

# HERCULANUM

Sophiensaele Berlin, November 2013

With: Maja Lange, Ulrike Schwab, Thomas Volle, Simon Robinson, Friedemann Mewes, Martin Lorenz, Theo Nabicht, Tobias von Glenck

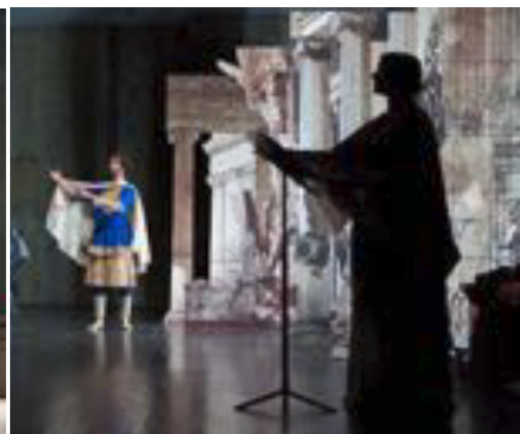
Set & Direction: Johannes Müller/Philine Rinnert, Arrangement and composition: Martin Lorenz, Musical direction: Friedemann Mewes, Martin Lorenz, Dramaturgy: Eike Wittrock, Artistic assistance: För Kunkel, Production management: Ehrliche Arbeit - Freies Kulturbüro



Félicien David's grand opéra Herculanum opened in Paris in 1959. Set in Roman antiquity, the opera depicts the downfall of a regime and the demise of the city of Herculaneum as God's vengeance for the decadence of the era. David's Herculanum was a spectacular success: a mixture of music, mass scenes, lavish decorations, revolutionary spirit and ballet. And its final scene left the Parisian audience whooping with delight: the explosive eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79, which famously buried Herculaneum.

In their new project, HERCULANUM, Johannes Müller and Philine Rinnert explore opera as a genre that has always conceived of itself as the privileged medium for representing the great horror scenarios and disasters of the world. The directors archaeologically research the lost theatrical success of Herculanum and the political entertainment of the grand opéra genre. In collaboration with singers, musicians and scientists, they collect relics and combine, reinvent and apply what they discover. They ponder whether opera is more than a museum of delicate voices on display and which current disasters are eligible for a grand operatic finale.

For the first time in over 150 years HERCULANUM showcases the music of Félicien David's forgotten opera success.



### “Joys of Excavation: The Grand Opera "Herculanum"

The idea of Johannes Müller and Philine Rinnert is as simple as it is brilliant: When Félicien David's Grand Opera "Herculaneum" premiered in 1859 it owed much to the enthusiasm about the excavations at Vesuvius. So why not turn the rediscovery of that forgotten opera into an archaeological expedition? The fact that David's opera can't completely be reconstructed is clear already by the start of the performance in Sophiensäle [...], when the staff list of the Paris Opéra in 1859 is being read: Even the bravest theatre director would surrender to the amount of hairdressers, stage cavalry and stablemen. Müller and Rinnert rather present fragments – of the original music, stage designs, but also of the opera's context and reception: In this successful series of operatic exercises the wild dramaturgical researches become part of the show. David's music is arranged for only eight musicians, but is in no way ruined: a small sound of a triangle can evoke the shadow of a massive and striking choral finale. And then, suddenly, in the simple beauty of a love duet, an arrow that was shot over a hundred years ago hits the listener straight into the heart."

*(Carsten Niemann, Tagesspiegel, 16.11.2013)*

"The plot of the opera is just a motivic surface for the deep excavations of "Herculanum". Underneath the production deals with – among other things – the mechanisms of the Grand Opéra itself: The parameters of this theatre spectacle are repeatedly isolated and taken under the microscope, to be finally recombined in various arrangements. To deconstruct the cliché of the genre it is kept at a distance. Interwoven into the dramatic events are meta-narratives and documents: excerpts from reviews, geological articles, reflections on theatre history, the never ending staff list of the Paris opera, which gives an idea of the spectacular stage magic. This eruption of different materials, the digging and searching on stage, develops a remarkable energy – you just have to sort those materials yourself."

