

The Little Prince – From Cult Book to Cult Opera

The music conservatory of the University of Cologne, in partnership with the Cologne municipal government, recently performed Nikolaus Schapfl’s opera *The Little Prince*, based on the book by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

The opera was mounted as a benefit performance for the “We Are Helping” charitable campaign of the Cologne daily newspaper, the *Koelner Stadtanzeiger*. The event raised 30,000 Euros for the campaign.

The success of the astonishing book upon which the opera is based appears to have passed undiminished to the musical opus. This is, of course, thanks, on the one hand, to the ingenious nature of the story, which corresponds to our longing to see with the “eyes of the heart” – and thus really to see – thereby countering the superficiality, obsession with visual imagery and loneliness of modern life.

On the other hand, it has to do with the quality of Mr. Schapfl’s opera, couched as it is in a tonal language somewhere between Wagner and Bernstein, and which does not seek to prove its modernity by driving the audience out of the concert hall. There is no other way to account for the success of this genial work since its world premier in 2003 in Salzburg. *The Little Prince* has since played to sold-out concert halls – at the Cologne Philharmonic Hall, in Beethoven’s native city of Bonn, at the Leverkusen Forum, and most recently at the concert hall of the conservatory of the University of Cologne.

Of all the performances to date, perhaps the high point was the January 26, 2005 performance at Frankfurt’s Alte Oper, which brought to a close Frankfurt’s year of fundraising partnership with UNICEF, the United Nations’ child welfare organization. A packed audience responded to the impressive performance of the soloists, chorus and orchestra, under the direction of Stephan E. Wehr, with a sustained ovation. The funds raised at this benefit performance were donated to UNICEF.