

## **Bayreuther Festspiele**

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I would like to firstly say an enormous thank you to the Wagner Society of Scotland for awarding me the 2017 Bayreuth Scholarship which enabled me to attend the festival this year. This was truly a 'once in a lifetime' experience and one which I am very grateful for.

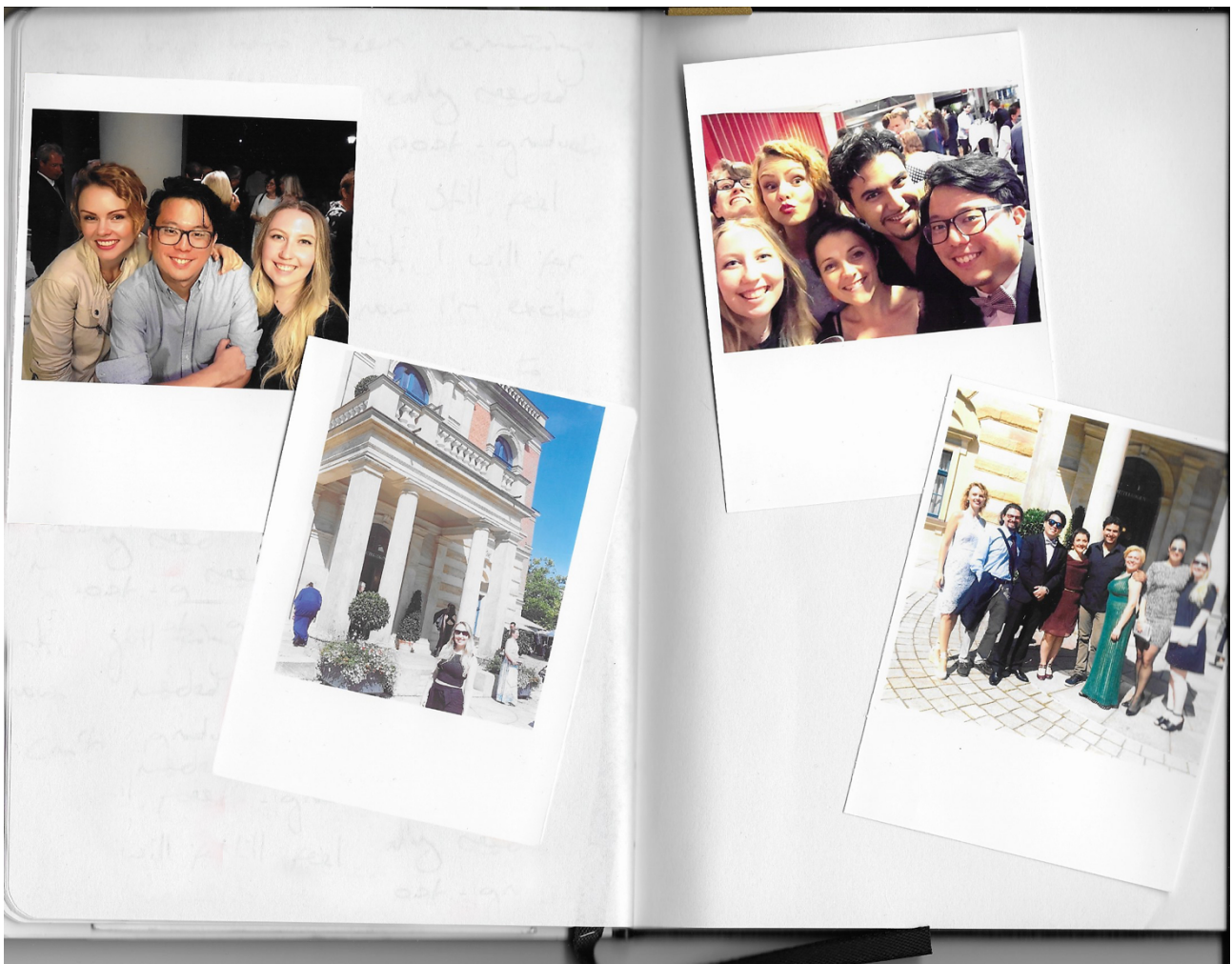
A 'Gesamtkunstwerk' is a work of art that makes use of all or many art forms - or strives to do so. Although Wagner only used this word twice in two of his essays it is often associated with his aesthetic ideals. As a Set and Costume designer, I appreciate how important the marriage of visual spectacle and performance can be. I am also aware that the Bayreuth Festival truly encompasses this and from the moment I stepped off the plane in Munich I was so very much looking forward to discovering what was on stage for each production when the curtains opened.

