

## Press Release of the Salzburg Festival, 23 April 2017

### A Peace Project for 100 Years: The Salzburg Festival



Max Reinhardt Archiv der Salzburger Festspiele/Foto: Karl Ellinger

On 25 April 1917 **Max Reinhardt** sent his “Memorandum regarding the Construction of a Festival Theatre in Hellbrunn” to Vienna.

In 2020 the Salzburg Festival celebrates its 100-year anniversary by presenting the world’s best artists performing important works of the past and present.

“Yet we already have every reason to commemorate those who believed in the realisation of the festival idea in Salzburg exactly 100 years ago, in April 1917, despite the hardships and misery of the world war then raging,” says **Festival President Helga Rabi-Stadler**.

On 25 April 1917 Max Reinhardt sent his “Memorandum regarding the Construction of a Festival Theatre in Hellbrunn” from Berlin to the General Directorate of the Imperial and Royal Court Theatres in Vienna. In it, he made an eloquent case for a festival in Salzburg, as “one of the first works of peace”. In addition, he emphasised the economic potential of such a festival, attempting to win over those less interested in the arts than in an economic upturn for an entire region that had been brought to its knees. And he demanded a programme with a broad basis. This too was a wise move in order to assemble various factions under the banner of the festival idea. Some people wanted a Bayreuth for theatre, others were fighting for a pure Mozart festival. Max Reinhardt propagated “a significantly broader base” which would encompass everything. And **Hugo von Hofmannsthal** added to this the motto: “Opera and theatre, the highest of both” – today one would say “the best of both”.

Thus, working for peace and presenting outstanding quality are the timeless goals set by the Festival’s founders.

Almost on the same day, on 28 April, the journalist Heinrich Damisch acted on behalf of the association “Salzburg Festival Theatre Society” and submitted the latter’s bylaws to the Imperial and Royal Ministry of the Interior for the necessary approval.

On 01 August 1917, then, the Vienna and the Salzburg Proposing Committees met at the Richard Wagner Hall at Vienna’s Musikverein for the constitutive assembly.

And on 07 December, the Salzburg association held its founding assembly.

An important integrating figure in the conflicts and jealousies that flared up regularly between Vienna and Salzburg was **Friedrich Gehmacher**, chairman of the Salzburg association and vice president of the overall association. Even then he dreamed of a “world capital of art” in Salzburg – a dream which only started to take real shape in 1920, but which many shared with him. Obviously, the Vienna Philharmonic and its conductors were among them.

Between 20 October 1918 – Austria was at war until 03 November; on 11 November the Emperor abdicated – and 18 May 1919, the Wind and Brass Association of the Vienna Philharmonic gave 10 concerts for the exclusive benefit of the building fund of the Salzburg Festival Theatre Society. And Richard Strauss, one of the co-founders of the Salzburg Festival, was our first fundraiser, so to speak, both at concerts in South America and at a memorable Circle Concert on 31 January 1920 at the state rooms of the Ministry of Finance. There, the orchestra suite from his *Der Bürger als Edelmann* had its first performance – a piece the Vienna Philharmonic performed last year at the Festival under the baton of Riccardo Muti.

“Reading the memoranda arguing for the founding of a festival in Salzburg, written by personalities ranging from Max Reinhardt and Hugo von Hofmannsthal to Gerhart Hauptmann and Bruno Walter, one is grateful to those who believed in the potency and power of arts and culture even during the darkest of times,” **Helga Rabi-Stadler** summarises.

