

Mgr. SILVIA HRONCOVÁ
Director of Opera

***Faszination Wagner*, a remarkable project combining opera and film, will receive its world premiere in Prague. Andreas Schager, one of the most acclaimed contemporary Heldentenors, will perform at the Forum Karlín.**

Prague, 4 October 2018

On 25 October, the National Theatre in Prague will host the world premiere of the unique *Faszination Wagner* project. Following the first night, at the Forum Karlín, it will be presented in other cities in Europe. The project, encompassing an opera performance and screening of a film, specially created for this occasion, may even be referred to as *revolutionary*. The evening features selected highlights from Richard Wagner's operas, which will be performed by the State Opera Orchestra, conducted by Matthias Fletzberger, and the stellar singer Andreas Schager, one of the most acclaimed contemporary Heldentenors.

The **State Opera Orchestra**, which is participating in a project of this kind for the very first time, will be led by the Austrian pianist and conductor **Matthias Fletzberger**, who said: "*Wagner's visions transcended the limits of music. His aim was to create a universal, comprehensive artwork, which would employ all the senses at the same time. Transformation of the content of live music to the form of film within the concert affords Wagner's work a new dimension.*" Along with **Andreas Schager**, his wife, the world-renowned violinist **Lidia Baich**, will appear as a soloist.

The entire concept of the project, including the film, was created by the German stage and film director, screenwriter and musicologist of Turkish descent **Selcuk Cara**, who started his artistic career as an opera singer. Today mainly working as a director and author, his autobiographical novel *Türke, aber trotzdem intelligent* (Turk, Yet Intelligent), dealing with the issues of the Holocaust, has become a Spiegel-bestseller. In his PhD thesis, he focused on Richard Wagner.

"Imagine you are dying, and in the final second of your life you see images of all the moments that have made you what you are; yet these images may also elucidate why you are dying – why you must die now. All that appears in a single flash, within a fragment of a second. My and your task is to transfer this moment on to the stage and emotionally communicate it to the audience," Selcuk Cara pointed out.

The star of the evening will be **Andreas Schager**, one of the most celebrated contemporary Heldentenors. The most recent triumphs of his career include the portrayal of Parsifal at the Bayreuther Festspiele 2018 under the baton of Semyon Bychkov and the performance of Tristan in the spring of 2018 at the Staatsoper Berlin, conducted by Daniel Barenboim. Schager's debut at

the BBC Proms in London in the role of Siegfried (*Götterdämmerung*, Staatskapelle Berlin/Daniel Barenboim) in 2013 was lauded by the critics as the “*sensation of the evening*”. Andreas Schager has garnered numerous accolades for his renditions of Wagner characters. Opera fans in Prague too have had the opportunity to admire his artistry – in November 2017, he performed at the Forum Karlín as Siegmund in a concert version of Act 1 of *Die Walküre* (State Opera Orchestra, conducted by Andreas Sebastian Weiser).

The compelling ***Faszination Wagner*** project, the fruit of collaboration of extraordinary artists and friends, will feature highlights from operas (*Rienzi*, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Der Rings des Nibelungen*) by Richard Wagner (1813–1883). The composer found inspiration for his monumental tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in Old German epic poems and Norse sagas, depicting battles between gods, demigods, as well as ordinary mortals, striving to take possession of the magic ring that gives its wearer absolute power. Three generations of heroes get embroiled in scheming and live complex dramatic lives, before ultimately suffering destruction in the cycle’s final instalment, *Götterdämmerung*. It takes 14 and a half hours to perform the entire *Ring* tetralogy! *Faszination Wagner* only lasts two hours and fifteen minutes, yet the audience can look forward to a truly spectacular evening. The passages selected from the tetralogy are primarily focused on fateful family relationships – of Wotan, the King of Gods, with his son Siegmund and grandson Siegfried, both of whom will be splendidly portrayed by Andreas Schager. The music performance will be accompanied by a film, specially made for this project.

