

## **Georg Heckel**

### Production processes

Hello everybody. It's a pleasure to be here. And I think this is a great event, and a great thing to think about opera in the future and how opera's done right now.

I would start with the example I think we're going to listen to tonight, to the Lord Byron, and I can talk a little bit about the production process and the way that this opera first saw the light of the world. Actually it started in 2007, with another opera project before. And the interesting question for me is, where is the initial point where is the initial key where you say okay we'll going to do an opera together? Or, where is the point at which you say I can trust the team, and how do I find that team? In our case there was the Book Fair close to Darmstadt in Frankfurt, that had the theme Catalunya, so that was a general theme for the area, to deal with the theme Catalunya, and we had contact with Dietrich Grosse, got to know Dietrich Grosse via Mr. Froboese from Halle, and he came up with the idea of having a world premiere called La Cuzzone first performed in our house.

So, there was a theme about an elderly singer, so an initial theme of opera which is actually always interesting. We got samples of the composer, not of the opera - the opera didn't exist at that point - but of the composer, and we got in closer contact, we met, we got to know the people, and I think that's the initial thing, just generally, to make projects together, that you have to get to know each other, you have to get samples from the work of each other. They saw productions in our house, so that hopefully they could trust us as

well, and that was the point where we all agreed that we can probably start this project. And I'm talking about La Cuzzoni, because after La Cuzzoni in Darmstadt, we saw that it was a huge success so we took up that opera another time the season after for a couple of performances, they were all again sold out. Afterwards we couldn't perform it any more for several reasons, and it was shown in Spain. And starting from that project we came to the next one. We came to Lord Byron with the same team, but of a completely different size. The initial point again is that the trust of each others' abilities was fixed after that first experience, and that, I think, is always the initial point; you have to find the people and you have to trust the people.

Well, Lord Byron, indeed, was a lot more complicated and a lot more complex, the whole situation, because now we have the full size opera and in German repertoire theatre you don't look at opera as one project, you have to deal with the repertoire which is steadily in the house; and you have to deal with the fact that you don't have guest singers for each production, you have an ensemble, and you have to have roles for that ensemble. That was the point the composer got to know, had to get to know this ensemble to find out who might be cast with which role, and we had to plan long term to make sure that singers would be free for that role. And sometimes fate is not happy or not lucky, and sometimes fate is a little bit mean, even to opera, so three of the singers had to be recast because they left us for Vienna and Munich. So we were standing there with the project which was already developing, but we still didn't have the capacities as planned, and we didn't have the singers the roles were planned for. That's also the thing if you do these kinds of premieres, you get to deal with changing circumstances all the time. So the production process after this short term thing,

La Cuzzoni, was for Lord Byron, I would guess three, three and a half years, something like that, really a pretty long time.

Over that time we had to deal with different things like, what about the choir? So we all knew there is a choir with a special function in that opera; nobody knew how big that part was going to be, was going to turn out. So we did not know how many resources we had to plan for that, and also you have to plan with a couple of X's; like an X here and an X there which have to be filled over time, but you have to have as many doors open for as long as possible. And it's always dealing between: I want to go there and the reality is here. And I'm glad that over this long period, – and I'm coming back to the initial theme -, we did not lose the trust with each other, and this is somehow again I think the basic theme; you have to have that idea, you have to stick with it, and you cannot stop trusting that, otherwise the whole project might take a different way, which is the way backwards. [That's it] so far. If you would like to hear more details I'm absolutely willing to answer them.