Selected quotations from Max Reinhardt’s memorandum:

*In addition to many of the most important phenomena revealed by our times, we must take note that the arts, especially the theatrical arts, have not only held their own during the ravages of this war, but have proven that their existence and maintenance are essential necessities. The world of appearances, which we might have expected to become entirely unhinged by the terrible reality of our days, has remained completely intact and has become a refuge for those remaining at home, but also for many returning from outside, seeking balm for their souls. It has become apparent that the arts are not merely a luxury for the rich and sated, but food for the needy.*

*... for the best must be assembled not only on stage, but also in the auditorium – if the perfect miracle of which theatre is capable on happy evenings is to ensue.*

*Thus, the idea of erecting a home for the most popular art form, the theatre – which is also the most powerful of all the arts, at least in its momentary impact – as one of the first works of peace is in the air. In Salzburg, a city perhaps particularly suited to the plan, it has already surfaced several times. Its implementation would bring not only immeasurable benefits for the arts, but also an immense wealth of practical and tactical advantages.*

The full text of the “Memorandum regarding the Construction of a Festival Theatre in Hellbrunn”, submitted by **Max Reinhardt** to the Imperial and Royal General Directorate of the Imperial and Royal Court Theatres in Vienna on 25 April 1917, can be found on the following pages.

**Max Reinhardt: *A Festival in Salzburg. Memorandum regarding the Construction of a Festival Theatre in Hellbrunn (1917)***

In addition to many of the most important phenomena revealed by our times, we must take note that the arts, especially the theatrical arts, have not only held their own during the ravages of this war, but have proven that their existence and maintenance are essential necessities.

The world of appearances, which we might have expected to become entirely unhinged by the terrible reality of our days, has remained completely intact and has become a refuge for those remaining at home, but also for many returning from outside, seeking balm for their souls. It has become apparent that the arts are not merely a luxury for the rich and sated, but food for the needy.

Never before has the often-doubted dignity of the theatre been put to a more serious test, and never has it passed any test with such honour. After the war, its mission will be not be diminished, especially not if, as we have cause to believe, the coming times will wear a serious face for a long time to come. Even if art is a heavenly body in its own right, holding its course unperturbed and revolving around its own axis, yet it receives its light from this world of reality, and even if the good spirits of art have relentlessly veiled their mirrors today, there is no reason to assume that the conflagration enveloping the world will long remain without poetic reflection. Surely the future will bring the gifts of new light, new love and new, fruitful life.

Spurred by this belief, its leaders strive to prepare themselves and their world for the challenges of those times to come.

Their efforts, as plentiful as they may and should be, must naturally culminate in the wish to return the theatre to its original and its ultimate form – the festival theatre. – Not the municipal playhouse catering to everyday parties and distractions, which are and will certainly remain equally necessary (and whose importance shall by no means be diminished here), but the house for the high feasts occurring but once a year, to be celebrated with the full consecration of art, far from urban daily life and in a place appearing so blessed by natural and artistic beauty that people joyfully flock to it during their summer days of leisure, relieved of their cares and burden.

The idea is ancient. Even the Greeks gave their theatre this form, reserved for feast days. Later, the medieval church with its mystery and passion plays built the cradle of today's theatre, and ultimately Wagner took up this thought and brought it to its full glory. The Festspielhaus in Bayreuth may be the most ingenious of all his works.

Every era, however, must form such a concept from its own needs and give it new shape, if it is to remain alive. Our times, more than others, doubtlessly lead us to this path. Our lives have almost entirely lost the tranquillity of yore; work floods our days until the late hours; our leisure hours begin later and later and find us tired and exhausted by the ever-increasing haste and the disquieting nature of our daily labour.

Our great classical works can only be forced into the ever-diminishing performance time by undergoing painful amputations, and then they often prove too heavy fare for the late hour. Given the hasty succession of repertoire, preparation falls short, lacking leisure and concentration. And the best minds of our times, to whom we wish to cater, are forced by their strenuous professional lives to forego the theatre almost entirely. They, however, are precisely the ones who might lend the theatre its general importance, the importance it merits, for the best must be assembled not only on

stage, but also in the auditorium – if the perfect miracle of which theatre is capable on happy evenings is to ensue.

The intensity of people's need for such extraordinary events, however, is proven by the festival venues in Bayreuth, in Munich, in Oberammergau and by many open-air stages, even if the quality of many of their offerings is, for the most part, rather questionable. Thus, the idea of erecting a home for the most popular art form, the theatre – which is also the most powerful of all the arts, at least in its momentary impact – as one of the first works of peace is in the air. In Salzburg, a city perhaps particularly suited to the plan, it has already surfaced several times. Its implementation would bring not only immeasurable benefits for the arts, but also an immense wealth of practical and tactical advantages.

