

# ARTS TALK

## *International*

Number 2

Summer 2024



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For the second edition of *International* we are at locations as far apart as Bruges and Beijing. We have reviews of two major opera productions - *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in Vienna and we talk to the director of *Tosca* in Munich. We have a profile of a Scottish clown who is equally at home in the circus ring or playing Shakespeare. It's 150 years since the first impressionists showed their work and we have a report from Paris on an exhibition to celebrate the fact. Nadya Tolokonnikova, of the notorious Russian feminist/anarchist group Pussy Riot, is exhibiting in Austria and we visit the excellent Ludwig Museum in Koblenz.

There's a wonderful new book on Bruges and we report on a festival in China.

Michael HASTED  
Publisher & Editor

### Contributors

Yannik EISENAECHER  
Wendy FOSSEN  
Astrid BURCHARDT

### Photographers

Thousand Word Media  
Michael PÖHN  
Wilfried HOESL  
Santiago Imkorpo PAGNOTTA

### Cover

Works by Nadya Tolokonnikova of Pussy Riot can be seen at OK in Linz

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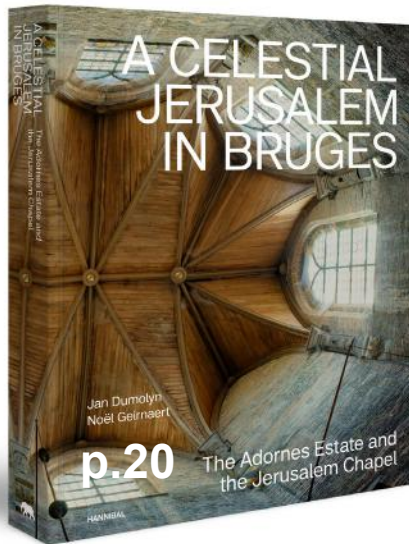
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The 798 Festival in Beijing

*Koblenz*

The  
**LUDWIG MUSEUM**  
in the Deutschherrenhaus

Photos by Michael HASTED







Rafael Canogar  
*Toledo* 1960  
Oil & acrylic on canvas



Eduardo Chillida  
*Abesti Gogrra IV* 1959-1964  
Poplar wood

**L**udwig Museum im Deutschherrenhaus is located in Koblenz in the German state of Rhineland-Palatinate. Opened in 1992, this was the fifth of twelve museums in Germany opened by Peter and Irene Ludwig bearing the name Ludwig.

The museum is housed in the thirteenth

century Deutschherrenhaus between the Kaiser Wilhelm Monument and the Basilica of St. Kastor, two hundred meters from the Deutsches Eck, the confluence of the rivers Rhine and Moselle. The back of the giant Kaiser Wilhelm monument which stands there can be seen on the left on the previous page.





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Anne and Patrick Poirier's installation *Dépot de Mémoire et d'Oubli*, 1990 with Kaiser Wilhelm popping his head above the trees



*The Thumb* by César 1963



The Ludwig Museum exhibits French art, with an emphasis on the years after the Second World War, making it unique in Germany. The museum collection is on display on four floors and includes works, by among others, Pablo Picasso, Jean Dubuffet, Daniel Buren and Arman and Jean Tinguely.

In addition, sculpture can be seen outside in the adjacent Blumenhof, namely *The Thumb* by César along with Anne & Patrick Poirier's installation *Dépot de Mémoire et d'Oubli* □



Photo by Michael Hasted



*A clown for all seasons*

# TWEEDY

**Michael HASTED meets a Scottish clown equally  
at home in the circus ring or on stage playing  
Shakespeare or Samuel Beckett**





Tweedy is a very modern traditional clown. He is perhaps not yet a British national treasure, but is certainly rapidly becoming a regional one. He doesn't wear a lot of make-up and he doesn't wear big boots but he does have very baggy trousers and a quiff of luminous red hair, dazzling enough to brighten anyone's day. Some of his routines are very traditional, some are very modern. Pathos is often very much to the fore. 'I kind of see myself a bit like an old music hall, vaudeville type comic because, although I do circus, I don't do traditional clown type routines. I see myself more as theatre, or at least, variety. Having said that, one of my big influences was an old time clown called Grock who started in the circus but moved to music hall and became the highest paid artist of his time. That's the sort of clown I see myself as. There was always a big cross-over. Max Miller dressed almost like a clown with his outrageous suits and cut off trousers and Max Wall's act was almost pure clowning'.

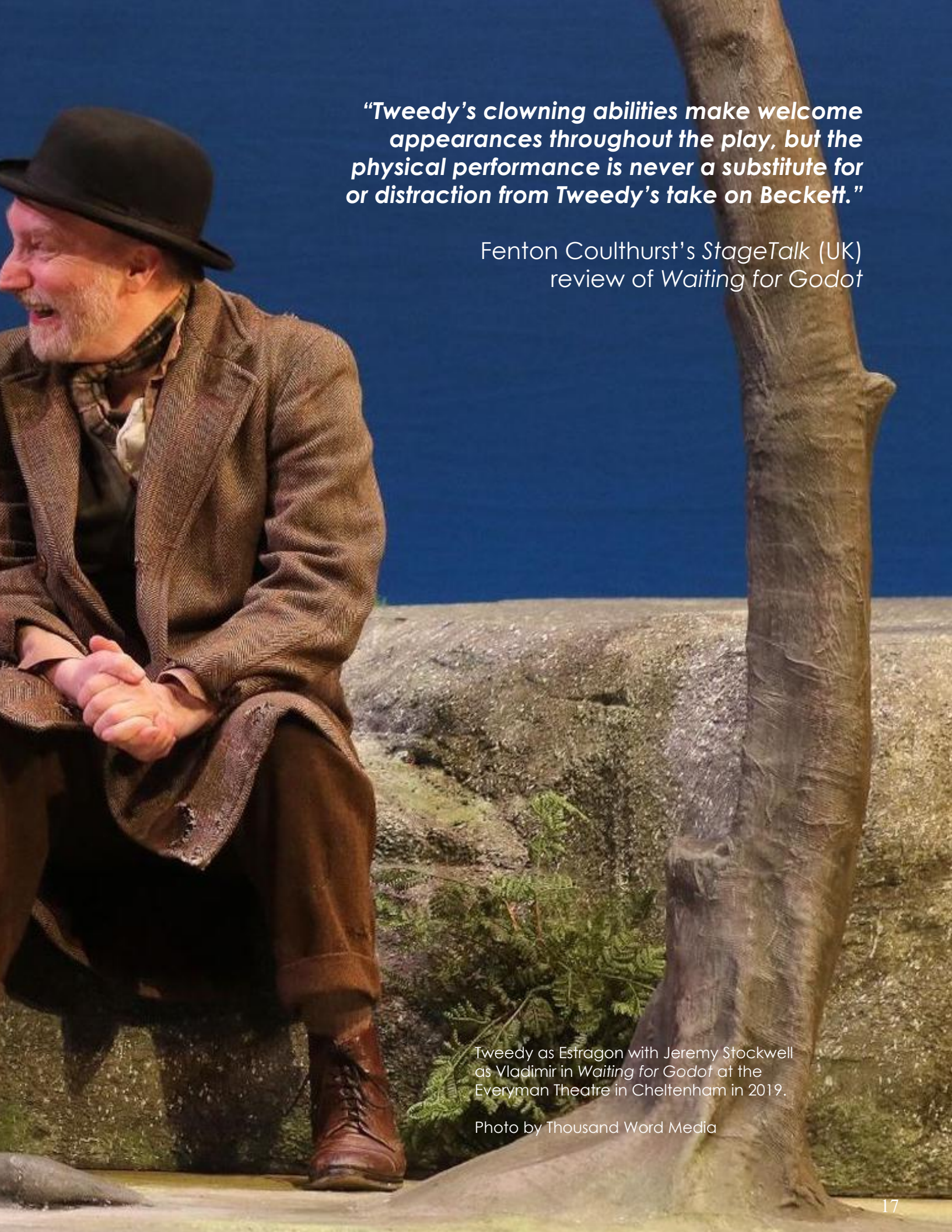
I first met Tweedy – real name Alan Digweed – in 2008 in a field in The Cotswolds in England. We were backstage at Gifford's Circus a few weeks before he was due to cross the Atlantic to take up a two year contract with the famous Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey's Circus.

