

67th Gstaad Menuhin Festival & Academy | 14 July – 2 September 2023

HUMILITY – CYCLE «CHANGE I»

Surely, you will agree with me that today, the world is a different place than it was four years ago, when we presented our last 3 years cycle. Several century-long events have upset the world order and the stability that had been reliable for decades in many respects. A pandemic has made us aware of how vulnerable the world we live in is. It has been made abundantly clear to us that climate change is not a thesis conjured up by scientists, but a real disruption that has visible impacts on our planet, sometimes in our most immediate surrounding: During the summer of 2022, the melting of the glaciers in the Les Diablerets mountain range opened up a pass between Vaud and Valais, the Col de Zenfleuron, for the first time in living memory. The Saanenland may be a paradise on earth, but we must not close our eyes to reality: Switzerland consumes 4.4 times its natural biocapacity today.

Humanity is facing a time of transition, a process that is affecting almost all areas surrounding us and, as a driving force of transformation, is accompanied by epochal challenges. War, pandemics and climate change have clearly shown that there are dimensions that are out of our hands and cannot be controlled or steered. As a classical music festival and organiser of cultural events, we feel a great responsibility to respond to the challenges of our time both with our own actions and also from an artistic, i.e. musical, perspective. For this reason, **we have decided to place the upcoming Festival editions from 2023 to 2025 under the banner of “Change”**. The world is undergoing a transformation that not only has an impact on the individual, but also fundamentally affects social structures – as well as the climate, nature and aspects of digital technology. Violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja, who is based in Bern, accompanies our journey to provide musical answers to the state of the world. Her concert cycle “Music for the Planet” will present three programmes a year that put the significance of the greatest compositions of music history in a completely new light against the backdrop of climate change.

“The humble person recognises on his own and accepts that there is something unattainable for him, something higher.” (Wikipedia)

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In 2023, the focus on “**Humility**” is intended to sharpen our awareness towards nature, but also towards issues that are not entirely within our hands. We feel that humility is a very present attitude to life in our society in these years between the ongoing pandemic, war and climate change – as part of the Festival in summer 2023, we are trying to address these topics by a variety of programmes. Since many crises have been caused by the effects of the pandemic and war, values such as humility, modesty and respect take on a new meaning. Wikipedia (see above), the contemporary Duden, brings it to the point: Mankind is being made aware with greater clarity than ever before that despite high-tech, highly developed civilisation and culture, humanism and education, as well as a high standard of living in our latitudes, processes are still possible that cannot be controlled and steered, but slip away from us. The word “*diomuoti*” from Old High German dialect actually consists of two words: severe and courage. Humility is therefore never to be interpreted negatively, in the sense of weakness, but as strength, as an explicitly positive ability and quality. Humility as an attitude of mind in music and in the context of our time will be the focus during the 2023 Festival edition.

Humility & Nature

Do you know the feeling of arriving on a mountain peak, after a sweaty ascent by foot or by bike, overwhelmed by the sight of craggy rocks, the breathtaking view, lakes, white mountain peaks, dark forests, and then wondering about our place within the universe? Humility is mixed right into this sublime feeling of grandeur and bliss: humility towards the power and wonders of nature. In her concert cycle “*Music for the Planet*”, Patricia Kopatchinskaja relentlessly illustrates how this idyll is increasingly in danger. The rushing brook in Beethoven’s “*Pastoral Symphony*” becomes a trickle, the merry trout in Schubert’s “*Trout Quintet*” deceives the appearance of its cheerfulness and playfulness, and the Inuit are being deprived of their livelihood. The message Patricia Kopatchinskaja shows to us is unsparing, but has a clear, uplifting statement to it: Music can address people in such an immediate and poignant level of consciousness as scientific facts alone cannot. Following on from this, music can impressively enable a change of perspective, simulate rethinking and influence active behaviour. In view of climate change and war, which meaning do Haydn’s *The Seven Last Words* take on? Patricia Kopatchinskaja is convinced that the great pieces of music history can take on a new, foreboding significance in the face of climate change and species extinction. We can all agree that today, mankind has the urgent task of protecting and preserving the fascinating planet depicted in Haydn’s *Creation*.

