Microtech Gefell KEM 975 microphones used at 16th ST. Gallen Festival 2021

The St. Gallen Festival took place for the 16th time in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Abbey District of St. Gallen from 25 June to 9 July 2021. The centerpiece of the festival was the large open-air opera production in the inner courtyard of St. Gallen Abbey. The focus of this year's festival was the opera "Notre Dame" by the Austrian composer Franz Schmidt. With this new production, the Festival continued its tradition of rediscovering rarely performed masterpieces. The new production of the opera classic exuded a touch of Gothic, for the central stage element was the famous west rosette of Notre Dame, which was created around 1260 and is supposed to embody creative order. An elaborate scaffolding structure, inspired by the images after the devastating fire of 2019 formed a flanking element.

Strict corona requirements posed a particular challenge to the sound engineering in 2021. Michael Balke was the musical director and the symphony orchestra of the Theater St.Gallen played. Responsible for sound and sound design were Stephan Linde (head of department of the Theatre St.Gallen / Left side of the picture) for the choir and soloists and Benjamin Schultz (freelance sound engineer/musician / Right side of the picture) for the orchestra.

Due to Corona strict requirements, this time the orchestra and Prague choir had to be transmitted from the Tonhalle in St Gallen, the theatre's concert hall, so to speak, via a three-kilometre fibre-optic line to the open-air venue in the Klosterhof. Traditionally, the orchestra and the Prague Choir had an extra building in the immediate vicinity of the Klosterhof. This time, because of the distance rules, the Tonhalle was used for this purpose.

The difficulties that arose in the large concert hall were to keep the crosstalk to the respective main microphones for the orchestra and for the choir as low as possible. In open air productions there are different choirs. Traditionally the opera choir of the house and various additional choirs that sing live, unamplified in costume in the production.

The Prague Festival Choir, which also sings at the Bregenez Festival, was mixed in live, which traditionally works very well in terms of balance in the Klosterhof. The first idea was to equip the Prague choir in the Tonhalle with headsets, but this idea was quickly abandoned due to the expense and the limited number of channels. This time, with the support of Microtech Gefell, the Linearray cardioid-plane microphones KEM 975 were used. Two KEM 975 now served as the choir's main microphones, plus spot microphones distributed according to voice groups.

The KEM 975s were exactly the right choice to prevent the reflections of the orchestra in the back of the microphones and to fade them out as far as possible. The singers of the choir had to stand 2 m away from each other due to the corona distance rules. The KEM 975s, with its 120 degrees in width, were thus ideally suited for this wide set-up of the choir and delivered an excellent result in terms of depth and transparency.

The Tingo GmbH and Habbegger, who have been reliable partners of the Festival for many years, provided the Festival with the necessary audio infrastructure to enable the extremely long transmission paths and A/D conversions. The choice of the linear array microphones KEM 975 convinced Benjamin Schultz and Stephan Linde to work with these very special microphones and their extraordinary characteristics for future projects.

The cardioid plane microphone KEM 975 is a line array microphone system with a largely frequency-independent polar pattern, which – in the horizontal plane – has the features of a cardioid microphone and – in the vertical plane – the features of a directional microphone with an operating angle of approx. 30 degrees. Thus, the polar pattern is adapted to the frequent case that the sound source to be captured is wide in space or moves around in it and, at the same time, sound coming from other directions is to be suppressed.

The sound to be rejected may consist of disturbing noises or reflections which come from the ceiling, table surfaces or floor areas. Due to its directional characteristics, the KEM 975 can be used for recording sound sources that are very extensive in width and depth for or moving sound sources. Since the complete signal processing

is analogue, there are no signal delays.

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