

Ralf Pleger

Director

A captivating storyteller acclaimed for his arresting imagery and deep feeling for fantasy, Ralf Pleger stands among today's most innovative directors and filmmakers. His approach arises from a commitment to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the total work of art, and draws inspiration from early opera's daring marriage of diverse artforms. It is driven, above all, by the will to defy convention and create things never seen before. Blind to hard borders between artistic forms and categories, he freely blends techniques from different genres to bring stories to life in fresh ways.

This season, Pleger has directed Mozart's *Mitridate* (Malmö Opera/The Royal Theatre in Copenhagen/Concerto Copenhagen/Skånes Dansteater), working with visual artist Alexander Polzin and choreographer Fernando Melo in a new type of collaboration that redefines how opera is created, with director, artist and choreographer fully involved throughout the process and the three artforms intrinsically connected. In collaboration with Grammy-winning viol consort Phantasm he has also created *Fantasia*, a music video in which the ensemble performs Bach in space, which will be released in 2022.

Pleger's production of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (La Monnaie/Teatro Comunale di Bologna), made in partnership with Polzin, premiered at La Monnaie in Brussels in May 2019 and was subsequently staged at Teatro Comunale di Bologna in January 2020. It was praised by AISE News as 'a model example of staging Wagner for the new millennium.' Pleger's connection with Wagner is deep and longstanding, with his 2013 film *Wagnerwahn* winning an Emmy nomination and first prize at the Montreal World Film Festival.

Other recent work as opera director includes *In War and Peace – Harmony Through Music*, built around the vocal and dramatic talents of Joyce DiDonato, which toured internationally between 2016 and 2019, at venues such as Carnegie Hall, Teatro Real, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Wiener Konzerthaus, Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing and Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires. DiDonato appeared in Pleger's film *Drama Queens* (2012), together with Marilyn Horne, Plácido Domingo and fashion queen Vivienne Westwood, and played the title role in his 2016 film *The Florence Foster Jenkins Story*, which won the Jury Prize for Originality at the 2017 Golden Prague International Television Festival, in recognition of its 'original and unconventional production techniques'.

As a film director, in February 2021 he directed a performance of Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* at Konzerthaus Berlin, with Philippe Jaroussky and Anna Prohaska, creating special dramaturgy and lighting effects to underscore the drama of the sacred work. Other film credits include the ECHO Klassik Award-winning *Tchaikovsky – Confessions of a Composer* (2015), *The Beethoven Files* (2013) and *Beauty is a Crime* (2015), a meditation on art and music made in collaboration with Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Musica Aeterna and Teodor Currentzis.

Ralf Pleger was born in 1967 in a small town in Brandenburg, East Germany. He made obligatory childhood visits to the local cinema and theatre, both ruled by the dictates of his homeland's Marxist-

Leninist regime, but allowed his imagination to run free while exploring the region's natural landscape. Maps supplied another vital creative stimulus, prompting dreams of life beyond the Berlin Wall, as did his parents' eclectic record and book collection.

The collapse of the German Democratic Republic in 1989 paved the way for Pleger to study art history and musicology at the Freie Universität Berlin and Italian during a graduate exchange year in Milan. He became absorbed by film towards the end of his undergraduate years and received his first television and radio commissions while working as a dramaturge for, among others, the Berlin Staatsoper Unter den Linden and the Innsbruck Festwochen. Many of his films have been linked to theatre or opera productions and multimedia collaborations, hallmarks of the director's determination to combine entertainment and fun with more profound artistic experiences.