

RINGAWARD

10th International Competition for Directing, Set and Costume Design in Music Theatre

in Graz/Österreich, organized by Bühnen Graz

The grand Final on June 28&29, 2025!

In the exciting final of the competition, three young directing teams will realise their production concepts for the competition opera *L'Orfeo* by Claudio Monteverdi (Acts II–III) on the stage of Schauspielhaus Graz. Three completely different perspectives on the Orpheus myth – within just 24 hours and in direct comparison.

Celebrating its 30th anniversary, the 10th International Competition for Directing, Set and Costume Design in Music Theatre once again showcases the diversity and innovative strength of young artists. Its aim is to provide a professional and practice-oriented platform for emerging, yet not fully established, directors, set and costume designers by awarding outstanding achievements in their work.

A record number of 353 young artists from 38 countries participated in the first stage of RING AWARD 25, developing innovative production concepts for *L'Orfeo* by Claudio Monteverdi in 109 teams.

In the first round, the anonymized concepts were reviewed, and nine teams from twelve countries were nominated for the semi-final. These teams presented their concepts and stage models live in front of a distinguished international jury and a public audience.

From Vision to Stage

The competition is structured in three stages, with its distinctive feature being the final round, where selected teams bring their concepts to life in fully staged productions at Schauspielhaus Graz.

During the first stage, an international jury of Artistic Directors and Music Theatre Professionals reviewed all anonymised submissions and selected nine teams for the semi-final.

In the semi-final, these teams presented their directing concepts and stage design models live to both the jury and the public audience. Rehearsal samples and a feasibility check of the designs also played a key role in the jury's decision.

Each of the three finalist teams will now present 40 minutes of the competition opera at Schauspielhaus Graz, turning their artistic visions into full-scale performances with set and costumes:

- **Team Maria Chagina (RUS) / Anna Agafonova (ISR) / Sören Sarbeck (DEU)**
[L'Orfeo. The Myth Next Door](#)
- **Team Franciska Éry (HUN) / Peter Butler (GBR) / Mathieu Cabanes (FRA)**
[Orfeo – Recording in Session](#)
- **Team Giorgio Pesenti (ITA) / Giulia Bruschi (ITA) / Riccardo Mainetti (ITA) / Elena Patacchini (ITA) / Matteo Castiglioni (ITA)**
[Orfeo. The End of Things](#)

Thus, not only theoretical concepts are being evaluated but the skills and abilities of young artists to realize their visions on stage.

Being globally unique, the RING AWARD is widely regarded as a significant platform for launching the careers of young talents. It mirrors the pulse of contemporary theatre, highlighting new directions in directing, stage and costume design, and performance practice. In doing so, it makes a meaningful contribution to the ongoing evolution of music theatre as a dynamic and relevant art form.

The RING AWARD is organised by Bühnen Graz – Oper Graz, Schauspielhaus Graz, Next Liberty, and art + event | Theaterservice Graz, in cooperation with the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz.

The competition opera *L'Orfeo* by Claudio Monteverdi

Often referred to as the “first opera,” this *favola in musica* was first performed in 1607 and remains a central part of the music theatre repertoire, continuously reinterpreted on stages around the world. The myth of the artist Orpheus, who moves both living and non-living nature with his song and descends into the underworld out of love for Eurydice, has inspired since antiquity.

How will this ancient narrative be reinterpreted by the emerging voices of the RING AWARD?

SYNOPSIS

Prologue: The Muse of Music appears and promises the audience a Favola in Musica – a tale framed and elevated by music.

Act I: Orpheus and Eurydice, deeply in love, celebrate their wedding surrounded by shepherds and nymphs. They call upon Hymen, the god of marriage, to bless their union.

Act II: As Eurydice leaves with her companions to gather flowers for the wedding bouquet, Orpheus stays behind in joyful company. Suddenly, Sylvia arrives with tragic news: Eurydice has been bitten by a snake and died with Orpheus' name on her lips. Devastated, Orpheus resolves to descend into the underworld to bring his beloved Eurydice back.

Act III: Hope leads Orpheus to the threshold of the underworld. With his enchanting music, he puts Charon, the gatekeeper and ferryman, to sleep and is able to cross the Styx. The souls of the dead, too, are moved and permit him to continue on his way.

