

The State Opera reopens to the public following a record-short three-year reconstruction

A spectacular gala concert reopens the door to the State Opera following a three-year general reconstruction. Symbolically, on Sunday, 5 January 2020, exactly 132 years since its first inauguration in 1888, the overture to Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* will be first performed under the baton of **Karl-Heinz Steffens**, Music Director of the State Opera.

The gala concert, subtitled “**The State Opera: Transformations in Time (1888–2018)**”, reflects the most illustrious chapters in the remarkable history of the State Opera. The concert is staged by the renowned director **Alice Nellis**. The Czech dramatist **Pavel Kohout** will address the audience several times during the evening through a special on-stage installation while clearly mapping *historic milestones*. The evening's concept has been prepared by the dramaturges Jitka Slavíková and Ondřej Hučín who carefully selected arias, ensembles and overtures symbolising the seminal moments of the State Opera building's history – world and Czech premières, exceptional productions, celebrated singers, conductors and stage directors, guest appearances of renowned foreign opera houses – as well as Czech history in general.

Under the baton of Karl-Heinz Steffens, Music Director of the State Opera, the evening will feature distinguished soloists of the Opera of the National Theatre and the State Opera and other Czech and foreign guests, **including Pavel Černoč, Eva Urbanová, Kateřina Kněžíková** and the Slovak bass singer **Peter Mikuláš**. They will perform with **the State Opera Orchestra and Chorus**. The audience will also see the outstanding young Norwegian soprano **Lise Davidsen** who made her Metropolitan Opera début in November 2019 as Lisa in *The Queen of Spades* receiving brilliant response from reviewers, colleagues as well as the MET General Manager. The gala concert will also feature an aria from this opera, *Uzh polnoch blizitsya*.

During the evening, the State Opera Orchestra and the Chorus will perform music by Janáček, Smetana, Puccini, Wagner and many others. The gala evening will be broadcast **live on Czech Television and ARTE** and replayed by ZDF and other European TV channels.

“The objective of the reconstruction was to restore the State Opera to its original state. The audience should thus have a feeling that they returned back to the times of the Habsburg Monarchy of 1888. To the times when the building still was the New German Theatre inaugurated exactly 132 years ago. At the same time, the technical part of the theatre will be state-of-the-art. Thus, two worlds will meet under the new roof – the past one and the present one. I wish that the State Opera in its restored look becomes a meeting point for different worlds, so that it attracts not only the same people all the time, but also those who have perhaps never been to an opera before,” said **Lubomír Zaorálek, Czech Minister of Culture**.

“I am delighted with the huge and technically demanding work of many collaborators within the theatre and building contractors,” summarizes **prof. MgA. Jan Burian, Director of the National Theatre**. *“I worked towards a comprehensive reconstruction of the State Opera and it has reached its finale. Now, I will work towards its new artistic blossoming in the European context. The National Theatre with all its stages wants to be an artistic institution to which both local and foreign audiences would want to return,”* he added.

WHAT HAS CHANGED

The State Opera underwent last comprehensive repairs in the 1970s. The historical building is now equipped with **new stage technologies, including a state-of-the-art turntable**. A **brand-new rehearsal room with excellent acoustics** is located in the second basement. The original rehearsal rooms, **the ballet, orchestra and choir studios, as well as the artists’ dressing rooms**, have been renovated. The operations building is afforded a new garb — **its glass façade**. Numerous restorers have worked on the State Opera’s reconstruction; they have cleaned Eduard Veith’s **monumental murals** on the parterre ceiling as well as the **precious frescos**. **New seats** have been installed in the auditorium, all of them newly furnished with a reading device for the viewer to choose the respective captions.

As part of the extensive reconstruction, the State Opera has received a **new curtain**. Over the past two years, it has been worked on by a team headed by David Černý, Artistic Director of the National Theatre Production section, in collaboration with students of the Department of Scenography of the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. The new curtain has been made in the National Theatre workshops based on the Eduard Veith’s design of the original curtain which was seen by the audience during the inauguration of the State Opera (then the New German Theatre) in 1888. The unique accomplishment is the result of more than 1,000 hours of meticulous work.

The original Veith’s curtain was mysteriously lost in 1945. The new curtain will replace Antonín Střížek’s curtain originally created for the 2002 production of *Die Zauberflöte*.

STATE OPERA PLANS

In the first half of next year, on 3 April 2020, the State Opera will stage a new production of **King Roger** by Karol Szymanowski, a towering figure of Polish music of the first half of the 20th century. The opera will be directed by Mariusz Treliński who amidst sophisticated, mesmerising sets created by the Slovak designer Boris Kudlička will unfurl the story of a king who en route to enlightenment struggles within, striving to decide whether to embrace reason, order and Christianity, or instinct, anarchy and hedonism. The adaptation will be co-produced by the Polish National Opera in Warsaw and the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm.