“*The film is actually a commentary that reveals Siegfried’s inner world through associative pictures and sequences...*”, said its director **Selcuk Cara**, who also focused on Wagner’s cycle in his doctoral thesis, titled *Der Ring des Nibelungen: Disintegration of family structures as a dramatic device in Richard Wagner’s tetralogy*. The first half of the evening will feature the orchestral introduction to Act 5 of the opera *Rienzi* and the Roman Tribune Cola Rienzi’s prayer “Allmächt’ger Vater”, to be sung by Andreas Schager, followed by *Tristan und Isolde – Symphonic Variations for Violin and Orchestra*, arranged by Matthias Fletzberger. Appearing as the soloist will be the superlative young Austrian violinist Lidia Baich, who too has performed in Prague previously, playing Alban Berg’s *Violin Concerto* within the aforementioned concert in 2017.

Combining Wagner’s subtle music and astounding images, the evening will undoubtedly be an unforgettable experience.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Andreas Schager (Guest of the Opera)

The Austrian singer Andreas Schager has been lauded as one of the most exciting and internationally acclaimed Heldentenors. His debut at the BBC Proms, in the role of Siegfried in Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* (with the Staatskapelle Berlin, conducted by Daniel Barenboim, 2013), was referred to by a critic as the "sensation of the evening". Similarly praised were his portrayals of Siegmund – "Schager struck us like a bomb" (Siegmund in *Die Walküre*, Baden-Baden, 10. 7. 2016; Opernschnipsel) – and Siegfried – "One of the best Siegfrieds" (Maifestspiele Wiesbaden, 26. 5. 2017, Der neue Merker). In 2018, he gave his third account of Parsifal at the Bayreuther Festspiele in Uwe Eric Laufenberg's production (conducted by Semyon Bychkov): "In the title role, Austrian tenor Andreas Schager was in strong command, making the transformation from unbounded spirited youth to spiritual-like leader with a robust and golden voice that communicated the text with ample nuance." (Paul Selar, 1. 8. 2018, limeghtmagazine.com). Andreas Schager studied at the Universität für Musik Wien. While still a student, he made his operatic debut as Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* at the Schlosstheater Schönbrunn. In 2009, he made his highly regarded debut at the Tiroler Festspiele Erl as David in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. It was a very significant step in his career, moving to a more dramatic repertoire, which includes the roles of Florestan (*Fidelio*), Max (*Der Freischütz*), Rienzi, Tristan (*Tristan und Isolde*) and Siegfried (*Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*). Andreas Schager has appeared at the Deutsche Oper and Staatsoper Berlin, Teatro Real Madrid, Staatsoper Hamburg, Teatro dell'Opera Rome and Teatro alla Scala Milan, on stages in Toronto, Cleveland, New York and elsewhere. The most recent highlights on the opera stage include Tristan, Florestan, Parsifal, Siegfried (*Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*) at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden Berlin under Daniel Barenboim, Siegfried (*Götterdämmerung*) at Dresden's Semperoper under Christian Thielemann, Tannhäuser at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Apollo (*Daphne*) at the Wiener Staatsoper under Simone Young, as well as Max (*Der Freischütz*) under Tomáš Netopil, and the title role in *Parsifal* at the Bayreuther Festspiele 2016, 2017 and 2018, at the Staatsoper Hamburg, and at the Opéra Bastille. Schager's engagements in the 2018/19 season include appearances in the role of Tristan at the Opéra national de Paris (conducted by Philippe Jordan) and the Staatsoper Berlin (conducted by Daniel Barenboim), as Lohengrin at the Wiener Staatsoper (conducted by Simone Young), Siegfried (*Der Ring*) at the Staatsoper Hamburg (conducted by Kent Nagano) and Apollo (*Daphne*) at the Oper Frankfurt (conducted by Sebastian Weigle). He will return as Parsifal to the Bayreuther Festspiele 2019. In April 2019, he is scheduled to give his debut at the Metropolitan Opera, where he will sing the role of Siegfried in Robert Lepage's renowned production of *Der Ring* (revivals on 13 and 27 April, under the baton of Philippe Jordan). In the meantime, on 22 and 24 February 2019, Andreas Schager will perform as Lohengrin at the National Theatre in Prague.