Building a festival theatre, a Festspielhaus, in our beautiful and popular Austrian homeland will be of immense importance for Austria – not merely for the future festival city of Salzburg, but for much wider regions of the former countries of our august empire. After all, the goal is to execute a meaningful artistic deed which shall not and will not be second in ideal and material values and consequences to those memorable and world-famous festival foundings within Germany. For decades, these have brought the cities of Bayreuth and Munich and thus the entire kingdom of Bavaria an endless stream of affluent travellers and potent tax-paying residents, allowing these to reap not only cultural rewards, but economic ones which can hardly be quantified by mere numbers. Indeed, without immodesty, we may confidently assume that the festival undertaking planned for Austria in Salzburg may even outstrip the sphere and influence of the above-mentioned older festival venues. On the one hand, this conviction rests upon the fact that the Austrian Festival Theatre in Salzburg is to build upon a significantly broader base than the festivals in Bayreuth and at Munich's Prinzregententheater, both of which are dedicated exclusively to Wagner's music dramas. The latter, however, are currently cultivated in a very perfect manner not only there, but in Vienna and Berlin and several other major cities as well. This broader foundation includes all dramatic masterworks from Antiquity onwards, from Calderon, Shakespeare and the German classics to Grillparzer and Raimund, and aims to impart uplifting, festive intellectual and moral impressions not only to connoisseurs of art, but to the widest range of individuals, in the shape of religious mystery and passion plays. Naturally, this broader foundation must be expressed at a greater frequency, since it meets with more broadly entwined interests than the Wagner festivals in Bayreuth and Munich.

Furthermore, it must be considered that it is mainly Austrians who have supported and promoted the unfolding of German-language theatre life during modern times. It is no coincidence that the famous Hofburgtheater in Vienna has always been the institution which has chosen to foster the high style of theatrical art in an exemplary fashion, for its history demonstrates the special talent of the Austrian peoples in this field. Almost all stages of the German Reich feature Austrians in leading positions, and even the festivals in Bayreuth and Munich would be unthinkable if Austria did not provide them with its outstanding talents – actors, singers, conductors, directors and musicians. Thus, it is an obvious conclusion that the rich fruits of this plentiful Austrian source should benefit Austria itself – more than has been the case so far, given the lack of a Festspielhaus. The enormous value of these artistic and economic advantages are reflected by the fact that both Munich and other German cities and courts have signalled that great concessions might be expected if such a new Festspielhaus were to be erected there.

Given this elevated assessment of the planned undertaking, it cannot be denied that its successful implementation in an Austrian city would make no small contribution to Austria's importance – already on the rise – within German-language culture, and also to foster cultural ties between the German Reich and Austria in a significant way. After all, a Salzburg Festival would necessarily draw an extraordinarily large stream of travellers from the German Reich to Austria, first of all providing a substitute for the lack or decrease of tourism from the nations now at war with the Central Powers. Furthermore, it must be taken into account that after the declaration of peace, a large number of visitors from other countries, especially from America, and particularly from these countries' affluent classes, will make their way to the festival, attracted by its unique character and the far-reaching international propaganda which the undertaking will organize as a matter of course. The result of his international propaganda, however, will not only benefit the City of Salzburg, but indirectly the entire Austrian Alpine region and all the touristically attractive areas of the Monarchy – some of which are far less known and visited than they deserve.

