotional confusion is made human and recognizable. That vulnerability is the key to the production's success, because it allows the love story to unfold not as a decorative operetta plot, but as a genuinely felt search for connection.

Hedwig Ritter as Sonja brings warmth, charm, and a fine sense of dramatic timing. Her performance balances lightness and sincerity, making Sonja's disguise and emotional ambiguity an active part of the story rather than merely a plot device. The chemistry between Kerber and Ritter gives the production its emotional center, and their scenes together are among the most rewarding moments in the evening.

The supporting roles are equally well cast. Martin Enenkel as Iwan, the Zarewitsch's secretary, contributes a poised and engaging presence, while Juliette Khalil as Mascha adds vocal sparkle and theatrical assurance. Their work helps build the broader social texture of the production, which is essential in a piece like this, where comic and romantic registers must coexist without friction.

Musically, Luka Hauser leads the production with a sensitive hand. Lehár's score is allowed to sing naturally, and the production wisely trusts the composer's melodic gift rather than trying to overstate its modernity. The music carries the performance with elegance, and Hauser's approach supports the production's balance of nostalgia, melancholy, and theatrical freshness.

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The visual concept is especially memorable. De Jong's live-drawn and projected images create a stage world that feels handcrafted and immediate, almost like watching an illustrated story come to life in real time. This gives the production a distinctive personality and prevents it from looking like a routine revival. The result is a stage experience that is imaginative without being cluttered, stylish without losing emotional intimacy.

What stays with the audience is the production's gentleness. It does not force Lehár into a new ideology; instead, it re-frames the operetta so that its themes of loneliness, longing, disguise, and forbidden love become newly legible. That restraint is what makes the evening so effective. It respects the score, trusts the performers, and uses stagecraft to open the piece rather than to overwrite it. For me, this Der Zarewitsch stands out as a deeply musical and theatrically intelligent production. It is elegant, imaginative, and emotionally clear, with a title role and central love story that linger long after the curtain falls. Volksoper Wien has created a revival that feels both affectionate and fresh.

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