

PRESS INFORMATION SEASON 2026/27

With the grand reopening of the stages at Offenbachplatz in September 2026, the Cologne Opera and the Gürzenich Orchestra will finally return to their traditional home in the heart of the city.

This marks the end of a long interim period spent in various provisional venues. Following an extensive renovation, the architecturally iconic building ensemble presents itself as one of the most modern opera houses in Europe.

As part of the modernisation process, the house has been upgraded to the latest standards in stage and building technology. Key improvements include the auditorium, where acoustics have been fundamentally refined, and an enlarged orchestra pit, which offers the Gürzenich Orchestra enhanced tonal possibilities. The fully renewed stage machinery – including modern hydraulic platforms, a high-performance understage, and a new grid – forms the technical backbone for world-class productions.

A unique architectural and conceptual highlight is the newly constructed Children's Opera located beneath the Kleiner Offenbachplatz. Conceived as a "second, smaller house", this venue provides a dedicated space for nurturing new talent and introducing young audiences to the world of music theatre.

Beyond these technical innovations, the return to Offenbachplatz focuses on the experience of coming together. The premises are intended to be an open space for artists and their audiences, which will henceforth be filled with both artistic excellence and vibrant social life.

OPENING FESTIVAL

On 19 and 20 September, the Offenbachplatz theatres will open its doors to the people of Cologne again.

Over these two days, visitors will have the opportunity to rediscover the foyers, auditoriums, and stages of both the Opera and also the Cologne Theatre (Schauspiel Köln) via various guided routes. The new Children's Opera stage beneath the Kleiner Offenbachplatz will also be open to the public. Technical showcases will demonstrate the capabilities of the new stage technology, while an outdoor stage on Offenbachplatz will feature a non-stop programme presented by the Opera, the Theatre, and numerous guest performers. Furthermore, cultural contributions from Cologne's nine city districts will be integrated into the programme for the opening festival. An interdisciplinary working group from the city administration has offered voluntary associations and institutions the chance to actively help shape the festivities on Saturday and Sunday. The aim is for every district to be represented on stage during the opening festival, allowing each to showcase its unique local identity.

On the evening of 20 September, and to conclude the opening weekend, music will finally resonate within the Opera House again, as the Cologne Opera ensemble and the Gürzenich Orchestra return to their positions. They will be joined by a special guest: the Cologne-based rock band Kasalla.

OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY

With a grand, festive gala concert on 24 September, the Cologne Opera and the Cologne Theatre (Schauspiel Köln) will jointly celebrate their return to their ancestral homes at Offenbachplatz. On the opera stage, both companies will present a combined programme for the citizens of Cologne and invited guests of honour. The evening will feature the ensembles of both the Opera and the Theatre, the Gürzenich Orchestra under the baton of General Music Director Andrés Orozco-Estrada, and a special appearance by star soprano Diana Damrau.

PREMIERES

The opening of this new era for the Cologne Opera will be marked on 27 September 2026 by the premiere of Richard Strauss's celebrated "comedy for music", **DER ROSENKAVALIER**, under the musical direction of GMD Andrés Orozco-Estrada. The renowned French film and stage director and video artist Marie-Eve Signeyrole has been engaged to direct this large-scale, festive inaugural production. Known for her visually stunning, multi-disciplinary stagings, she will fully exploit the new technical potential of the stage. The lead role of the Marschallin will be performed by Magdalena Hinterdobler, with Patrick Zielke as her cousin Baron Ochs, while the title role of Octavian will be sung by the sought-after mezzo-soprano Bianca Andrew.

On 1 November 2026, the season continues with Alessandro Scarlatti's **CAIN AND ABEL** (*Cain, overo Il primo omicidio*) from 1707. This is a gripping Baroque drama for six voices, exploring envy, guilt, and the search for recognition, featuring a high-calibre cast including the celebrated Catalan countertenor Xavier Sabata (God), with Adriana Bastidas-Gamboa and Alina König Rannenbergl as the conflict-ridden brothers. Dietrich Hilsdorf's production, which earned a nomination from *Opernwelt*, will be conducted in Cologne by Baroque specialist and regular guest conductor of the Cologne Opera, Rubén Dubrovsky.

