

## 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.

Pleger's production of Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (La Monnaie/Teatro Comunale di Bologna), made in partnership with visual artist Alexander Polzin, premiered with ten performances at La Monnaie in Brussels in May 2019 and was subsequently presented at Teatro Comunale di Bologna in January 2020. The staging, rooted in its director's deep connection to Wagner in general and *Tristan* in particular, is the outcome of a compelling dialogue with Polzin about what art could be. It marks the first in a series of ambitious future stage projects, part of a significant rebalancing of the director's work in film and theatre.

Pleger reached new audiences as director of *In War and Peace – Harmony Through Music* (2016), a touring production built around the vocal and dramatic talents of Joyce DiDonato. *In War and Peace* debuted at more than twenty renowned concert halls and theatres worldwide, including Carnegie Hall, Teatro Real, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Wiener Konzerthaus and Elbphilharmonie. The production travelled to Russia at the end of 2018 and China the following January, before making its first outing to South America and a return to North America at the end of 2019. DiDonato played the title role in Pleger's 2016 film *The Florence Foster Jenkins Story* and appeared in the director's *Drama Queens* (2012), together with Marilyn Horne, Plácido Domingo and fashion queen Vivienne Westwood.

Ralf Pleger has created everything from radio projects and television documentaries to arthouse films and stage productions. His film credits include the ECHO Klassik Award-winning *Tchaikovsky – Confessions of a Composer* (2015), the Emmy Award-nominated *The Wagner 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.

While Pleger's output embraces a multitude of different media, music has always been at its heart. Blind to hard borders between artistic forms and categories, he freely blends techniques from different genres to bring stories to life in fresh ways. The 2017 International Festival Golden Prague created a new award, the Jury Prize for Originality, specially for *The Florence Foster Jenkins Story*, in recognition of the film's 'original and unconventional production techniques'.

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.