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Schwetzingen Festival: Where the public broadcasters really take their cultural mission seriously

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Asleep, titular Councilor Golyadkin lies flat, but with enough space above him. It won't stay like that. Sometimes the man in the beige suit has to hunch in order to cope with life, but also with low ceilings. The elevator of career rushes up and down, sometimes standing, sometimes sitting.

In the end he lies again, having been almost crushed by walls, balancing on a plank above the orchestra pit, now without the breath of life. Is he the victim of an intrigue or his own madness? No matter, the even more closed institution awaits.

The stage design by Bettina Meyer seems to be almost half the cost of the production at the recent premiere of the [Schwetzingen SWR Festival](#), the Dostoyevsky setting "The Double" by Lucia Ronchetti. Because this gray case, whose different, fluid, expanding, shrinking, flattening compartments are entered from behind between elastic black bands, contributes at least as much to the claustrophobic Kafkaesque atmosphere of loss of personality as the suggestively flowing, condensing, increasingly dominant soundscape that the 61st-year-old Italian, who also heads the music section of the Biennale di Venezia.

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Ronchetti has a routine in this. This Dostoyevsky sound dramatization, which the Bachmann Prize winner Katja Petrowskaja has streamlined without fluff from the winding 260-page early work into a concentrated parable libretto in German, is the latest of well over thirty operas, action concerts, radio plays, chamber and choral operas, as she calls her works, which rarely last longer than 75 minutes, which knows no other genres. Your choice of topics ranges from "Pinocchio" and Kästner's "The Flying Classroom" to Dante. This makes it as successful as it is in demand, especially in Germany, but also Italy and France.

One must also mention the successful history of the Schwetzingen SWR Festival, which has been held since 1952 – founded by the then Südwestfunk Baden-Baden – in the summer palace premises of the former princes of the Electoral Palatinate, especially in the classicist theater. It only has 500 seats, but thanks to the radio broadcasts the sound message reaches very far. There are usually two staged productions: baroque opera rarities appropriate to the spirit of the place and, above all, contemporary chamber operas.

Place for progressive conservatives

But while the asparagus and wild garlic are sprouting outside, the circular garden features trimmed beech hedges, purple lilacs, subtly colored bosquettes and fresh greenery, the harmony of the feudal refuge is only slightly disturbed by the sounds from within, and actually never disturbed. In the long line of Schwetzingen operas, the progressive conservatives have mostly set the tone, since Werner Egk's Gogol adaptation "The Revisor" (1957), Henze's "Elegy for Young Lovers" (1961) or Wolfgang Fortner's Garcia-Lorca setting "Don Perlimplin loves Belisa in his garden". With works by Aribert Reimann, Udo Zimmermann, Hans-Jürgen von Bose, Rolf Liebermann, Manfred Trojahn and Wolfgang Rihm, we follow a certain line of tradition into which Lucia Ronchetti now fits seamlessly.

All works were produced in collaboration with other theaters and were therefore shown more often (than the two or three times on site); the Lucerne Theater is currently a co-producer. A lot of them were replayed again and again. So the public broadcaster has really taken a cultural mission seriously and disseminated it as widely as possible, even enriching the opera canon. The oldest preserved theater of all as a breeding ground for the new. It is precisely from the fault line, the aesthetic contrast, that the Schwetzingen SWR Festival draws its appeal.

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A charm that comes across as very dignified but exciting in "Doppelgänger," which draws entirely from the romantic literary tradition. In addition to Peter Schöne as the grotesque Golyadki, who uses every possible singing tone, there is the almost sober Christian Chelebjew as a double, the bizarre countertenor Zwi Emanuel Marial as a servant, the sonorous Robert Maszl as the doctor and the harsh Vladyslav Tluschch as his superior.

They all also sing alternating mini-roles and an abstract vocal quartet from behind, which, in addition to the electronic alienation of the voices, makes the main character's phobias soundable. Only the only female part, Olivia Stahn as the distant, rather projected lover Klara, who can hardly be suspected behind audio streaks, remains dull and two-dimensional.

The tsarist satire of officials, a literary specialty of this time, not least in Gogol, as a tragedy of the modern, lonely, out-of-self person. This is not new, but here it becomes subtly whispered, from the ticking obsessive ostinati at the beginning, varied and colorful to the airy soundscape

interspersed with folklore quotations. Which Tito Ceccherini paints with confidence at the podium of the mobile SWR Symphony Orchestra. This is a little surprising, but Schwetzingen *at his best*.

#Schwetzingen #Festival #public #broadcasters #cultural #mission