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Of Roses and Foxes and Friends

Premier of the Opera *The Little Prince*

By Heidimarie Klabacher

Salzburg -- Nikolaus Schapfl has set Antoine de Saint Exupery's *The Little Prince* to music with the express permission of the author's estate. The family had turned down 70 composers before finally granting the formal right to make a musical treatment of the book. The premier of the Opera (in concert version), which took place in the sold-out Great Hall of the Mozarteum in Salzburg, was a triumph for the composer and the performers.

The premier was entrusted to the Salzburg Youth Philharmonic and its lead conductor Elisabeth Fuchs. The piece, which filled the entire evening, is unaffected by the concepts of contemporary music, and makes no concession to classical Modernism. This Little Prince is simply beautiful.

The work comes in the guise of classical opera or more precisely film music. It surprises through the clever instrumentation of its major themes, and its intimate, introspective glances that often seem to resemble chamber music.

Nikolaus Schapfl, as his own librettist, generally took the dialogue from the book as written. Many details from the book are illustrated in the manner of program music – the Little Prince glancing angrily at the sheep drawn by the Pilot, or the astray delirium of the Drunkard – all of these are present in the very colorful music, which, with a few props and simple costumes, comes semi-scenically to life.

The Salzburg Youth Philharmonic is, as always, conducted supremely well and with solid craftsmanship by Elisabeth Fuchs. Tonal presence and technical mastery have long been hallmarks of the youthful orchestra. The Orpheus Choir, also founded by Elisabeth Fuchs, was also thoroughly well prepared.

Truly like a star – or indeed like a little prince – that has fallen from the heavens, was Yvonne Moules in the title role. She was technically brilliant and gave an utterly magical performance. Equally convincing were the other members of the ensemble: Bernhard Berchtold as the Pilot and the Lamplighter, Monika Waeckerle as the Rose and the Snake, Johann Winzer as the Fox, Christoph Stephinger as the King and the Drunkard, and Einar Gudmundsson as the Vain Man and the Businessman.