



musikfest bremen

A Brief Retrospective!

Founded by Professor Thomas Albert in 1989, the Music Festival Bremen developed rapidly during the 1990s to become one of Germany's leading music festivals featuring primarily classical music. The concept of productive tension between the old and new, between tradition and avant-garde, comes to fruition in the quality and diversity of the Music Festival's programme and the contrasts among the venues. Its scope encompasses popular formats such as the opening evening entitled "A Great Night Music" (since 2011) taking place at various locations along three timelines around the Market Square especially illuminated for the occasion as well as the projects in jazz, world music and crossover; without regard for formal boundaries, they elegantly blur distinctions of style and deliberately provoke listeners to rethink their ideas about the music of past periods and contemporary music. From the very beginning, Professor Thomas Albert, General Manager of the Music Festival, has rejected a programme concept revolving around a general motto or focus on a key artistic figure. Instead, he consciously aims for stylistic variety and breadth of scope to create an atmosphere open to all sides in which the latest and most exciting developments in many different genres and musical periods can be examined and presented to audiences for discussion.

Professor Thomas Albert, General Manager

Many attentive observers from the early music movement had long been aware of Thomas Albert as an artist. After completing his formal studies as a violinist, the Bremen native son, born in 1953, was a member of leading early music ensembles for several years until he founded his own ensemble, "Fiori Musicali", in 1978. From this time on, he appeared at all of the major international festivals, performing as a violinist and conductor. And he continued to work as an educator, training an entire generation of students. In 1982, he created the *Forum for Early Music* in Bremen, which was followed in 1986 by the founding of the Academy of Ancient Music Bremen, the first higher educational institute of its kind in Germany. Professorial appointments in Hamburg and Strasbourg were interim positions held until 1989, at which time he became a professor at the University of the Arts Bremen and simultaneously began the integration of the Academy of Ancient Music into the Bremen University; the transition was completed a few years later. Although active as both a performing artist and educator, in 1989 he accepted the challenge of initiating the first music festival in his home city more or less out of thin air. At a time when culture sponsoring of any major scope was still a foreign word in the Hanseatic City, Albert set out to convince local entrepreneurs that their involvement in the Music Festival would send out a signal on behalf of the location. After taking a breather in the following year, the Festival was able to establish a solid position for itself through its ambitious and attractive programme concepts from 1991 on. By the third year of the Festival, the framework of the programme had coalesced into

about 30 events. The series of performances has musically proclaimed the end of the summer break on the Weser around the end of August/beginning of September ever since.

Historical performance practice with avant-garde understanding — numerous premieres

The course his own career had taken made it clear to Albert right from the beginning that historical performance practice would function as the underlying principle which would give the entire programme a striking image with a modern perspective. He knew just how to generate enthusiasm for his project among friends and professional comrades whose ensembles were tailored to their specific repertoires, and he brought all of them to Bremen: Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Sir Roger Norrington, William Christie, Frans Brüggen, Christopher Hogwood, Philippe Herreweghe, Ton Koopman, Jos van Immerseel, Paul McCreesh. Even Nikolaus Harnoncourt returned several times to the city which had been one of the key centres of his work in the 1970s to take part in the Festival. A number of world firsts such as the first performance of the Beethoven Violin Concerto on historical instruments (Monica Huggett/Academy of Ancient Music, Christopher Hogwood, October 1989) or the first performance since 1827 of the long-lost “Messe solennelle” by Hector Berlioz (Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique and Monteverdi Choir under John Eliot Gardiner, October 1993) along with premieres of compositions by Verdi, Tchaikovsky, Bruckner, Mahler, Bizet, Strauss or Ravel featuring the original orchestral sound were sensational successes for the Festival. But just as the orchestras playing historical instruments worked their way farther and farther into the repertoire of the 19th and early 20th centuries over the years, Albert worked just as hard — and without blinders — from the start to present the great symphonic repertoire, performed by the best international orchestras, as a welcome enhancement of the early music accents in the compilation of his programmes.

Formative venues of the early years

The various musical genres were showcased well by being embedded in venues which were suitable for each form. Along with the historical facilities in the centre of Bremen such as the concert hall *Die Glocke*, St Peter’s Cathedral, the Church of Our Lady or the City Hall, the factories which were temporarily turned into a concert hall while the *Glocke* was being renovated (re-opened in 1997) created a uniquely progressive atmosphere while conveying a sense of proximity to the sponsors of the Music Festival Bremen. Where could audiences in the past 25 years experience performances by Vladimir Ashkenazy among sacks of coffee, Sir John Eliot Gardiner in a shipyard, Anne Sofie von Otter in a fruit terminal, Paquito D’Rivera in a former swimming pool, STOMP in a former shipyard hall or Jessye Norman in an aircraft hangar? At the Music Festival Bremen, of course!

