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**The World Youth Concert Scene
The 68th Festival of Young Artists in
Bayreuth**

Bayreuth, the city of Richard Wagner and the venue of the famous theatre and opera festival, known for its rich historical and cultural heritage, claims another title each summer – that of the world’s music capital of youth. Over almost seven decades now, for a month each year, this city has hosted the Festival of Young Artists (Festival junger Künstler Bayreuth). The Festival was founded in 1950 under the auspices of the renowned Finnish composer Jean Sibelius. At the time, in the wake of the Second World War and the establishment of the Iron Curtain, the Festival served as a kind of link between the Blocs, a neutral ‘territory’ that welcomed artists from both the East and the West. The idea of bringing together different cultural and artistic traditions and experiences has been kept alive to this day, so every August Bayreuth gathers more than four hundred young musicians from over forty countries worldwide, who participate in workshops for symphonic, chamber and choral music, composition and music theatre as well as other disciplines such as photography, camera-work and sound recording.

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Sissi Thammer has been the Festival’s artistic and executive director since 1986. Through educational work with the young, she strongly advocates ideas of promoting international cultural exchange. During her time as the head of the Bayreuth Festival, she has received numerous awards presented by the Federal Republic of Germany and the Free State of Bavaria as well as being the recipient of the 1997 Woman of Europe award. The collaborators and numerous participants all say Sissi Thammer supports artists “well beyond her professional duties”. Together with the Festival team, she strives to educate young people by involving them in a series of high-quality projects and commissioning renowned conductors and educators, and advocates freedom and peace among nations, open and free society, and the promotion of inventiveness and innovation in the young.

A large number of young people from all over the world also participate in the organisation of the Festival each year. Working in several sectors – as assistants to the director, in the organisation of concerts and events, in the art management office, the newsroom or as hosts to foreign students – they assume responsibility and are offered an insight into the workings of a large international festival. Moreover, they gain a great deal of experience that benefits their future careers, since they are mostly students of cultural management, tourism, the humanities, journalism, communication studies, art and music. Every year the Festival organises a course called *Stepping Stone* for their benefit in order to further their development and familiarise them with all the ins and outs of their professions. The development programme, intended for young people embarking on

their careers, but also for younger students and secondary school students, consists of a series of lectures and workshops, at the end of which each student is presented with a certificate. This year young people from Germany, Great Britain, Ukraine, France, Canada, Zimbabwe and other countries participated in the organisation.

Every year the Festival has a certain motto. Owing to the resounding success of last year's motto of the Festival and great public interest, this year's motto – *Roots to the Future. Reloaded* – in fact continues the theme of 2017, suggesting that only by getting to know and understand our own roots will we be able to face the foreign and the unknown. Guided by this thesis, the 68th Festival of Young Artists opened on 2nd August 2018 with performances of a number of ensembles and artists from different parts of the world, who interpreted compositions representative of the culture and tradition of the region they came from.

According to the concept of the Festival of Young Artists, participation is by invitation only. Out of the numerous interested ensembles and solo musicians the organisers choose those who will have that year's honour of staying in Bayreuth, taking part in some of the workshops and holding recitals in the town and its environs. Such artists in residence included several very interesting ensembles this year – the *Görög Sisters* piano duo (Hungary/Serbia), the chamber orchestra of the “Gheorghe Dima” Music Academy from Cluj-Napoca (Romania), the Tel Aviv Wind Ensemble (Israel), an ensemble of traditional Chinese instruments from the Shandong University in Jinan (China), the *Kabachok* traditional vocal-instrumental ensemble (Ukraine), *Duo Maelo* (Germany/Switzerland), *Duo*

Allegria (Ukraine), the “Jazeps Medins” Boys' Choir from Riga (Latvia), the University of Macedonia Choir from Thessaloniki (Greece) and the Novi Sad Chamber Choir (Serbia), not to mention numerous renowned soloists who have already carved out successful international careers.

