

THE FIRST CYCLE OF CHANGE

“Music on its own might not change the world, but it can definitely contribute to it”

said Artistic Director Christoph Müller on launching the ambitious program cycle called CHANGE.

As the echoes of the last notes from this year's Gstaad Menuhin Festival & Academy fade away, he offers his insights into the 2023 edition and provides an enticing glimpse of what awaits attendees in the festival's 2024 instalment.

Mr. Müller, how satisfied are you with this year's Menuhin Festival?

Very satisfied. We had about nine per cent more visitors than in 2022 and can speak of a successful year. At the end of the festival, one is always tired but very grateful for everything. I am enormously pleased that nearly 26,800 people attended all our events and that we can thus build on the record year of 2018. It is interesting to note that the attendance at our Academy concerts is growing steadily, which speaks for a great curiosity on the part of the audience.

What was your personal highlight, and why this one in particular?

I have a special emotional and human connection with the Gstaad Festival Orchestra. What this ad hoc orchestra, which has been playing almost unchanged at the part-leader positions for almost ten years, achieved with its concerts this year was world-class! This is largely due to conductor Jaap van Zweden, who energetically demands quality, emo-

tion and energy from the musicians and gets it. This Mahler 2 (Resurrection Symphony) or Shostakovich's Ninth, which we fortunately recorded for the Gstaad Digital Festival, will remain in my memory for the rest of my life.

How have you dealt with the controversial reactions to the new festival content such as Music for the Planet?

I am grateful that the two projects, "Les Adieux" and "Forelle" in particular, have triggered discussions. I realise that the subject of the drama of rapidly accelerating climate change is sometimes a generational issue. I have seen 20-year-olds at the concerts who were close to tears because they felt addressed by a topic that moves them every day. Others could only make little sense of the whole thing.

It is impressive that such opposing emotions can be triggered with such intensity, even in the context of music. I expected criticism, and that's a good thing. Every criticism shows that the concerts have an effect. One should not close one's eyes to reality, and in my eyes, it is le-

gitimate that this moving reality is also taken up in cultural projects at times – that is what culture is there for! And at the same time, I understand all those who want to experience culture as a pleasure – that is still possible at most of our events – and it should be! Our festival stands for top-class music combined with enjoyment in unique surroundings. We are not changing anything about this successful formula.

What do you want to tell your festival visitors (or in general) at this point?

The 2024 edition is about "transformation," and we have arrived at the second year of our three-year cycle. The programme will be published shortly before Christmas 2023. Transformative aspects in music on different levels will play a role, and musicians such as violinist Julia Fischer or pianist Hélène Grimaud will present promising programmes. We are very much looking forward to this!

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Photograph: Kerem S. Maurer