The evolution of music theatre productions and the addition of a new venue

Over the course of the years, there was steady evolution along the path from music theatre productions such as Schumann’s “Manfred” (1994), Grieg’s “Peer Gynt” (1998) or

Beethoven's "Egmont" (1999), each of them starring Klaus Maria Brandauer and the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen under Thomas Hengelbrock, and concert versions or semi-staged performances of operas to fully staged opera productions. The first of these was a co-production with the Salzburg Festival of Mozart's opera seria "Mitridate, re di Ponto" in 2005, and the series continued in 2006 with Mozart's "Il re pastore". In response to an initiative of the Music Festival Bremen, a so-called forklift hall which was part of the former power control centre of the port area was converted into a multi-functional festival theatre "of a slightly different kind". Praised by conductor Marc Minkowski as "the most incredible opera house in the world" at the time of its dedication, the forklift hall, known since then as the BLG-Forum Überseestadt, has been used for concerts of world music and jazz, hosting artists such as Fazil Say, Goran Bregovic or Kristjan Järvi and his Absolute Ensemble New York, as well as opera performances during the Music Festival. In addition, the BLG-Forum Überseestadt has been the venue for the newly integrated series "Music Festival Surprise" since 2010. Audiences attending this series encounter bold programmes which do not fit into conventional pigeonholes: unusual constellations of performers, new forms of presentation or unexpected bridges spanning the gap between musical worlds. Contemporary meets classical, free jazz joins heavy metal, Orient reaches out to Occident — a fresh approach, unconventional and exciting! These events are concert experiences "of a slightly different kind" for audiences as well because the seating at tables, including beverage service, deviates from classic concert halls and the single ticket price of €30, deliberately set at such a low level, encourages friends of all kinds of music to take a risk and open their minds to what these unusual concerts can offer. Artists who have given this series its special touch include the Quatuor Ebène as "The Other Ebène", Alarm Will Sound, Spira mirabilis, Sō Percussion, Dhafer Youssef, Avi Avital, Rudresh Mahanthappa or Marino Formenti. The conscious contrasting of music from various periods, styles and cultures practiced here in a converted port building is as characteristic for the Music Festival Bremen as it is for the vitality and diversity with which the project "Überseestadt Bremen" itself is constantly driven forward.

During the 20th season of the festival in 2009, the series of international co-productions in music theatre was continued, this time with the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, the largest and most famous opera festival in France. The productions of Mozart's "Idomeneo" (another co-production with the Mozarteum Foundation Salzburg) and Haydn's "L'infedeltà delusa" were staged in the Musical Theatre Bremen and in the Oldenburg State Theatre for technical reasons. In 2011 — back in the BLG-Forum Überseestadt — Peter Brook's interpretation of Mozart's "Magic Flute" was realised in cooperation with the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord Paris and other international partners such as the Barbican Centre, London, Piccolo Teatro, Milan, and Lincoln Center Festival, New York. The year 2013 saw the German premiere of Peter Brook's "The Suit" in the BLG-Forum, and this year his latest production, "The Valley of Astonishment", will have its German premiere at this venue as well. The connection to the

Mozarteum Foundation Salzburg/Mozart Week Salzburg established for the co-production of “Idomeneo” in 2009 has been continued with a co-production of Mozart’s “Lucio Silla” (with the Salzburg Festival as a second co-production partner) and this year with a production of Gluck’s “Orfeo ed Euridice” — both of them with Marc Minkowski and Les Musiciens du Louvre Grenoble.

The Music Festival Bremen, the North-West and the Arp Schnitger Festival

In the meantime, however, the impact of the Music Festival Bremen is no longer limited to cultural events in the Free and Hanseatic City and in the Maritime City Bremerhaven, but extends to the entire north-western region of Germany. Thanks to the carefully planned expansion of the Festival beyond the borders of its home city begun in 2002 with the support of Oldenburg’s EWE AG, about one-third of the concerts now take place throughout the north-western German area. This step has successfully provided the Festival with new platforms for presentation to a wider audience, and the interaction between “giving and taking” has reinforced the Hanseatic City’s self-perception as a top musical centre of the Lower Saxony region between the Ems, Weser and Elbe. The metropolitan region Bremen and Oldenburg, officially recognised in the association Nordwesten e.V. since 2005, is thus delightfully enlivened through music which playfully crosses all borders. Another extension of the scope of the programme and simultaneously a focus on the globally unique paradise of organs in the environs of Bremen was created in 2010 when the Arp Schnitger Festival was established as a “festival within a festival”. Even during his lifetime, Arp Schnitger (1648–1719), who came from Wesermarsch District, became the organ builder with the most extensive list of works and the geographically most widespread distribution of his instruments. The instruments built by Schnitger which are still in use today have served as models for organ builders around the world and their sound has been captured in innumerable recordings, assuring their position as one of the outstanding elements of the global organ culture. At the initiative of the Arp Schnitger Festival, a lobby group of representatives from politics, business and culture was first formed in 2012 to promote the project “UNESCO World Heritage Arp Schnitger 2019”. The activities of the group led in 2013 to the establishment of the Arp-Schnitger-Kulturerbe e.V., Association for the Care, Maintenance and Dissemination of the Life’s Work of the Master Organ Builder Arp Schnitger. The association’s objective is to secure the inclusion of the 45 organs and designs from Schnitger’s workshop still existing today as the first intercontinental project on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Renowned artists from all over the world are guests at the Music Festival Bremen