Act IV: Moved by love, Proserpina implores Pluto to release Eurydice. The lord of the underworld consents – but only if Orpheus refrains from looking back at her until they reach the upper world. Hand in hand, they begin their ascent. Yet, gripped by fear or longing, Orpheus turns and with a sorrowful cry, Eurydice fades into the shadows forever.

Act V: Orpheus mourns his lost love, and only the echo answers his cries. Taking pity on his son, Apollo carries Orpheus and Eurydice into the stars. On Earth, the singer's love and song are praised for all eternity.

Team A: L'Orfeo. The Myth Next Door

Team Maria Chagina (RUS) / Anna Agafonova (ISR) / Sören Sarbeck (DEU)

The Concept:

Orpheus and Eurydice have spent a long life together and have grown old side-by-side. Now Eurydice has died. Orpheus finds himself alone in his apartment, isolating himself from his environment. Only his grown-up son Apollo tries to maintain contact with the increasingly inaccessible man.

An old melody begins to haunt Orpheus's mind, taking him back to his youth. Long-deceased friends appear and celebrate the wedding of Eurydice and Orpheus. But the veil of aging covers all; the celebration turns into a funeral procession. Orpheus's apartment transforms into the underworld, becoming a hell for him. The narrow spaces expand into an endless landscape in which the frail man finds himself helpless. The river Styx begins to flood the apartment. On its shore a lost diver sits, whom the ship's crew may well have presumed dead. Searching for an exit, Orpheus sings out into the void, but only the echo responds. Will a ship come to ferry him across the waters?

Orpheus as the eternal myth of aging—within the 60 square meters of the apartment next door and in the inner infinity of loneliness.

The Team:

Director: Maria Chagina

Set and costume design: Anna Agafonova

Dramaturgy: Sören Sarbeck

Maria Chagina and Sören Sarbeck have been working together since their studies at the August Everding Theatre Academy in Munich, where they developed the opera *Invitation to a Beheading* together. For *L'Orfeo*, the stage and costume designer Anna Agafonova joins their team. Together they are looking for a music theatre that draws on everyday experiences and is located at the transition between drama and opera.

Anna Agafonova graduated from the Moscow Art Theatre School and has worked in various theatres in Russia, including the Gogol Centre and the Moscow Youth Theatre. She currently lives and works in Israel.

After graduating from the Moscow GITIS, **Maria Chagina** staged Orff's *The Moon* in Yakutsk and an evening about Carola Neher for the human rights organisation Memorial in Moscow before emigrating to Germany. She is a fellow of the Akademie Musiktheater heute.

Dramaturg and librettist **Sören Sarbeck** is currently engaged at Theater Lübeck after a traineeship at Bayerische Staatsoper.

Team B: Orfeo – Recording in Session

Team Franciska Éry (HUN) / Peter Butler (GBR) / Mathieu Cabanes (FRA) Das

Concept:

Tony is a superstar singer. He is married to Sarah, who is also a singer. They work together and tour the world, but their marriage is in crisis.

We meet them at a recording session where they are booked together to sing the parts of Orfeo and Euridice in Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*. La Musica, the sound engineer, is running the session. But Tony is wobbly – he self-medicates to keep his anxiety at bay, he is unfaithful to his wife to feel desired, and he is terrified of being overshadowed by Sarah. As the session progresses, he finds it harder to distinguish his 'trip' from reality, finding himself in his own personal underworld, where he has to face his insecurities and save his marriage.

We believe that the archetype of the male hero is in crisis. Gone are the days where we can tell the story of a man singing about how much he loves his wife without ever hearing from the woman herself; where we can follow the hero's journey without understanding the person he is trying to save. In Monteverdi's opera, Euridice has 4 lines in total. Where is she in this opera? In our recording studio we invite our audience to ask the question: who gets to have a voice?

The Team:

Director: Franciska Éry

Set and costume design: Peter Butler

Lighting design: Mathieu Cabanes

We're artists from Hungary, France and the UK, interested in spatial relations and an interdisciplinary approach to opera.

Hungarian director **Franciska Éry** puts cultural belonging and the audience experience in the forefront of her work. Past projects have received the OffWestend Award for Best Opera Production, Highlights of Hungary, and nominated for the FEDORA prize.