*(David Vicia, unruheimberrang.net, 18.11.2013)*

### Opération Spirituelle [RPM45]

Sophiensäle Berlin, September 2012

With: Franziska Dick, Anna Eger, Jill Emerson, Cora Frost, Hauke Heumann, Martin Lorenz, Ulrike Schwab, Directed by: Johannes Müller, Musical director, Composer: Martin Lorenz, Set & costumes: Philine Rinnert, Make-up: Elena Irsigler, Lights: Ralf Arndt, Director's assistant: Nolundi Tschudi, Stage & costume design assistant: För Künkel, Production management: ehrliche arbeit – freelance office for culture.



Ever since the Fox sisters became a media sensation in 1847 for making contact with the poltergeists haunting their house in New York, esotericism has developed into a branch of business situated somewhere between counseling and show biz. Together with a cast of singers, dancers and actors, director Johannes Müller and composer Martin Lorenz venture into the commercial sphere of the ephemeral. Based on the comedy *Blithe Spirit*, which tells the story of a séance gone terribly wrong, they go on a quest for new sounds, personal spirits and brilliant business ideas. With the assistance of 30 record players and the greatest radio hits of the 1940s, *Opération Spirituelle* [RPM 45] delves into the depths of questions such as: Do the voices of people long dead present themselves in the pink noise and crackles of a playing record? Would they join in a song? And what happens if your long-suppressed past suddenly takes a seat beside you on the sofa?



“It is as if the performers in *Operation Spirituelle* absorbed the oscillations of a record player and moulded them to their bodies, or gave them other bodies and trajectories. A rare mix of sounds emerges that simply makes everything audible: the space, the bodies, moods, objects. And then it happens: amid the transformation of sounds, the dancer Jill Emerson leaps into the circle. She is the spirit of the deceased first wife of the paterfamilias, and a struggle for power over him ensues between the living and the dead. After all, what is theatre if not such a struggle? Spirit wrenching the body, non-entities pulling at beings, and vice versa?”

(Doris Meierhenrich, *Berliner Zeitung* about *OPÉRATION SPIRITUELLE*)



## ONE DAY MORE / Extravaganza

Sophiensaele Berlin, 2012

With: Jill Emerson, Jessica Gadani, Hauke Heumann, Sebastian Straub, The Melodetts

Directed by: Johannes Müller, Arrangement/Musical Director: Santiago Blaum, Choral Director: Nicolette Richter, Set/Costumes: Philine Rinnert, Lighting Design: Mark Howett, Sound Design: Matthias Erb, Dramaturgy: Eike Wittrock, Production Management: ehrliche arbeit - freelance office for culture.



The world of money is characterized by a storm of events – a code of deadly danger. ONE DAY MORE/Extravaganza voyages into money's apocalyptic heart of darkness, transcending all restraint in the rhythm of attack and crisis, adorned with the symbols of barbarity. The story of financial crisis is told as a mega-musical, a genre developed in the early 1980s when financial markets and commercial theatre each took on a new dimension. ONE DAY MORE/Extravaganza is a catastrophe clothed in music, a tornado of violence, conquest and pure, unadulterated kitsch before the world collapses in one terrific blackout: the odyssey of a 28-year-old billionaire and fund manager, who leaves his apartment for an appointment with his hairdresser on the other side of town.



## **Intrigo Internazionale (KV 492)**

Bayerische Staatsoper Munich and Radialsystem Berlin, 2010

With: Kirsten Burger/Diane Busuttill, Jill Emerson, Hauke Heumann, Laura Nicorescu/Herdís Anna Jónasdóttir, Eun Hye Jung, Il Hong/Ezra Jung and Todd Boyce/Wieland Lemke  
Text & Direction: Johannes Müller, Set and costumes: Philine Rinnert, Musical direction: Tobias Schwencke, Make-up: Romy Medina, Assistant direction: Martina Stütz, Stage assistant: Julie Rüter  
Production/PR: ehrliche arbeit – freelance office for culture



### **A fiction for agents and keyboard instruments based on motifs by W. A. Mozart**

Modern structures of power are fundamentally based on secrets and concealment, espionage, disinformation and treachery. Surveillance and spying are indispensable instruments of governing, warfare and information retrieval. "Intrigo Internazionale (KV 492)" deals with intelligence services and their techniques of invading privacy. Johannes Müller, Philine Rinnert and Tobias Schwencke examine international intrigue and the hunt for a mysterious suitcase: are the romantic connections between the agents strictly related to business or are they means to an end to gain or block information, or to harden or change fronts? One absurd disclosure follows another and everyone is nothing less than a double agent for his own and higher cause.

