

Awardee: Gerard Mortier (1943 – 2014)

Opera director, Belgium

Gerard Mortier was a singular European cultural protagonist. His continuous work with German and German-speaking theatres revealed his strong ties with Germany. He was considered a versatile innovator in music theatre and, as an ingenious pioneer of new forms of artistic expression, enthused the younger generation in particular for large-scale productions. Gerard Mortier was a member of the Berlin Akademie der Künste and received the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1991. Following his death in March 2014, the Goethe Medal is being awarded to him posthumously.

Gerard Mortier, born on 25 November 1943 in Ghent (Belgium), was one of the world's most prestigious opera directors. His career led the lawyer and communication expert to the major international theatres. For many years he worked in the German-speaking world, where his career began in 1972 when he took over the management of artistic operations at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein. He subsequently held positions in large theatres in Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg, Paris and Brussels before becoming manager and artistic director of the Salzburg Festival in 1991. He opened the festival to a young audience; under his direction 25 operas of the 20th century were shown in Salzburg. On the invitation of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, he managed the first cycle of the Ruhrtriennale from 2001 to 2004 and was subsequently director of the Opéra National de Paris until 2009. In 2010, he was the successor of Antonio del Moral at the Madrid opera house Teatro Real. His last great world premiere was Charles Wuorinen's operatic version of the cowboy epic *Brokeback Mountain* on the Madrid stage. On 9 March 2014 Gerard Mortier succumbed to cancer.

The decision of the jury to award Gerard Mortier a Goethe Medal was made in 2013, during the lifetime of the opera director who is now being honoured posthumously. Sylvain Cambreling, his long-time companion, the French conductor and present music director of the Stuttgart Opera and Principal Conductor of the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra Tokyo, will accept the award on his behalf. Cambreling was born in Amiens, France, and studied at the conservatory there and at the Conservatoire de Paris. In 1975, he was choir director of the Opéra Nouveau Lyon, 1976 guest conductor of the ensemble intercontemporain. He gave his debut at the Opéra National de Paris in 1978 with Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. From 1981 to 1991 he was musical director of the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, followed by positions as music director of the Frankfurt Opera and chief conductor of the SWR Symphony Orchestra Baden-Baden and Freiburg. Sylvain Cambreling has won several awards for his work. In 1994 and 2009 he was named Conductor of the Year and in 2009 he was also awarded the ECHO Klassik Prize and the Deutsche Schallplattenpreis. In 2010, he was awarded the MIDEM Contemporary Music Award and in 2012 he was awarded the Premio Lírico Teatro Campoamor 2011. In 2012 Sylvain Cambreling received the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Quotes by Gerard Mortier

“Creating theatre means breaking through the everyday routine, questioning the acceptance of economic, political and military force as normality, to sensitize the community to questions of human existence that cannot be regulated by laws and to reaffirm that the world can be better than it is.” (From *Dramaturgie d'une passion*, 2009)

“The fact that we learn everything we do first through imitation and that all clothing is basically costumes with which we protect ourselves and through which we create an image of ourselves, shows how much acting is an essential element of life.” (From *Dramaturgie d'une passion*, 2009)

“Great existential emotions like those in ‘Tristan and Isolde,’ in ‘Othello’ and ‘Falstaff’ can be as popular as in a film by Almodóvar. The opera is a fantastic means of communication. We have to make the young people understand that. When a swan appears in the first act of Lohengrin, that’s quite bad. Instead something better appear that surprises and provokes us. We have to renew the audience. So we have to free the opera from the traditional lovers of opera!” (From an interview with KlassikInfo, Thomas Migge)

Quotes about Gerard Mortier

“With the artistic stimuli that came from his work as curator and managing director, Gerard Mortier, like hardly anyone else, made it possible to rethink the opera genre in a way we did not know it. He not only confronted music theatre with new constellations and the visual arts, but also restored the productions of the opera repertoire to contemporaneity and thus to a future. I was happy to build upon many of the initiatives with which he established the Ruhrtriennale. I am also very glad that I had the opportunity to get to know him personally in recent years. His great interest in our productions and most of all his spontaneous willingness to support the No Education programme as patron was very important for our work and we thank him for that, as well.” (Heiner Goebbels, artistic director of the Ruhrtriennale, March 2014)