Peter Butler is a visual artist specialising in set and costume design. Credits include *Shut Up I'm Dreaming* (National Theatre London), *A Taste Of Honey* (Royal Exchange Manchester), *The Shape of Things* (Park 200). He won the Linbury Prize for Stage Design and nominated for the Stage Debut Award.

Mathieu Cabanes is a French lighting designer. Credits include *La Belle au Bois Dormant* (Opéra National de Lyon), *Don Pasquale*, *Le Climat*, *Séisme* (Opéra National de Montpellier), and several productions by Bob Wilson. He works with Concept K, Lab212, Maison Hermès, MISK Art Institute, Saudi Arabia and the Times Art Museum, China.

Team C: Orfeo. The End of Things

Team Giorgio Pesenti (ITA) / Giulia Bruschi (ITA) / Riccardo Mainetti (ITA) / Elena Patacchini (ITA) / Matteo Castiglioni (ITA)

The Concept:

As Europeans, we are not accustomed to early, sudden deaths, such as Euridice's in the myth. Europe is increasingly aging, with more than 90 million elderly people and many of them receiving inadequate assistance. The Euridice we release into the realm of Pluto could be anybody's older parent. We are Orfeo as this myth urgently calls to reflect on our present relationship with death.

In our narrative, the hero is an old man forced to face a double conflict: on the one hand, to overcome the death of the person he loved all his life, and on the other, alone, locked up in a retirement home, forced to deal with his impending death, with the inability to be independent. He is a man split in two: his body is aging, but his voice still sings for love. Isolated and surrounded by strangers in uniform, Orfeo seeks refuge in the past. In the retirement home, he forgets Euridice's death and makes a plan to escape and find his lost love. The retirement home turns into a baroque theatre where Orfeo stages his final journey. Like in a fairy tale, the hero flees. Outside, he encounters the city: a modern, fast, consumerist world. Orfeo accepts the journey into contemporary hell and finds Euridice. With the fiercest form of

love, she helps Orfeo to turn around. By looking back and accepting life Orfeo will organize his memories and surrender to the end of things.

The Team:

Director: Giorgio Pesenti

Set and costume design: Giulia Bruschi

Set design: Riccardo Mainetti

Dramaturgy: Elena Patacchini

Video design: Matteo Castiglioni

As a team, we want to explore the social and political power of musical theatre to question our times.

Giorgio Pesenti, director and pianist, is Daniele Abbado's assistant, with whom he worked in theatres such as La Scala and La Fenice. He cofounded Opera Popolare, that combines social and theatrical issues.

Giulia Bruschi, set and costume designer, trained in Architecture at Politecnico of Milan and in Set and Costume Design at Brera Academy.

Riccardo Mainetti, set designer, trained in Theatre Design at Brera Academy in Milan. Together, they designed *Aida* in Teatro Sociale Como with a social choir and a collaborative workshop process.

Elena Patacchini, playwright and dramaturg, finalist at the 2023 Biennale Teatro. She worked in theatre such as Teatro Stabile del Veneto and Teatro Nazionale di Genova. She is cofounder of Opera Popolare.

Matteo Castiglioni, composer and multimedia artist, worked at Opera di Roma and at Biennale di Venezia, focusing on live-visuals and site-specific projects.

The Programme

Saturday, June 28, 2025

Schauspielhaus

10:30-11:15	Opening Ceremony
11:30-12:10	Team Maria Chagina (RUS) / Anna Agafonova (ISR) / Sören Sarbeck (DEU) <i>L'Orfeo. The Myth Next Door</i>
12:15-12:45	Speakers' Corner (Salon, 1st floor)
16:30-17:10	Team Franciska Éry (HUN) / Peter Butler (GBR) / Mathieu Cabanes (FRA) Orfeo – Recording in Session
17:15-17:45	Speakers' Corner (Salon, 1st floor)

Sunday, Jun 29, 2025

Schauspielhaus

10:30-11:10	Team Giorgio Pesenti (ITA) / Giulia Bruschi (ITA) / Riccardo Mainetti (ITA) / Elena Patacchini (ITA) / Matteo Castiglioni (ITA) Orfeo. The End of Things
11:15-11:45	Speakers' Corner (Salon, 1st floor)
12:30-13:00	Award Ceremony

In between the performances, the **Speakers' Corner** offers space for dialogue: the directing teams answer questions from the jury and the audience, offering interesting insights into their artistic visions.

