

The Mahler Chamber Orchestra opens the Whitsun Festival in Baden-Baden with Weber's opera Der Freischuetz under the baton of Thomas Hengelbrock

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A year after the celebrated performances of Beethoven's Fidelio at the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra (MCO) returns with another opera production. Der Freischütz, as interpreted by the MCO and Thomas Hengelbrock, will open this year's Whitsun Festival. The orchestra will present a further high-point of German Romantic music in a concert featuring Schumann's Symphony no.3 in E-flat major op.97 in addition to selected works of Mozart.

Since 2002, the MCO has been present regularly in the well-known resort city of Baden-Baden with successful opera productions. In particular, the productions of Die Zauberflöte (2005) and Fidelio (2008), conducted by the orchestra's founder, Claudio Abbado, made a lasting impression on the discerning audiences at the Whitsun Festival. Weber's opera Der Freischütz, a co-production with the Konzerthaus Dortmund and part of the MCO's NRW Residence, is now awaited with great anticipation.

Der Freischütz, Carl Maria von Weber's main work, is considered to be the cornerstone of German Romantic opera. The story of Max, the huntsman's apprentice who, threatened by dark powers, hopes to become head forester with the help of magic bullets, will be staged by Robert Wilson. Nineteen years after he and Tom Waits made theatrical history with their production The Black Rider, which treated the same theme in the form of a musical, Wilson now turns to the original. The main roles are presented by singers including Juliane Banse, Julia Kleiter, Klaus Kuttler, Steve Davislim and Reinhard Dorn.

With Der Freischütz, Thomas Hengelbrock gives his debut with the MCO. The conductor is a regular guest with well-known orchestras worldwide. With his own ensembles, the Balthasar Neumann Choir and the Balthasar Neumann Ensemble, the conductor, recently named chief of the NDR Symphony Orchestra, realizes his varied ideas as stage director as well as conductor. He is known as one of the excellent representatives of historical performance practice. In keeping with this emphasis, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra presents Der Freischütz partially on period instruments.

The day after the premiere of Der Freischütz, the MCO and Thomas Hengelbrock will lead their audiences away from the wolf's glen and to the banks of the river Rhine. Schumann's lively Third Symphony, also called "Rhenish", expresses the euphoria and hopefulness that the composer brought to his new appointment as music director in Düsseldorf. Selected arias and the Symphony no.25 in G minor of Mozart present a further counterpoint to the ominous drama of magic bullets.

Soprano Véronique Gens will be heard in these arias, in her fourth appearance with the MCO. The ensemble also has a long history of collaboration with baritone Peter Mattei, who charmed audiences as Don Giovanni in Aix-en-Provence in 1998 under Claudio Abbado, and in that role was an integral part of the MCO's international breakthrough.

The concert and the second performance of Weber's Freischütz will be broadcast live on the cultural station ARTE.

The Mahler Chamber Orchestra (MCO), with its unusual structure, internationality and outstanding quality, is an ensemble unique to the present time. Its organisation and method of operation make it a model for the future of the European orchestral landscape. Composed of around 40 musicians from 20 different nations, and independent of external sponsorship, the MCO plays operas and concerts all over the world, in cities as well as at exclusive festivals from the North Pole to the Red Sea. The orchestra was founded in 1997 by the musicians themselves and Claudio Abbado, and the two have been reaching milestones of European musical life together ever since.

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