



New opera by Detlev Glanert

In February 2024, Detlev Glanert's latest stage work, a commissioned composition, will be premiered at the Semperoper Dresden: the five-act opera "Die Jüdin von Toledo" ("The Jewish Woman of Toledo") with a libretto by Hans-Ulrich Treichel based on the play of the same name by Franz Grillparzer.



Detlev Glanert is alone among German composers of the past few decades in frequently and successfully providing modern music theatre with material and content that is relevant to our times, reaching and appealing to a wide audience in the process. It is not for nothing that he was awarded the **OPUS Klassik prize as "Composer of the Year"** for his Fontane opera "Oceane" in 2020, as well as being presented with the **International Opera Award** in 2020/21. But Glanert

always also demands something of his audience, as the source material he uses, whether historical or literary (or both) in nature, is always of some complexity, as evidenced, for example, by "Der Spiegel des grossen Kaisers"/"The Mirror of the Great Emperor" (premiere 1995, after Arnold Zweig, awarded the Rolf Liebermann Opera Prize), "Joseph Süß" (premiere 1999, about the historically documented figure of the financier of that name), "Scherz, Satire, Ironie und tiefere Bedeutung"/"Jest, Satire, Irony and Deeper Meaning" (premiere 2001, after Christian Dietrich Grabbe, awarded the Bavarian Theatre Prize) or "Solaris" (premiere 2012, after Stanisław Lem).

Detlev Glanert's new opera, "Die Jüdin von Toledo", has a seemingly simple plot: a man who is no longer quite young, and married to boot, meets a young and beautiful woman who is still almost a girl, and is almost consumed by his passion for her. And the young girl, bewitched and flattered by the man's ardent courtship, enters into a relationship with him. The story becomes more complex when we know that the man is Alfonso VIII (1148-1215), the king of Castile, and that the girl is the young Jewish woman Rahel, who, like the king, lives in Toledo, a city threatened and besieged by the Moors. This turns the seemingly simple story of adultery and passion crossing all borders of religion and social standing into an ever more complex historical, political and social tragedy — a tragedy at the end of which Rahel, the beautiful "The Jewish Woman of Toledo", suffers a cruel death.

It is largely owing to this complexity that the story, handed down in a medieval collection of legends, has found its way into literature, both as a drama and as the basis for novels, from Lope de Vega and Franz Grillparzer to Lion Feuchtwanger. "The Jewish Woman" and her tragic fate have thus become a topos and a motif in operatic history as well, a motif that is always able to take on a specific relevance in every historical period.

It is Grillparzer's drama, which was given its first performance posthumously in 1872, that served as a major basis, though not the sole one, for Detlev Glanert's new opera. However, the text needed to undergo a special, free transformation to make it suitable for a music drama. Glanert gave this job to his **tried-and-true librettist Hans-Ulrich Treichel**, who used the five-act drama written in blank verse as the starting point for a largely independent adaptation of the material. It is the third time the pair has worked together, after "Caligula" (2006) and "Oceane" (2019).

Glanert's musical language

Detlev Glanert employs a lyrical and passionate musical language that does not shut itself off from tradition but casts a new light on it from a contemporary perspective. *"I don't belong to the hardcore avant-garde. (...) I see myself as a conservative anarchist. I would like to be free of the daily changing series of modernities. I try to reimagine the music behind me in a very individual way to turn it into music for the people of today. And I don't want to write music for specialists. For example, I have forbidden myself to use electronic music, as I can't manage to really feel it."* As far as orchestration is concerned, in the "Jüdin von Toledo" listeners can look forward to a refined sound landscape in keeping with the subject, produced by a classical orchestra along with ample percussion, including crotales, glockenspiel, tubular bells, gong, wood and temple blocks and tambourine. A mixed choir complements the six vocal soloists.