This too can be substantiated by examining the examples of Bayreuth and Munich. The Royal Bavarian authorities and the press have never ceased to emphasize the invigorating effect the Wagner Festival and also the festival at Munich's Künstlertheater have had on the Bavarian tourist areas, which is also due to the arrival of ten thousands of affluent travellers, and that the resulting economic advantages benefit broad areas of economic life there, increasing tax revenues for the population. One must also take into account that affluent, independent art lovers enjoy taking residence in or near such cities offering them a unique attraction brought by the interesting life a festival undertaking entails, especially when the surroundings of these cities are already blessed by nature – which would be the case in Salzburg to an almost incomparable degree. The undertaking in question here would support this even further, since it includes plans for a performing arts academy in a later phase. – Such an influx of well-situated persons cannot but have a stimulating and positive effect on the real estate market, on building activities and the economic life of the district in question.

Regarding the building complex to be created, the plan is to build the grand Festspielhaus itself first of all, on a forest meadow in the nature park of Hellbrunn, relatively far away from Hellbrunn Palace and its garden in the French style. Since its exterior is to be carefully adapted to the style of the existing, graceful grounds, there is no reason to fear that the harmony of the whole might be impaired even in the least. On the contrary: the project under discussion is an entirely new combination of a closed theatre and a natural stage, enabling presenters to include the existing grounds in special cases and thereby create incomparably powerful effects. Therefore, it is a matter of course that the existing building and garden landmarks, whose character makes them equally attractive to the planned purpose, should be maintained without changes as much as possible.

The Festspielhaus should encompass 3,000 to 4,000 seats, a perfect example of all the achievements of modern theatre technology in every way, but especially in its stage facilities. It should benefit from all modern know-how, resulting in the largest and most exemplary institution of its kind, not only in physical size, but also in its technical facilities and architectural beauty. Naturally, this requires the investment of very large amounts of capital which would flow into Salzburg and thus into Austria from abroad, benefitting – as already explained above – mainly the above-mentioned Austrian territories. This circumstance makes it seem appropriate that in leasing the building grounds with their park and palace for a suitable duration, the project should be considered with a benevolent mindset. Furthermore, a smaller, quite intimate theatre should be built, mainly dedicated to the

*singspiel*, an art form to which namely the older Austrian masters made wonderful contributions, and whose revival could only serve to heighten the reputation of Austrian art to the highest degree. – An additional, third institution would be the academy of the performing arts already mentioned, where actors, singers and dancers would be trained. This school would be in session the year round – a fact which must also be of significance to the City of Salzburg – while the festival, including the weeks of preparatory rehearsals, would only take place during the summer months and the general holiday travel period. This means that it should be possible to make the park available to the public for much of the year.

However, the design and maintenance of the old and new grounds in a respectful and noble manner will add even more to the building and maintenance costs, which are already very high; therefore the cost of the leasehold should be kept moderate, and local interested parties should examine whether further subsidies might be considered. Suggestions regarding the benefits to be expected for tourism etc in Salzburg have already been submitted, so that the benevolence which must needs accompany the implementation of such an expensive project should be assumed. After all, the potential revenues to be realized after the war can in no way be estimated at this point, since it is impossible to know how tourism will develop. This circumstance alone should make it seem reasonable that in the interest of implementing the plan, the sum to be paid for the leasehold should be reduced to the unavoidable minimum, and that all other means of aiding and promoting the undertaking, not only in financial, but spiritual means, should be considered by all interested parties.

If, however, the revenues from the festival turn out as one might hope, given a relatively advantageous general situation and the end of the war, there will be a possibility of offering some of said revenues to the Imperial Treasury, to mitigate war damages and serve other charitable purposes. There is also the intention to create a scholarship fund from possible profits, which will enable students of secondary schools, low-income artists and art students, musicians, painters, teachers etc. to attend the festival, including funding for such travel as necessary for this purpose.

The most outstanding and experienced artists will be commissioned to execute the new buildings and grounds and maintain the existing buildings and gardens.

It is in the interest of the festival undertaking itself that such values should be maintained in their entirety, contributing in their own right, through their own unique attractiveness to the assembly of art lovers from all cultured nations here. After all, the tradition so noticeable in Hellbrunn is not least among the reasons why this jewel was considered above all other possibilities of erecting a festival theatre. It may be destined to bear witness to the importance of Austria and its culture throughout the world.

*Translation: Alexa Nieschlag*