Lidia Baich (Guest of the Opera)

Lidia Baich is regarded as one of the most fascinating violinists of the young generation. The Austrian who was born in St. Petersburg received her first violin lesson from her grand-father when she was just 4 years old. She then went on to study with Boris Kuschmir in Vienna. Aged eight she won her first international competition, at the age of 18, her outstanding musical performance earned her the first place in the 1998 Grand Prix d'Eurovision and the title „European Musician of the year“. Concert tours have taken Lidia Baich to Japan, China, Russia, Britain USA, Korea, South Africa, Argentina and Brazil. She plays recitals as well as a soloist with the world's top orchestras (the New York Philharmonic, St. Petersburg Philharmonic, Tokyo Philharmonic, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Malaysia Philharmonic, the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Nationale de France a.o.) and conductors (Lorin Maazel, Vladimir Fedoseyev, Yuri Temirkanov, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Bertrand de Billy a.o.). She is also a passionate chamber musician and has performed at many festivals including the Wiener Festwochen and Salzburger Festspiele. Her discography includes CD with Violin Concertos by Mendelssohn and Prokofiev with the RSO-Orchestra Vienna/Bertrand de Billy (Deutsche Grammophon 2008), and two recordings with pianist Matthias Fletzberger: CD/DVD *Violin in Motion* (Deutsche Grammophon 2011) a CD with Violin Sonatas by Richard Strauss and Joseph Marx (label Preiser 2014). Since 2014 she has been also teaching at the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien. Another concern of Lidia is the promotion of young talents; she presents young musicians, holds master classes, plays special concerts for children and also serves as a jury member at prestigious violin competitions such as the Eurovision- or the Menuhin Competition. Lidia plays a violin made by Joseph Guarnerius del Gesù „ex Guillet“ in 1732, made available to her by courtesy of the Austrian National Bank.

Selcuk Cara (Guest of the Opera)

The German opera and film director, scriptwriter, author and singer (bass) Selcuk Cara first studied philosophy with Jürgen Habermas before beginning to explore his passion for opera. As an actor and graduated opera singer, he worked with Werner Schroeter, Frank Castorf, Stefan Ruzowitzky, Michael Hampe, Günter Krämer, Vincenzo Cerami and Roberto Ando. Upon the advice of Werner Schroeter, he began studying for an MA in scenography, focusing on film. Master classes and seminars with Vittorio Storaro, Vilmos Zsigmond, Gus Van Sant, Mike Figgis, Christopher Doyle and Dennis Hopper deepened his knowledge. With his second movie, *Hymns to the Night*, he was invited to eleven international film festivals, with his third film, *Lullaby*, he was invited to the Plus Camerimage International Film Festival, Poland, and the Delhi International Film Festival, India. Shortly after completing his fourth film, *My Last Concert*, he was invited to the Montreal World Film Festival, Canada, won numerous international film awards, including the Alaska International Film Award, USA, the TMFF Film Festival in 2016, UK (three categories: best movie, best screenwriter, best editor), the Phoenix Film Festival Award – *Best Human Rights* 2016, Australia, the Flickers Rhode Island International Film Festival (Grand Prize: cinematography), USA. *My Last Concert* received the rating “highly recommended” (Prädikat “besonders wertvoll”) and was named “film of the month” by German Film and Media Review (FBW) – film evaluation