Ten workshops were held at this year's Festival of Young Artists. The programme called *Passio – Compassio*, led by the idea of bringing the East and the West together, included works by Bach and Weil, but also performances of Christian and Arab Muslim songs in baroque as well as jazz and traditional arrangements. The centenary of the birth of Wagner's granddaughter Friedelind was marked by a music homage to her personality and work, a recital of songs entitled *Friedelind: a Wagner*. There followed a video workshop *Diversity. Above all*, which resulted in the shooting and making of a promotional film about this year's Festival, a workshop on sound recording and arrangement, whose participants were tasked with making the Festival CD, and several workshops intended for the youngest participants – the Festival children – such as the staging of the musical play *The Town Musicians of Bremen* and an educational workshop called *What is opera?*

The project that undoubtedly gathered the largest number of people was the performance of the Vespers of the Blessed Virgin (*Vespro della Beata Vergine*) by Claudio Monteverdi. Featuring nearly one hundred performers on stage, under the direction of Swedish conductor Fred Sjöberg, the performance brought together three choirs – the Boys' Choir from Riga, the choir from Greece and the Novi Sad Chamber Choir – as well as an international choir

composed of young artists from Germany, Canada, France, Ukraine, Spain, Poland and Croatia, led by Karl Magnus Jansson on the organ. The orchestra played on authentic baroque instruments – violins with an old-style string tightening and a baroque type of bow – with an arched form and loose strings which the performer tightens and loosens with his right thumb as necessary, as well as on wooden flutes, recorders, wooden cornetts and an old, baroque type of trombone called the sackbut.

The performance of this very demanding vocal-instrumental work also featured seven soloists – sopranos Radoslava Vorgić-Žuržovan and Teresa Hörl, alto Alexandra Hebart, tenors Edward Nilsen-Leach and Simon Jass, and baritones Rafael Leo and Michael Wolfrum. The technical vocal abilities of Radoslava Vorgić-Žuržovan and Edward Nilsen-Leach made them stand out among the other soloists. Fred Sjöberg, a conductor with a distinguished international career, is already known to the organisers and the audience at the Bayreuth Festival for his successful workshops held in previous years. Thanks to his energy, exacting artistic demands, and dedicated and meticulous work with the vocal and instrumental ensemble, he succeeded in staging a remarkably successful and noted performance of Monteverdi's work in a very short time. The performances were preceded by a series of intense daily orchestral, choral and soloistic rehearsals, followed by joint rehearsals of all the participants. Gunnel Sjöberg, soprano and vocal coach, assisted the conductor in preparing the vocal ensemble. Her many interesting vocal exercises and the useful advice she offered the choir singers on how to respond to the exacting technical demands placed before them helped

render the timbre of the new-formed large choir uniform.

This monumental piece by Claudio Monteverdi, created in early 17th century at the height of the Counter-Reformation, was performed twice at the 68th Festival of Young Artists. It was premiered on 9th August in the impressive setting of the City Church of the Holy Trinity in Bayreuth, restored in 1610, right about the time Monteverdi wrote his *Vespers*, and performed again the next day, on 10th August, in a late-baroque church in the Speinshart Monastery. In addition to these two locations, the Festival concerts were also organised in the *Europa* Hall of the “Das Zentrum” conference and cultural centre, other city churches and nearby venues. Over sixty all-evening concerts and promenade performances in city squares, concerts for city officials and citizens of Bayreuth, were performed in the course of the Festival.

Joint music-making, meeting new people, forming friendships and making contact with artists from all over the world, not to mention the challenges of playing in different and new circumstances, all provide any young artist with invaluable experience. As one of the festivals with the longest tradition in Europe, for 68 years now it has maintained a high reputation in professional circles and represented a place young people attend and always happily return to, a place of opportunity for personal development, gaining new experience, researching, experimenting and freely expressing one's creativity. In the 68 years of its existence, the Festival of Young Artists in Bayreuth has made an impact on the lives of over 25,000 young people – artists, managers, researchers – from more than 80 countries worldwide.