

Lawo Technology for ORF



The Grosses Festspielhaus (Grand Festival Hall) in Salzburg, with a seating capacity of 2,200, is one of the world's most prestigious opera and concert venues. Since its opening in 1960, it has served as central stage for the Salzburg Festival (Salzburger Festspiele), bringing together top-tier international artists for elaborate opera and orchestral productions. The venue's audio infrastructure must meet exceptionally high demands, requiring outstanding sound quality, flexibility, and operational reliability. As part of a technical modernization initiative, Austrian public broadcaster ORF has upgraded the audio control room at the Grosses Festspielhaus with state-of-the-art Lawo technology.

The modernization, completed at the end of 2023, features a Lawo mc²56 MkIII audio production console with 32 faders, selected for its superior sound quality, flexible configuration options, and seamless integration with ORF's existing systems. The system is powered by the A_UHD Core audio engine, complemented by A_stage64 and A_stage80 stageboxes for high-resolution audio interfacing, and A_madi6 for integration with additional audio components. The Waves SoundGrid integration provides extensive sound processing capabilities, while a fully IP-based network infrastructure with redundant switches ensures a stable, future-proof signal transmission. The new Lawo system has been in operation since early 2024, successfully supporting major events such as the Mozart Weeks, Easter Festival, and other music events, proving its reliability from the start.

Frank Wendtner-Andraschko, ORF Tonmeister (pictured above), highlights the complexities of live opera production: “Opera productions uniquely blend music, vocals, and stage performance. The orchestra plays from the pit, while singers and choirs perform on stage. Additional musical and vocal elements are often positioned behind the scenes, on lighting bridges, in the loft, or beneath the stage. Each production presents new challenges, from microphone placement to mixing in 5.1 surround.”

“The Lawo mc²56 MkIII convinced us with its flexibility and intuitive operation. The extensive Free Controls allow us to assign global or channel-specific parameters, ensuring fast and precise workflow adjustments. Additionally, MIDI integration, for example, enables remote control of microphone panning for wireless stage microphones (hidden microphones), greatly simplifying our production processes.”

Another crucial factor in choosing Lawo was its seamless integration into ORF’s broader infrastructure. “Our studio control rooms and OB trucks already use Lawo technology, allowing us to rely on a proven system. IP-based signal distribution enables us to seamlessly control productions not only in the Grand Festival Hall, but also in the Felsenreitschule and the House for Mozart. The stage boxes are then housed centrally in the central hub, where the signals from all the venues are received and distributed via fiber optics.”

Operas and large orchestral productions place particularly high demands on an audio mixing console: in addition to a large number of channels, often well over 60 input channels, high dynamics, fidelity and lossless signal processing are crucial. The Lawo mc²56 MkIII fulfills these requirements with high-quality microphone preamps for maximum transparency, flexible routing options for monitoring, broadcasting and recording, as well as seamless IP connectivity. Redundant systems guarantee maximum reliability and uninterrupted performance.

With the new Lawo setup, ORF has established a high-performance, future-proof audio infrastructure. Thanks to cutting-edge IP technology, scalable DSP capabilities, and a flexible network architecture, the system is well-equipped to handle future production requirements with ease. “Our investment in Lawo technology has already paid off,” concludes Wendtner-Andraschko. “We now have a reliable, sonically outstanding, and highly adaptable solution that meets the exacting demands of the Salzburg Festival and beyond.”

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