One of the many highlights of my trip was a tour inside the famous Bayreuth Festspielhaus. There is something very magical about an empty theatre space and the Festspielhaus is a treat for anyone who has a love for theatre buildings. The Festspielhaus is famous for the unusual orchestra pit - the pit actually sits underneath the stage and allows the sound to flow out of the space towards the audience in such a way that it creates the ideal acoustic condition for the singers voices and orchestra to blend together. I have never heard a sound like this. Many times during the performances which I was fortunate to attend I found myself closing my eyes and it felt as if the music was all consuming. This definitely gave me goosebumps! I find it interesting that the orchestra is hidden. This positioning very firmly guides the attention of the audience towards the stage. Although 'grand' in terms of size, the seating and theatre itself, is fairly modest in decoration. For me it feels that Wagner structured this in such a way as to draw attention firmly towards where the action is unfolding and taking place! The large scale of the stage blew me away. There is so much space to play with and to create within. As a comparison, the stage of The Theatre Royal in Glasgow has a depth of 13 metres compared to an amazing 22 metres in the Festspielhaus. This distinction becomes even more apparent when viewing the very beautiful collection of theatre model boxes which are on display at the Richard Wagner Museum. I spent a very interesting time looking at the beautifully preserved model boxes of various productions from as far back as the 1880s. Usually it is the case that theatre model boxes are destroyed either through production work and rework or many are simply lost or discarded but the collection at the Wagner Museum has been kept as new. This was amazing for me to see and certainly something which really inspired me as a designer.

Part of the Richard Wagner Museum is Wahnfried House - which is his former residence. This was especially interesting as on the previous evening we had attended Die Meistersinger Von Nürnberg where the first scene is set in the library at Wahnfried. The attention to detail was amazing on stage. Even the awe inspiring chandelier had been painstakingly recreated in full on stage. The set had been built on a moving truck so the stage transition was very striking as the whole library rolled upstage to reveal the next scene. The opera was filled with many amazing moments like this - from having a beautiful meadow on stage which quickly flew into the air to transition into a cold, accurate recreation of the Nürnberg trials. The designer, Rebecca Ringst had created very bold visuals by taking risks. At the end of the performance the set flew out and an orchestra in blacks moved downstage making that large space appear very empty but very full at the same time. It was very beautifully carried out.

The second opera which we attended in the week was Tristan Und Isolde. The design for this performance was stark but interesting. The first set was made of multiple grey stairs and levels which allowed the performers to move around in multiple ways. I would say the first set wasn't used as well as it might have been and the direction made it lose a little bit of its magic. What really struck me however was the turnaround from the set of Die Meistersinger, which we had only seen the night before. To dismantle and reassemble large sets is a complex and difficult task - with such a fast turnaround I can't imagine how many people must be on those teams! Tristan Und Isolde had no live transitions but instead each setting changed during the intervals. The third set remained in the grey industrial world and mainly played with light to alter the settings. The design was very clever.

On our last night we attended Die Walküre. I had been very much looking forward to this performance particularly as the production was designed by one of my very favourite designers; Aleksandar Denić. For the previous two performances I was fortunate to be seated in the stalls, and very much enjoyed the view of the stage from this perspective. However for the performance of Die Walkure I was seated high up in the gallery and I could see everything. A real birds eye view of the stage and this was truly fantastic. The set did not disappoint. The designer had created a giant barn structure on a revolve which was used beautifully by the performers. Parts of the set moved to created huge screens which had projected on them live film footage from the stage. Following the performers around hidden parts, the cameras were able to provide the audience with an immersive view of what was taking place in these small intimate spaces. It was an incredibly intelligent use of such a large stage area. I have never seen a live performance on that scale before and it absolutely blew me away. The costumes, by Adriana Braga Peretzki, were very beautiful with the Valkyries especially standing out, their design drawing the audience into their fantastical godly world. Amazing and entrancing visuals.



My wonderful trip to the Bayreuth Festival in 2017 has inspired me greatly, it has given me experiences and ideas which I will always now be able to draw upon within my career as a set and costume designer. It was simply awe-inspiring to stand in such a large space as the Bayreuth Festspielhaus with a thousand or more people, applauding and celebrating, the talent and presentation of theatre and production. To have spent time meeting and networking with the many amazing young scholars from around the world who share my passion for the arts was such a wonderful experience. I anticipate that many of the scholars will return to Bayreuth in the future as working professionals and to build those connections is one of the greatest gifts of receiving the Bayreuth Scholarship and I would like to say thank you again to the Scottish Society for this opportunity.