



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

## Enchanting Transformations: Hotel Metamorphosis

Salzburg Whitsun Festival, 10.06.2025 [ENA]

Salzburg's Whitsun Festival 2025 unveiled a truly transcendent theatrical and musical creation with *Hotel Metamorphosis*, a meticulously crafted pasticcio that breathes fresh life into Ovid's *Metamorphoses* through the vivid lens of Antonio Vivaldi's baroque genius. Under the visionary direction of Barrie Kosky the dramaturgy of the performance was done by Olaf A. Schmitt.

Musically anchored by Gianluca Capuano and Les Musiciens du Prince – Monaco, this production transcends mere staging to become a resonant meditation on metamorphosis, myth, and identity. The evening is further elevated by a constellation of star performers—Cecilia Bartoli, Philippe Jaroussky, Lea Desandre, Varduhi Abrahamyan, and Angela Winkler—each delivering debut roles that cement their status as luminaries of the baroque stage.

The concept of the pasticcio, a baroque-era tradition of weaving existing arias into new dramatic frameworks, serves as the perfect vehicle for this contemporary reinterpretation. In *Hotel Metamorphosis*, Ovid's mythic narratives—transformation, self-destruction, the interplay of human and divine—are reimagined within the confines of a non-place: a hotel, signifying both intimate immediacy and universal anonymity. This rich metaphorical setting bridges classical antiquity with our modern sensibility, where the boundaries of identity blur and fluidity reigns.

Each vignette—Arachne's prideful artistry, Myrrha's incestuous yearning, Narcissus's self-obsession, Pygmalion's sculpted ideal, the singer and his underworld-bound beloved—unfolds with poignant clarity. The familiar Vivaldian arias, ensembles, and choruses—animated by emotional intensity and color—are deftly integrated, revealing facets of these myths that feel suddenly intimate, even urgent.

Barrie Kosky, known for his psychological depth and aesthetic boldness, stages *Hotel Metamorphosis* with masterful subtlety and visual finesse. With DOP Michael Levine (set), Klaus Bruns (costumes), Otto Pichler (choreography), Franck Evin (lighting), and rocafilm (video), the production shifts fluidly between dreamscapes and stark reality. An elegantly minimal hotel suite becomes the crucible for each metamorphosis—its doors, corridors, and mirrored surfaces both literal and symbolic thresholds of identity. Costumes, reminiscent of hotel staff uniforms and haute couture, reinforce the tension between mundanity and myth.

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Choreography transforms the movement vocabulary from classical dance to surreal enactments of transformation—spidery contortions for Arachne, eerie illusions of stasis for Myrrha, and self-absorbed wandering for Narcissus. Video projections morph along with the performers, underscoring the mutable nature of flesh, identity, and memory. Gianluca Capuano and Les Musiciens du Prince – Monaco bring razor-sharp energy and expressive nuance to Vivaldi’s orchestration. Capuano’s direction balances rhythmic precision with emotive intensity, ensuring each aria resonates in its own right and within the dramatic arc.

The timbral variety—from vibrant strings to poignant obligatos—immerses the audience in a sonic world where transformation is not only seen but felt. The chorus *Il Canto di Orfeo*, expertly guided by Jacopo Facchini, offers harmonious counterpoints and narrative texture, embodying both communal judgment and mythic chorus. Together, the ensemble fashions a dynamic sonic tapestry that bridges baroque vitality and theatrical realism.

This production is elevated by extraordinary vocalists, most notably:

**Cecilia Bartoli (Arachne / Eurydice):** Bartoli’s dual portrayals embody the hip-roots of hubris and emotional redemption. As Arachne, her voice crackles with fiery intensity; as Eurydice, it's home to softness and tenderness. Her charisma anchors the ensemble and illuminates each mythic tableau with emotional dexterity.

**Philippe Jaroussky (Narcissus / Pygmalion)**

A countertenor of rare agility and purity, Jaroussky channels Narcissus’s vanity and Pygmalion’s yearning with equal finesse. His crystalline tone captures Narcissus’s self-infatuation and Pygmalion's idealism, reinforcing the inherent duality of reflection and projection.

**Lea Desandre (Echo / Statua / Myrrha)**

Desandre’s voice moves hauntingly through states of presence and absence. "Echo" reverberates with longing; "Statua" is still, magnificent; "Myrrha" trembles with taboo. Her soprano threads psychological nuance through each transformation.

**Varduhi Abrahamyan (Minerva / Nutricen)**

Embodying divine judgment and protective care, Abrahamyan’s mezzo bridges celestial detachment and maternal depth. Her Minerva bristles with contained authority; her Nutricen glows with empathy—a

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masterstroke of interpretive flexibility.

Angela Winkler (Orpheus narrator)

A distinguished actor, Winkler brings Orpheus to life not only in text but in presence. With measured gravitas, she narrates with humility and reflection, reminding the audience that all transformation is also a journey of internal discovery.

The synergy of these artists, each in debut roles, builds a constellation of vocal archetypes—mirrors reflecting and refracting each other's myths.

This production's dramaturgy is deft in weaving the transformation motif across narratives. The setting—a liminal hotel—creates an emotional throughline: the sense of expectation, loss, transience, and identity crisis. Each mythological moment is recontextualized as a human drama—a story of obsessive love (Narcissus), creative rebellion (Arachne), forbidden desire (Myrrha), idealistic projection (Pygmalion), and eternal waiting (Eurydice).

