

THEATRE WORLD PREMIERE

DAS BESTE STÜCK ALLER ZEITEN *THE BEST PLAY EVER*

75 Years Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen)

MILO RAU



FREE
REPUBLIC OF
VIENNA
FESTIVAL

15 – 22 May
Halle E im
MuseumsQuartier

A polyphonous, beautiful and shocking 'Symphony of the Vienna Festival, of theatre, of Vienna, written by us all': it's *The Best Play Ever*. In this large-scale anniversary production, Milo Rau and a cast of more than twenty participants revive formative scenes from the Vienna Festival's 75-year history with its fans and haters, lots of music as well as many memories. There are even idols from the Festival's past joining in from the beyond! Darlings of the public Inge Maux and Samouil Stoyanov guide the audience through this evening of absurd and deeply touching moments. Grand events in collective memory meet personal stories; the most theatre-enamoured city in the world itself becomes a stage. For – to quote *The Best Play Ever* – 'this is modern Vienna: no more emperors, no more gods. No longer the people, only an audience. All that remains is theatre and music'.

Language
German, English,
Hindi, Serbo-Croat

Surtitles
English, German

Duration
approx. 90 mins


barrier-free access

Q&A
19 May, following
the performance

‘Every night at the theatre is a birth
and death. Every night we find
ourselves at the dawn of all time.
Every day the world is made anew.
And so each night it ends. When
the lights on stage extinguish.’

FROM *THE BEST PLAY EVER*

Direction Milo Rau **With** Inge Maux, Samouil Stoyanov and Richi August-Chi, Ruchi Bajaj, Olivier Benoit, Daniel Rajcsanyi, Milan Eror, Lukas Kaltenböck, Aurelia Lanker, Elisabeth Löffler, Marion and Arno Messiner, Agnieszka Salamon, Olga Shapovalova, Georg Smolek, Dora Staudinger, Brigitte Weinberger, Angelika Rahbar, Fred Weißensteiner, Stefanie Wieser, Samed Yilmaz, Ada Zar, Barbara and Alma Zenker and others **Research, Dramaturgy** Laura Andreß **Music** Herwig Zamernik **Live music, Accompaniment** Matej Wakounig **Sound design** Dominik Mayr **Stage design** Anton Lukas **Costume design** Cedric Mpaka **Video design** Moritz von Dungern **Light design** Victor Duran, Jürgen Kolb **Assistance direction** Nastasia Griesse **Artistic coordination** Jonas Baur **Assistant set designer** Alma van der Donk **Costume assistance** Marie Therese Fritz **Childcare** Grazia Caccin **Translation play text and surtitles** Sebastian McKimm **Surtitles** Isolde Schmitt

Production Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna **Thanks to** Christa Pohl, Paul Poet for the original material from Christoph Schlingensief's container action, and especially to the entire team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen)

executed by the team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

World Premiere Mai 2026, Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

Performance rights for an excerpt from *Peter Handke: The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other*, reproduced with kind permission of Suhrkamp Theatre Publishing, Berlin.

'TIME IS A RIVER, A VIOLENT TORRENT OF THINGS COMING INTO BEING'

A JOURNEY THROUGH GLOBAL HISTORY, FESTIVAL
HISTORY AND PARTICIPANTS' PERSONAL MEMORIES

4.6–4.5 billion years BCE

Earth emerges from a molecular cloud

113,000–9,700 BCE

Last ice age

2,000 BCE

First permanent settlement on the
ground of modern-day Vienna



15–10 BCE
The first Romans arrive on the
ground of modern-day Vienna

c. 97 CE
Establishment of the Roman
legion camp Vindobona

17 March 180 CE
Death of the Roman emperor
Marcus Aurelius

375–600 CE
The Migration Period brings about
fundamental changes in Europe, the
Roman Empire disbands

433 CE
End of Vindobona as a Roman city,
the walls of the camp remain

1273–1282 CE
Start of Habsburg rule in Austria

1719–1723 CE

Construction of the royal-imperial
court stables and winter riding hall
(now Halle E)

10 September 1898

Assassination of Empress
Elisabeth, aka Sisi

31 October 1918

End of the Habsburg monarchy

26 May 1951

Opening of the first Vienna Festival
(Wiener Festwochen)
Festival motto: Immortal Vienna



15 May 1955

Conclusion of the Austrian
State Contract

27 June – 10 October 1976

Artists, students and young people
occupy the Arena premises after
the final performance of the Vienna
Festival 'Arena' series.

18 May 1980

World premiere of *Jesu Hochzeit*
by Gottfried von Einem and
Lotte Ingrisch

*'One of the Second Republic's biggest
theatre scandals'* (Die Presse)

15 May 1985

Falco entertains fifty thousand people at the Vienna Festival opening event



22 June 1987

Angelika and Fred meet in the auditorium during Brahms' *A German Requiem* at the Vienna Festival

Fred recalls:

'She took no notice of me. I thought, "She's so beautiful, there's no point even trying."

