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Beauty Will Triumph by Marie Czernin

Unrestrained joy and overwhelming enthusiasm at the world premier of the opera *The Little Prince* in the sold-out *Grosser Saal* of the Mozarteum: the Salzburg audience greeted the opera with standing ovations and prolonged applause, a genuine triumph for the Munich composer Nikolaus Schapfl and the Salzburg Youth Philharmonic under the direction of the 27 year-old conductor Elisabeth Fuchs.

Schapfl's music did not leave anyone cold or indifferent that night, for its beauty provokes, and its listeners gradually get caught up in an undercurrent of emotions. Schapfl, like so many of his young colleagues, is convinced that tonality in music is not imposed, but rather belongs to human nature, like a fish to water: "Beauty in music is like a small plant that breaks through a slab of concrete."

It is astonishing that such a young composer has succeeded in "breaking through the slab of concrete" to build again on the musical tradition of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He takes to heart the words of Gustav Mahler, who once said: "Tradition is not the worshiping of the ashes, but rather the rekindling of the fire." The fire is in Schapfl's music and can be felt especially in *The Little Prince*. With craftsmanship and a joyful lightness that partially recalls the temperament of Mozart, he guides the listener through the opera without boring him. Schapfl employs a variety of stylistic elements, including those of the 20th century, such as dissonance, for example, to express the loneliness and emptiness of the Drunkard, and shimmering expanses of sound and *glissandi* to suggest the toxicity of the Snake. He describes an arc of vibrating melodies, always preserving a unique identity and never simply borrowing the music of the past.

"Of course there are romantic passages in my music, but they are romantic in a timeless way," says Schapfl. "Even Nikolaus Harnoncourt once said, 'All music that touches the heart is in fact romantic.'"

That the heirs of Antoine de Saint Exupery, having rejected 70 other composers, attended the world premier can be considered a special honor and acknowledgement of the opera and its composer. They expressed their satisfaction in these terms: "Antoine would have been very pleased."