

50th Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik Officially Opened

The 50th anniversary of the Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik was officially inaugurated on the morning of 7 August during a ceremonial event held in the Spanish Hall at Ambras Castle, attended by the President of Austria, Alexander Van der Bellen. Music took centre stage throughout the celebration, performed by a distinguished line-up of artists from the Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik.

In the evening, the first part of Pietro Antonio Cesti's opera 'Il pomo d'oro' celebrates its premiere, with the second part following on 8 August. This anniversary edition is centred around the guiding question 'What do we celebrate?'. Until 30 August, audiences can enjoy a richly varied programme featuring two operas alongside numerous concerts and free events. As in previous years, the festival opened with the Ambras Castle Concerts.

'Otto Ulf planted a tree so that today we can dance in its shade and harvest its golden apples,' said **Artistic Director Eva-Maria Sens** in her opening address, evoking the festival's long and successful history.

President of Austria Alexander Van der Bellen emphasised the unifying power of culture: 'At the Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik, people from across Europe and around the world come together with their languages, their stories and their music. It is precisely this diversity that represents Europe's greatest strength: it unites rather than divides. Innsbruck reminds us that culture has always been the language through which we all understand one another.'

Governor of Tyrol Anton Mattl said: 'In its anniversary edition, the Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik addresses highly relevant contemporary issues explored in the spectacular opera "Il pomo d'oro". It is about exclusion, polarisation and delusion, but also about the many positive forces that can serve the common good. With its opera programme at its heart and a wide-ranging programme surrounding it, the Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik has shaped our provincial capital for the past fifty years. My warmest congratulations on this remarkable success story, and my very best wishes for this anniversary year.'

Innsbruck's Deputy Mayor Georg Willi added: 'The fact that the monumental work "Il pomo d'oro" is being performed in its entirety for the first time again as part of the festival's 50th anniversary sends a powerful message about collaboration and the strength of cultural vision. This opera tells the story of how vanity and wounded pride can throw an entire order out of balance. We continue to witness today how quickly rivalry and the pursuit of power can triumph over reason and mutual understanding.'

That is why places such as the Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik, where people listen to one another, respond to one another and create something together, are more important than ever.'

At the heart of this anniversary edition is Pietro Antonio Cesti's monumental opera 'Il pomo d'oro', widely regarded as the composer's masterpiece and a landmark in the history of Baroque opera. Lasting more than eight hours in its original form, featuring 47 roles and an unprecedented level of theatrical splendour, the work surpassed every known dimension of seventeenth-century music theatre when it premiered in 1668 and was later considered 'unperformable'. Now, the opera returns to the stage in Innsbruck. This ambitious new production will be performed three times, each spread across two evenings. An international cast of 20 singers performs the 47 roles, with Fabio Ceresa directing the production. Musical direction is in the hands of Ottavio Dantone, who reconstructed two acts of the opera previously believed to be lost and brings the work to the stage together with his Accademia Bizantina.

From 21 August 2026 onwards, participants from last year's Cesti Competition present George Frideric Handel's 'Atalanta'. The singers perform this festive opera in a production by François de Carpentries and Karine Van Hercke under the musical direction of Andrea Buccarella. The Barockoper:Jung production also marks the debut of, among others, Cesti Competition winner Salvador Simão and third-prize laureate Pierre Gennaï. The Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik traditionally conclude with the final of the 17th Cesti Competition on 1 August.

Guided by the question 'What do we celebrate?', the Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik 2026 is dedicated to the elements that have made it one of the world's leading festivals for early music over the past half-century. Across six weeks, the festival celebrates its artists, its audiences, early music and, naturally, the festival itself. Alongside concerts featuring stars such as Jean Rondeau, Anna Bonitatibus, Arianna Vendittelli and Giovanni Antonini, the programme also includes a number of special anniversary events. As every year, the festival is complemented by countless free events taking place throughout the city.