7 May 1988

The Vienna Festival opens with the show *A Song Goes Round the World* featuring songs from Vienna's music scene that were banned by the Nazis.

12 June 1990

Austrian premiere of *The Black Rider* by Robert Wilson, Tom Waits and William Burroughs



22 May 1991

Austrian premiere of *La Tempête*,
directed by Peter Brook

Lukas Kaltenbäck recalls:

*'I was awe-struck by the fact that all actors
were speaking in their own mother tongue.
I had never seen Shakespeare produced
like that.'*

10 May 1988

World premiere of Thomas Barsch's
anti-war play *Frauen. Krieg. Lustspiel*,
directed by George Tabori

9 May 1992

World premiere of *The Hour When We
Knew Nothing of Each Other* by Peter
Handke, directed by Claus Peymann

13 January 1993

Austrian premiere of *Les Atrides*,
directed by Ariane Mnouchkine

Lukas Kaltenbäck recalls:

*'Before the production visited, I went to
Paris so that I could see for myself how we
might be able to realise the piece in Vienna.
My only problem was, I didn't know a word
of French. But that didn't actually matter.
The play was a flood of images, amazing.
That gave me something to work with for
the light design.'*

29 May 1993

Austrian premiere of *Nelken*
(*Carnations*) by Pina Bausch



21 May 1999

World premiere of *Hamlet*,
directed by Peter Zadek

4 February 2000

Appointment of the first Austrian
Freedom Party (FPÖ)-ÖVP
coalition government

14 May 2000

World premiere of *The Seagull*,
directed by Luc Bondy

11–17 June 2000

Please love Austria! –
First Austrian Coalition Week
by Christoph Schlingensief



2 August 2001

Agnieszka Salamon moves to Vienna.
Mere weeks later, the World Trade Center in New York is hit by the 9/11 terror attacks.

27 May 2004

World Premiere of *Simmering gegen Kapfenberg '34 – Heimatkunde der Brutalität* by Karl Wozek

Marion Messiner recalls:

'The stage was our classroom where we practised the civil war. The best bit was that we were using our packed lunches as grenades. I kept thinking, "I hope no-one in the audience is bit by a bit of sausage."

11 May 2013

Austrian premiere of *Sul concetto di volto nel Figlio di Dio* by Romeo Castellucci

'A small, obviously well-organised group in the audience attempted massive disruptions during the Vienna Festival premiere at Burgtheater. They raised a choir of booing and whistling that lasted for a while during one scene.' (Der Standard)

14 May 2016

World premiere of *Us Dogs* by SIGNA

Stefanie Wieser recalls:

'Crawling on all fours for six hours, until I am tired, going head to head with a doggy who was much too big and getting a black eye and standing by that. Drinking shots with a member of the audience and rolling about on the floor and then talking about love while I pee into a bucket.'

5 June 2021

World premiere of *Die Gewebte der Frau Kathrin Angerer* by René Pollesch

Being a massive Pollesch fan, Georg Smolek attends all four shows of the Vienna Festival visiting production.



1 April 2022

Austrian premiere of *Requiem*
by Romeo Castellucci

Brigitte Weinberger recalls:

'It was very challenging, rolling out of the bed and crawling through all the dancers in the darkness. But before that, the beginning all alone on stage, that was a great experience!'

21 May 2024

Austrian premiere of *La Clemenza di Tito* by Milo Rau and Thomas Hengelbrock

Olga Shapovalova recalls:

'It was the first time that I had sat so close to opera singers. It was much more intense than in the audience. That memory stuck with me and it started affecting my own artistic practice.'

10 June 2024

Austrian premiere of *SANCTA* by
Florentina Holzinger
'Went to the opera, puked' (FAZ)



12 June 2024

Austrian premiere of *ja nichts is ok* by
René Pollesch and Fabian Hinrichs

18 May 2025

World premiere of *Burgtheater* after
Elfriede Jelinek, directed by Milo Rau

Dora Staudinger recalls:

*'We made up the text together during the
rehearsals for 'Burgtheater'. After the
summer break, we all ended up saying
something slightly different during the
performance, but that was okay because it
was our text anyway.'*

15 May 2026

World premiere of *The Best Play Ever*
by Milo Rau

Hello! Hello!
Are you there?
Are you really there?
Can you see me?
Not me, but rather, what I'm saying,
What I'm trying to tell you here.
What we are talking about.
Can you hear that?
Theatre means: to make oneself
disappear;
You spend your whole life playing a part.
I think on stage you no longer have to.
I don't want to play.
I don't want anyone to act out
Something written by someone else ...
And to then actually feel it,
And actually believe it.
I don't want to have to have feelings.
Theatre must be the place
Where nothing works.
Where everything starts anew,
Just for those who happen to be there,
Those for whom we perform,
Together with whom one says
something ...
Or thinks through something.

