An interview with Cecilia BARTOLI about the Salzburg Whitsun Festival and the new opera production:

ARIO DANTE by Handel, her first trouser role in Salzburg.

You have extended your tenure as artistic director of the Salzburg Whitsun Festival for the first time. What does Salzburg mean to you?

Salzburg has revealed itself to me as a city with its very own character, where art in general and music especially seem to form part of the daily needs of the people’s soul. Without pretending to fool myself, I experience great affection and gratitude in Salzburg and in many places in Austria, and perhaps this is founded on the “food for the soul” which we have in common and share. Salzburg allows me to roam one of the best art scenes. This creates a kind of homecoming sensation and a feeling of protective comfort, and for that I am grateful!

Audiences and media are raving about your concert programme Handel Heroines, and you have been lauded as a “singing symbol of sympathy”, then again as a “phenomenal comedienne who overcomes vocal challenges with ease and enriches
her performance with any imaginable emotion”, and another critic writes of “pure happiness” and “enchantment”. Who is George Frideric Handel to you?

A friend who is a writer recently told me that Handel apparently owned a major art collection numbering several hundreds of paintings and paying homage almost exclusively to the naked, voluptuous female body. Perhaps Handel’s musical sensuousness can be derived from this pictorial voluptuousness, and perhaps every painting – this happens to be a highly amusing thought experiment – has a corresponding aria in Handel’s oeuvre… Artistic workmanship of the highest calibre and emotional profundity, paired with a sensual enjoyment, a dash of seriousness and a big portion of humour to finish it all off! Yes, that is how I might construct “my” Handel…

You have chosen Handel’s Ariodante for the staged production. What was your main reason for selecting this particular work for Salzburg?

Around 1733, Handel discovered he had serious competition in London from Nicola Porpora and his “pop star” Farinelli, ending in a bitter and ruinous competition between the rivalling companies, and ultimately leading to their bankruptcy. Before that happened, however, Handel threw his entire ability as a composer into the balance, creating Alcina and Ariodante, two absolute masterworks full of imagination and ideas, and far from routine and baroque “assembly-line composing”. As the quintessence of a master’s output, Ariodante perfectly fulfils the Festival’s criteria of showing great masterworks in a new context in Salzburg – or, for example, because recent insights into historical performance practice have inspired a new reading of these works. Despite this, however, this masterwork has never been premiered on the Salzburg Festival stages. Furthermore, it also appealed to me to embody a trouser role for the first time in Salzburg – after all those suffering, pining and occasionally dying female figures…

Christoph Loy has directed Handel’s Theodora, Haydn’s Armida and Die Frau ohne Schatten by Richard Strauss in Salzburg. You also worked with him on Handel’s Alcina in Zurich. What makes his approach, his work as a director special?

Christoph is a great aesthete, without losing himself in merely superficial beauty. His work as a director is precise and intelligent, without excluding sensuousness or the necessary humour. He is a magician who knows how to translate the inner workings of the characters’ souls into stage action, and how to fascinate the audience with his gentle, never obvious manner.
What will the new production focus on?

Without doubt, as a Nordic hero, I will wear a kilt underneath my knight’s armour… No, why not let ourselves be surprised? Let us wallow a bit in our “grief of joy” and see what comes our way!

*Founding a new ensemble must be one of the most fulfilling tasks of all for an artist. You have made this dream come true with “Les Musiciens du Prince”, whose patron is Prince Albert II of Monaco. What may we expect of this orchestra?*

Many, many people experience misery and hardship through no fault of their own. I feel that it is a great gift to be able to dedicate oneself to music in such times, and it obliges me to treat this precious privilege with care and responsibility. Great cultural institutions and quite a few orchestras, especially the many independent groups specialized in New Music and Early Music, find themselves fighting a losing battle for dwindling subsidies and sponsorships. To receive princely support for the founding of a new specialist ensemble is truly wonderful. It revives the historical idea of courtly music, where the “Court Orchestra” and “Court Music” intersected. As a recently appointed court musician, as a *Musico di Corte*, I say “Evviva Salisburgo e evviva Monaco”!

*The Süddeutsche Zeitung called it a “phenomenal ensemble dedicated to historical performance practice, with soloists to die for”. Would you like to add anything to this description?*

The resonance of our first European tour was truly overwhelming and unexpected. It was important to me that Les Musiciens du Prince was not perceived as a Bartoli vehicle, its only goal to provide the right sound for the diva. The various positions in the orchestra are occupied by outstanding musicians, and all of them also perform as soloists. This option was used deliberately, in order to enrich the arias of the concert programmes with solo numbers by the various orchestra soloists… And perhaps it was this particular mix of vocal and instrumental numbers, as well as the seamless sequence of the programme items which drove the audience to a delirium in all those cities. The halls were jumping, as if Madonna and her band were playing there – and all that with baroque music almost 300 years old… Which only leaves one wish open: that the reaction of the Salzburg Whitsun audience may be similarly euphoric.
Please share the secret of your energetic charisma with us…

Perhaps it’s genetic? I never knew a more energetic person than my grandmother Libia! She was a proud, tall woman with curls that were black as night, a sensuous dancer, full of energy and fast as lightning. Even in the middle of winter she would always go barefoot, because putting on shoes and removing them seemed too great and unnecessary a loss of time to her. She seemed to run from one task to the other faster than her own shadow. At the same time, she was a great “scolder”! When she had a bone to pick with my grandfather, she would regularly curse all the relatives on my grandfather’s side in a rapid-fire staccato. In order to make her scolding more effective, she would constantly invent new family members, and over the years that family seemed to increase to a size that might have filled an entire village, with hundreds of brothers, sisters, uncles and other relatives… But I digress.