We met up soon after his return and I asked how it went. 'America went very well; it was an incredible experience, ninety cities in two years. One of the best bits was that you live in and travel by train. Some of the long journeys were three days. Everything is on this train, lions, tigers, elephants, everything. It's over a mile long, all the sides are painted and everyone gets very excited when it passes through. We went up though the Rockies, along the coast, into the desert and to Las Vegas. All that was amazing

Tweedy as Fowle with Mark Hyde as Morganhall in *The Dock Brief* at the Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham in 2014. Photo by Michael Hasted







***“Tweedy’s clowning abilities make welcome appearances throughout the play, but the physical performance is never a substitute for or distraction from Tweedy’s take on Beckett.”***

Fenton Coulthurst's *StageTalk* (UK)  
review of *Waiting for Godot*

Tweedy as Estragon with Jeremy Stockwell as Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* at the Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham in 2019.

Photo by Thousand Word Media



A  
**MIDSOMMER**  
Nights Dreame.





but I didn't really like the show, it was just too big. You just get this vast performing space which is the arena floor. Some of the venues were ten or 15,000 seaters, it's very different to Giffords Circus in England where I usually work. Of course I had a mic but it was very difficult to reach the people on the back row – I mean difficult to connect with them, to have any rapport. I had to big everything up, it just wasn't for me really”.

Tweedy likes to have a rapport with his audiences, to see the whites of their eyes. For most of the time I have known him he has spent his summers with the small but perfectly formed Giffords Circus touring the south of England and his winters at the Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham in pantomime. His contribution was acknowledged by him being awarded a British Empire Medal in the King's New Year's Honours list of 2023 for services to circus and the community.

Giffords is perhaps his spiritual home - or at least it has been. This year he has launched his own small circus touring in the same sort of locations as Giffords and he has just finished playing Bottom in an Everyman tour of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Paul Milton.

This was Tweedy's third foray into straight theatre. He made his straight acting debut in 2014 in *The Dock Brief* which I produced and directed at the Everyman. We had talked about doing a play together for years and everything finally came together for the John Mortimer play which was a sell-out.

He played Estragon in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 2019, also directed at the Everyman by Paul Milton. In both *Godot* and *Dock Brief* he managed to stay within the confines of the fourth wall, giving fine, measured performances in each. In the *Dream* he was given his head and bits of Tweedy were certainly showing through. He is and always will be a clown and the straight roles are a bit of a diversion.

I asked him if he'd always wanted to be a clown. 'At one point I was wanted to go to art school to learn animation. I always had this thing that I wanted to create a character. Then in a flash it came to me that I could be the character and then I decided I wanted to be a clown. After the appearing in an Aberdeen pantomime I got a job at a Butlin's holiday camp and, while I was there, I was saving my money to go to the circus school in Bristol but it went bust that year. So I sent out a questionnaire to lots of clowns asking for advice. I got a reply from Zippo's circus saying the best way to learn was to join the circus and did I want a job. So I joined them, aged 19, doing publicity, going round the schools and all that. During my first week the main clown got stuck in traffic and I went on for him and that was it, they kept me on.' And he has been Tweedy ever since. 'The only people who don't call me Tweedy are my bank manager and other men in suits,' he laughs, 'and it's been like that for thirty years.' □