board. Selcuk Cara was invited to the New York City International Film Festival, USA, the 36th Film Festival Max Ophüls Prize, Germany, was in the official selections of the UK Film Festival London and Michael Ballhaus *First Steps* festival, Germany. Selcuk Cara is the first Turkish-origin winner of the Yerevan International Film Festival, Armenia, and the first winner of the American Movie Awards 2017 (best cinematography), USA, and the North American Film Awards. In 2016, he published the autobiographical novel *Turk, Yet Intelligent*, which became a Spiegel-Bestseller. His novel is taken up in the Library "Gedenk- und Bildungsstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz" (Joseph Wulf Mediothek) and in the International Tracing Service ITS Library (one of the world's largest archives of the Holocaust, concentration camps, forced labour and displaced persons). His novel is now part of the UNESCO World Documentary Heritage. Selcuk Cara is a member of the BVR (German Directors Guild). In 2016, he was chosen as a member of the nomination jury of the most important German directors award, *Deutscher Regiepreis Metropolis*, and he was the director of the opening ceremony at the Brecht Festival 2017 with Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler's *Die Maßnahme*. In May 2017, he was granted the first scholarship by the Richard-Wagner-Verband Frankfurt am Main for his PhD dissertation on the subject of *Der Ring des Nibelungen: Disintegration of family structures as a dramatic device in Richard Wagner's tetralogy*. In 2019, Selcuk Cara will implement – as director, set designer and light designer – a unique project in which he unites an opus of the composer Chaya Czernowin, born in Israel, and *Weißer Rose* by the German composer Udo Zimmermann. This project will be shown in a number of opera houses in order to educate young people. A famous history researcher will supplement the project with information about the "Widerstand", the German anti-Nazi resistance (*Forschungsschwerpunkt Widerstandsgeschichte*).

Matthias Fletzberger (Guest of the Opera)

The Austrian pianist and conductor Matthias Fletzberger (born in Vienna) enrolled at the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien at the age of five. While still a student, attending the class of Hans Graf, he won major prizes at international piano competitions, including the Ferruccio Busoni (Bolzano 1984, Silver Medal), Arthur Rubinstein (Tel Aviv 1986, Gold Medal), and Bösendorfer (Vienna 1988, First Prize) competitions. Upon the recommendation of Rolf Liebermann and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Matthias Fletzberger started a second career as an opera conductor. He was an assistant conductor in Salzburg (*Le nozze di Figaro*, directed by Peter Ustinov and conducted by Gary Bertini), and worked as a conductor at the State Opera Prague (1991/92 season, *Die Fledermaus*), the Vienna Festival (1991, *Die Zauberflöte*; 1993, *La belle Hélène*) and as assistant conductor and assistant to the opera director at the Theater St. Gallen until 2000. After serving several years as general manager of the Sofiensäle, Vienna's oldest and largest venue for cultural events, he decided to return to the classical music scene. In 2009, he launched his comeback as a classical pianist with solo recitals and as a chamber music partner of the Austrian-Russian violinist Lidia Baich, as well as a conductor in concert and opera. In 2011, Deutsche Grammophon released the CD/DVD album *Violin in Motion*, featuring Lidia Baich and Matthias Fletzberger (arrangements of famous ballet music). Highly acclaimed too is

his work with singers, including Elīna Garanča, Thomas Hampson, Andreas Schager and Ramón Vargas. Recent engagements as a conductor include performances in the USA (Philadelphia, New York/Lincoln Center, Washington, Miami), Canada (Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver), China (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou), Japan (Tokyo Spring Festival) and Korea (Seoul Art Center, Daegu Opera House). In the 2018/19 and 2019/20 seasons, Matthias Fletzberger is scheduled to successively perform at the Seoul Arts Center all the music dramas that constitute Wagner's tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (directed by Achim Freyer).

BASIC INFORMATION

Faszination Wagner

25 and 26 October, 7 pm, Forum Karlín, Prague

Selcuk Cara – concept, direction, set and lighting design

Matthias Fletzberger – music exploration, conducting, arrangement

Andreas Schager – tenor

Lidia Baich – violin

State Opera Orchestra

Su Sigmund – costumes

PROGRAMME:

Highlights from Richard Wagner's works: *Rienzi*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*

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