Because one cannot think alone,
One can only feel alone.
Yet every thought needs two;
And every conversation, many more.
All of us are needed,
Us all.
And then you have this place,
Where you can finally be together.
Where you're no longer alone.
And so the question won't be:
How does something work?
But rather: why did it ever work?
Why did this solitude ever work?
How do we manage
To make *nothing* work any more?
To exchange the beginning with the
end?
How can *we* do that? All of *us* here?
Yes, that's theatre;
That's the "Best Play Ever."

75 YEARS OF THE VIENNA FESTIVAL (WIENER FESTWOCHE) – WE'RE CELEBRATING EVERYWHERE!

22 May Opening on Heldenplatz

Featuring artists like Patti Smith and the Schmusechor choir – this year on Heldenplatz square, but free of charge like every year!

A Festival's Traces. Your Memories from 75 Years Vienna Festival

A House of Austrian History web exhibition. Join in at hdgoe.at/category/write-history

Hype and High Culture – 75 Years of the Vienna Festival in Posters

An exhibition of unforgettable campaigns from the Festival's history (from 21 April at MAK – Museum of Applied Arts)

Christoph Schlingensief – It's No Longer My Problem!

The first Austrian solo exhibition dedicated to Christoph Schlingensief (1960–2010), radical artist and Vienna Festival idol (from 13 May at MAK – Museum of Applied Arts)

Cinema of the Republic

Film excerpts, documentary material and conversations about legendary productions (House of the Republic, festival hub)

ORF documentary: *75 Jahre Wiener Festwochen – Schönheit und Provokation* (75 Years of the Vienna Festival – Beauty and Provocation)

Watch on ORF 2 on 18 May and at a special screening at Stadtkino on 21 June

Vienna Festival Online Archive

Programme books and booklets as well as unexpected finds that were hidden away in basements are now accessible at archiv.festwochen.at

wiener hefte

An edition about the Vienna Festival with contributions by K. Cerny, F.J. Gangelmayer, M. Leutgeb, M. Mokre

75 Years Vienna Festival Walk

Use the WienTourismus City Guide App for a city walk to dive into legendary Festival locations and productions.

Patti Smith Quartet

The Vienna Festival and Arena Wien are celebrating their anniversaries together with a concert by the Godmother of Punk! (21 May, Arena Wien)

BIOGRAPHY

Milo Rau, born in 1977 in Bern, proclaimed the Free Republic of Vienna in 2024 in his capacity as Artistic Director of the Wiener Festwochen. As a director and author, Rau has produced over 100 plays, films, books and actions. Many of his works engage with authenticity, interweaving documentary material with personal perspectives, and the political with the private (*La Reprise*, *Lamb of God*, *Family*, *The Pelicot Trial*).

Rau's theatrical productions have been presented at all major international festivals, including the Berliner Theatertreffen, the Festival d'Avignon, the Venice Biennale and the Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels, and have toured in over 30 countries worldwide. At the Wiener Festwochen, his works have included *Orestes in Mosul* (2019), *Antigone in the Amazon* (2023) and *Medea's Children* (2024).

From 2018 to 2024, Milo Rau was Artistic Director of NTGent (Belgium). Alongside his work for stage and film, Rau also teaches directing, cultural theory and social sculpture at universities and art academies.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

Owner, Editor and Publisher Wiener Festwochen GesmbH, Lehárgasse 11/1/6, 1060 Wien, T + 43 1 589 22 0, festwochen@festwochen.at | www.festwochen.at **General Management** Milo Rau, Artemis Vakianis **Artistic Direction** (responsible for the content) Milo Rau, Artistic Direction **Translation** Nadezda Müngersdorff (wordsmithery); **Song**: Sebastian McKimm **Picture Credits** **Performance** Opening of the Wiener Festwochen 1988, Dr Helmut Zilk: Vienna City and Provincial Archives (WStLA); Bomb-damaged Federal Chancellery at Ballhausplatz: ORF Historical Archive **Image credits (evening programme)** Cover illustration © Inès Bacher; p. 6: © Votava / brandstaetter-images / picturedesk.com; p. 7 (top): © City of Vienna, Municipal Department I3 – Media Centre (Landesbildstelle Wien); p. 7 (bottom): © Clärchen Baus-Mattar; p. 8: © Ulli Weiss; p. 9: © Didi Sattmann; p. 11: © Luna Zscharnt; p. 12: © Nicole Marianna Wytyczak. In some cases, the Wiener Festwochen were unable to identify the holders of image rights. We kindly ask any rightful claimants to come forward. **Produced by** Print Alliance HAV Produktions GmbH (Bad Vöslau) **Design** SIRENE Studio **Layout** Valerie Eccli

15 MAY –
21 JUNE 2026

REPUBLIC
OF GODS



MAIN SPONSOR



PUBLIC FUNDING BODY



SPONSORS



DOROTHEUM
SEIT 1707

MOBILITY PARTNER



MEDIA PARTNERS

Theater
heute

DERSTANDARD

FALTER