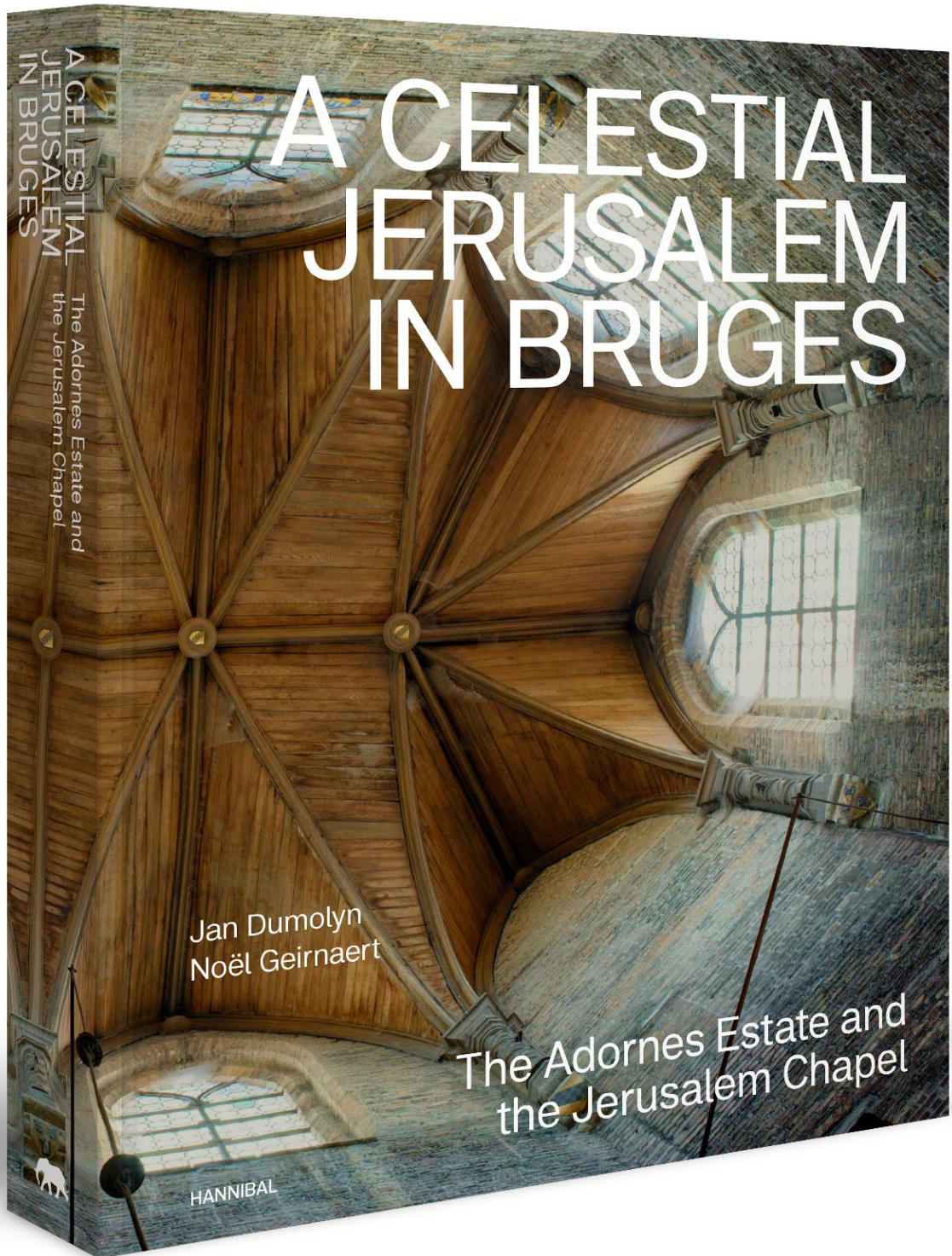
Tweedy as Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham in 2024.  
Photo by Thousand Word Media





**A CELESTIAL  
JERUSALEM**  
*in Bruges*

**A new book on the Adornes Domain  
and the Jerusalem Chapel in Bruges.  
Michael HASTED has been reading it**



# A CELESTIAL JERUSALEM IN BRUGES

A CELESTIAL  
JERUSALEM  
IN BRUGES

The Adornes Estate and  
the Jerusalem Chapel

Jan Dumolyn  
Noël Geirnaert

The Adornes Estate and  
the Jerusalem Chapel

HANNIBAL



The small town of Bruges, just a few kilometres from the Belgian coast, has for long time been one of Europe's tourist hotspots. Its cobbled streets and narrow alleys are full of visitors from all over the world studying their crumpled maps and taking selfies. There was a 1969 film called *If It's Tuesday It Must Be Belgium* about a group of American tourist on a trip around Europe in a bus. Well, now it's not just Americans and it's not only Tuesdays. Every day of the week finds so many tourists packed into the confined space it's difficult to imagine what they get out of their visit and what memories they take away – apart from the selfies.

However, there are havens of tranquillity where one can, hopefully, escape and be far from the madding crowd. While the Adorne Domain is certainly on most tourist itineraries, within its red brick walls is a place I didn't know about, that was, until I discovered *A Celestial Jerusalem in Bruges*, a beautiful, heavy-duty book packed with everything you want or need to know about this truly amazing place.

The tiny Jerusalem Chapel, a replica of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, was built as the place of worship by Anselm Adornes, founder of the current Adornes Domain, six hundred years ago. In 1428 Pieter II and Jacob Adornes started work on the Jerusalem Church. Anselm Adorne's pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1470 prompted him to continue and extend the building. Anselm, diplomat to the Duke of Burgundy and advisor to King James III of Scotland, was murdered in Linlithgow, though his heart was buried under the Jerusalem Chapel alongside that of his wife Margriet who had born him sixteen children.

There are strong connections with Scotland. The book contains photos of the private family rooms and, unless one has read the history, one is surprised to see a couple of sofas upholstered in seemingly incongruous blue tartan fabric.

The Adorne family's substantial properties were handed down over the centuries but have always remained in the hands of the Belgian aristocracy. It is now the property of the



The tiny Jerusalem Chapel, a replica of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, was built by Anselm Adornes . . .









*The magnificent photos show all aspects of the place from broad sweeping panoramas to up close and personal details of the chapel's wonderful artefacts and decorations . . .*



Counts Limburg Stirum who live in the mansion surrounded by alms houses, a beautiful garden and the wonderful Chapel but from 1680 to 1986 the Apostolian Sisters occupied the Domain and over the centuries installed a number of schools for poor girls, lacemaking workshops and later, the retirement homes for single women.

This mighty, three-hundred page tome contains everything you ever wanted to know and probably a lot more, about the Adorne Domain, the families and the Jerusalem Chapel with plans, maps and family trees and much more besides. The first 130-odd pages are taken up with dense text by a number of authors describing in great detail the story of the place and the people who lived there. And although that is fascinating and intriguing stuff, I'm sure, that for most people, it will be the photographs they turn to first. And magnificent photos they are too, showing all aspects of the place from broad sweeping panoramas to up close and personal details of the chapel's wonderful artefacts and decorations.

The final section of the book takes us through the last will and testament of Anselm Adornes, made in 1470, which offers fascinating reading, especially if you are able to decipher the original documents which are reproduced in fine detail. And, if all that is not enough for you, at the back of the book is a six page bibliography, listing roughly three hundred other works you can check out if you feel this one does not leave you satiated or you want to know even more.

*A Celestial Jerusalem in Bruges* is more than just the history of one building and one family in this small Belgian town. It encompasses six hundred years of European history and whether you have visited the domain or not, will provide a rare insight into ways of life which are often hidden away behind high brick walls and strong, forbidding gates.

