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[Salzburg - Peter Sellars stages Renaissance funeral music with reverence and deliberation. \(Rubric\) | Opera Online - The website for opera lovers \(opera-online.com\)](#)

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Canticle of the Sun Overture Spiritual Salzburg Festival 20.7.2023

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Completed in 1707 by the architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, the collegiate church expresses a special spirituality with its lack of decoration and interior furnishings and is an exceptional performance venue, particularly suitable for the Ouverture Spirituelle concert series at the beginning of the Salzburg Festival.

In 1964 the professional choir Los Angeles Master Chorale was founded by conductor Roger Wagner. It has achieved international recognition for its innovative projects as well as vocally dynamic ensemble. After the production *Lagrima di San Pietro*, *Music to Accompany a Departure* is the second collaboration with the director Peter Sellars, to the music of Heinrich Schütz's *Musikalische Exequien* SWV 279-281. This was originally commissioned by Heinrich Posthumus von Reuss. The sovereign prepared his funeral ceremonies meticulously. He had his coffin decorated with biblical texts and choral verses, which the composer set to music in 1635. The burial - and thus the premiere of the work - took place on the appointed date, February 4, 1636.

Based on the history of the work, saying goodbye forms the central idea of the directorial concept. A simple table, an angled arrangement of chairs for the twenty-something member choir, an organ table for Lisa Edwards, and a chair for Malachai Bandy with his viola da gamba are on the stage. In the first part, the "Concert in the Form of a German Funeral Missa", the choristers, usually in pairs, rise and create a musical farewell scene. One person lies down on the table. The gestures and reflections on the German texts are intimate.

To the following motet "Lord, if I only have you" and to Simeoni's canticle "Lord, now leave your servant", the choir performs scenes of prayer and worship together. Hands are stretched towards the sky in rhythmic movements, hugs and expressions of sympathy flow into each other. Everything seems casually natural, the choir, in the everyday clothes deliberately chosen by Danielle Domingue Sumi, moves calmly and softly. The events are accompanied by low doses of lighting effects. In the final image, shadow-plays on the white church wall are impressive.

The articulation is very clear and distinct, every chorister is convincing, the vocal coloring shows variety and character. The instrumental design, which is well interpreted by the two soloists, is unobtrusive. The voices are in the foreground and fill the large church hall. A moving, fascinating, creative spectacle that does not fail to have an effect.

Before that, Sofia Gubaidulina's *Sonnengesang* for violoncello, chamber choir and percussion had been heard. The work was composed in 1997 and dedicated to the important Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich on his 70th birthday. In 1998 it was premiered in Frankfurt with him as a soloist. The text is by Francis of Assisi. The composer herself judges that she wants to create "a kind of sound cathedral"

and the result seems particularly appealing in this magical venue. The interplay between the choir and the solo instrument cello, which seems like a dialogue, is exciting and concise. The score allows the instrumentalist to stroke the neck of the instrument acrobatically, the tonal structures are so colorful and increase again and again into the sphere. Julia Hagen shows her high command of the instrument. Tirelessly highly concentrated, she keeps in close contact with the conductor Grant Gershon and the choir.

Christoph Sietzen and Bogdan Bacanu contribute a broadening of the sound and impressionistic impressions with different drums.

Quietly emotional and reverential enthusiasm from the audience!