

Prolight + Sound 2023: Opus Award for “Pandaemonium”



Picture: Sebastian Hannak

This year's “Opus – German Stage Award” honours the “Pandaemonium”, a completely new kind of box theatre concept that realised a wide variety of scenic areas and sightlines and brought the audience close to the action. The sophisticated construction and safe distances between the seats made it possible to realise large opera productions such as “Wozzeck” or “Tosca” with a large orchestra and choir in front of the audience at the Staatstheater Kassel, even in times of pandemic challenges. The Opus will be presented on 27 April 2023 at Prolight + Sound, the leading international trade fair for the event and entertainment technology industry.

As a renowned industry award, the Opus honours special achievements in the fields of staging, technical realisation, set design and lighting design. The award has been an integral part of Prolight + Sound since 2002. The Opus is granted by the Association of Media and Event Technology (VPLT), the European Association of Event Centres (EVVC) and Messe Frankfurt. An expert jury consisting of association members, industry experts, media representatives and representatives of Messe Frankfurt chose the project as the winner.

As hard as the restrictions of the past few years have hit the entire event industry, so great is the amount of creativity and visionary power that the pandemic has

unleashed among many professionals in the arts, culture and stage business. The Pandaemonium is downright emblematic of the forward-looking approach to the challenges of the crisis. Not only did the innovative stage concept provide maximum planning security through the extended distance between the individual visitor seats. The team around Florian Lutz (Intendant/Artist Director Staatstheater Kassel, Director of Wozzeck), Sebastian Hannak (Scenographer) and Mario Schomberg (Technical Director) also succeeded in exploring new theatrical forms of use and successfully realised a visionary concept.

As a three-story, cross-shaped installation on the main stage, back stage as well as the side stages, the Pandaemonium connected the auditorium with the different performance areas into a space for shared theatrical experience. The entire stage was equipped with a scaffolding construction with a total height of 7.90 meters – a 16-metre-long bridge led diagonally across the main stage area and connected the side stages. The orchestra was located in the centre of the stage, while up to 270 audience members were seated around the stage area on all three floors of the complex construction. The scenographic concept allowed the performers to move freely within the entire installation, which led to completely new possibilities for involving the audience in the productions. In addition to the large screens, numerous flat screens ensured that the stage action, which was spread throughout the entire space, could be seen from every seat. Video artist Konrad Kästner was responsible for the video concept and video design of the two opera productions.

The openness to explore new approaches was an essential element right from the start of the project. Prior to the set-up, the planning and preparation took place in digital space due to the pandemic. Vincent Kaufmann, a member of the “digital.DTHG” team of the German Theatre Technical Society, modelled the project virtually and accompanied the entire production process digitally – from the first sketches to the stage mockup with VR Headsets until the premiere. In times of contact restrictions, this approach was an elementary foundation for the successful cooperation of all those involved.

The architect Oliver Mann supervised the project as construction manager, Björn Schmidt-Hurtienne from EHS was in charge of the statics, and head of workshops Harald Gunkel supervised the building of the set design within the installation. As head of the sound department, Karl-Walter Heyer and his team were responsible for the operation of the spatial sound system. Stage manager in charge Andreas Lang and his fellow stage managers as well as the stage technicians and props department under the direction of Anne Schulz contributed a lot in advance to the preparation and supervision during the run of Pandaemonium.

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