Published by Hannibal Books in Belgium and edited by Jan Dumolyn and Noël Geirnaert, the 288pp *A Celestial Jerusalem in Bruges, The Adornes Estate and the Jerusalem Chapel* is available in English, Dutch and French as a hardback with dust jacket □





# **UNCOMPROMISINGLY POLITICAL**

**Malte Krasting in conversation with  
KORNÉL MUNDRUCZÓ, director of  
TOSCA at Bayerische Staatsoper in  
Munich**

**Production photos by Wilfried Hoesl  
Translation edited by Astrid Burchardt**





## **W**hat role does Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca* play in your perception?

There are two kinds of opera-goers: those who like this piece, and those who loathe it. I belong to the first category. *Tosca* has accompanied me since childhood, I heard the melodies in my early life. The work was an important entry to the art form of opera for me. For some, *Tosca* may be an end point that blocks the way to understand new music. For me, the opposite is the case: *Tosca* throws the doors wide open. The opera offers an immediate approach, both musically and theatrically – a crazy psychodrama on the highest emotional level. Whether Puccini has overshot the mark, yielding to a sentimental romance, is secondary – you'd have a pretty high horse attitude not to be touched by this piece. Puccini goes to the very end, always balances very close to the edge of the crash. Like Richard Wagner, whose *Lohengrin* we staged here two years ago, he works very manipulatively in his music. It is hard to avoid it. Wagner and Puccini fans are drawn in like addicts as if this music was a drug on which they become dependent. This may have less to do with the actions and productions, but with the music itself. In some respects, both Puccini and Wagner's works are also questionable. Puccini's subjects are rather uncomplicated, almost simplistic. Wagner's life and work on the other hand have many dubious features. But both have undoubtedly left behind works of indescribable beauty.

### **Like *Lohengrin*, *Tosca* combines historical events with invented actions. What is the dramatic core of the opera?**

The opera is based on the play *La Tosca* by Victorien Sardou which emerged from the French drama tradition. Puccini uses it to implement his own ideas of musical drama and enriches it with its own dramatic accents, in which his view of a contemporary and

promising theatre is reflected. Sardou's piece is awesome. I regret that it is not performed more often.

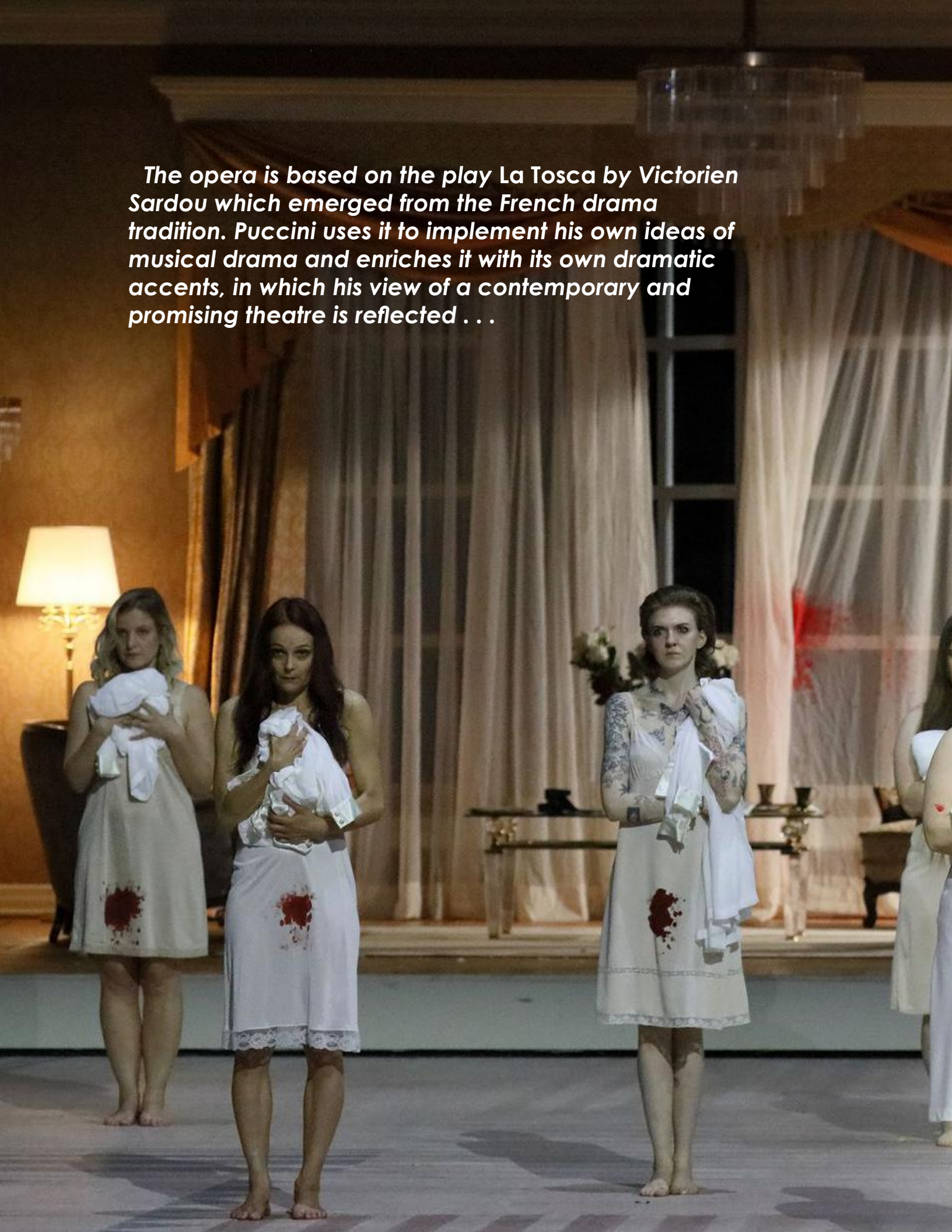
Puccini's opera undermined the dramatic action. This is rather a shame because *Tosca* is a phenomenal mix between a political statement and a comedy, a rare mixture – a combination of lightness and gloom, in the literature in other languages often separated. Here we have one of the best examples that French drama is capable of. With Sardou, you can learn a lot about the historical background of the story, which is only hinted at in the libretto.