Humility & Role Models, Humility & Faith

Yehudi Menuhin’s great role model was George Enescu. He was his teacher and, as a violinist and composer, exemplified many of the things to which Menuhin also aspired. Menuhin felt a great sense of humility towards him. Every human being has idols and role models who have led a path that is exemplary, innovative, courageous or even ground-breaking for us. Humility towards role models is also a feeling of admiration or recognition and, above all, gratitude. Brahms described himself as a “*Bachian*” and exclaimed: “*Study Bach. There you will find everything!*” Many of his compositions are based on harmonic structures of J. S. Bach; he even used quotations or arranged works by him. Musicians of all epochs and genres are captivated by Bach’s genius and harmony, coupled with deep musical emotionality and spirituality. His perfection culminates in the *Mass in B minor*, which Albert Einstein called “*the greatest work of art of all times*”. The mindset of J. S. Bach’s humility in the spiritual sense, in which man submits to the divine will in recognition of his own imperfection, is probably expressed most strongly of all his sacred works in this great cultural monument of the history of Western civilisation. The fact that the *Mass in B minor* has officially been a “*UNESCO World Documentary Heritage*” since 2015 is an expression of the great value of this work for humanity.

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The art of Bach is so timeless and ingenious that his musical language can withstand musicians from classical, romantic, impressionist, modern, jazz and even pop music building their own works on it. His sons, Mozart and his *“Gran Partita”*, Brahms’ *Cello Sonatas* and his *Piano Trio No. 1*, Busoni’s *Chaconne*, Debussy’s *Preludes* and Chopin’s *Etudes* inspired by the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Villa-Lobos’ *Bachianas Brasilieras*, Mendelssohn’s complete cycles of organ and piano works, Kurtág’s arrangements of Bach’s chorales for two pianos or the jazz version of the Bach *Double Concerto in D minor* by the Janoska Ensemble: The humility towards the “Übervater” Bach is infinite and still feeds the creative power of any artist today, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow; according to John Elliott Gardiner, Bach is “universal – I believe – Bach is the composer of the future”.

Role models can influence and shape our lives: At the age of 23, the press elected Ute Lemper to be the successor of her idol Marlene Dietrich. As Ute Lemper apologised to Marlene Dietrich by postcard, she received a call from her and a close friendship developed. With a twinkle in their eyes, the music comedy duo “Igudesman & Joo” call Sergei Rachmaninoff their hero ... is it only because of his “big hands”? Baritone Thomas Hampson describes Gustav Mahler’s symphonic oeuvre as “jubilant humility”, and his *Symphony No. 2* in particular, the epochal “Resurrection Symphony”, is a most impressive testimony to humanity’s humility in the face of inexplicable, almost transcendent forces. “It all sounds like it’s part of another world. And – I don’t think anyone will be able to escape the effect – you are knocked to the ground with clubs and then lifted to the highest heights on angels’ parachutes.” (Gustav Mahler in a letter from Hamburg on 31 January 1895 about his *Symphony No. 2*)

Even if the humility of Cavaradossi painting in the church as depicted in Puccini’s *Tosca* is a white lie, or the humility of the war-wounded pianist Paul Wittgenstein¹ is overinterpreted; as a music festival and organiser of cultural events, we do not only want to entertain you and celebrate the summer lightness of spending time together, but also encourage you to think, question and discuss with each other, especially in the context of our time, right within 2023. We would therefore be delighted if you would engage with our approach to the theme of “Humility” in the world of music and if the concert programmes stimulate your imagination and thoughts.

I am convinced that humility is a central state of mind of people engaged in any field of creativity, especially for composers. They try to express with music what cannot be put into words and to which they are faced in their everyday lives: unearthly and incomprehensible beauty, greatness, admiration of role models or even cruelty, despair and powerlessness. Creativity seems to unfold to a special degree in the state of a humble approach in the creative process of every human being. We are humbled by the challenge not only to be more resource-conserving and sustainable in our own actions, i.e. on the operational side, but also to be able to set musical accents for rethinking and changing behaviour. Perhaps it is overconfident to attempt to place contemporary events and social change in the context of a music festival. However, Seneca’s wisdom² prove that it is at least worth taking the risk: “To obtain the right idea, far more than one’s own view is required. It takes a lot, humility is needed, openness and also courage.”

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Inspired by the programme of the 67th Gstaad Menuhin Festival, we are looking forward to spending an inspiring, most delightful and joyful summer of concerts together with our audience from 14 July to 2 September 2023.

With humble, energetic and highly motivated greetings,

Christoph Müller
Artistic Director, Gstaad Menuhin Festival & Academy

¹ *Paul Wittgenstein is the patron of the piece written for the left hand by Maurice Ravel (1929). Wittgenstein lost his right arm during World War I due to a war injury and continued his career as a pianist playing only with his left hand.*

² *Seneca, a Roman philosopher and Stoic (lived from about 1 to 65 AD).*

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