

# The Schagerl Brass Festival Klaus Härtel

**A**nd now we have to wait three years until the next festival. What a shame really, because what the Austrian music instrument maker put together for five days at Melk Abbey on the banks of the Danube River was simply breathtaking. The concerts, the performers, the atmosphere: breathtaking.

The organizer of all this, Karl Schagerl, said basically the same thing in an interview: "This festival exceeded our expectations. After the success of the wonderful festivals in 2008 and 2011, we were lucky to go even higher." To name a highlight is just about impossible. The opening concert, though - The European Brass Festival, directed by Thomas Clamor - pointed the way. The soloist was no less than James Morrison. The remaining line-up was just as remarkable. Bullhorns, Mnozil Brass, the Vienna Trombone Quartet with Gabor Tarkövi, James Morrison's "All-Star Big Band" with Thomas Gansch, Harry Sokal and Andy Haderer, Blechreiz, da Blechhauf'n, and, and, and... Above all, the performers weren't just there to blow their horn and hit the road; no - they were there the whole time. They gave workshops, interviews, and engaged throughout the festival with beginners, students, amateurs and professional colleagues.

This year's line-up also boasted many South American guests, with an emphasis on the Schagerl connection to the musicians of "El Sistema", the unique musical/social programme from Venezuela. "The strength and energy that stands behind this exceptional programme was evident throughout the entire festival," said Karl Schagerl, "and it bears a large responsibility for the success of the festival."

Your highlight, Herr Schagerl? "In view of the many fabulous concerts, lectures and workshops, it's almost impossible. However, I have to mention the "Grand Finale" concert. So many great guest



Thomas Gansch and James Morrison.



James Morrison at the Schagerl Brass Festival.

artists appeared, led by the Saxon Wind Philharmonic and Thomas Clamor - a singular evening that everyone who was there will keep in their memory." Once again it becomes clear the Schagerl Brass Festival is really just a big family get together. International instrumentalists, stars in their fields, fall into each other's arms like family members that haven't seen one another in ages. They horsed around, chatted and - above all - made music together. Though sometimes, it must be said, you didn't envy the task of Thomas Clamor - trying to rein in his lively group of soloists who at times resembled a group of kindergarteners on a field trip! But he managed it.

Naturally, the Schagerl brand stood behind everything. "In the last years and decades, we have had the fortune of having many great artists from around the world enjoy playing our instruments," explains Karl Schagerl. "From these relationships many friendships have grown. Our festival affords our Schagerl Artists the opportunity to get together and prepare new programmes and then have a wonderful, unforgettable time with each other. The Festival is also a breeding ground for new projects and international exchanges between people from different lands and cultures. These artists have something in common: the joy of music and their Schagerl instruments. To convey this joy, and offer it to the participants of the workshops and to the concertgoers, was our common goal. The Festival is also an important impulse for the further development of existing and new models from our firm."

Let's look back for a second at the history of the festival. How did the

idea come about to put such a festival together? Why Melk Abbey? "On the occasion of our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2001," Karl recalls, "we invited Schagerl Artists and friends to come and celebrate with us. There were two concerts, at that time in the Stadtsaal in Mank. The success of this anniversary gave us the courage to take the next step, which would become the first Schagerl Brass Festival in 2008." At that time the little village of Mank was, for four days, the place to be! Brass players from all over the world enjoyed high profile concerts, and could also take part in the many and varied workshops that were offered each day.

"One of our workshop speakers then was Thomas Clamor, who taught brass chamber music workshops. That summer, 2008, Thomas had been engaged to conduct his Venezuelan Youth Brass Ensemble at the Salzburg Festival. That gave us the opportunity to invite them to perform a guest concert at the Abbey Church in Melk. Because of that we came up with the idea to create a similar ensemble in Europe. Just one year later the newly formed "Great European Brass Ensemble" met for their first rehearsals in Melk Abbey. From the very beginning, Brother Martin Rotheneder, who is responsible for Culture and Tourism at Melk Abbey, supported us and offered us the support of the Abbey. From him we received the invitation to hold our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary Schagerl Brass Festival at Melk Abbey in 2011. We accepted wholeheartedly and with great thanks."

The 2014 Festival was therefore a resounding success, building upon the experiences of the previous two festivals. Concert and workshop offerings were expanded. Additional spaces were used: for concerts - the large underground baroque hall; for workshops and lectures - additional classrooms from the Abbey school. All of this "had a very positive effect on the further growth of the Festival," explained Karl Schagerl.

The fact that we have to wait another three years until the next festival? Karl does find that a bit of a pity, but also necessary in equal parts. "The Schagerl Brass Festival has established itself as a singular event in the international brass scene. It is very important that the Festival preserves its unique character. This is only possible, really, when there is enough time for new ideas and new initiatives to generate. For the next Festival in the summer of 2017 we can at least promise a singular musical experience in general, and in particular, some of the greatest in the Art of Brass.

*Translation by Jack Burt*