His text reveals the brutal way in which the three spheres of the action collide: the oppression of a minority by the powerful regime, the revolt against it and *Tosca*, trapped in between, in love with the enemy of the regime, but forced to sing for the tyrannical Scarpia. One must not only look to the past. In our own time there are also countless examples of similar occurrences. In Europe and worldwide we are faced with the question of how we want to deal with artistic freedom. In this respect, to me, the significance of *Tosca* largely seems to be unrecognized, both as a spectacle and as an opera.

### **To what extent does your personal experience as an Hungarian artist play in there?**

The political dimension of the drama evokes many memories in me. The freedom and independence of art in Hungary has become an illusion, and all those who work there in this field must themselves take position. My answer to this is that, fortunately, I can work a lot abroad, and if I do something in Hungary I feel free to manage without Hungarian funding. For about five years now we have not received any state funds for our projects. We no longer apply for funding because even by the very act of trying threatens to poison one's own thinking. If one wants to succeed, one must take into account the mechanism behind

*The opera is based on the play La Tosca by Victorien Sardou which emerged from the French drama tradition. Puccini uses it to implement his own ideas of musical drama and enriches it with its own dramatic accents, in which his view of a contemporary and promising theatre is reflected . . .*







it. On paper, everything may seem free and EU-compliant, but the decisions are made by people who judge by other standards. Of course, there are many countries where the situation is still very different, such as in Russia, where the state intervenes much more in art.

### **How do you want to depict the opera's conflict?**

We were looking for a constellation to which today's audience could feel a direct connection in order to express the aforementioned problematic relationship. We found a great provocateur who was also a philosopher, poet and filmmaker who had a difficult relationship with his own time, contemporaries and to society around him, as well as with the political authorities - and who happened to be Italian: Pier Paolo Pasolini. He is our inspiration for Cavaradossi – a figure that is not easy to approach. By having radically reduced the text for opera, Puccini and his librettists remain largely in the dark - where Cavaradossi comes from, what moves him, in which political actions is he involved, what is his artistic greatness, what is his magical attraction to others? Specifically, for example: where did he encounter Angelotti? I wanted to find answers to these questions. Scarpia, on the other hand, is a comparatively uncomplicated phenomenon. There are men like him today – people in the sphere of power, such as some high-level bureaucrats who use their influence to fulfil their own dark desires. Such individuals easily come to mind. Many Toscas are also known: artists who are celebrated financed by the state, who are unhappy - some may even finally be destroyed by it. Countless such biographies have appeared in the 20th anniversary, especially from the time of dictatorships, including communism which I experienced as a child. However, an avant-garde art scene inevitably arises in countries under dictatorial regimes that create a revolutionary milieu. Under the oppression artists choose to be all the more

courageous, provocative, sometimes almost suicidal – because that is the task of art. I wanted to give Cavaradossi this impulse and make it clear that Tosca's heart and Tosca's existence are interwoven in it.

### **Both Tosca and Cavaradossi put their art at the service of state and ecclesiastical power.**

Although they are critical spirits, they live on money they get from the state. Since it pays the state assumes that it can also control what public funds are used for, but in this assumption it succumbs to an error. Firstly, the money does not belong to the state, but to the people. It comes from the taxpayers, and secondly, the population needs art to be critical.

We want to make this contradiction apparent in our interpretation. Making films is certainly a very expensive art form, not at all like writing poems or painting. Pasolini received public funding; the Italian state co-financed his films. And what does he do with this money? He makes the films *Mamma Roma*, *The Gospel of Matthew*, *Medea*, *Teorema* – a great provocation for the Church – and he films *Salò*, also known as *The 120 Days of Sodom*, one of the darkest visions since the Marquis de Sade, although De Sade had described the true nature of power in an almost philosophical way. This seemed to me a good starting point to combine the features of this deeply religious Christian tract and the visionary left-wing filmmaker with those of the republican painter Cavaradossi.

### **Pasolini was called a “Catholic-Marxist”**

Exactly! And his films still provoke, even if the Church has lost influence in the meantime. But the poor, for whom Christianity was once destined, still exist, left behind and humiliated. Pasolini's concern is therefore still current.

In addition, as if by coincidence of fate, there is Pasolini's totally unpredictable love for Maria Callas. They came from two completely different worlds and found each other against



all probability – just like Cavaradossi and Tosca. Callas and Pasolini get to know each other, spend a lot of time together, work together during the making of his film *Medea* and they almost become a couple.

The life of Callas, like that of Tosca, is characterized by a great sadness and by tragic loneliness. But the singer found consolation in Pasolini. For a while he drew her into his active, exuberant, dubious way of life and yet, he himself had to fight his many demons before to his own shocking end. I almost believe that Callas was inspired by Puccini's opera and believed that she finally found her Cavaradossi in Pasolini. He was supposed to free her from the Scarpias of her world, who paid and used her to bolster their own image. Who knows! Her life has so many astonishing similarities with the opera's character.

We want to discover this parallel and sketch out its place in the political love triangle between Scarpia, Cavaradossi and Tosca. Of course, this is only a starting point, the performance should not be a biopic. But the Italian analogy





felt coherent and the 1970s seem an apposite period in which to set our production. Italy at that time was very conservative, divorce was prohibited until 1970 and was only allowed against the Vatican's opposition. The political atmosphere after the end of World War II was similar to that in the late 19th century. At that time – that is, at the time of the opera's creation – there were anarchist groups that may even have wanted to thwart the premiere of Tosca with a bomb threat.

Later, the heirs of the partisans who had fought against Mussolini turned to the Brigade Rosse, who took a grip on Italian society of the 1970. There is speculation as to whether

Pasolini had links to the Red Brigade and the precise cause of his death is still unknown.

**The performance begins with the filming of a scene from Pasolini's film *Salò*. To what extent did that influence the production?**

*Salò*, Pasolini's last film from 1975, still provokes today and is still difficult to watch, despite the fact that it is already fifty years old. It is his very personal view of the dark future – one of the strongest films about the World War II and Fascism and National Socialism. No other film comes so close to the problem and explains as completely that this ideology was, at its



base, sadistic. The historically real republic of Salò becomes an imaginary success of the Nazis. Instead of serving the cliché of the stupid Nazis as personified devils, Pasolini demonstrates in a perverse power game how the representatives of fascism (with their four representatives from aristocracy, judiciary, politics and clergy) occupy and capture the freedom of others. The recourse to the writings of the Marquis de Sade was provocative, but conclusive. Pasolini does not present Nazis as screaming SS men, but as refined, perverse aesthetes. One might think that Puccini thought of such a figure when conceiving *Te Deum* at the end of the first act.

