

## IN BRIEF

## Stage

Kunstpreis for *Impulstanz*

Vienna's *ImPulsTanz* International Dance Festival was recognised in the "International" category at this year's Bank Austria Art Award. Valued at €70,000, the award is given in support of cultural projects in Austria.

Introduced in 1988, *ImPulsTanz* has become Europe's biggest contemporary dance festival. It provides a creative atmosphere for performances, workshops and research projects in the genre, with local community integration. Individual dancers and choreographers, full companies, teachers and artists in the field come together to share new projects and exchange techniques and knowledge.

Participation in the festival speaks for its success and popularity: In 2012, over 50 dancers and companies presented new productions. With over 100 performances in all, hosting over 100 teachers and 212 workshops (for pro and amateur dancers), the event boasted approximately 3,000 attending students. Participants hailed from Austria and internationally.

This prize was given for the third year in a row and is the highest for art organisations in Austria. Altogether the *Kunstpreis* injects €218,000 into the Austrian art scene. Other winners included *Soho in Ottakring* in the category "Regional Projects", the *Diagonale* Austrian film festival's trainee programme in the category "Art Education", and the writer Thomas Trenkler of *Der Standard* for "Cultural Journalism". The six winners were selected out of 313 applications.

## Praise for Vienna Ballet

Last minute changes in lineup at the Vienna Ballet didn't detract from a strong premiere on 20 February at the Wiener Staatsoper.

Four contemporary viewpoints from different choreographers comprise *Dance Perspectives* (*Tanzperspektiven*). Understudy and newcomer Natascha Mair (18), performing in David Dawson's *A Million Kisses to My Skin*, especially garnered praise, as did male star Kirill Kourlaev. Strong performances, new choreography and vivid staging and design give a positive outlook for the Vienna Ballet.

For further performance dates see Musical/Dance Events, page 24.

## Sofiensäle reloaded

In 2001, the notorious Sofiensäle (Sophie's Halls) on Marxergasse were destroyed by fire. Designed and built in the beginning 19th century, by Eduard van der Nüll and Sicard von Sicardsburg, the run-down building was used both as an indoor swimming pool and event hall; in the late 1990s it was often used for club-style events, student parties and was the venue of the annual *Opferball* (literally "Victim's Ball", the Homeless People's Ball, funded by the newspaper *Augustin*).



**The project will combine modern elements with the salvaged remains** Photo: Soravia Group

The new "Sofia" will be a multi-functional structure, encompassing 78 apartments, a university institution, two food and drink businesses, ateliers in the old box seating areas of the former theatre space. An art gallery in the ancient banquet hall, protected from the outside by a filigree glass-roof-construction, will stay the heart of the building.

After long discussions, the IFA AG, part of Soravia group, is renovating the space. The 46-million-euro project combines modern elements in the residential spaces with detailed restoration of the ancient, lavish decoration elements of the old, protected segments of the original structure. The official opening ceremony is planned for September.



**Dennis Kozeluh as Andrew (L) plays with Michael Smulik as Milo** Photos: I. Gundersveen & T. Schluet

Co-produced by the Vienna Theatre Project, Anthony Shaffer's thriller captivates with well-timed wit and comic tension

Let's Play the Killing Game: English Lovers Stage *Sleuth*

by Lauren McKay

The tagline of *Sleuth*, "Are you ready for murder?" sets your mind racing before the games even begin. The intimacy of Bar & Co in Theater Drachengasse places the audience right in the heart of the action of Anthony Shaffer's two-man thriller. With only 28 seats, the whole space is used as a stage, and we are sitting centre stage. The two actors, Dennis Kozeluh and Michael Smulik, pace around us, sparring.

Set in the stately home of mystery writer Andrew Wykes (played by Kozeluh), all the action takes place in the elaborate living room in which we sit. Bitterly jealous that Milo Tindle (played by Smulik) is having an affair with his wife Marguerite, Andrew invites the younger man to his home, and lures him into a staged robbery. Andrew knows of Tindle's intentions to wed Marguerite, of whom he is openly disdainful. But he also knows Tindle is poor, and his wife accustomed to luxury. "This," Andrew announces, "is where the plot thickens." Milo is to steal jewellery from the safe, and sell it abroad. At home, Andrew will cash in on his insurance, and both will profit. Or so we think...

## Playing at deception

The twists and turns are many, and their unfolding drives the play, as roles are reversed and reversed again, ensuring a captive audience right until the dramatic ending.

▷ LAUREL & HARDY  
*Continued from page 17*

As Oliver "Babe" Hardy, Neumayr gives a bravura performance. He glowers magnificently – brows beetling, eyes narrowing, lips pursed tightly in furious indignation – and also nails Hardy's trademark tie-fiddling routine. As the bashful, simpering Stan Laurel, Lomas too produces a fine physical characterisation and captures the signature weeping face to a T. He's guilty of occasionally playing to the audience rather than playing the role, but it's a minor transgression. Throughout, the two actors interact with a relaxed, easy affinity that's as unforced as that displayed by the original Stan and Ollie. A two-man show always runs the risk of turning into a competition between the actors for the audience's attention, but Neumayr and Lomas work hard for each other and the resulting camaraderie feels like the real thing – bantering, prickly, but affectionate.

Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in the mime sequences recreating some of the pair's classic contributions to silent cinema. An early tussle with a step-ladder is merely the prelude for an hilarious routine involving paintbrushes and wallpaper which culminates in Hardy/Neumayr being crowned with a bucket.

The onstage action is wonderfully complemented by Sebastian Brandmeir on the piano. Sitting just in front of the first row of seats and sporting a straw boater and red waistcoat, a jaunty live piano adds an extra layer of Vaudeville authenticity to the proceedings, and deepens the sense of immersion.

When playing the subsidiary parts, both actors struggle a bit with the various accents but



**In the second act roles are reversed and it seems that Andrew has met his match in Milo**

This is a play about games. Andrew lives in a fantasy world, and struggles to maintain the line between his novels and reality. He talks in mystery tropes, and is fixated on the games the two of them are playing. He even looks like a character straight out of Sherlock Holmes, in a brown tweed jacket and cravat. Andrew styles himself as a games master, orchestrating the actions of those who hold supporting roles in the story of his own life – Milo, as well as the two women we never meet, Marguerite and Andrew's mistress Tea. Milo seems the oppo-

site of the cunning, refined Andrew: He isn't a rich man, yet he is at ease with himself and the world around him. He is genuinely in love with Marguerite, and believes that true love alone will sustain their relationship, rather than riches – although his willingness to commit the fraudulent robbery shows that few of us can escape the lure of wealth. He moves quickly from a resolute "It sounds like a crime!" to wondering if Andrew has any real-life experience of committing the crime he proposes.

Dressed in classic burglar black, and with one of Marguerite's stockings over his head, Milo is at Andrew's mercy. He breaks in through the skylight, armed with a hammer and stethoscope, taking instructions from Andrew via a walkie talkie. He is Andrew's pawn. Early in the action, he fingers a piece on the chessboard in the centre of the room and receives a sharp reprimand – Andrew is the one who moves the pieces, and he intends to stay in control. Which he is, for the entirety of the play's first act.

But, moving into the second act, the roles are reversed, and Andrew becomes Milo's pawn. Andrew describes Marguerite as "vain, meddlesome and generally bloody crafty" – but the description seems more fitting for the pair of men. Both Kozeluh and Smulik play it superbly – their descent charted by quick talk and manic laughter, memorably embodied in a Cole Porter sing-a-long of "Anything Goes".

It becomes apparent that Andrew has met his match in Milo. Their character differences fade away, as Andrew's cunning is mirrored in Milo's devilish schemes. The two men flirt with friendship the whole while, trading one-liners and relishing their ever-changing roles as cat and mouse. When Andrew is duped by Milo, he is caught between annoyance at being tricked and admiration. "You and I are evenly matched," he says ecstatically.

**This successful staging of a challenging script resonates with audiences** Photo: Open House Theatre

Comic relief

Even in moments of the most heightened tension, it's impossible not to laugh. With spot-on comic timing, their verbal spats provide much-needed relief in a thriller where the audience members are quite literally on the edge of their seats. During one of their quibbles over Marguerite, Andrew says, "I'm not joking." The two men face off, and Milo responds, "I'm not laughing." But the audience is, heartily.

With just two actors, each can play to his full potential. The tension remains tightly wound throughout *Sleuth*'s unravelling, with Kozeluh and Smulik bouncing off each other in a brilliant script laden with opportunities for fun. These two, who have been improvising together for over fifteen years, clearly relish the chance to push each other to the limit: another game in this play of games.

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**Sleuth**  
*Nightly through 2 March*  
*Theater Drachengasse, Bar & Co*  
*1., Fleischmarkt 22*  
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increase towards the twilight of their careers there's too little intensity, and consequently the second half of the show drags somewhat.

This is certainly not the fault of the actors, however, who give their all right to the end. The script's conclusion is suitably bombastic, packed full of punch-lines, to ensure that it finishes on a high and poignant note. At the end, the two move downstage in a silent movie slow motion sequence that's so authentic you can almost hear the whirring of the camera reels.

In all then, the production represents a successful staging of a challenging script. It would have been easy to put on a crowd-pleaser from a household-name playwright, but Open House Theatre have opted for a tougher route. *Laurel & Hardy* is exactly what English-language theatre in Vienna should be about – introducing audiences to unfamiliar writers and presenting innovative and experimental work. Their efforts should be applauded and judging from the enormous goodwill resonated by the capacity audience on the first night, they've hit the target. Catch it while you can.

*Laurel & Hardy* is showing Monday-Saturday through 9 March; no performances on 28 February and 7 March. Tickets only €8 on Mondays. Next up for Open House Theatre is the psychological thriller *The Collector* in April. Open House Theatre is also running the *Open Minds Series* at the Expat Center on 6 March and 11 March, which will feature rehearsed readings of possible future productions; attendees can vote for what they would like to see staged.

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For details see *Theatre in English*, page 23 or visit: [www.openhousetheatre.at](http://www.openhousetheatre.at)