The **Concept Area** complements the festival experience by giving insights into the creative process – from submission to stage-ready production, showcased through models, concepts, and team profiles.

Should you be unable to attend in person, you can watch the final live on [OperaVision](#).

The Prizes

STAGE 1

NEW! EUR 2.500 **Sustainability Prize**, sponsored by art + event | Theaterservice Graz, awarded by the Sustainability Jury

SEMIFINAL

NEW! EUR 3.000 **Dramaturgy Prize**, sponsored by Schauspielhaus Graz and Oper Graz

NEW! EUR 1.500 **Heinz Weyringer-Prize** (Honorary President)

EUR 1.000 **Audience Prize**, sponsored by Wagner Forum Graz

Recognition fee for each semifinal team: EUR 2.500

FINAL

1st Prize **RING AWARD**, a stage production at one of the stages of Oper Graz, EUR 2.500

2nd Prize **Province of Styria Prize**, EUR 2.500

3rd Prize **Bühnen Graz Prize**, EUR 2.500

Recognition fee for each final team: EUR 7.000

Additional Special Prizes for stage productions may be awarded by several theatres and opera houses.

The Jury

15 renowned international artistic directors and music theatre experts:

Jossi Wieler, Stage Director, Head of Jury

Jan Henric Bogen, General Artistic Director Konzert und Theater St. Gallen

Renata Borowska-Juszczyńska, General Manager Teatr Wielki Poznan

Valérie Chevalier, Directrice Générale Opéra Orchestre National Montpellier

Klaus Grünberg, Set and Light Designer

Tatjana Gürbaca, Stage Director

Marlene Hahn, Head of Dramaturgy Oper Leipzig

Stefan Herheim, Stage Director, Intendant Theater an der Wien

Marko Hribernik, Conductor, Director General of Opera SNG Opera in balet Ljubljana

Ulrich Lenz, Dramaturg, Intendant Oper Graz

Andrea Moses, Stage Director, Artistic Director of Opera Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar

Annette Murschetz, Set Designer, Professor at University of Music and Performing Arts Graz

Elisabeth Sobotka, Intendant Staatsoper Unter den Linden

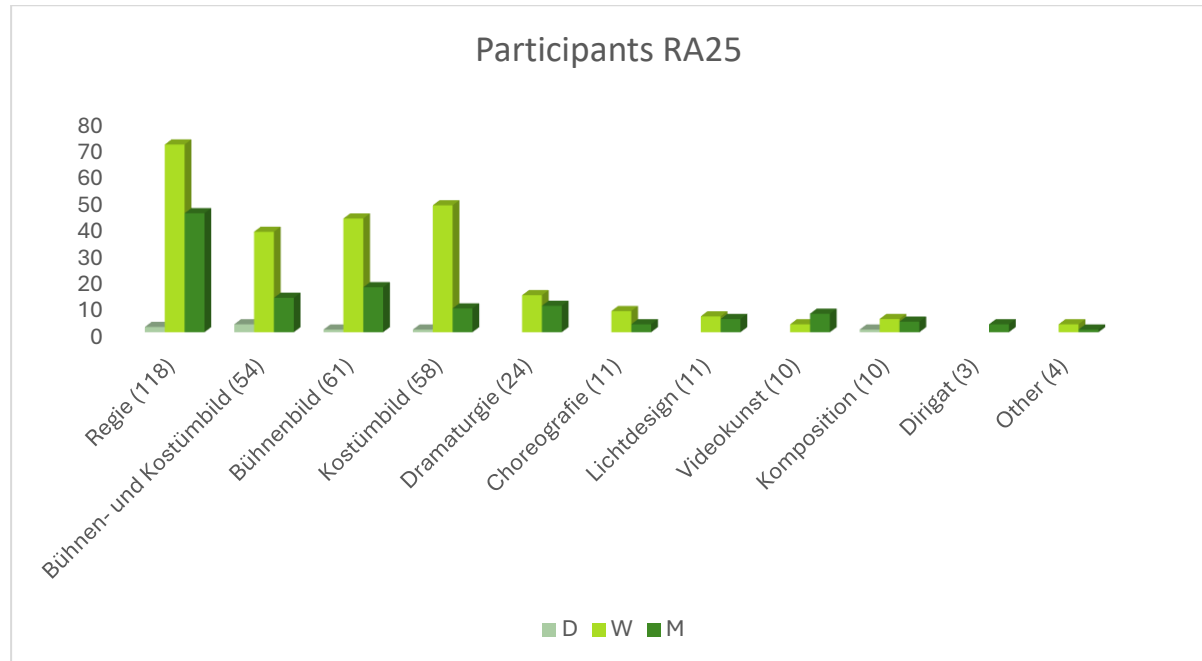
Andrea Vilter, Dramaturg, Intendant Schauspielhaus Graz

