

# The Salzburg Music Festival – *Peter Sellars & Mozart at Trump Tower Salzburg July 2019*

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It is part of a well established tradition that leading figures in the world of culture are invited to give the inaugural address at the opening of major arts festivals. And so it happened that one of the worlds leading theater and opera directors, Peter Sellars, teaching art as social and moral action at the University of California, was called to set the stage for this years' Salzburg Music festival.

Of course Peter Sellars is no newcomer to Salzburg. His Mozart interpretations have become famous for building cultural and social bridges between the centuries and between Salzburg and the world as often pointed out by the international press. A very special case that reflects Sellars mindset was the 1988 Festival setting of the Marriage of Figaro in the Trump Tower, that prompted an interview published by Michael Cooper of The New York Times Michael shortly after the presidential election on Nov.28, 2016.

The interviewer does nothing to hide the political connotations and parallels:

“The scenario sounds verily familiar: A plutocrat on a high floor in Trump Tower wields enormous political power, while a woman in his employ worries that he believes that his wealth and position entitle him to do anything he wants with her.

No, it is not the synopsis of a new book about the 2016 presidential campaign. It was rather one of the most influential opera productions of the last 50 years: Peter

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Sellars's 1988 staging of Mozart's "Le Nozze di Figaro" which he happened to set on the 52nd floor of Trump Tower, a symbol of wealth and excess and power in an opera about inequality."

For the inaugural opening of this years' Salzburg Festival on July 27, 2019 Peter Sellars turned to his staging of another of Mozarts' operas- Idomeneo and connects it to the ongoing fight for the environment.

"In Mozart's Idomeneo the humans are endlessly blaming the gods, blaming the stars and claim in that nature is cruel rather than getting the message. Human beings are now consuming six times what the earth can sustain. Perhaps something is wrong with us. And now what we need to create, with urgent daring, care, intelligence, creativity and sacrifice, is nothing less than a new civilization that moves at last from the era of empire into the era of ecological awareness....I think we must acknowledge that we are living very badly, and it is not the gods that are cruel. Even our constant use of the words "we" and "our" are poisoned by our narrowness, our "we."

And our "our" do not include most people and most of the planet. This morning the eight richest people in the world own more than the 3.7 billion people, one half of humanity, that lives on less than three euros a day.

There comes a time when we need new stories and when it is no longer acceptable to repeat the appalling cycle of human failure, learning nothing, refusing to advance.

Mozart's Enlightenment project was to move beyond autocratic delusions, beyond the received artificial structures which sustain autocratic delusions into the far more liberating realities of equality, the fact that every being is equal in the sight of a larger universe.

Mozart's project is reconciliation instead of a bloodbath, recognition and enlightenment instead of tragedy, and the creation of a new vocabulary which can give voice to a genuine apology for years of incorrect behavior, false assumptions, greed and thoughtlessness, and translates that remorse into action allowing the community to move forward together. Every Mozart opera ends with this moment of recognition, repentance and renewal, initiated by a social and political justice."

For the complete text in English see Salzburger Festspeile