*Cecilia Bartoli surrounds herself with only the best artists. How would you describe your selection process?*

Attending concerts and operas, but also musicals and theatre performances has always been part of my great passion, and thanks to my constant nomadic existence, I can indulge in it all over the world! In addition, I have a natural inquisitiveness which loves discoveries, exchanging new ideas with artists who have long been friends and artists whom I have only just discovered, in combinations that often have astonishing and unhoped-for results. However, I don’t like calling this a selection process – instead, it is a great privilege when friends such as Daniel, András, Valerie, Juan-Diego, Anna, Bryn or Gustavo and many others take a Whitsun break in Salzburg, helping to make great things happen!

**ROLEX**

Since 2012 Rolex has supported the Salzburg Festival as a main sponsor and the Salzburg Whitsun Festival under Cecilia Bartoli’s directorship. Without Rolex, a staged production during the Salzburg Whitsun Festival would not be possible. The successful cooperation has been extended until 2021.  
THE 2017 SALZBURG WHITSUN FESTIVAL
The Programme – An Overview

Friday, 2 June 2017 19:00 | Monday, 5 June 2017 15:00

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL
ARIODANTE
Haus für Mozart, New Production
Diego Fasolis, Conductor
Christof Loy, Director
Johannes Leiacker, Sets
Ursula Renzenbrink, Costumes

Nathan Berg, The King of Scotland
Cecilia Bartoli, Ariodante
Kathryn Lewek, Ginevra
Norman Reinhardt, Lurcanio
Christophe Dumaux, Polinesio
Sandrine Piau, Dalinda
Kristofer Lundin, Odoardo

Les Musiciens du Prince – Monaco
Salzburger Bachchor

Saturday, June 3
Orchestra dell’Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia
15:00 | Großes Festspielhaus
FELIX MENDELSSOHN BARTHOLDY · RICHARD WAGNER · GIUSEPPE VERDI
Antonio Pappano, Conductor
Tatiana Serjan, Lady Macbeth
Bryn Terfel, Macbeth/The Dutchman

Saturday, June 3
BALLET LA SYLPHIDE
20:00 | Großes Festspielhaus
Music by Herman Severin Lovenskjold
Valery Ovsianikov, Conductor
Ballet of the Mariinsky Theatre, St. Petersburg
Alina Somova and Philipp Stepin, Soloists
Mozarteum Orchestra Salzburg
SALZBURG WHITSUN FESTIVAL
June 2 – 5, 2017

Ballet La Sylphide: Ballet of the Mariinsky Theatre, St. Petersburg

Sunday, June 4 at 11:00 | Großes Festspielhaus

ANNIVERSARY CONCERT Anne-Sophie Mutter
40 years Anne-Sophie Mutter at the Salzburg Festival
FRANZ SCHUBERT · ANTONIO VIVALDI
Anne-Sophie Mutter, Violin/Conductor
Hwayoon Lee, Viola
Maximilian Hornung, Cello
Roman Patkoló, Double bass
Daniil Trifonov, Piano
Mutter’s Virtuosi

Sunday, June 4 at 13:30
CHARITY LUNCH
Chefs: Johanna Maier & Sons

in aid of the Salzburg Festival's youth work
and the Anne-Sophie Mutter Foundation
Sunday, June 4 at 19:00 | Haus für Mozart
GIOACHINO ROSSINI: LA DONNA DEL LAGO
Concert performance

Diego Fasolis, Conductor
Alois Glaßner, Chorus master

Cecilia Bartoli, Elena
Edgardo Rocha, Giacomo V. (Uberto)
Vivica Genaux, Malcolm
Norman Reinhardt, Rodrigo di Dhu
Nathan Berg, Duglas d'Angus

Les Musiciens du Prince – Monaco
Salzburger Bachchor

Monday, June 5 at 11:00 | Stiftung Mozarteum — Großer Saal
ARIA MATINEE: Max Emanuel Cencic
Arias from musical settings of the epic poem Orlando furioso by Ludovico Ariosto

NICOLA PORPORA · ANTONIO VIVALDI · GEORG FRIEDRICH HÄNDEL

Max Emanuel Cencic, Countertenor
George Petrou, Conductor
Armonia Atenea
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Find the Salzburg Festival Whitsun selection here: http://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/fotoservice/subcategoryid/5731/archivyear/2017

Salzburg Festival Ticket Office: info@salzburgfestival.at

Salzburg Festival Press Office: presse@salzburgfestival.at

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