The Czech National Ballet will stage at the newly refurbished State Opera the feted Brazilian prima ballerina and choreographer Marcia Haydée's adaptation of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's **The Sleeping Beauty**. Its Czech première will take place on 21 May 2020 with live music played by the State Opera Orchestra. The State Opera will also host the repertoire ballet titles *La fille mal gardée* and *Timeless*.

Another new State Opera première will be Richard Wagner's **Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg** performed also during the gala opening of the New German Theatre (Neues deutsches Theater) on 5 January 1888. It is a title that played a significant role in the history of the State Opera, while over the first two decades following the theatre's opening Richard Wagner's works were among the most frequently performed there. The *Meisters* rank among the most challenging operas as regards the duration (4.5 hours) as well as the requirements placed on the choruses.

After its reopening, the State Opera will welcome home *Fidelio*, the popular production premièred last year, which will feature a new cast. Its programme will also include Jiří Heřman's critically acclaimed adaptation of *Madama Butterfly*, *Bohéma* or *La traviata*. When it comes to *Tosca*, we will revive its 1999 production.

"The current programme of the State Opera must be rooted in its history. Since its opening, the State Opera played a seminal role in the development of the genre in Europe, absorbing, yet also creating, the major artistic impulses of that era, always engaged in dialogue with other European opera houses, which hosted many leading contemporary global artists," says **Per Boye Hansen, Artistic Director of the Opera of the National Theatre and the State Opera**, adding: *"Personally, I am greatly inspired by Alexander Zemlinsky. In 1911–1927, he served as Music Director of the State Opera, then the New German Theatre. Zemlinsky was an extremely innovative experimenter, and under his guidance the State Opera advanced to a high international level."*

The Artistic Director's plans pertaining to the repertoire are ambitious and wide-ranging indeed. He would like to stage grand Romantic 19th-century operas, particularly those of Verdi, Wagner and Puccini. The programme will also encompass the Late-Romantic and Expressionist impulses of the first half of the 20th century – Richard Strauss, Korngold, Schreker, Zemlinsky and Hindemith; and also grand 20th- and 21st-century works and operas by living composers, including new works. He will not leave out operas dating from any era that have the potential to attract new audiences – families and young people, those who have never attended opera performances previously.

GUESTS OF THE GALA EVENING

The Sunday gala reopening of the State Opera in Prague will be also attended by the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Other countries, such as the USA, Germany, Austria, France, Poland, Hungary, Israel, Norway or the Slovak Republic, will be represented by their respective ambassadors and diplomats. The concert will be also attended by prof. Monika Grütters, Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. The Czech Republic will be represented by its Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Radek Vondráček, Ministers of Culture, of Finance, of Industry and Trade, of Transport, of the Environment, of Health, of Justice, of Labour and Social Affairs, Mayor of the Capital City of Prague, His Eminence Cardinal Dominik Duka, Chairpersons of Political Groups of the Parliament or Chairman of the Trade Unions Josef Středula. The auditorium will host directors and managers of Czech and world opera houses and ballet companies as well as renowned personalities and patrons of the Czech culture.

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME

The gala opening of the State Opera was ushered in by **a unique flashmob at the Prague Main Railway Station** followed by an original **videomapping** involving cars passing by.

On Friday, 13 December 2019, an unusual event took place at the Prague Main Railway Station with the participation of soloists of the Opera of the National Theatre and the State Opera. Roman Janál, František Zahradníček, Josef Moravec, Pavel Švingr, Kateřina Jalovcová, Michaela Zajmi and Jana Horáková-Levicová met unusually early in the morning at the hall of the railway station. They were not to set out for a journey together, they were to offer a unique performance to passengers waiting for their connections or to casual passers-by. Soloists in civilian and work clothes performed a short mix of world-famous arias with piano accompaniment. Videos made by passers-by spread on social media. (*Flashmob videostory: <https://youtu.be/P-qV7gHh-rl>*)

A unique audio-visual show on the front façade of the theatre building was yet another herald of the anticipated event. It could be seen from the New Year's Eve midnight till 5 January 2020. The special videomapping (as well as the flashmob at the railway station) was initiated jointly by the National Theatre and **Raiffeisenbank, a.s., general partner of the National Theatre**. Videomapping was created by the 3dsense artistic group that made use of the building's location on a main busy road, with the passing cars becoming components of the generative videomapping. *"Cars passing by the State Opera like notes on the staff generated a unique video projection and light show on its façade and created a music composition in real time. The position, size and speed of the cars was identified by a camera that was placed on the State Opera building. The data was processed on-line and used to generate a music composition and visual effects,"* explains Jan Hrdlička of 3dsense.

The State Opera building, an architectural gem of the famous Vienna-based company **Fellner und Helmer**, was inaugurated on **5 January 1888** by Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* as Neues deutsches Theater (New German Theatre). Today, the State Opera – together with three additional theatre buildings – is administered by **the National Theatre**. In 132 years of its existence, it underwent many changes and staged works of many renowned and forgotten authors and hosted many singers. 5 January 2020 marks its **new era** with new technologies and a new curtain.

Details on the general reconstruction including a photo gallery and videos can be found at www.statnioperavrekonstrukci.cz

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