

Leonce und Lena at the Linz Landestheater

Erich Zeisl's Musical Comedy Celebrated by the Audience

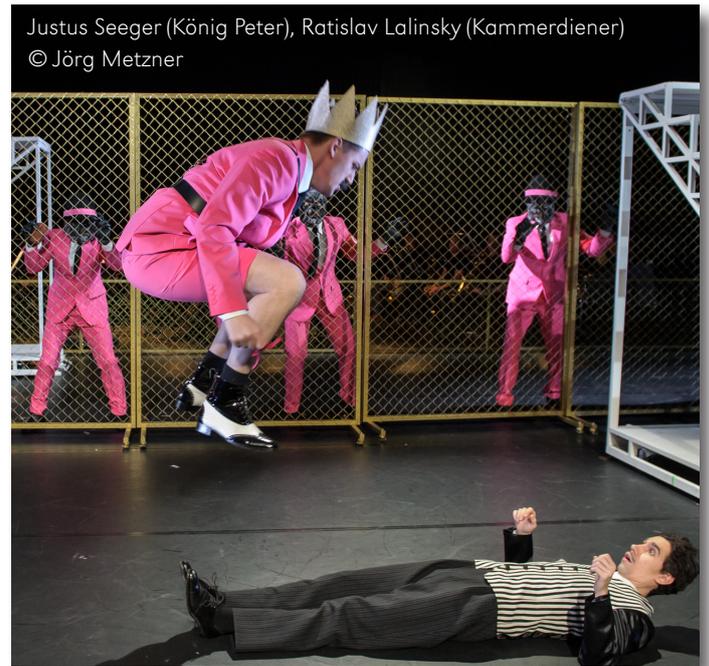
A resounding success was the European première of *Leonce und Lena*, Erich Zeisl's musical comedy at the Linz Landestheater. The production was also the first scenic production in German, unbelievable 80 years after its creation; but if one considers when the piece was written – in 1937 – one also discovers an explanation why the piece had to wait so long for its performance.

Erich Zeisl, born 1905 in Vienna, embarked on a promising career as a composer after his musical studies in his home city. Pieces like the ballet suite *Pierrot in der Flasche* or his *Little Symphony* met with favourable reactions from audience and critics alike. But the annexation of Austria by the Nazis abruptly ended the European career of the Jew Zeisl. He succeeded in emigrating to America via Paris; he became a movie composer in Hollywood and later a teacher and professor of music theory and composition. It was still back home in Vienna that he had completed his comedy with music after Georg Büchner's *Leonce und Lena*, in collaboration with librettist Hugo von Königsgarten, who had a similar fate to Zeisl's.

In his setting of Büchner's comedy Zeisl concealed neither his admiration for late romantic music nor his sympathy for the style of Gustav Mahler or a grotesquely sharpened expressionist idiom. First performances in Prague and Vienna were already planned when the fateful political developments prevented their realization. In Los Angeles Zeisl worked at an English-language version of the piece, the libretto written by Hans Kafka (no relation of his famous namesake). And thus Zeisl was finally able to hear his work performed in this version in 1952 at the Los Angeles City College Opera.



Erich Zeisl © Barbara Zeisl-Schönberg



Justus Seeger (König Peter), Ratislav Lalinsky (Kammerdiener)
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Afterwards the work was forgotten until Christoph Blitt, chief dramaturge at the Linz Landestheater, found the courage – 65 years after – to present this work to the audience: instead of the originally planned three performances in the 'black box' the piece was incidentally played seven times.

And here are some reviews:

Successful First European Performance of 'Leonce und Lena'

Prince Leonce and Princess Lena are meant to marry, but don't want to. Both run away and fall in love without knowing each other. The highly emotional love story is full of anxieties about life, love, and humankind. (...)

The comedy with music in three acts with a libretto by Hans Kafka and Hugo F. Königsgarten after Georg Büchner's comedy of the same name is a German-language production by the Oberösterreichisches Opernstudio. The cast delivered excellent voice and acting performances, especially Justus Seeger as King Peter of Popo, Xiaoke Hu as Prince Leonce and Julia Grüter as Princess Lena inspired the audience. (...)

Zeisl found a tonal language for Büchner's playfully profound comedy that is as brilliantly lively as lyrically sensitive and mixes late romantic attitude with a grotesquely sharpened idiom. (...)

The piece will be played until 25 May 2017. As several performances are already sold out one should quickly secure some tickets. (Josef Gruber, www.tips.at/)