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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Horrible Habsburger

Theater in Bunker, 16.08.2026 [ENA]

With Horrible Habsburger! Theater zum Fürchten transforms the former air-raid tunnels of Mödling into one of Austria's most imaginative and exhilarating theatrical environments. This is not conventional theatre, nor does it pretend to be. Instead of taking a seat and observing a story unfold at a safe distance, the audience enters the dark, cool labyrinth of the bunker and becomes part of a moving historical fantasie

Every corridor, doorway and unexpected turn creates the anticipation of a new encounter with the strange, scandalous and often astonishing history of the House of Habsburg. Bruno Max, responsible for concept, text and direction, has created a piece that combines historical material, grotesque humour, cabaret-like exaggeration and immersive theatre with remarkable confidence. The title promises "six hundred years of sex, crime and Kaiserschmarrn," and the production delivers exactly that: a wildly entertaining procession of monarchs, archduchesses, eccentrics, outsiders and political figures who are stripped of their marble-pedestal dignity and revealed in all their vanity, absurdity and human weakness.

The bunker is much more than a location. It is the production's most powerful performer. Its narrow passages, low ceilings and raw concrete surfaces generate a sense of claustrophobia and curiosity, while its historical weight adds an unsettling undertone to the comedy. The contrast is central to the evening's effect: the glitter of imperial costume, the pomp of court ritual and the exaggerated mannerisms of royalty collide with a setting that is severe, cold and unmistakably real. The result is theatrical irony at its finest. The former imperial family, accustomed to palaces and ceremonial magnificence, has been relocated to an underground world where its myths can be dismantled with laughter.

The station-theatre format is especially well suited to this subject. Small groups of spectators move through the tunnels at regular intervals, encountering a sequence of short scenes rather than a single continuous narrative. This structure reflects the fragmented, sprawling history of the Habsburg dynasty itself. One moment, the audience meets a ruler caught in a ridiculous scandal; the next, it is confronted with dynastic ambition, erotic obsession, historical violence or political self-deception. The episodes are concise, sharply drawn and often hilarious, but they accumulate into a surprisingly rich portrait of a family whose influence shaped Central Europe for centuries.

The performances are the evening's beating heart. The ensemble approaches the material with fearless comic precision and enormous physical commitment. Actors must work at very close range, often only a

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few steps away from their audience, where every look, pause and gesture becomes visible. They respond brilliantly to this challenge, shifting swiftly between caricature and character, broad farce and genuine pathos. Their timing is exact, their energy infectious and their pleasure in theatrical transformation unmistakable.

The production never asks us to admire the Habsburgs uncritically. Rather, it invites us to examine the curious mixture of grandeur and grotesquerie that surrounds the dynasty. Its rulers appear not as distant symbols of a vanished empire, but as flawed people shaped by desire, ambition, fear and self-delusion. The satire can be outrageous, yet it is never merely superficial. Beneath the laughter lies a perceptive reflection on inherited power, public image and the persistent temptation to turn history into nostalgia.

Costumes, music and visual details enhance the sense of excess and historical playfulness. Period references are constantly interrupted by contemporary theatrical wit, ensuring that the evening remains unpredictable. The atmosphere alternates between carnival, haunted house, historical revue and political satire. It is this refusal to fit into a single genre that makes *Horrible Habsburger!* so memorable.

Ultimately, this is theatre that must be experienced physically as well as intellectually. One walks through it, laughs inside it and gradually becomes aware that the bunker's darkness gives the familiar imperial past a new, unsettling resonance. Theater zum Fürchten has created a brilliant, eccentric and richly entertaining production.

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