The plot

Act 1: Although it is forbidden, young Rahel, followed by her sister Esther, climbs over the wall into the royal garden of the palace in Toledo because she has heard festive music coming from there. King Alfonso VIII has left the banquet because he is tired of the courtly ceremony and the constant talk of war and the imminent battle against the Moors. When he encounters Rahel in the garden, he is immediately impressed by her beauty. But they are disturbed by Don Garceran and his father, Count Manrique, who see Rahel as a hostile spy. The king takes the two intruders under his protection and orders that they be allowed to leave the garden freely. At the same time, he invites Rahel to visit him in his country residence whenever she wants. While Rahel and Esther are starting off on their way out, Rahel deliberately drops her shawl, which the king picks up. When Alfonso's wife, Eleonore, approaches with her mentally ill son and her retinue, Rahel and Esther manage to hide just in time. The queen accuses Alfonso of neglecting government business and especially the fight against the Moors. Alfonso wants to escape from this confrontation, but the queen stirs up court society against him. Upon discovering Rahel's shawl in his hand, she also mocks him. After everyone has returned to the castle, Rahel and Esther are able to leave their hiding place. Rahel wants to see the king again, but her sister warns her against going near him. **Act 2:** Rahel and Esther wait for Alfonso in the royal country residence. When Alfonso appears, his wishes with regard to Rahel are clear. Manrique arrives unannounced and provides information on the imminent battle. But the king is interested only in his coming night of love with Rahel; he sends Manrique away and devotes himself completely to her. Seven months pass. Garceran unexpectedly enters the country residence and reports that the queen has convened the privy council and declared a state of emergency, justifying the move by saying the king has abandoned his kingdom with the enemy at the gates. Because Garceran casts lustful glances at Rahel, Alfonso becomes enraged; he also accuses Eleonore of treason and a coup d'etat. Esther bursts in, believing that Rahel needs help. Garceran continues to remonstrate with Alfonso. He reproaches him once more for his various failures and explains that the privy council will pass a resolution. Alfonso interprets this as an attack on him and sets off hastily towards Toledo. **Act 3:** At the palace, the members of the privy council, Garceran, Manrique and the queen gather; bolstered by Eleonore's authority, they decide to end the truce and attack. At the same time, Eleonore complains that Rahel is preventing the king from taking action and that she is a spy for the Moors. The council is unanimous that the king can no longer exercise his office and that the queen should be handed the power in his stead. Alfonso suddenly enters the room, breaks up the meeting and remains alone with Eleonore. A quarrel ensues. Alfonso lacks the arguments to justify his behaviour, and finally, after massive threats from the queen, gives in. He dissociates himself from Rahel and agrees to let her be killed. **Act 4:** Rahel and Esther wait for the king in the country residence. Esther exhorts Rahel to flee. But it is too late: henchmen burst in, rush at Rahel, kill her and plunder the building. Esther manages to hide. Shortly afterwards, Alfonso enters the wrecked room and sees Rahel lying dead. He kisses her and leaves the room. Esther comes back and collapses over her sister's dead body. **Act 5:** Arms for the war are being blessed in a state ceremony in the cathedral. At the same time, Esther laments her

sister's murder and suspects that it is the start of something even more terrible. The cardinal and all the others leave the church, while the mentally ill prince remains alone.

The cast

The role of Rahel is to be interpreted at the premiere by the American soprano **Heidi Stober**, who has become an audience favourite on both sides of the Atlantic with her distinctive lyrical voice and striking stage personality. Rahel's sister Esther will be portrayed by the Norwegian singer **Lilly Jørstad**, whose mezzo-soprano is in demand throughout Europe. The part of Alfonso is to be taken on by **Christoph Pohl**, a much sought-after baritone in modern music theatre – for example, he sang main roles at the premieres of Georg Friedrich Haas' "Morgen und Abend"/"Morning and Evening" at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in 2015 and of Detlev Glanert's "Oceane" at the Deutsch Oper Berlin in 2019. Eleonore of England, the queen, will be interpreted by the mezzo-soprano **Tanja Ariane Baumgartner**, who will be involved in the premiere of another new music drama this season, "Melancholie des Widerstands"/"Melancholy of Resistance" by Marc-André Dalvie. The parts of Count Manrique and his son Don Garceran will be performed by **Markus Marquardt** and **Aaron Pegram**, two members of the ensemble at the Semperoper Dresden, which has commissioned this work.

The production of this world premiere is by the Canadian **Robert Carsen**, whose name is currently on everyone's lips because of his nomination as director of "Jedermann" in Salzburg for 2024 and who already worked with Glanert at the premiere of "Oceane". The Sächsische Staatskapelle and the Dresden State Opera Chorus will be under the musical direction of **Jonathan Darlington**, the current principal conductor of the Nürnberger Symphoniker, who has already rendered contemporary opera great services, among other things with the premiere of Manfred Trojahn's "La grande magia" (Dresden 2008).

Information on the **Semperoper** website:

<https://www.semperoper.de/en/whats-on/schedule/stid/die-juedin-von-toledo-en/62287.html>

Information on the **Boosey & Hawkes** website:

<https://www.boosey.com/pages/opera/moredetails?musicid=103923>

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