"Müller puts the biblical scenes of Judas' betrayal at the end of his show; a betrayal, that becomes especially perfidious in its combination with the kiss as proof of love. Müller's new Figaro-Finale is definite and reveals all that had been previously connected with love, eroticism and jealousy as selfish and calculating.

It is the strongest image of this show, which is at the same time a play with Mozart's Figaro as well as an extension of the opera. Müllers interprets the motif of constant secrecy and backroom diplomacy of Mozart's lead figures as "espionage" and creates a new story around this term.

The court of Almadiva becomes a private intelligence agency, whose employees hunt after a briefcase containing something that will "change our lives". At the end, as far as the spectator can tell, the briefcase holds nothing, strikingly illustrating the uselessness of all previous actions."

*(Clemens Haustein, 8.1.2011, Berliner Zeitung)*

“The few running notes of the beginning of the overture are enough and one is immediately ensnared: wonder of reduction. One doesn’t need more to remember all the Figaro-overtures of ones listening biography. It is the same with the whole opera: this evening jumps outright into the emotional key moments, it doesn’t need much for it. And this pathos does not always need to be ironically distorted: that Johannes Müller not only knows how to take apart the classics but also can work well with acting singers one feels in the depths of expression that the arias reach again and again despite the youth of the singers.”

*(Phillip Hahn, 13.7.2010, Neue Musik Zeitung / badblogofmusick)*

“Müller likes to look at operas from unusual perspectives. In spin cycle he twirls them around and gives them new drive. But what does industrial espionage and international secret agents have to do with Mozart’s opera on betrayal and jealousy? Exactly that! Professional and private motifs of the protagonists soon merge in Müller’s interpretation. Obsessively jealous they sleuth their partners. The show is about deceit, control and surveillance, secrecy and betrayal. This is an exciting point of departure to dissect the complications of love and its consequences. Müller achieves some slapstick and great moments, for instance when someone controls the cell phone of the partner with full physical effort or Mozart’s hide and seek bedroom-scene is being exponentiated to absurdity.”

*(Eckard Weber, Januar 2011, Siegessäule)*





## Cheap Blood (199)

Sophiensaele Berlin, May 2010

With: Jördis Richter, Armin Pommeranz, Hauke Heumann, Cora Frost, Agnieszka Dziubak, Bonnie Cameron, Kirsten Burger and Tayfun Schulzke

Text & Direction: Johannes Müller, Arrangement and musical direction: Armin Pommeranz, Stage and costumes: Philine Rinnert, Choreography: Diane Busuttill, Lighting design: Ralf Arnd, Dramaturgy: Eike Wittrock, Make-up: Elena Irsigler, Production management: ehrliche arbeit – freelance office for culture



In "Cheap Blood" Johannes Müller and Philine Rinnert have developed a new hybrid of artistic genres. Johann Sebastian Bach's cantata *Mein Herz schwimmt im Blut* and the history of the biggest flop Broadway has ever seen – "Carrie – The Musical" – combine into an overdrive of teenage angst. First love, along with the experience that the sugar-coated image of your romantic self just doesn't seem to fit into a brutal reality of school, facebook and youporn, culminate in a state of chaos and despair.

Singers, actors and musicians tread the experimental turf of "Cheap Blood", which combines the exuberant and grotesque expressional needs of baroque and Broadway. Don't be surprised if plots to destroy the entire planet with telekinetic powers are disguised as a divine visitation.

“Although the conceptual combination of Bach and Stephen King reveals itself entirely only to those, who are familiar with the cantata that is based on a collection of sacrificial church texts, but even without background knowledge its thematic and aesthetic frictions are alluring. The sacred tones of the old music and the fire of pop spark each other. The protagonists step out of the choral arrangement into the middle, and reunite again in a powerful vocal organism. And indeed the horror motif of Stephen King and Bach enlighten each other... this musical-theatrical experiment succeeded.”

*(Tom Mustroph, Neues Deutschland, 11. Mai 2010)*

“(…) It is important for Müller that the individual parts of his collage meet at eye level, only then something new emerges. Certainly, his peculiar explorations, that he undertakes also in „Cheap Blood (199)“ with an ensemble of actors, performance artists and singers, sometimes meet raised eyebrows in the established opera business. But Müller effectively takes his profession much more serious than the tame “updaters” of operas.”

*(Patrick Wildermann, 29. April 2010, Der Tagesspiegel)*

