



Axel at the Gates of Heaven – A Firework of Gags at the Vienna Volksoper

The operetta genre has long since awoken from its long sleep; a young and youthful audience finds much delight in the catchy tunes and in the charm of the romantic and heartfelt stories mostly finding a happy end.

Many theatres jump on this train and either produce well-known pieces in new, fresh garb – or they demonstrate courage and waken the audience's delight in rarely performed pieces. How successful this can be is proven by the recent première at Vienna's Volksoper: 'Axel an der Himmelstür – ein Triumph in Schwarz-Weiß' ('Axel at the Gates of Heaven – A Triumph in Black and White') is the title of the 'musicals' review of Ralph Benatzky's operetta's production. The Volksoper gives the piece truly new splendour; director Peter Lund revised the libretto in order to make the audience smile with modernized dialogues and a smart tightening of the plot; and Kai Tietje made the orchestra pit resound splendidly with his musical arrangements. Here, he actually achieved the impossible: his orchestration evokes the sound of the 1930s, but he manages to produce a bespoke modern adaptation at the same time.

The magazine 'musical' goes on: 'The musical styles range from foxtrot to tango to the Viennese waltz and prove, as the "Weisses Rössl" does, that the same score can be performed either full of operetta nostalgia or jazzily bouncy. (...) With the videos by Andreas Ivancsics, where one often does not notice where they and their marvellous trick elements stop and the stage design begins, Madwar created a stage Hollywood (...) These set changes are not easy to describe, one simply has to see them; they are surely the greatest change to the 1936 original version.' (musical vol. 181, Bernd Freimüller)

The Austrian dailies were enthusiastic: Stefan Ender writes of a 'firework of gags in black and white' in the Standard and ends his review with 'please leave this in the repertoire for the next 50 years!', while Daniel Wagner praises the 'heaven full of gags' in the Wiener Zeitung. 'At the Volksoper such a [yellow press reporter] in the end has his triumph – as Axel at the Doors of Heaven. The eponymous

hero (Andreas Bieber performs him with wonderful presence and eloquence) finds his way thanks to Ralph Benatzky's tunes (with risqué texts by Hans Weigel) into the home, heart and bed of fictional movie star Gloria Mills – a screen goddess à la Greta Garbo played here, at the Währinger Gürtel, by Bettina Mönch. (...) In this way a comedy becomes an all-round entertainment that is pretty colourful even in black and white.' (Wiener Zeitung, 09.19.2016)

But the success by far transcended the Austrian borders; the production won BR Klassik's ninth 'Operetten-Frosch' 2016! <https://www.volksoper.at/>