With his final, unfinished opera **THE TALES OF HOFFMANN**, Cologne-born Jakob "Jacques" Offenbach created a musical monument to the writer E.T.A. Hoffmann in 1881: a grand tragicomic opera about art, love, and life. Stefan Herheim's production for the Bregenz Festival will celebrate its Cologne premiere on 28 November 2026, conducted by GMD Andrés Orozco-Estrada. The title role will be shared by the distinguished tenors Young Woo Kim and Enea Scala. Alina Wunderlin, who began her career in the Cologne International Opera Studio, will perform the roles of Olympia / Giulietta.

To mark the centenary of Hans Werner Henze's birth, the Cologne Opera will present his vaudeville **LA PICCOLA CUBANA** from 24 January 2027. This "grand little work", which explores the tension between art and society through the life confession of variety show star Rachel, will be performed in a posthumously completed version for a small ensemble, just as Henze had originally intended. The production will be directed by Cecilia Ligorio, well known to Cologne audiences for *La Cenerentola* and *Don Giovanni*, and who was recently honoured with the prestigious Italian "Abbiati Prize" for Best Director. Jordi Francés will conduct, with Emily Hindrichs and Adriana Bastidas-Gamboa in the leading roles, while Franziska Junge will be the narrator of texts by Hans Magnus Enzensberger.

With Bedřich Smetana's **THE BARTERED BRIDE**, a romantic-comic opera classic returns to the Cologne repertoire after a long absence. This production by Laurent Pelly focuses on themes of self-determination and solidarity in the face of purely economic interests. Following his brilliant conducting of *Don Giovanni* during the 2024/25 season, Tomáš Netopil returns to the podium of the Cologne Opera. Under his musical direction, Selene Zanetti (Mařenka) and Maximilian Schmitt (Jeník) will perform the lead roles, while Tijl Faveyts (Kecal) makes his debut as a new member of the

ensemble. This co-production with Teatro Real Madrid, La Monnaie Brussels, and the Opéra National de Lyon will premiere at Offenbachplatz on 28 February 2027.

From 4 April 2027, Richard Wagner's tetralogy **DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN** continues with **SIEGFRIED**, following the young hero's journey from the slaying of the dragon to the awakening of Brünnhilde. The new Cologne *Ring* concept by Paul Georg Dittrich relies on shifting theatrical perspectives and, in this instalment, explores digital worlds and narrative styles. Conducted by Felix Bender, the production will feature Daniel Johansson as Siegfried and Jordan Shanahan as the Wanderer in their respective role debuts, with Trine Møller appearing as Brünnhilde.

With **MACBETH**, a work enters the repertoire that proves Shakespearean psychological depths and bel canto are by no means a contradiction. This opera marks Verdi's resolute path towards music drama, placing Lady Macbeth—one of the most ambivalent female characters in history—at the centre of a haunting study of the soul. Italian director Damiano Michieletto, whose comedic staging of *L'elisir d'amore* captivated Cologne audiences in the 2024/25 season, uses powerful imagery in this production to depict the temptation and guilt of Macbeth. This production from Teatro La Fenice, Venice, will be presented in Cologne from 2 May 2027. It will be conducted by Verdi expert Giuliano Carella, with the ambitious Macbeths portrayed by Daniela Schillaci and Daniel Luis de Vicente.

Undoubtedly one of Giacomo Puccini's most successful and frequently performed works, **MADAMA BUTTERFLY** addresses the momentous clash of cultural identities in a globalised world. In Cio-Cio-San, the composer created an iconic figure for this very phenomenon, tracing her journey through a particularly emotional and virtuosic score. For this new Cologne production, Sua Jo has been engaged for the role of "Butterfly"—a role debut that is highly anticipated. Sabine Hartmannshenn directs, with musical direction by Giulio Cilona. The premiere at the Cologne Opera House will take place on 6 June 2027.

Henry Purcell's choreographic opera **DIDO AND AENEAS**, interpreted by choreographer Sasha Waltz as a cross-genre project, allows dance and opera to merge into a single entity. This co-production with the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, the Grand Théâtre de la Ville de Luxembourg, and the Opéra National de Montpellier will be performed at the Cologne Opera on 14 and 15 July 2027.

Each year around carnival, the all-male choir Cäcilia Wolkenburg brings the world premiere of a truly "Kölsch" musical to the stage. To mark the 100th anniversary of Trude Herr's birth, the curtain rises on **WAT E THIATER**, a brand-new, turbulent "Divertissementchen" penned by Zillche director Lajos Wenzel. It is a loving homage to the soul of Cologne, the magic of theatre, and the unforgettable Trude Herr. The music and arrangements are by Thomas Guthoff, and the premiere is on 10 January 2027.