Prominent names and unusual projects have shaped the Music Festival in the Hanseatic City over the years. The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra with Claudio Abbado, the Vienna Philharmonic under Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Zubin Mehta, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra under Riccardo Chailly and Andris Nelsons, Sir John Eliot Gardiner and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique, the Philharmonia Orchestra London conducted by

Esa-Pekka Salonen, Riccardo Muti and Vladimir Ashkenazy, Sir Roger Norrington and the London Classical Players and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Philippe Herreweghe and the Collegium Vocale Gent and the Orchestre des Champs-Élysées, Marc Minkowski and Les Musiciens du Louvre Grenoble, Jérémie Rhorer and Le Cercle de l'Harmonie, Jordi Savall and Hespèrion XXI, Ottavio Dantone and the Accademia Bizantina, Masaaki Suzuki and the Bach Collegium Japan, Jos van Immerseel and Anima Eterna, Jean-Christophe Spinosi and the Ensemble Matheus, Christina Pluhar and L'Arpeggiata, Cecilia Bartoli, Maurizio Pollini, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Murray Perahia, Rolando Villazón, Vesselina Kasarova, Maxim Vengerov, András Schiff, Maria-João Pires, Ton Koopman, Janine Jansen, Gidon Kremer, Hélène Grimaud, Philippe Jaroussky, Arcadi Volodos, Thomas Hampson, Abdullah Ibrahim, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Kurt Elling or Klaus Maria Brandauer — international stars who have carried the reputation of Bremen's musical culture far beyond national boundaries, just as the local orchestras, the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen and the Bremen Philharmonic, have done.

Awards for outstanding achievement and young talent full of hope

The **Music Festival Award** was presented to international artists for their outstanding musical work in the Festival between 1998 and 2012. The Music Festival Bremen awarded the Music Festival Award to artists whose outstanding artistic work in the international music world represented unique highlights and to whom the Music Festival owed a debt of gratitude for their decisive contributions. The Music Festival Award, which included a monetary prize of €25,000.00 (donated by the Deutsche Bank Foundation from 1998 to 2008 and by the Commerzbank Foundation from 2009 to 2011), is one of the most important and most highly endowed honours for excellent artistic achievement in international concert life. The award winners were Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Gidon Kremer and Kremerata Baltica, Klaus Maria Brandauer and Thomas Hengelbrock, Jessye Norman, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, András Schiff, Sir Roger Norrington, Marc Minkowski, Anne Sofie von Otter, Kristjan Järvi and Absolute Ensemble New York, Fazil Say, Hélène Grimaud, Jos van Immerseel, Masaaki Suzuki and Harald Vogel.

In addition, the Music Festival Bremen has been especially committed to the encouragement of young talent. Since 1998, the Festival, in conjunction with Deutschlandradio (Radio Germany), has given the **Incentive Award Deutschlandfunk** to highly talented young artists whose individual interpretations at a young age stand out. The material reward offers to the artists practical support as they continue to establish themselves in international cultural activities. As "artist in residence", they realise studio recordings and a CD production with the broadcasting company which endows the prize and are invited to the Music Festival which follows the awarding of the prize. Previous award winners were the cellist Tanja Tetzlaff, guitarist Aniello Desiderio, violinist Julia Fischer, the new art saxophone quartet, clarinetist Nicola Jürgensen, violinist Sergey Khachatryan, pianist Yu Kosuge, composer Lera Auerbach, violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja, pianist Kristian Bezuidenhout, violist Antoine

Tamestit, the vocal ensemble Cinquecento, the orchestra project Spira mirabilis, pianist Sophie Pacini, cellist Davit Melkonyan and pianist Mikayel Balyan and the Chiaroscuro Quartet. They are all happy whenever they can return to Bremen — just like the great stars!

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