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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Il pomo d'oro

Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik, 09.08.2026 [ENA]

The famous Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik have chosen to celebrate their 50th anniversary with a gesture of breathtaking ambition and historical responsibility: the resurrection, in its entirety, of the wonderful opera Pietro Antonio Cesti's *Il pomo d'oro*, the ultimate emblem of some of the best Baroque court operas and long regarded as theatrically unstageable.

To attempt *Il pomo d'oro* at all is a bold statement; to present it in its full, two-evening span, with its original scale of more than eight hours and 47 roles, is nothing less than an artistic manifesto. In doing so, Innsbruck aligns itself explicitly with the Habsburg spectacle culture for which the work was conceived, yet reframes that splendour through the lens of modern, historically informed performance practice. The decision to reconstruct the missing Acts III and V, rather than offering a pragmatic "suite" of highlights, shows an admirable refusal to compromise on dramaturgical integrity.

The audience is invited not to visit a museum fragment, but to encounter a living, breathing opera in the proportions its age considered worthy of an emperor. At the heart of the project lies Ottavio Dantone's newly created reconstruction of the lost music, fashioned from surviving fragments and from Cesti's wider oeuvre. For a musician steeped in Early Baroque idiom, this is not merely an exercise in pastiche, but a sophisticated act of stylistic empathy, demanding intimate familiarity with Cesti's harmonic language, vocal profiles and sense of theatrical pacing.

The presence of Accademia Bizantina, one of Europe's finest period ensembles, promises a sonorous fabric of rare refinement, capable of tracing the work's long arc from Olympian splendour to the more intimate inflections of individual arias and ensembles. Dantone's own remark that *Il pomo d'oro* was "regarded as the greatest operatic spectacle of its age" is here less boast than challenge: his reconstruction must not only fill in the gaps, but make us forget that they were ever there.

Equally striking is the production's commitment to Cesti's original sense of visual excess. Magnificence, extravagance and "spectacular stage effects" are not treated as mere historical trivia; they become the central aesthetic axis around which Fabio Ceresa's staging appears to turn. The mythological frame – the Judgement of Paris and the fatal golden apple, the Olympian gods at their most capricious – offers Ceresa endless possibilities for irony and theatrical play, and the press text pointedly notes that the divine world will be "as magnificent as it is unexpectedly humorous."

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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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That sense of playful grandeur is underpinned by the visual team: Nikolaus Webern's sets and Giuseppe Palella's costumes, the latter designed by an artist recently named "Costume Designer of the Year" by Opernwelt, promise a richly textured world in which Baroque opulence is filtered through contemporary stagecraft. The inclusion of two dance companies, Street Motion Studio and Associazione Culturale Fattoria Vittadini, suggests that movement will be treated not as decorative interlude but as integral dramaturgical layer, echoing the centrality of ballet de cour and dance spectacle in 17th-century opera.

Vocally, the project honours the composer's legacy in a particularly elegant way by drawing on prizewinners of the International Cesti Competition, which bears his name. Singers such as Shira Patchornik, Sophie Rennert and Giacomo Nanni embody a generation of specialists for whom Cesti's idiom is not exotic territory but home ground, and their presence ensures that the work's coloratura, declamation and affective nuance will be shaped by voices already tested in this repertoire. With some twenty soloists, choir and dancers on stage, Il pomo d'oro becomes a living showcase of the festival's long-standing commitment to nurturing young talent and integrating it into major productions, rather than segregating it in "studio" projects.

Finally, the choice of Il pomo d'oro is deeply resonant in Innsbruck itself. Cesti's ties to the Habsburg court in Innsbruck, where he served as Kapellmeister before his Vienna years, reconnect the festival to the city's own operatic DNA; the 1668 wedding festivities of Leopold I and Margarita Teresa, for which Il pomo d'oro was composed, now find an echo in the jubilee of a festival that has become one of the world's defining platforms for historically informed performance. By embedding this colossal revival within a broader programme of concerts, further opera productions and the International Cesti Competition – including a Barockoper.

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

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Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
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