



FLIPPED STUDIO “SUCCESSFUL INNOVATOR” - NOVA

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Salzburg Festival’s 100th anniversary amid the COVID pandemic

Creator of the good practice, country: Salzburg Festival Foundation (Salzburger Festspielfonds), Austria

Sector: Music

Type of business / employment: Foundation established by Austrian federal law

Achievements in CCS before the Pandemic

The Salzburg Festival is one of the world's most important cultural festivals for opera, drama and concerts. It was founded more than 90 years ago by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Max Reinhardt and Richard Strauss, and is a magnet today more than ever. There are three main factors that make the Festival such a success:

First of all, the Salzburg Festival offers a broader artistic program than any other festival: Salzburg features opera, drama and concerts. And in the selection of works and interpretations, it also offers the broadest spectrum from Mozart, the genius loci, to modern works, from classical interpretations to avant-garde experimentation, from Hofmannsthal’s Jedermann to Tchaikovsky’s Eugene Onegin. And only the best and most famous artists from all over the world are invited to Salzburg.

Furthermore, visitors to the Salzburg Festival can combine the enjoyment of art with vacationing. During the daytime, the unique surroundings and the lakes of the Salzkammergut make for wonderful excursions and golfing – in the evening, the Festival beckons with incomparable performances.



Photo source: <https://www.dw.com/en/salzburg-festival-director-arts-are-indispensable/a-54783408>

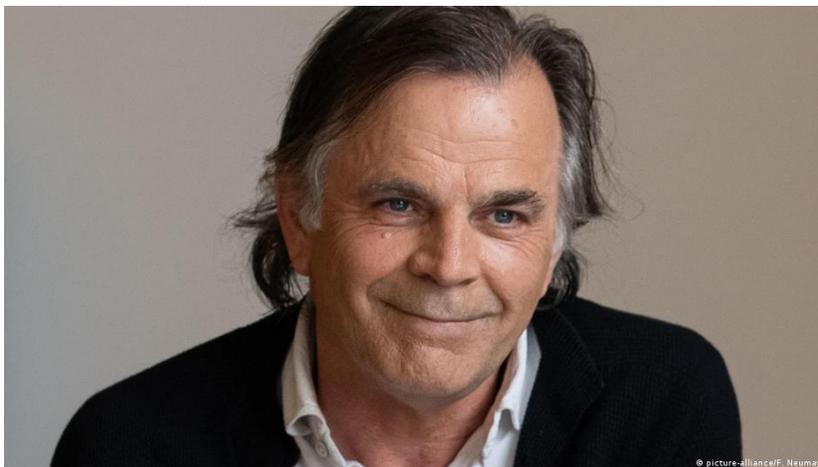


Challenges faced during the Pandemic and innovative solutions to overcome them

The Salzburg Festival's 100th season came amidst the coronavirus pandemic. There weren't any buffets or receptions to celebrate, yet despite restrictions, the renowned festival managed to stage two opera productions, three plays and several concert series with top-echelon musicians.

One of the major challenges that organisers faced due to pandemic were the ticket sales and the financial reliability of hosting a festival of this magnitude during the shut down. Last summer many people were unable to travel because of the coronavirus. Before the shutdown in mid-March, organisers sold well over 180,000 tickets. After downsizing the playbill, there were 80,000 remaining. You don't have to be Albert Einstein to see that of the profound forces at play here, business is not one of them. However The Salzburg festival organisers proved to themselves and to the world that a communal experience of opera and music is possible.

According to the festival artistic director Markus Hinterhäuser – “Every area of life has its right to existence, be it air travel or riding on a train. Borders are open, people are traveling, going to restaurants, staying at hotels. Industry, offices and ministries are open for business. But some



schools, universities and cultural establishments are still shut down or have reduced operations. That's not only a horrible state of affairs, it's dangerous. Humanistic education and culture are being treated as though they were superfluous — not just the Salzburg Festival, but also the mid-sized, small and smallest cultural entities.”

Photo source: <https://www.dw.com/en/salzburg-festival-director-arts-are-indispensable/a-54783408>

Despite the struggles and raised eyebrows, guests came to the festival of their own volition, for the joy of experiencing the arts live, and free choice implies a sense of responsibility. At first, people might have held back somewhat, but the organisers safety precautions soon became second nature with the artists and audiences. That was a highly interesting and gratifying experience this summer: People took the situation very seriously. After the — absolutely justified — total shutdown in the spring, organisers set to work planning, enabling and implementing. Nevertheless, some performances had to be canceled or rescheduled. In the end the festival was slimmed down, with a strict hygiene concept supervised by medical experts. All staff and artists were tested daily, the program and ensembles were downsized, and the Vienna Philharmonic



was the only orchestra allowed to play. "We are skating on thin ice," Salzburg artistic director Markus Hinterhäuser told DW at that time. The ice held: There was not a single case of COVID-19 found to have spread among the festival's 76,500 visitors.

Conditions for the innovativeness and success

First of all, according to Jan Brachmann — a renowned German music critic and editor at the German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung — the epidemiological situation in Austria is slightly more relaxed than in Germany.

The second reason is political, Brachmann said, and essentially linked to the festival's president, Helga Rabl-Stadler.

For years, Rabl-Stadler was a politician for the ÖVP party, Brachmann pointed out: "I believe that her political connections have been very helpful in getting the festival to take place."

Thirdly, there is the economy. "The share of tourism in Austria's gross domestic product is almost twice as high as in Germany," Brachmann told DW. "In 2019, it was 3.9% in Germany compared to 7.3% in Austria. The festival boosts tourism tremendously, especially in the province of Salzburg."



Photo source: <https://www.dw.com/en/salzburg-festivals-centenary-celebrations-extended/a-58255003>

Lastly, there was a great number of things that were either adjusted, rescheduled, or cancelled in order to have the best possible experience to both artists and the audience. Festival organisers' ability to adapt to certain situations and implement the right decisions has most likely played the key part in the success of the Salzburg Festival's 100th season.

Benjamin Britten's great War Requiem should have been performed by the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, which premiered the piece in 1962 in the rebuilt Coventry Cathedral. But COVID threw a spanner in the works: Due to the strict quarantine regulations on return trips to the United Kingdom, the orchestra found itself unable to travel.

Instead, the Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra stepped in by contacting its members throughout Europe: 91 musicians from 18 countries have traveled for the project, living up to the festival's founding aim after World War I, which was to unite Europeans again through music. They were joined by 100 choristers from the Vienna Singverein.

When asked if the success of this season could be repeated and if the festival would survive another coronavirus shut down director was straight – "I think it would be very difficult to make



another such summer possible. This one was difficult enough. But long-term, it's nearly impossible. The festival is an organization that depends on ticket sales. Less than one-fourth of the budget is covered by public funds. In a normal year, more than 70% of our budgetary needs are brought in through ticket sales. This year, we wanted to make a statement. We always knew that there would be absolutely no financial advantage to it.”

Sources:

- <https://archive.salzburgerfestspiele.at/en/organisation>
- <https://www.dw.com/en/why-the-salzburg-festival-wasnt-canceled-during-the-pandemic/a-57582360>
- <https://www.dw.com/en/salzburg-festival-director-arts-are-indispensable/a-54783408>
- <https://www.dw.com/en/salzburg-festivals-centenary-celebrations-extended/a-58255003>

Self-reflection questions

1. How can a festival attract more funds during the pandemic?
2. Will music festivals survive the pandemic? How many of them will have to shut down completely or change the way they are organised?

This good practice story is prepared by Birstonas Culture Center.