

Prolight + Sound 2024 "Opus German Stage Award"



Picture: Chris Moylan

This year, Prolight + Sound, a trade fair for the entertainment technology industry, is honouring two projects with the "Opus - German Stage Award" that focus on people as individuals in very different ways: The Grand Show "FALLING | IN LOVE" at the Friedrichstadt-Palast stages the story of a deaf poet in search of love as a breathtaking, innovative play of colours - curated and visually designed by designer icon Jean Paul Gaultier. Ensemble Modern's walk-in sound body at the cresc Biennale 2023 focuses on the individual in relation to the community. The jury honoured the impressive implementation of this project with the special "Opus AVantgarde" prize.

The "Opus" is considered one of the most prestigious awards for outstanding stage projects. Since 2002, it has been awarded at Prolight + Sound by a jury of experts from industry, associations, trade publications and representatives of Messe Frankfurt. It recognises the creative use of technology in the design of theatre or stage productions, concerts, conferences and open-air events. The non-endowed honorary award is sponsored by the Association for Media and Event Technology (VPLT), the European Association of Event Centres (EVVC) and Messe Frankfurt. The award ceremony will take place on Thursday, 21 March 2024, embedded in a glamorous gala dinner at the 5-star luxury hotel Steigenberger Icon Frankfurter Hof.

When creativity and technical expertise at the highest level are combined with the appropriate financial resources, an ideal breeding ground for breathtaking art is being created. Berlin's Friedrichstadt-Palast offers an impressive example in every aspect with its Grand Show "FALLING | IN LOVE", which celebrated its world premiere on 11 October 2023. Created with a record-breaking production budget of 14 million Euros, over 100 artists from 28 nations transform the stage into a glittering sea of colours, shapes, costumes and effects, supported by technically

innovative installations.

In an exclusive collaboration with Swarovski, 100 million Swarovski crystals bathe the scenery in a sparkling light – an impressive world record in the film and stage industry. Among them is the largest cut Swarovski crystal in the world, which weighs an impressive 180 kg. As visual design director, star designer Jean Paul Gaultier realised his aesthetic vision not only in the costumes but also in the stage set. As curator of the show, he also brought up-and-coming design teams on board. These include artists Hannah Rose and Steven Raj from Fecal Matter, who challenge gender boundaries and beauty ideals with their unique vision of beauty and reality. Sasha Frolova, a performance artist specialising in latex, completes the team with her striking aesthetic.

For the first time, the Friedrichstadt-Palast has engaged leading actors with disabilities in the form of the deaf dancers Callum Webdale and Hearn Sebudo, who alternately embody the protagonist You. In order to provide Webdale and Sebudo with the best possible basis for their performances, a vibration plate was built into the stage floor. This allows the two of them to orientate themselves to the sound waves of the music during their solo moments. In addition, all texts were translated for them by sign language interpreters and their dressing rooms were equipped with light signals, as they are unable to recognise the usual bell signals.

The spectacular stage production also fascinates with technically impressive installations such as movable lifting platforms in a water basin, water effects, mirror zones and a stunning rain curtain. The audiovisual experience is rounded off by an immersive 360° sound system and superb lighting with 250 LED spotlights, 129 conventional spotlights and 347 moving lights. The idea for the project originated from artistic director and producer Berndt Schmidt, inspired by the poem "The Garden of Love" by the English poet William Blake (1757-1827). It was written and directed by Oliver Hoppmann, one of Europe's most successful show creators.

At the centre of the story is "You", a young, deaf poet full of passion and longing. The artist does not fit into any mould and feels misunderstood. His search for love repeatedly ends in rejection. In these moments, "You" wishes he could just sink into the ground. But then the grey asphalt of civilisation breaks beneath his feet and he plunges into another reality. In this hidden garden of love, a world reveals itself to him that he has never seen before – a surging sea of colour and beauty, a diversity that encompasses all facets of nature. Here lives the eternal human dream of a better world, enclosed under traditional norms. The focus is on the question of whether "You" will ultimately find the words to shatter the man-made walls and allow love to blossom. The emotional story, embedded in a technically sophisticated frenzy of images and costumes, captures the spirit of the times: Over 300,000 tickets have already been sold to date.



This year's special "Opus AVantgarde" award goes to the renowned Ensemble Modern for its "walk-in sound body" at the "cresc - Biennale for contemporary music" in Frankfurt. The international ensemble is one of the world's best-known, leading formations for contemporary music and performs at renowned festivals around the globe. The "cresc" festival is organised by Ensemble Modern in collaboration with the HR Symphony Orchestra. Under the title "MeWe", musical formations explored the relationship between the individual and the community in a variety of modern music in 2023.

The "Earth Dances" work (by Sir Harrison Birtwistle), staged jointly by the HR Symphony Orchestra and Ensemble Modern, could be experienced by the audience in a completely new way immediately after the live performance in the form of a walk-in sound body. Sound designer and sound director Norbert Ommer relied on innovative technologies. The tones recorded by the orchestra were transferred into a 3D audio installation that allowed the audience to move freely within the orchestra's sound body. The playback was linear and was mixed live by Ommer via a d&b Soundscape system in three dimensions and transmitted into the room. The technology used included 44 loudspeaker components, supported by 8 subwoofers on different levels. These were arranged on the floor, at a height of 5 metres and in a ring below the studio ceiling. A particular highlight was the programmed rotation of the entire orchestra by up to 180 degrees as well as the movement of vocal instruments within the sound body. The technical implementation was realised in

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collaboration with renowned companies such as Crystal Sound. The result was a fascinating musical exploration, made possible by a technologically innovative concept that expanded the boundaries of the conventional concert experience and transported the audience into a new dimension of contemporary music.

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