REVIVALS

Verdi's **RIGOLETTO**, in the celebrated production by Katharina Thalbach, returns to Offenbachplatz in October 2026; a story of a father who fails bloodily in his attempt to protect his daughter from the ruthlessness of power. During Christmas season, Mozart's **THE MAGIC FLUTE** in Michael Hampe's fairy-tale staging leads audiences through a world full of trials. In March 2027, Frederick Loewe's musical **MY FAIR LADY** (based on G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*), directed by Dietrich Hilsdorf, offers a perfect balance of elegant entertainment and humorous social commentary. From April 2027, Tatjana Gürbaca's production of Mozart's **COSÌ FAN TUTTE**—a psychological experiment on the fragility of fidelity—returns to the Cologne Opera. In May, Dvořák's **RUSALKA**, in Nadja Loschky's

sensual interpretation, unfolds the late-Romantic musical magic of a fatal love curse. Finally, in June, Ted Huffman's highly acclaimed staging of Monteverdi's **THE CORONATION OF POPPEA** exposes the eroticism of power in ancient Rome.

DANCE

The 2026/27 dance guest performances bring together legendary choreographers and international elite companies, beginning with Ballett Basel, which presents three masterpieces: **BELLA FIGURA**, Jiří Kylián's world-repertoire work poised on the boundary between dream and reality; **THE OLD MAN AND ME**, a study on a couple ageing together by the late Hans van Manen; and **LE SPECTRE DE LA ROSE**, Marco Goetze's poetic vision of a young girl's dream, set to Carl Maria von Weber's "Invitation to the Dance" (10/11 October 2026).

On 21/22 November 2026, Danza Contemporánea de Cuba brings Caribbean energy to Cologne. In **REVERSIBLE**, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa choreographs a high-voltage battle of the sexes using a Cuban-influenced movement vocabulary, while George Céspedes captures the Cuban spirit in **MAMBO 3XXI**, a fiery mix of street dance and neoclassicism.

A further guest appearance brings the company of the Fondazione Nazionale della Danza / Aterballetto from Northern Italy to the Cologne Opera House. Marcos Morau's **NOTTE MORRICONE** is a visually powerful homage to film composer Ennio Morricone, serving as a surreal, cinematic nocturnal journey through his musical universe (20/21 February 2027).

Henry Purcell's most famous opera, **DIDO AND AENEAS**, depicts the tragic romance between the Carthaginian queen and the Trojan prince, whose love ultimately falters due to the conflict between their kingdoms. In her interpretation, choreographer Sasha Waltz allows dance and opera to merge into a single entity by actively integrating the singers into the choreographic action. Since its premiere in 2005, this multi-layered production has enjoyed worldwide success and will be staged at the Cologne Opera on 14/15 July 2027, in co-production with the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, the Grand Théâtre de la Ville de Luxembourg, and the Opéra National de Montpellier.

CHILDREN'S OPERA

The new Children's Opera building beneath the Kleiner Offenbachplatz is the only known venue in the world specifically designed as a permanent theatre for children and young people. To mark this occasion, a dedicated press conference will be held in late May to provide an in-depth look at this new space. We are pleased to present a brief overview of the productions scheduled for the 2026/27 season:

With **THE KING GIVES SOMETHING AWAY** (*Der König verschenkt was*), a work commissioned by the Cologne Children's Opera to inaugurate its new stage, the King breaks with the tradition of naming a single heir, instead presenting his children with identical rings. However, this idea does not lead to the intended peace, but rather to conflicts that the siblings must resolve. The motif of the "Ring Parable" is deeply rooted in literary history and is translated here into a fairy-tale scenario for everyone aged 6 and up. The music was composed by Cologne-based Philipp Matthias Kaufmann, with a libretto by the Düsseldorf writer Martin Baltscheit. The world premiere will take place on 10 October 2026.

In the **GRAND HOTEL OF EMOTIONS** (*Grand Hotel der Gefühle*), every feeling is welcome – from space-consuming anger and tear-heavy sadness to joyful and laughing love. On the opera stage, these emotions are brought to life through music from all eras. An inclusive children's choir,

featuring young people with Down's syndrome alongside the house's vocal soloists, transforms Lidia Branković's bestseller into a subtle stage narrative. It demonstrates that in the opera, as in a hotel, all feelings have their rightful place. The world premiere is on 3 April 2027.

