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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

La Cage aux Folles

Seefestspiele Mörbisch, Seebühne, 16.08.2026 [ENA]

Some musicals were made for indoor jewel-boxes. And then there is La Cage aux Folles, which — as the Seefestspiele Mörbisch have gloriously proved this summer — was in fact secretly waiting all these years for a lake, a reed belt, a Burgenland sunset, and a floating stage the size of a small Riviera boulevard under general director Alfons Haider, who also steps into the sequined shoes of Albin/Zaza.

Directed by Mörbisch veteran Andreas Gergen, this production is the rare open-air blockbuster that keeps its heart perfectly in tune with its glitter. The story, we know: Georges runs Saint-Tropez's most extravagant travesty club with his life-partner Albin — the incomparable Zaza — until Georges's son Jean-Michel announces his engagement to Anne, whose father happens to be the country's most starched conservative politician. What follows is that unbeatable Jerry Herman / Harvey Fierstein cocktail: a farce that is really a love letter, wrapped around one of the great humanist anthems of the modern musical, "I Am What I Am".

And oh, the stage. Set designer Walter Vogelweider, Mörbisch's house magician, has built what he calls "a great revue-cosmos", and the description is exact. A 60-metre-wide staircase landscape spans the full breadth of the Seebühne, threaded with more than a kilometre of running LED lights that pulse, chase and shimmer around the ensemble like a chorus line all their own. The steps become a permanent site of appearance — "a place of arrival, of showing oneself, of self-assertion", as Vogelweider has put it — and Gergen uses them exactly that way: every Cagelle entrance is a small coronation.

Beyond the staircase, the Cote d'Azur is conjured with a beautifully worn Mediterranean palette, the reed belt of the Neusiedler See becoming, in the late Burgenland twilight, an unexpectedly perfect Riviera hinterland. When Zaza descends the staircase for the Act I finale, the whole lake seems to lean in. The costumes, by Armella Müller von Blon, are the second star of the evening. She dresses 38 Cagelles from 12 nations — the largest ensemble the piece has ever seen — in a sequence of tableaux that never repeats itself: acid-bright feathered fantasias, jet-beaded flapper silhouettes, pastel tulle grand siècle, silver lamé jumpsuits with plumed headdresses tall enough to be seen from the far shore.

Zaza's gowns are a masterclass in stage couture, cut for both descent-of-the-staircase drama and the small, tender moments of "I Am What I Am": the gloves come off, the wig loosens, and suddenly a single figure in beaded black holds the entire lake. That the costumes remain crisp under a Pannonian August evening — and read cleanly from row thirty as well as row three — is a testament to von Blon's discipline as much as

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her flamboyance.

The performances match the surroundings. Alfons Haider is a Zaza of enormous warmth and impeccable comic timing, alternating with the internationally seasoned Drew Sarich, whose celebrated Volksoper interpretation now finds full open-air scale here. Mark Seibert's Georges is a beautifully sung, tenderly played anchor — his "Song on the Sand" with Zaza is the emotional pivot of the evening. Around them, Timotheus Hollweg and Anna Rosa Döller bring a fresh, unforced sweetness to Jean-Michel and Anne, Ines Hengl-Pirker and Mathias Schlung deliver the Dindons with real comic sting, and Aliosha Jorge Ungur's Jacob steals every scene he sets foot in.

Musical director Tom Bitterlich keeps Herman's score buoyant and glossy without ever losing the ballads' aching centre, and choreographer Faye Heather Anderson turns the LED-lit staircase into a full-throttle revue machine. By the time the company assembled on the summit of that shimmering staircase for the final chorus, four thousand people were on their feet in the warm lake air. Ein Käfig voller Narren in Mörbisch is that increasingly rare thing: a big open-air spectacle that is also a small, generous, unmistakably tender piece of theatre. Running through 22 August 2026 — and, on this evidence, entirely worth crossing a country for.

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