**Cavaradossi, alias Pasolini, is making a film about a character like Scarpia, who then, as a real person, interrupts the filming . .**

Very true. The figure of the film director is also an important factor in other respects. It can help to justify Tosca's exaggerated jealousy. In opera, this character trait, which she shows from the very first second, seems almost pathological and is difficult to understand – it is hardly conceivable that Cavaradossi would have given her cause for her suspicion. Sardou provides us with some pointers - Tosca's childhood and youth was spent in a nunnery, for example, but that is not mentioned in the libretto. In this way, we have been looking for another motivation for her jealousy - in the diametric spheres in which Tosca art and Cavaradossi's art develop, as well as their opposite view of society and politics. He lives in a different world to hers, and that frightens her.

The circle Callas moved in did not overlap with those of Pasolini. He expressed his ideological convictions through nudity, physicality and violence. Tosca's jealousy is not so much caused by other women, but by her subconscious fear of Cavaradossi's art. She realizes that he acts more freely than herself as an artist, and that is disconcerting to her. The fact that her lover cooperates with young people in great intimacy in his artistic avant-garde endeavour does not result from a personal desire. Nevertheless, everyone

can empathise with her anxiety about her lover. It may make Tosca more emotionally understandable. Of course, the environment of the film set, which is constantly chaotic, with countless people and backdrops and props involved were also attractive for those on the stage. The church associations, such as the triptych or the Madonna also occur: Like Callas, Pasolini was a believer and he constantly alluded to Christian motives in his films.

**From the beginning, abstractions also sneak into the seemingly realistic setting.**

In the context of the Salò villa, whose hall closely resembles the film decor and the real building, especially the torture chamber as the sphere of Scarpia, was to be more timeless and thus come closer to our present. This enables a disturbing, uncomfortable moment on the film set. Scarpia's room is a hypermodern glass space in which the torture scene takes place. It is a room in which violence evokes a kind of art. While power tries to restrict people's freedom, it creates a new freedom on this canvas - violence as the art of power.

**How much of it is in Puccini's music?**

Puccini has given his subsequent interpreters a hard nut to crack. It is always a balancing act between staying close to the template and breaking away from it. Puccini's music makes it particularly tricky to deviate from the scenic instructions of the text, because everything flows in the score. The many small motifs such as the fan and the knife cannot be changed – a modernist adaptation would not work. This often leads to a conservative approach that easily leads to a clichéd look. But I appreciate these factual conditions and have great pleasure in playing with them, with the specific costume, the devices and the characters' behaviour, everything that text and music tell us so clearly and helps to move us a little closer to our current reality of life. I hope that this is how I am able to convince the audience that *Tosca*, being so uncompromisingly political, is perhaps Puccini's most modern opera □

# PARIS 1874

## *Inventer l'Impressionisme*

**at Musée d'Orsay in Paris runs until 14th July.  
ArtsTalk's Wendy FOSSEN went to see it.**

**O**n 15th April 1874 at eight in the evening a miscellaneous group of artists opened an exhibition of their works. They called themselves *La Société des Artistes Peintres, Sculpteurs et Graveurs*.

There was no jury, everyone could participate. That exhibition is considered to be the starting point of Impressionism and this year, the 150th anniversary, is celebrated with exhibitions around Paris and throughout the world.

The most important show is undoubtedly *Paris 1874. Inventer l'Impressionisme* at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. 130 paintings, sculptures and engravings illustrate this turning point in art history.

The best thing of this exhibition is that it gives you an impression of both aspects of the Paris art world in 1874: the *salon* of that year and a presentation of this new *Société*. It starts with the exact



Edgar Degas *Répétition d'un ballet sur la scène*, 1874. Musée d'Orsay Legs comte Isaac de Camondo, 1911. © Musée d'Orsay, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Patrice Schmidt

presentation of the paintings that were displayed at the regular *Salon* which shows the current, conservative taste. Frame against frame, and from plinth to ceiling you can admire the best works selected by the jury of the *Salon*. Painters like the Dutch Sir Laurens Alma Tadema participated in this *Salon* with a finely painted classical scene.

There are also portraits, historical and biblical scenes and sculptures all very acceptable at the time and of course painted and sculpted in the academic tradition.

After having seen this you realise how innovative these independent artists were, when you move to the next section. Here you see amongst others, the works of Morisot, Monet, Renoir and Degas, painters we now call Impressionists.



Claude Monet (1840-1926) *Impression, Soleil Levant*, 1872 Paris, Musée Marmottan Monet Don Eugène

The paintings show the new way of representing how these artists perceive the world around them. The most famous painting that illustrates this is *Impression Soleil Levant*, on loan from the Musée Marmottan-Monet. In a review by Louis Leroy of 25th April 1874 Monet's *Sunrise* was compared to wall paper and mockingly referred to as a mere impression. Thus the name of the new movement was born.

Musée d'Orsay has requested loans from all over the country which results



ne et Victorine Donop de Monchy (donateurs). © musée Marmottan Monet, Paris / Studio Baraja SLB

in showing pieces such as *Les Dindes* from the Louvre which was commissioned by Ernst Hoschedé from Monet to be installed in his country house. *Impression, Soleil Levant* which is normally at Musée Marmottan-Monet (but there is still enough reason to visit this museum) is now of course the eye-catcher of this exhibition. So before you make your holiday plans, be aware that Caillebotte's *Partie de Bateau* is not at Musée d'Arts de Nantes nor is *Le Balcon* of Eduard Manet at the museum in Bordeaux □

# GERMARD DREAMLAND

**Text by Yannik EISENAECHER**

**Photos © Vienna State Opera/Michael PÖHN**









## Wagner's DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG at Vienna Staatsoper

The Vienna State Opera has once again assembled an ensemble of the most distinguished singing actors of today to front a core work of the operatic repertoire: Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. A five hour long German parable on German art and being very German, and finishing off with a whopping two-hour third act and a rousing C-major finale, extra trumpets screaming arpeggios from the rooftops included. Director Keith Warner hammers it home by having the chorus hold up the covers of legendary German works of literature, Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* and Goethe's *Faust* among them. I wonder what Mann would have made of that.