“And how astonishing that with all the clear-sightedness and criticism, he did not lose faith in the fact that art has something to do with showing humanity the way it is in a world that need not be as it is.” (Holger Noltze, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, March 2014)

“Mortier always put the respective project in first place. He created optimal conditions for the music, libretto and theatre, and for the performers he enabled optimal freedom of thought and action.” (Eleonore Büning, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 2014)

“Mortier is the European par excellence, multilingual, visionary. For more than 30 years he has been devising shocks and ideas that thoroughly renewed music theatre between Brussels and Paris.” (Volker Hagedorn, *Die ZEIT*, February 2014)

“Until the very end, Gerard Mortier dedicated himself to this task, argued with his very unique gentle insistence that the theatre be acknowledged by government funders as an essential form of human expression. But he fought just as hard that the funds made available to the arts be pertinently employed. Hence, not to make representative ‘prop theatre’ by buying as many stars as possible, but to enable performances that penetrate the core of the works, that touch and galvanize the audience.” (Frederik Hanssen, *Der Tagesspiegel*, March 2014)

“He was married to the opera; she was both his muse and his lover. He breathed, thought, lived the opera. At times he hated the operations, could also be a cynic and doubter, at times saw himself pessimistically as a lonely fighter on a broad field, but every morning he still symbolically rolled up his sleeves in dedication to what drove him, what he wanted to offer others.” (Manuel Brug, *Die Welt*, March 2014)

“With his work, Mortier also inspired other directors. When operas in Lyon, Stuttgart or Frankfurt am Main offer modern operatic theatre today that nonetheless draws large audiences, then one always feels the influence of Mortier.” (3Sat Kulturzeit, March 2014)

Productions under Mortier’s administration: 1981-2014 (selection)

- 1982 *La clemenza di Tito*, W. A. Mozart
Musical director: Sylvain Cambreling, stage directors: Ursel and Karl-Ernst Herrmann; Brussels
- 1995 *Erwartung*, Arnold Schönberg
Musical director: Christoph von Dohnányi, stage director: Robert Wilson; Salzburg
- 1998 *Don Carlo*, Giuseppe Verdi
Musical director: Lorin Maazel, stage director: Herbert Wernicke; Salzburg
- 2000 *L’Amour de loin (world premiere)*, Kaija Saariaho
Musical director: Kent Nagano, stage director: Peter Sellars; Salzburg
- 2004 *Le dernier caravansérail (Odyssées)*
Idea: Ariane Mnouchkine, music: Jean-Jaques Lemêtre; Ruhrtriennale
- 2005 *Wolf (world premiere)*, W. A. Mozart
Musical director: Sylvain Cambreling, stage director: Alain Platel; Paris

- 2006 *Don Giovanni*, W. A. Mozart
Musical director: Sylvain Cambreling, stage director: Michael Haneke; Paris
- 2006 *Adriana Mater (world premiere)*, Kaija Saariaho
Musical director: Esa-Pekka Salonen, stage director: Peter Sellars; Paris
- 2008 *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, Richard Strauss
Musical director: Gustav Kuhn, stage director: Robert Wilson; Paris
- 2013 *Così fan tutte*, W.A. Mozart
Musical director: Sylvain Cambreling, stage director: Michael Haneke; Madrid
- 2013 *The Conquest of Mexico*, Wolfgang Rihm
Musical director: Alejo Pérez, stage director: Pierre Audi; Madrid
- 2014 *Brokeback Mountain*, Charles Wuorinen
Musical director: Titus Engel, stage director: Ivo van Hove

Awards

- 1991 Commandeur in de Kroonorde, Brussels
- 1991 Großes Bundesverdienstkreuz, Federal Republic of Germany
- 1991 Honorary doctorates from the University of Antwerp and the University of Salzburg
- 1991 Commandeur des Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, France
- 2002 Silver Mozart Medal of the International Mozarteum Foundation
- 2004 Grand Officier de l'Ordre de Léopold, Belgium
- 2005 Knight of the Legion of Honour, France
- 2007 Conferred title of Baron by the King of Belgium
- 2010 Gloria Artis, Gold Medal for Merit to Culture, Poland
- 2014 Posthumously granted the Medalla de Oro al Mérito en las Bellas Artes, Spain