

Thiersee Passion Plays 2016 – a village reflects

Every six years for over 200 years, the small Tyrolean community of Thiersee has focused on the passion plays. In 2016 it is once again time, as more than 250 amateur actors and musicians from the community place themselves in the service of the faith, and convey the life and passion of Jesus Christ to their audience. The preparations are already in full swing.

Diethmar Straßer, who is currently the artistic director of the Vienna Volksoper, will in 2016 be directing the production, which has become one of the most touching amateur productions in the German-speaking world, for the third time.

Tradition and modernity

Despite the long history of Thiersee's passion plays, they have not lost any of their topicality or explosive power. Even after 2 centuries, the Thiersee residents manage to present the story of Jesus Christ's life and passion in a gripping and fascinating manner, and every season they cast a spell over the thousands of visitors and audience members. Keeping it this way is a deeply personal commitment for the director Diethmar Straßer. "Even though this will be the third time that I'm directing here, it's very important to me that I don't just repeat myself."

After significant and fundamental changes in 2005 and 2011, such as the cooperation with theologians from the University of Salzburg, there was a return in the text to the Gospel of Mark in 2005, and we're excited to see what they have planned in 2016.

Political punch

In 2011 the role of Judas was significantly revised and reworked. For the first time, Judas represented not simply as a mere traitor, but also as a political figure who hunted Jesus as a revolutionary in the political sense. In 2016 the Thiersee residents will make the historical and social context of the passion a subject of discussion. This will be done with a supplementary, second level of action. This level will represent people who did not come into direct contact with the saviour, but who were indirectly influenced by his life and acts. For example the figure of a Roman who is friends with a local Jew is introduced. The varying ways that these two understand and reflect on Jesus' message demonstrates their cultural differences. It also illustrates the political explosiveness of Jesus Christ in the eyes of the Roman occupation forces.

Faith today

Then, as today, people naturally questioned how to deal with religion: how and what we should and can believe. The Thiersee residents broached this issue in 2011 when they first decided, under the motto "faith without seeing", to not depict the resurrected saviour on the stage, but rather have his resurrection be announced by Mary Magdalene. In 2016 this subject is discussed even more intensively by introducing the figures of young people who have completely different opinions and experiences with faith, and grapple with it in their own way.

Already in full swing

The preparations are already in full swing, so that once again in 2016 countless visitors will be touched by the plays. The whole village comes together and helps bring this major event to the stage. Passion play association chairman Johann Kröll is excited: "Seeing how the Thiersee residents get behind the passion play is simply unbelievable. Without this voluntary commitment the passion plays wouldn't be possible."