Georg Zeppenfeld leads the ensemble as the eminent Hans Sachs of our time. His voice is an interesting case: Settled exactly between the two Sachs-traditions of heavy-voiced basses with heroic ambitions (think Josef Greindl or Robert Holl) and the genuine heroic baritones (Bernd Weigl or Michael Volle), Zeppenfeld really sings a Sachs of his own Fach. His voice has the low, authoritative timbre of a bass, paired with the lightness and flexibility of a baritone. Add to that that the likely best German pronunciation of any singer on the Wagner circuit, and the five hours of Sachs (longest male opera role in the repertoire!) fly by. Zeppenfeld paces himself through the role and he doesn't have the biggest comedic chops. You won't laugh along with his Sachs, but rest assured you might cry.

Alongside Zeppenfeld are Günther Groissböck as Pogner and Hanna Elisabeth

Müller as Eva. Pogner is simply an ideal fit for Groissböck's high bass voice, and his boisterous portrayal of the slightly over-eager Goldsmith who puts his daughter up as the prize in a singing competition is second to none. He doesn't take the role too seriously, but also never descends into caricature. Hanna Elisabeth Müller uses her crystal-clear voice to amazing effect as Eva, cementing her status as surely the most sought-after lyric soprano of our day. At times she alternates spoken and sung phrases, moulding a full-bodied operatic portrayal. She doesn't just sing the role and she in no way sinks into the background of the performance like other Evas do.

Rounding out the ensemble in above-average, reliable performances are Martin Gantner as the most amusing Beckmesser on the circuit right now. Gantner has sung this role so many times that he even puts in little extra syllables here and there, or leaves a pause to accentuate the iconic timing. David Butt Philip braves the demanding role of Stolzing – a long role right on the edge between lyric-dramatic and Heldentenor, which leaves many tenors grappling for what's left of their voice in the prize song. No such weaknesses for Butt Philip, whose acting will become more convincing and involved when he's sung this role more often.

Philippe Jordan leads the iconic Orchestra of the Vienna State Opera in the pit. The first act of *Meistersinger* is musically the trickiest – so many tempo changes, zippy exchanges between the singers, chamber-music-like interactions, transcended by a sheen of



lightness that is so difficult to pull off. Here, the first act does go wrong. Jordan conducts from memory (bad idea here) and doesn't have the orchestra as close at his fingertips as this music demands. In acts two and three, the orchestral performance is more settled as the qualities of the orchestra (exquisite string sound and flexibility) come to shine. Still, having heard Christian Thielemann, you are left wishing for a conductor who serves the piece and the singers more, rather than boisterously letting the orchestra off the leash.

Finally, any words on Keith Warner's production? It takes the road of many Regietheater-Meistersingers: While placing a moderate concept on the story (in this case, the opera is one long dream of Hans Sachs that also confronts him with the trauma of losing his wife), the overall aesthetic is kept fairly old-fashioned, but also unwilling to serve the detail and exquisite sets and costumes of the likes of Otto Schenk's old Vienna production. Boris Kudlicka's set remains in muted blues, the use of projected images (during Stolzing's first song) is not expanded upon to great effect. Kasper Glarner's costumes are colourful, but in no way gripping. It's nothing half and nothing whole, as an old German saying goes. And therefore also undeserving of any further comment.

We are left with a performance that accentuates the strengths of the Vienna State Opera: An exquisite orchestra, and the pull to bring in the most sought-after singers of the day to sing in visually pleasing productions, that still manage to leave you wanting compared to the stellar international standout performances one finds in Dresden or Bayreuth □



# Pussy Riot's

## Nadya Tolokonnikova at OK Linz

Nadya Tolokonnikova, founder of the feminist collective Pussy Riot, has long been persecuted in Russia for her conceptual performances and artistic protest against the Putin regime. Her performance *Punk Prayer* in the Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow, recognized by *The Guardian* in the UK as one of the most important artworks of the twenty-first century, ended for her and her colleagues with imprisonment for “hooliganism motivated by religious hatred.”

OK LINZ is bringing Nadya Tolokonnikova's art, curated by Michaela Seiser and Julia Staudach to the museum, presenting her haunting works dealing with resistance, repression, and patriarchy for the first time to the European public.

Tolokonnikova's oeuvre encompasses objects, installations and performance-based works in which she processes her traumatic experiences during her life under Putin. Out of a state of repression she has developed a visual language that rebels against aesthetical and political realities: anarchic and radical yet also moving and witty.







Photo by Santiago Imkorpo Pagnotta

*“The most radical act of rebellion today is to relearn how to dream and to fight for that dream.” - Nadya Tolokonnikova*

*Rage* is the name of Tolokonnikova's last video work filmed in Russia. The filming was raided by the police but the crew was able to steal just a few shots before everyone was arrested. In 2021 Alexei Navalny was arrested after coming back to Russia from Germany, where he was treated for being poisoned by the nerve agent Novichok. *Rage* was released a few days after Navalny's arrest in 2021: Pussy Riot called for the immediate release of Navalny and other political prisoners.

This exhibition will spotlight a selection of Situationist actions by Pussy Riot. At the center is Tolokonnikova's 2022 performance *Putin's Ashes* in which she joined forces with twelve women from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia who had experienced repression and aggression at the hands of the Russian president to burn a portrait of Vladimir Putin in a desert, collecting the ashes in small bottles.

*Pick Your Poison* is the inviting title of a series of candy machines in tempting colours in the exhibition room. Not only is poison the Russian regime's tool of choice to get rid of enemies, "choose your poison" in English also means choosing between two bad solutions. Sculptures made from used sex dolls embody the Pussy Riot characters with their typical colourful balaclavas. They stand for the global network of resistance that Pussy Riot has become today.

"This art is a weapon," says Tolokonnikova of her works, analyzing and exploring in this way

the role that her art and she herself can play in the context of international power structures.

