

Press Release
Zurich, 23 May 2013

Kunsthhaus Zürich presents 'Valkyries over Zurich. 150 Years of Wagner Performances in Zurich'

From 24 May to 18 August 2013, the Kunsthhaus Zürich offers the first ever overview of 150 years of Wagner performances in Zurich. Featuring some 150 set designs and models, production photographs, programmes and other exhibits from Swiss collections and ranging from the 'Flying Dutchman' (1852) to Bob Wilson's design for the 'Ring of the Nibelung' (2000/2002), the exhibition in the cabinet reveals how music and the visual and performing arts combine to create a 'Gesamtkunstwerk' – a total work of art.

Richard Wagner (1813-1888) spent nine years in Zurich, from 1849 to 1858. During this extraordinarily productive phase in his artistic career he not only wrote the essays on art known as the 'Zürcher Kunstschriften' and the treatise 'A Theatre in Zurich,' but also composed large parts of the 'Ring of the Nibelung' and 'Tristan and Isolde' as well as the prose sketch for 'Parsifal.' Additionally he conducted numerous concerts and operas, including his 'Flying Dutchman' and 'Tannhäuser.' The May concerts of 1853, which included works by Wagner himself and are seen as forerunners of the Bayreuth and Zurich festivals, attracted international attention.

TRANSFORMING THE STAGE: FROM TWO DIMENSIONS TO THREE

The music director Lothar Kempfer, who had been active in Zurich since 1875, was a passionate advocate of Wagner's work; and he ensured that after the new Stadttheater opened in 1891 with a performance of 'Lohengrin,' the 'Master of Bayreuth' dominated the programme to a degree that is almost unimaginable today. The high points of the Wagner mania were the cyclical performances of his works and, in 1913, the first legal staging of 'Parsifal' following the end of the 30-year embargo. The Stadttheater and its stage designer Albert Isler played a central role in the replacement of the two-dimensional 19th-century stage by a three-dimensional space, an idea propagated by the stage designer and reformer Adolphe François Appia (1862-1928) from Geneva together with the British stage designer and director Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966). Visual artists including Gustav Gampfer, Karl Moos and Otto Baumberger also contributed to the design, as did the projection artist Nina Tokumbet. Roman Clemens, whose background was in the Bauhaus movement, was chief set designer from 1932 to 1943.

A PRELUDE AND THREE ACTS

For the first time, the 'theatrical art exhibition' at the Kunsthaus offers an overview of 150 years of Wagner performances from 1852 up to the year 2002, when Bob Wilson astonished audiences around the world with his stage designs. The drawings, watercolours, production photographs, programmes and set models come from the Swiss Theatre Collection in Bern, the Zurich City Archives, the Zurich central library and the Study Library Winterthur.

The presentation, designed by guest curator Christian Bührle, is arranged chronologically. As in a Wagner opera, the 'prelude' is followed by three 'acts' illustrating the stylistic development and documenting outstanding productions using hitherto little-known visual materials. Visitors pass through a dark-grey entrance wall (prelude) into a first room decorated in green. Passing 'Rienzi', the 'Flying Dutchman,' 'Tannhäuser,' the 'Mastersingers of Nuremberg' and 'Tristan and Isolde,' they move into an ominous red and black space ('The Ring of the Nibelung') before reaching the productions of 'Lohengrin' and 'Parsifal,' with exhibits hanging on ethereally luminescent, light-blue walls.

The Kunsthaus is the ideal location for this temporary homage to visual artists such as Gustav Gampfer, Otto Baumberger and Roman Clemens, who also worked for the theatre. The Kunsthaus collection contains not only numerous paintings and works on paper by the artist and stage designer Otto Baumberger – poster designs, socially critical sketches and portraits – but also a small number of landscape sketches by Gustav Gampfer and paintings by Roman Clemens.

Supported by the Zurich Festival, Privatbank IHAG Zürich AG, the Goethe Stiftung für Kunst und Wissenschaft and the Ernst Göhner Foundation.

PUBLICATION

A 48-page book entitled 'Valkyries over Zurich,' published by the Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft, accompanies the exhibition. It contains 18 black-and-white and colour illustrations, together with texts by Christian Bührle on the individual Wagner operas.

It is available in the Kunsthaus shop, price CHF 18.-.

ZÜRICH FESTIVAL

From 14 June to 14 July the 2013 Zurich Festival is putting Richard Wagner's Zurich years in the spotlight with a programme of events based around the theme 'Wagner Greenhouse.' The line-up includes musical theatre, opera, plays, concerts, exhibitions, debates, a symposium and much more. In addition to the

exhibition at the Kunsthaus, various other highlights of the Festival will revive the work, life and time of Richard Wagner – such as the world premiere of the musical play 'Richard Wagner – Wie ich Welt wurde' by Hans Neuenfels, in which Richard Wagner stops off in Zurich on his last trip to Venice.

Already on 9 June at 11 a.m., visitors of the Kunsthaus will be taken back to Wagner's time, when the Zurich Chamber Orchestra will be staging a guest performance of works by Wagner's contemporary colleague Theodor Kirchner. For more information on the Festival programme, go to: www.festspiele-zuerich.ch

GENERAL INFORMATION, GUIDED TOURS AND CONCERT

Kunsthaus Zürich, Heimplatz 1, CH-8001 Zurich

Tel.: +41 (0)44 253 84 84, www.kunsthhaus.ch.

Exhibition opening hours: Sat, Sun, Tues 10 a.m.–6 p.m., Wed, Thurs, Fri 10 a.m.–8 p.m. For public holiday opening see www.kunsthhaus.ch.

Admission incl. collection: CHF 15 / CHF 10 concessions. Children and young people up to the age of 16 free of charge. Admission free on Wednesdays.

Advance sales: SBB RailAway combination ticket, with discount on travel and admission: at stations and by phoning Rail Service: 0900 300 300 (CHF 1.19/min. by ground line), www.sbb.ch.

Zurich Tourism: Tourist Service at Zurich Main Railway Station, tel. +41 44 215 40 00, www.zuerich.com.

Magasins Fnac: sales points in Switzerland: Rives, Balexert, Lausanne, Fribourg, Pathé Kino Basel, www.fnac.ch; France: Carrefour, Géant, Magasins U, 0 892 68 36 22 (EUR 0.34/min), www.fnac.com; Belgium: www.fnac.be.

Public guided tours: Sunday 26 Mai and 30 June, 12 midday, with guest curator Christian Bührle.

Concert by the Zürcher Kammerorchester (Zurich Chamber Orchestra): 9 June, 11 a.m. in the lecture hall of the Kunsthaus. Information/tickets: ZKO Ticket Office, tel. 0848 84 88 44, www.zko.ch

MEDIA CONTACT

Visual material is available for download at www.kunsthhaus.ch under Information > Press.

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