

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

## Salzburger Festspiele / Salzburg Festival (held for 5 weeks starting, in late July)

### How the Salzburg Festival came to Salzburg 100 years ago



Hugo von Hofmannsthal had a Jewish ancestor but saw himself as a conservative Catholic

The five men picked up on an idea that had been around at least since 1876, the founding year of the Bayreuth Festival, namely to organize a festival in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's home town. Just like the festival in Bayreuth, it would take place far from any cultural metropolis. "The big city is a place of diversion, but a festive performance requires concentration: both by those who participate and by the audience," as Hugo von Hofmannsthal put it.

So the Salzburg Festival had something in common with the one in northern Bavaria, but there were also major differences. In Bayreuth, the focus was on Richard Wagner and his ten works suitable for the festival — period. Salzburg would focus on several composers, and even more: The festival would showcase the entire world of culture. It was also meant to tie in with an age-old tradition: In the Middle Ages, Salzburg was the place of

mystery plays, festive church festivals and processions. The first opera performed north of the Alps was said to have been staged in Salzburg in the 17th century.

#### Utopia in times of war

It was a foolhardy thought that seemed unrealistic not only because of the raging war; there was also no adequate venue. "What gives the Salzburgers and Austrians the courage to do so at the present moment?" Hofmannsthal asked, according to a festival advertisement. His answer: "The fact that all people are now demanding spiritual nourishment."

The townsfolk of Salzburg were skeptical. They feared an influx of tourists would further decimate already scarce food supplies. Max Reinhardt, who had bought an old castle in the region in 1917 and was Jewish, faced growing anti-Semitism from the local population.



Richard Strauss was popular abroad, too

The First World War ended in 1918 and saw the once proud Austro-Hungarian Empire reduced to a fraction of its former size. Practical considerations added to the visionaries' humanistic ideals; they wanted to boost tourism and preserve what was left of the old splendor of the lost Danube monarchy. What better way than to put those plans to work with this lovely city in the heart of Europe as a backdrop? As Max Reinhardt said, "The entire city is a stage."

#### "Everyman" for the festival, but a festival for every man?

Following the old tradition of mystery plays in Salzburg, a contemporary play was staged on August 22, 1920: Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Everyman*, directed by Max Reinhardt. Using simple language, the play based on a religious idea was supposed to move people without lecturing.

In 1921, the second year of the festival, Salzburg Mozarteum director Bernhardt Paumgartner organized concerts with local musicians. Festival co-founder Richard Strauss was not thrilled. He wanted to see the most renowned artists at the Salzburg Festival — and that's what he got.



Max Reinhardt was successful in Salzburg long before the town became home to the festival

With this approach, the festival hit the ground running. Beginning in 1922, the program also had opera performances, works by Mozart and Strauss — in the latter case particularly works that Strauss had created with the librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal. The three pillars of theater, concert and opera provide the framework for the festival program to this very day. The Felsenreitschule Theater was used as a venue from 1926, and in the following year, construction of a new "Festspielhaus," or festival theater, was completed.