

New Artistic Director of the Opera to be named by the National Theatre Director for 2019/2020

The National Theatre director Prof. MgA. Jan Burian has notified the Minister of Culture Antonín Staněk that he will name a new Director of Opera starting from 2019/2020. From September 2019 the first Czech opera ensemble will be directed by a Per Boye Hansen, a renowned Norwegian music manager.

The theatre had been considering candidates for this prominent position since November 2017. *“In repeated discussions we considered what type of creative artists and managers should be contacted,”* said the current General Director of the National Theatre Jan Burian. *“We agreed on several key criteria. They should have sufficient experience managing a comparable opera company, understand the theatre management system in Central Europe, and have a relationship to Czech opera and its traditions, above-average knowledge of opera as an art form, the right motivation and the ability to work in Prague continuously on a day-to-day basis. They have to have demonstrated an ability to take responsibility and have a sufficiently extensive network of international contacts. I am happy that all these expectations have been more than fulfilled by Per Boye Hansen.”*

The Director of the prestigious international Opera Europa as well as several influential European theatre artists have recommended Mr Hansen, who was selected after discussions with the Guarantee Board of The National Theatre.

“I have willingly participated in the search for people who may combine knowledge of the Czech musical and theatre scene with an international experience and outlook, and have been encouraged that several well-qualified candidates have emerged with a strong interest in the task,” describes Nicholas Payne, Director of Opera Europa, who has also worked as Director of the Royal Opera Covent Garden in London.

„Per Boye Hansen has always demonstrated strong expertise when choosing singers and actors. He is knowledgeable about new talents and shows support to artists in their development while maintaining a strong international network of renowned agencies, directors and conductors. He has significantly contributed to the advancement of the whole opera scene. He is therefore a clear candidate for opening up the opera to international cooperation,” comments Bernd Loebe, Director of Opera Frankfurt and Deutsche Opernkonzert.

The choice has also been supported by Andreas Homoki, Director of Opernhaus Zürich: *“I regard Per Boye Hansen as one of today’s most experienced and skilled opera managers worldwide and I think any opera company should be happy to gain him as artistic director.”*

“I am very grateful to have had Per Boye Hansen as a colleague, to have experienced his leadership, knowledge, support and spirit. It is a true gift to be able to collaborate with him, and I give my warmest salutes to those who will have this opportunity in the future,” says Ballet Director at the Norwegian Opera and Ballet, Indrid Lorentzen.

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Birgitta Svendén, Artistic Director of the Royal Swedish Opera, has similarly declared that she *“will happily support the suggestion for the recruiting of new artistic management in Prague.”*

PER BOYE HANSEN (born in 1957 in Oslo) was Artistic Director at the Norwegian National Opera from April 2012 to July 2017. The ensemble has become one of the leading Scandinavian opera companies and received international acclaim and recognition. In 2015 the Norwegian National Opera received the international Opera Award in London, in the category "best accessibility".

From 2005 to 2012 Hansen acted as artistic and managing director of the Bergen International Festival. In 2011 he was appointed by the Norwegian Ministry of Culture as chairman of the jury for the Ibsen International Award. He is also a member of the board of Dacapo Records, supported by the Danish Ministry of Culture, member of the jury for BBC Singer of the World in Cardiff in 2013, jury for the Ring Award in Graz and for The Opera Award in 2017.

Since 1999 he was casting director at the Komische Oper Berlin where he was appointed General Music Director in 2002. He was responsible for the daily management of the company and for engaging guest singers and conductors. At the opera he worked with a variety of stage directors such as Peter Konwitschny, Hans Neuenfels, Barrie Kosky, Calixto Bieito, David Alden, Richard Jones and Sebastian Baumgarten.

In 1990 Hansen founded Oslo Arts Management, an opera and concert agency, and presented a concert series at the Oslo Concert Hall featuring artists such as Jessye Norman, Kiri Te Kanawa, Kathleen Battle, Anne Sophie von Mutter, Anne Sofie von Otter, James Galway, José Carreras and Bryn Terfel, while also working closely with the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra and its chief conductor Mariss Jansons. In 1994 he was invited to organize a series of concerts for the National Olympic Committee as part of the cultural programme at the Winter Olympic Games at Lillehammer. Starting in 1996 he has been in close collaboration with "Künstlersekretariat am Gasteig" in Munich.

From 1984 to 1988 he had worked as Assistant Stage Director at the Cologne Opera. For several years he was assistant to Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, to the director of the Cologne Opera Company, Michael Hampe and the house directors Hans Neugebauer and Willy Decker. During 1980s he frequently assisted Michael Hampe and Jean-Pierre Ponnelle at the Salzburg Festival. In 1982 he founded the Oslo Summer Opera and led the company as Artistic Director until 1992. Per Boye Hansen developed the company from a free group for young Norwegian artists into an annual 10-day festival, presenting international artists such as Francisco Araiza, Edith Mathis, Delores Ziegler and Lucia Popp. He staged several Norwegian premieres: Benjamin Britten's "Midsummer Night's Dream", Mozart's "Don Giovanni", "Cosí fan tutte" and "La Clemenza di Tito" and Richard Strauss' "Ariadne auf Naxos".

After Theatre Studies at the University of Oslo, he attended Folkwanghochschule in Essen, Germany, where he studied Opera Stage Directing under the lead of Professor Dieter Bülter-Marell.

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The Director of the National Theatre has asked the outgoing Director of Opera Petr Kofroň to collaborate on future projects in contemporary opera and music.

Per Boye Hansen is well acquainted with Czech opera culture. *“I have the deepest respect and admiration for your vast artistic heritage. Composers like Smetana, Dvořák, Martinů and Janáček represent a unique part of opera history, quite amazingly considering the relatively small country and language group they belong to,”* says Per Boye Hansen.

“Although opera, maybe more than any other art form, is international, the importance of local tradition and social and political circumstances is crucial. Theatre lives within society and should have as its goal not only to be part of it, but should participate in the entire social and cultural development.”

“One of the most important tasks for me as a new Artistic Director would be to understand more of the Czech mentality and the structure of your cultural and social peculiarities. I have already been able to appreciate your unique sense of humour. Learning the language will certainly be a challenge, but very helpful in order to get closer to your culture and society.”

Jan Burian describes the goals for the upcoming opera management era: *“Prague should be a place where people go to visit the opera. We must continue to shape the image of each stage – and with bringing in excellent musical directors, and with management truly paying attention to each and every performance.”*

“Both the opera company at National Theatre and State Opera, in order to achieve your desired level of international competitiveness, need to be strengthened throughout. I do feel highly motivated to use my experience and competence in order to increase the opera's reputation and strengthen its position. Visiting the opera should be a primary reason to visit Prague, and its increased reputation could improve the total perception of Czech culture,” are final comments from Per Boye Hansen about his upcoming challenge.

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