"Being from Russia brings me pain. Most of my life, even after two years imprisonment following my art protest, I chose to stay in Russia, even though I had plenty of opportunities to immigrate, I tried to change Russia, make it a country that I would be proud of - peaceful, prosperous, friendly, democratic, loving, a country that values human life, art and happiness. First with Voina Group, later with Pussy Riot, I've been in performance art since 2007, for 17 long years - years filled with joy of protest and comradeship, harassment, arrests. I watched my friends being murdered and revolutions suffocating under Putin's boot."  
Nadya Tolokonnikova

Tolokonnikova's *Putin's Ashes* art installation at Deitch Gallery in January 2023 propelled her into a new criminal case and put her on said most wanted criminal list. The exhibition travelled to America where it was shown at [CONTAINER] Gallery in Santa Fe and at Dallas Contemporary as well as visiting museums around the world. In her inspiring TED Talk she tells the story of her imprisonment and shares what motivates her resistance; delivering a powerful message to Putin himself □

Nadya Tolokonnikova/Pussy Riot's *Rage* continues at OK Linz until 20th October





# 798

**A two month art festival in Beijing**





家王光  
红磷'系  
互动性的  
视觉设计'

性与互动  
艺术家采  
用秩序感

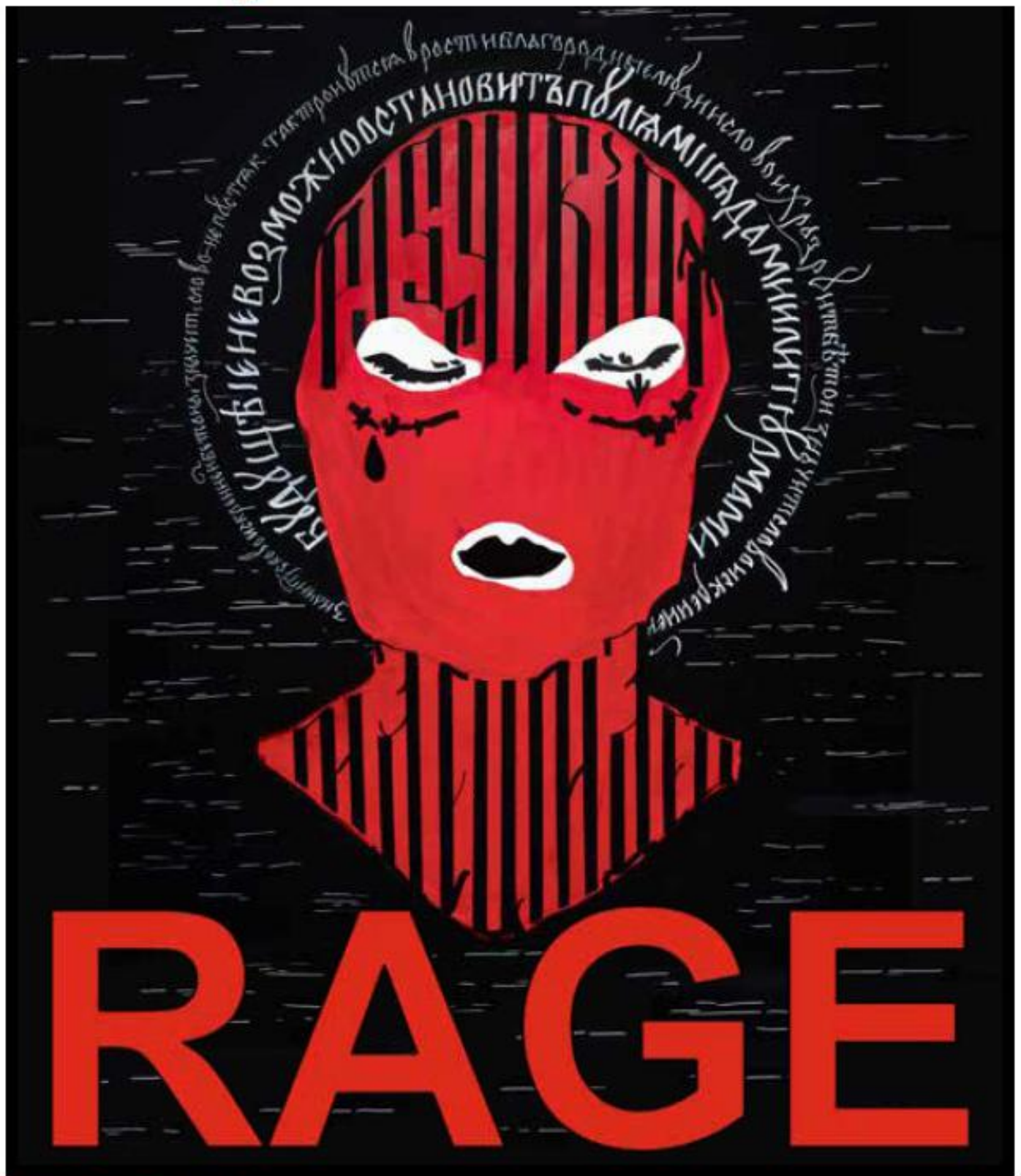
Every year from May to June, Beijing transforms into a vibrant hub of artistic activities, boasting the highest art density of the year. In addition to the major art fairs, numerous art organizations also present their finest exhibitions to audiences worldwide. Up to 90 exhibitions are held simultaneously in the 798 Art District during the Beijing Art Season.

The art season is also remarked by the official opening of 798 artworks, the first official cultural and creative space operated by 798 Art District. Under the title *Sparking*, the space collaborates with international artist Wang Guangle for its debut exhibition, launching a limited edition of collectible artworks titled the *Red Phosphorus* series. In the future, 798 artworks aims to work with top art museums and pioneering creators globally to explore creative energies and connect with infinite possibilities.

The 8th Gallery Weekend Beijing, which opened on May 24th and runs until August, finalizes *Drift to Return* as this year's theme to reflect the coexistence of local art scenes and global art influences. Gallery Weekend Beijing features a Main Sector showcasing 798 local galleries and institutions, a Visiting Sector, and *The Inner Side of the Wind*, an Up & Coming Sector which taps into how young Chinese artists reflect and express the interplay between global culture and China's local identity under the theme, revealing the vitality and distinctive features of their art ecosystem. Additionally, the public unit *Poetry Marathon*, co-curated by international artist Qiu Zhijie and Gallery Weekend Beijing ran alongside the 2024 Paris Olympics, tapping into the shared humanistic values of sports, culture, and art in the Olympic ethos.

Concurrently, 798CUBE presents *Elliptical Dipole: Visceral Particles Sorcerous Flows*, the first large-scale solo exhibition of international artist Yunchul Kim in China and his largest solo exhibition to date. This exhibition visualizes Kim's interpretation of the universe, life, and culture. Visitors will be immersed in the fusion of technology and art, entering the material world of the artist's imagination and resonating with the boundless universe □

# Nadya Tolokonnikova | Pussy Riot



06.21.-  
10.20.2024

● OK  
●: Linz