Igor Stravinsky's opera **THE NIGHTINGALE**, based on the fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen, has been by the side of the Cologne Children's Opera since its founding in 1996. For the original opening of the Children's Opera in the "Yakult Hall", it was adapted into a chamber music version by Manfred Trojahn's composition class and has since seen many performances for young audiences in Cologne. Beka Savić's 2015 new production of this parable about nature, artificiality, and death will return on 27 May 2027.

For younger children, the 2026/27 season once again offers the short piece **MARLA THE MAYFLY** (*Marla, die Maifliege*). As a mobile production, this opera visits nurseries as well as residential facilities for adults with and without dementia or disabilities in and around Cologne.

And for the very youngest audiences under the age of 3, the 2026/27 season introduces the new piece **EVERYTHING THAT SOUNDS** (*Alles, was klingt*). In this 30-minute mini-opera, babies and toddlers, along with their companions, can immerse themselves in a space full of life and music in January and April 2027.

OPERA.CITY.SCHOOL – MUSIC EDUCATION

In the upcoming season, the music education team from "Opera.City.School" (Oper.Stadt.Schule) will once again offer a characteristically diverse programme of projects, events, and interactive workshops for all generations. The focus remains on the current repertoire, as well as the art form of opera itself. The offering is rounded off by tailor-made introductions to works, a music theatre laboratory, various drama clubs, advanced training, guided tours for different groups, cross-generational event series, accompanied opera visits, and much more.

In November 2026, in cooperation with various renowned partner institutions, the Cologne Opera will host **POWER UP! THE DEMOCRACY FESTIVAL** for the first time. As a thematic extension of the world premiere of *THE KING GIVES SOMETHING AWAY*, school classes, families, and all interested parties are invited to experience political participation for all age groups through various hands-on activities and workshops. Planned activities include community-building initiatives such as participatory art projects, readings, community music, as well as business games and practical democracy workshops.

As a young group of experts, the **OPERATORS** – a group of young people aged between 9 and 15 – have recently begun meeting regularly to inspect, shape, and challenge the programme and the opera's environment, using their own ideas to make it an even more exciting place for children and adolescents.

Following the successful launch of the versatile opera podcast "**StageVibes**", five further episodes on selected opera productions are planned for the 26/27 season.

The full Opera.City.School programme will be presented in detail during the annual press briefing, which this year will take place in late June 2026.

CONCERTS AND MORE

With a **FESTIVAL OF OPERETTA**, the Cologne Opera will celebrate winning the radio station BR-KLASSIK's "Operetten-Frosch" award for its successful production of Michael Krasznay-Krausz's **EINE FRAU VON FORMAT**, in the acclaimed staging by Christian von Götz, on 4 October 2026. In this concert, conducted by Berlin operetta specialist Adam Benzwi, illustrious guests Annette Dasch and Richard Glöckner – the protagonists of the award-winning production – will join members of the opera ensemble and the Gürzenich Orchestra to revisit hits from *EINE FRAU VON FORMAT* alongside other genre classics. The official award ceremony will also take place during the evening.

Under the title **NIT ESU LAUT** ("Stripped back"), the acclaimed Cologne band Kasalla will perform three extraordinary guest concerts at the Cologne Opera House. From 28 to 30 June 2027, the band will present their hits, always in local dialect but moving away from their usual rock sound in favour of quiet arrangements with a small orchestra. The programme will include both their well-known anthems and new songs.

Beginning in November 2026, the Cologne Opera will regularly host eight **LUNCH CONCERTS** in the foyer of the Opera House or at the Children's Opera. The programme starts at 1 pm each time, ranging from Handel to Offenbach and from *The Magic Flute* to *Carmen*, presented by the opera ensemble or the International Opera Studio. From 12 pm onwards, catering will be available at "Offenbach am Offenbachplatz".

For the festive season, the traditional classics **SING HALLELUJA!** with the St. Stephan Youth Choir (5/6 December 2026) and the **RED CROSS MATINEE** in support of the Cologne Red Cross (13 December 2026) are essential fixtures in the calendar.

Prior to the performances of most new productions and selected revivals, the dramaturgy team will provide introductions to the works. Furthermore, the popular Soirées featuring public rehearsals will offer an early insight into the works and their stagings. On selected dates, post-performance discussions will also be offered, providing an opportunity for direct dialogue immediately following the show.