The use of Ovid's original text, translated by Hermann Heiser and arranged by Kosky and Schmitt, forms a poetic anchor. Musical selections are dramaturgically framed; Vivaldi's varied emotional palette underscores narrative tension from fury to tenderness, whimsy to pathos. The pasticcio format permits both familiarity and innovation—Vivaldi's arias surprise us anew in emotionally resonant contexts, while the hotel interior becomes a stage for the human drama under thin veneer.

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The entire artistic team creates a seamless blend of color, motion, and atmosphere:

Set: A minimalist hotel suite, walls of soft beige or stark white, with reconfigurable walls—mirrors, sliding panels, door frames—allow for swift transformations.

Costumes: Under harsh minimalism—a housekeeping uniform, a stately coat, or an evening gown—hide archetypal hints. Arachne's tapestry-infused gown, Myrrha's greenery-livened dress, Narcissus's reflective apparel—they all signal metamorphic triggers.

Lighting: Franck Evin sculpts the ambience—cold neutrals for psychological tension, warm pockets for

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passion, stark spotlights to isolate or expose.

Video: rocafilm projections depict organic transformations—concrete fracturing, vines growing, water rippling—mirroring each character’s fate. The hybrid live-video creates an uncanny synergy, where bodies and screens conversely trap and release each other.

The result is a dynamic Gesamtkunstwerk: a room that becomes limitless, a myth that becomes immediate, an opera that becomes a living mirror.

What sets Hotel Metamorphosis apart is not just spectacle, but a deep emotional resonance. The whisper of fragmentation—where identity cracks, myth invades reality, and humans discover their own fluidity—echoes through the production. Themes surface clearly:

Art and hubris: Arachne’s rebellion isn’t just mythic defiance—it’s a contemporary challenge about craft, hierarchy, and the price of perfection.

Forbidden love and identity: Myrrha’s tree-bound isolation paradoxically frees her from social norms—this feels eerily timely.

Self-love and isolation: Narcissus becomes locked in self-imprisonment—how modern is that?

Projection and possession: Pygmalion’s statue comes to life—but at what cost of projection vis a vis autonomy?

Eternal waiting: Eurydice’s silent vigil reminds us that transformation often demands sacrifice, patience, vulnerability.

For an audience, Hotel Metamorphosis becomes a mirror: we recognize our own metamorphoses—moments of self-revelation, rupture, adaptation.

In context, this production stands tall within Salzburg’s storied festival tradition, offering an original narrative and a daring move beyond canonical opera. With Venice as thematic backdrop (“Klänge der Serenissima”), Hotel Metamorphosis carries forward the lineage of Serenissima operatic experimentation—Monteverdi, Vivaldi, Rossini—while forging new ground through pasticcio methodology and psychodrama staging.

A line in the program reflects Vivaldi’s admonition: “If this melody does not please, then I do not wish to write any more music.” Yet here, Vivaldi writes again—his music recontextualized, refreshed, reborn in this modern narrative. Audiences will depart carrying with them not just melodies, but emotional correspondences—mythic echoes that resonate amid modern existential questions.

Hotel Metamorphosis is more than an opera or concert—it’s a living organism, breathing between myth and

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modernity, voice and psyche. Every element—from Kosky’s understated brilliance to Capuano’s musical precision, from Bartoli’s dramatic poetics to the emotional cohesion of the ensemble—converges into a production that transforms the audience as it transforms its characters.

This Whitsun production galvanizes the baroque. It reaffirms Salzburg’s commitment to daring artistic vision. And most of all, it reminds us that transformation—in art, in myth, in life—is not just possible, but necessary.

For long after the final note, you remain entranced by the memories of metamorphosis: of cloth shimmering into spider-silk, of a tree recalling forbidden love, of self-reflection become prison, of ideal manifesting flesh, of love echoing from the underworld. Hotel Metamorphosis is not just a pasticcio: it is a masterpiece of emergent spiritual alchemy, a bridge of time, and a radiant example of what happens when myth, music, and modernity embrace in full theatrical bloom. Salzburg's Whitsun Festival has presented not merely a show, but an instant classic—an opera for our time, a mirror to ourselves, and a resonant testament to the transformative power of art.

In Hotel Metamorphosis, Cecilia Bartoli is nothing less than a force of nature. Her dual interpretations—as the proud weaver Arachne and as the sorrowful Eurydice—radiate both fiery intensity and emotional depth, anchoring the entire production with her musical and dramatic genius. This is Bartoli at her most compelling: the very mezzo-soprano who has shaped the Salzburg Whitsun Festival since 2012, blending intellectual curiosity, theatrical instinct, and heartfelt warmth. From the moment Bartoli steps on stage, she commands absolute attention—not merely as a singer, but as a visionary storyteller. Her voice, rich in nuance and color, breathes new life into Vivaldi’s pasticcio of mythic metamorphosis.

Each note she delivers is infused with narrative purpose; each phrase hints at complex emotional landscapes, interweaving hubris and humility, pride and vulnerability.

Unsurprisingly, the performance culminated in a thunderous standing ovation that rippled through the Haus für Mozart—an overwhelming tribute not only to Bartoli’s artistry, but to the profound humanity she brings to mythic transformation. The audience’s sustained applause and multiple curtain calls were a fitting acknowledgement: Hotel Metamorphosis is unforgettable, and Cecilia Bartoli, in full bloom, remains the beating heart of this visionary work.

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