

UPF Linz, Austria in recognition of World Refugee Day, UPF held a concert

Maria Pammer
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Linz, Austria -- In recognition of World Refugee Day, UPF held a "literature concert" that combined classical music with readings of the written word.

The event titled "Europe -- Identity and Future" took place on June 25, 2018, in the performance space Upper Austrian Culture Quarters.

The texts were chosen and read by the famous actress Raina Mercedes Echerer, who is also a former member of the European Parliament.

The program was brilliantly synchronized with classical music performed by the young musicians of Ensemble Adornamento.

Maria Pammer, the secretary general of UPF-Upper Austria, briefly introduced UPF. She also gave some background to World Refugee Day and cited recent statistics published by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. In the past year worldwide about 68.5 million people were fleeing from conflict, pursuit and human rights violations, which is more than the population of France or the United Kingdom.

Mercedes Echerer said she did not want to give a speech on this subject, but preferred to let culture speak for itself. At the beginning she asked the question: What is Europe's identity and which future can we extrapolate out of this? Europe represents, among other things, democracy, freedom, equality, human rights and freedom of speech, she said. Our grandparents mounted the barricades, with some losing their lives, so that we can vote in freedom, which is not self-evident. Another feature of Europe, she said, is the diversity of society and cultures, and this shall remain also in the future.

After her introduction Ms. Echerer read the story *Love* by the Hungarian writer Tibor Déry (1894-1977), who is regarded as one of the intellectual pioneers of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956.

This was followed by a performance by Ensemble Adornamento of *Sonata Seconda* by the German Baroque composer Johann Rosenmüller.

Next Ms. Echerer read *Poems to My Wife from Prison* by the Turkish poet Nâzim Hikmet, who spent more years in prison and exile than he had spent out of prison. This was followed by a sonata by Domenico Scarlatti.

After an excerpt from the story *Deer, My Mother and Germany* from the current Turkish journalist and author Nursel Duruel, who has been awarded many times for her stories, Ensemble Adornamento performed a folia by the 17th century Italian composer Andrea Falconieri.



A listener said that the whole room vibrated through the energy of Ms. Echerer's readings, so completely did she identify herself with the texts. Ms. Echerer herself had to wipe away tears, as did many a listener.

Especially intense was then an excerpt from *My Way through Hell*, a book by Ernő Lazarovits, a Hungarian Jew who survived the death march from Hungary to the concentration camp in Mauthausen, Austria, in the last days and weeks of the Second World War.

After a further piece of music by Andrea Falconieri (1585-1656), Ms. Echerer read extracts from the audiobook *Romanian Roulette*, published by herself a year ago. It is a fictional story, but based on facts of her life. Her mother came from Transylvania in 1950 to Austria. The story deals with homeland, identity, and family and is a fascinating journey into the past, present and future of a Europe where history and stories interweave.

Performances of music by the Italian composer Antonio Caldara (1670-1736) and Andrea Falconieri followed.

Mercedes Echerer concluded by reading poems of the writer and journalist Ali Al Hasan, who in 2015 fled Syria. The poems comprised both those written in Syria and new works that he wrote in German after his arrival. After a performance of music by Italian composer Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713), the poet presented roses to Ms. Echerer, cordially thanking her for choosing some of his writings for this literature concert on the occasion of World Refugee Day and also for inviting him to participate personally.

Our heartfelt thanks to Mercedes Echerer for the touching texts and to the young performers of Ensemble Adornamento for the great sound quality of the music they presented and the sensitive harmonization with the texts!

It was for all of us not only a cultural experience but also an impulse to reflect on identity, homeland, family and the future of Europe.