

## **The Little Prince in Cologne: A New Avant-Garde**

By Hans Thomas, *Westfalenblatt*, September **XX**, 2004

Cologne – The era of re-education is over. For decades, “modern” opera tried to brow beat the public – until *The Little Prince* arrived in Cologne.

Those who preferred musicality to strident atonality should have realized long since that they were out of step with the times. And those who, nevertheless, wanted to continue patronizing musical performances simply had to put up with the pain occasioned by deliberate dissonance.

But it seems there is another approach to modernity. It required a new *avant-garde* to bring it about, one with the courage to drop the practice of giving the cold shoulder to the public’s desire for sonority. Perhaps weak box office receipts are bringing about a new way of supporting the arts – full houses.

The Cologne Philharmonic hall was sold out months in advance for the September performance of *The Little Prince*.

Since the late 1990s, Nikolaus Schapfl, the Munich-born composer who now resides in Salzburg, wondered if his opera, which is faithful to the text of the world famous story by Antoine de Saint Exupery, would ever be performed. In Munich, August Everding was planning to mount a performance of the work before he died.

In Cologne, news of the opera’s success in Munich and Salzburg arrived just as a favorable constellation was coming together – the tenth anniversary of “Wir Helfen,” the charitable organization to help children headed by Hedwig Neven Dumont, the city’s commitment to this anniversary, and the opera itself (Cologne’s Mayor Norbert Schramma called it a “fantastic work” even before the performance) and the clear enthusiasm of Professor Josef Protschka, rector of Cologne’s *Hochschule fuer Musik*. The soloists, chorus, and the orchestra under the direction of Stephan E. Wehr, gave a notably assured performance.

Kathrin Smith, soprano, who sang the role of the Little Prince and marvelously conveyed his purity and capacity for wonder, told the *Westfalenblatt* that although she learned of the project just two months before the performance, it was the most beautiful role she had ever played. Also delighted was Delphine Lacroix, who represented the estate of Saint Exupery. More than 70 composers had applied to the Saint Expery estate for the rights to the text of *The Little Prince*. Now, the family feels it made the right choice.

Standing ovations; prolonged applause; cries of bravo. And the words of the Fox, movingly sung by the chorus, reverberated in everyone’s memory: “One sees only good with the heart. The essential is invisible to the eyes!”

*The Little Prince* will be performed in Bonn on November 16 and in Leverkusen on November 22, as well as in Duesseldorf in January.