



THEATER CHEMNITZ

## DER WEG DER VERHEISSUNG

### a play about the Holocaust?

„Der Weg der Verheissung“ is the most important translation of the Old Testament into the language of modern opera. Looking back on musical history, similar attempts may be found in Bach's Passions (regarding the New Testament) or in Haydn's Oratorios („Genesis“). In the history of the Jewish people, „Der Weg der Verheissung“ represents a unique attempt to exemplify the meaning of Judaism. This alone would justify its production; up to now, however, it has done more to prevent it because the concept is too demanding and elaborate - after all, it reflects four thousand years in the history of humankind as told in the most valuable literary tradition - the Bible.

But there is a second, more topical angle: „Der Weg der Verheissung“ is also a modern drama that portrays in gripping scenes the Jewish population's tragic history in twentieth-century Germany and Europe, a scenario that ultimately ended in the Holocaust. Although Auschwitz was still in the distant future in 1934/36, Werfel, Weill and the great director Max Reinhardt already sensed the horrors to come. The piece, then, is a prophetic work that foresees the tragic unfolding of history, but at the same time it is suffused with a Messianic belief in redemption.

Kurt Weill and Franz Werfel were both rooted in the Judeo-German middle class whose achievements shaped German and European culture. In the opera both pay tribute to their heritage while at the same time berating the Germans.

Although the narratives stem from Hebrew traditions, German is the language in which they are conveyed, and the frame plot reflects - and at times foresees - the events in Germany between 1933 and 1945.

This is what inspired the opera's authors, and it more than justifies its production today. And yet there is another reason for staging it, and that is its artistic value. And we do not say this out of piety or reverence for a well-meant effort without artistic merit. This opera is a masterpiece that has the power to deeply move an audience and encompasses a unique mixture of German and Jewish artistic traditions. Franz Werfel, a member of Rainer Maria Rilke's and Franz Kafka's poetic school in Prague and an eminent German novelist, created short, poignant stories out of the vast Biblical material; Kurt Weill's memorable and stirring music blends Jewish and German melodies and draws equally on the folk song and classical master-pieces. At the same time Weill pays tribute to his father, an erudite Jewish cantor from the central German town of Dessau.

Our objective is to produce this piece as a testimony of Judeo-German culture and a document of the Germans' culpability in the tragic history of the Jews, but also as a forward-looking appeal for reconciliation. The monstrosities of the Third Reich cannot be healed by time; they must enter people's hearts and minds. What many suffered (and many more never survived) must be conveyed through art to prevent generations to follow from experiencing the same horrors. The twentieth century did not bring forth as many great operas as the previous one. „Der Weg der Verheissung“, however, is on a par with the operas of Verdi or Puccini. Ernst Bloch, the great Jewish philosopher, spoke of Kurt Weill as the „Verdi of the man in the street“. We hope that our production will prove him right. Whoever witnesses these scenes and listens to this music will always remember them.

Gerhard Müller  
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