Sibylle Wallum, Costume Designer

Facts & Figures RING AWARD 25

- 10th International Competition for Directing, Set and Costume Design in Music Theatre
- For the first time, the RING AWARD is organized by Bühnen Graz.
- New Artistic Director: theatre and opera director Jossi Wieler (former Artistic Director of Staatsoper Stuttgart)
- New Board of Directors: Jossi Wieler (Artistic Director of RING AWARD), Ulrich Lenz (Artistic Director, Oper Graz), Andrea Vilter (Artistic Director, Schauspielhaus Graz), Michael Schilhan (Artistic Director, Next Liberty), Georg Schulz (Rector, University of Music and Performing Arts Graz), Wolfgang Hülbig (Managing Director, art + event | Theaterservice Graz)
- Renowned international jury of 15 members for the RING AWARD
- 353 participants (233 women / 112 men / 8 non-binary)
- Participants from 38 countries across all continents
- 109 teams
- Nearly two-thirds of participants were women
- Most submissions came from Germany (137), Italy (58), Austria (21), the UK (15), and Spain (13)

RING AWARD	1997	2000	2003	2005	2008	2011	2014	2017	2020	2025	TOTAL
PARTICIPANTS	66	121	176	186	156	138	196	200	326	353	1918
TEAMS	33	60	87	89	70	62	91	89	126	109	816
NATIONS	11	13	17	26	22	20	29	24	32	38	59



Participants with multiple roles within the team have been listed accordingly.

Green Event

Green Events are events that take into account ecological, social, economic, and cultural sustainability in a comprehensive way and actively support the implementation of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

They show that sustainable living isn't about doing without but about gaining lasting value through smart concepts and responsible choices.

RING AWARD 25 meets the criteria of the [Austrian Ecolabel for Green Events](#), and is committed to reducing environmental impact, conserving resources, and supporting the regional economy.

As a Green Event, RING AWARD 25 encourages all visitors to travel as sustainably as possible – by train, bus, or bicycle. Forming carpool is also a simple and effective way to reduce emissions. Our venues, Schauspielhaus Graz and Next Liberty, are barrier-free, easily accessible by public transportation, and equipped with bicycle parking facilities.

Thank you for helping us reduce emissions and make music theatre more sustainable!



The Festival Pass

The Festival Pass provides full access to the RING AWARD 25 final weekend, including all three finalist productions of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, the Speakers' Corner, and the Concept Area.

In just 24 hours, visitors experience three contrasting interpretations of the opera, each reflecting a unique creative vision.

The Speakers' Corner offers space for dialogue: finalist teams answer questions from the international jury and the public, offering insights into their artistic processes. The Concept Area presents the creative journey in an exhibition format – from initial ideas to the completed stage design.

Offering a sharp look into the future of music theatre, the Festival Pass invites audiences to discover the diverse creative voices of a new generation of directors.

Festival pass now available both [online](#) and at the ticket center! (Kaiser-Josef-Platz 10, 8010 Graz)

RING AWARD FINAL on June 28&29, 2025

Contact

Deborah Siebenhofer

RING AWARD Project Management

art + event | Theaterservice Graz GmbH · Kaiser-Josef-Platz 10 · 8010 Graz · Austria

M: +43 676 3811379

T: + 43 316 8008-1154

M: deborah.siebenhofer@art-event.com

More information available at www.ringaward.com

