

SILVIA HRONCOVÁ

Director of the National Theatre Opera and State Opera

The National Theatre to present *Werther*, staged by the renowned director Willy Decker in Prague on 7 and 9 June

Prague, 30 May 2018

Jules Massenet's opera, based on J. W. Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, is returning to the National Theatre in Prague after almost 80 years. The new production will receive its premiere on 7 and 9 June 2018.

Werther is returning to the National Theatre almost eight decades since its most recent production, performed from 1927 to 1939, so as to remind music lovers why it is one of the most acclaimed French operas. The current production, created by the internationally renowned German theatre director Willy Decker, premiered on 14 January 1996 at the Het Muziektheater (Nederlandse Opera) in Amsterdam, following which it was undertaken by the Oper Frankfurt, Opéra Lyon, Teatro dell'Opera in Rome and Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona. The Prague production, staged by Stefan Heinrichs, will be conducted by Petr Kofroň, the Artistic Director of the National Theatre Opera. The sets and costumes have been designed by Wolfgang Gussmann. The role of Werther has been assigned to Peter Berger and Richard Samek, while Charlotte will be portrayed by Veronika Hajnová, Štěpánka Pučálková and Michaela Zajmi.

Massenet's opera is a top-notch work of the Romantic era, loosely based on J. W. Goethe's 1774 epistolary novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which soon after its publication became a cult book, one in which young readers recognised themselves, with a number of them even taking the hero's example and committing suicide. The libretto focuses on Charlotte's inner conflict between her feelings of duty and love. Furnished with Wolfgang Gussmann's abstract sets, Willy Decker's production displays the dynamic of the discrepancy between the longings of an individual and social constraints, between freedom and restriction, hope and resignation. The scenery highlights the comical and dark romantic aspects of the work and places the set and costumes in the late 19th century, the time when the opera was written. The colours of yellow and blue, symbolising Werther, contrast with the predominant grey, black and white hues.

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“Massenet’s virtue is his faculty of working with leitmotifs on a wide symphonic basic,” says Peter Berger, who performs in the title role of *Werther*. “He was able to alternate extremely melancholy, sentimental and lyrical moods with delicate dynamics, which have both a meditative and dramatic effect on me. What it more, Massenet understood and thoroughly depicted the psychology of the respective characters.”

Massenet’s compositional style is primarily noted for abundant distinct melody and colourful orchestration, inspired in part by Richard Wagner. His suggestible musical idiom serves to underline a story replete with passions, which the protagonists fail to satisfy. *Werther* also contains one of the best-known tenor arias, *Pourquoi me réveiller*, which is deemed to be among the touchstones of each and every singer appearing in the title role.

The next new National Theatre opera production will be that of Verdi’s *Nabucco*, staged by José Cura and scheduled to premiere on 28 and 29 June 2018.

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