

# THE BLACK CAT



**Musik- und Tanztheater**

**für einen Tenor, zwei Tänzer, einen Schauspieler und Barockensemble**

**nach der Novelle “The Black Cat” von Edgar Allan Poe**

**Konzept: Frank Hoffmann, Martin Haselböck, Virgil Widrich**

**Musik: J.S. Bach u. David Sylvian**

**Eine Koproduktion :**

**Théâtre National du Luxembourg/ Musikkonzept Wien**

*(...) ich bin weder wahnsinnig, noch habe ich geträumt. Morgen aber muss ich sterben und möchte darum heute meine Seele entlasten. E.A.Poe, “The Black Cat”*



**Ein Mensch ohne Namen sitzt im Todestrakt und wartet auf seine Hinrichtung. Er hat jemanden getötet, lautet die Anklage. Er hat seine eigene Frau getötet. Doch verstehen tut er das nicht. Was ist passiert? Was hat er getan? Und er fängt an, seine Geschichte zu erzählen.**

Die Geschichte der schwarzen Katze.

Der Luxemburger Theater- und Filmregisseur Frank Hoffmann hat zusammen mit Martin Haselböck, dem bedeutenden Wiener Organisten und Dirigenten, und Virgil Widrich, dem ungewöhnlichen Film- und Multimediakünstler, ein genreübergreifendes Musik- und Tanztheaterprojekt entwickelt. Gesungen werden weltberühmte Arien aus Kantaten von J. S. Bach. Zu der Musik des Engländers David Sylvian stellen die bekannten luxemburgischen Tänzer Sylvia Camarda und Jean-Guillaume Weis den Weg ins Verderben und in den tiefen Abgrund der Seele des verzweifelten Mörders aus der einschlägigen Novelle von Edgar Allan Poe dar.

Den Zuschauer erwartet ein Projekt der Gegensätze und Extreme, zwischen Barockensemble und Multimedia, zwischen Bach und Rock, gesungen, getanzt, gespielt

# THE BLACK CAT

„Take ingredients like the base substance of Edgar Allen Poe’s Short Story « The Black Cat », a proper dash of dance and David Sylvian’s music, as well as – the most prominent of all – excerpts of Bachs Cantatas and video projections as the coloring agent and you receive a highly explosive mixture. » – Luxemburger Wort

Director Frank Hoffmann says: « The stage design is foremost a film – moving images, scenes and stories. In the third dimension, the singer, the dancers, and the musicians merge with the virtual space ... to become one total spatial experience. »

This production integrates music, drama, dance and multimedia stage design, breaking the boundaries between performing arts and visual arts. Two dancers along with a singer and a baroque ensemble perform a work of contrasts and extremes, from baroque ensemble to visual multi-media, from Bach to Rock.

**U.S. PREMIERE: 19. + 20 january at The Beverly O’Neill Theater, Long Beach**

Basada en la novela *Black Cat* (El gato negro) de Edgar Allan Poe, esta obra que mezcla teatro, música, danza y video cuenta con la participación de los bailarines Sylvia Camarda y Jean-Guillaume Weiss y la Orquesta Wiener Akademie de Austria y la Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra de Estados Unidos. Una coproducción del Théâtre National du Luxembourg y Musikkonzept Wien.

Partiendo del famoso relato del escritor inglés Edgar Allan Poe, el director de cine y teatro Frank Hoffmann, el director de orquesta Martin Haselböck y el creador de películas y multimedia Virgil Widrich se unen para este proyecto multidisciplinar. Todas las acciones se desarrollan al ritmo de la banda sonora creada por Haselböck, en la que utiliza cantatas de Johann Sebastian Bach, obras del compositor contemporáneo David Sylvian, así como creaciones de Ernst Krenek, Martin Haselböck y Ülo Krigul.

**Escenario:**

**Teatro Mayor Julio Mario Santo Domingo - San José de Bavaria, Bogotá**

**Enero, 25 y 26**



**Konzept:** Martin Haselböck, Frank Hoffmann, Virgil Widrich

**Text:** Edgar Allan Poe

**Musik:** J.S. Bach, David Sylvian

**Musikalische Leitung :** Martin Haselböck

**Regie :** Frank Hoffmann

**Assistenz :** Jacques Schiltz

**Video:** Oleg Prodeus, Virgil Widrich

**Kostüme:** Katharina Polheim

**Licht:** Daniel Sestak

**Garderobe:** Yolande Reuter

**Mit :**

Sänger: Aaron Sheehan, Nicholas Mulroy/Tänzer: Sylvia Camarda, Jean-Guillaume Weis/  
Schauspieler: Jacques Schiltz/ Ensemble: Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra Los Angeles

**Eine Koproduktion :**  
Théâtre National du Luxembourg/ Musikkonzept Wien

# THE BLACK CAT

stieß in Los Angeles und Bogota auf Begeisterung

Edgar Allans *The Black Cat* begleitet von der Musik von J.S. Bach und David Sylvian auf Tournée in Nord- und Südamerika.



Die Aufführungen wurden sowohl in Los Angeles als auch in Bogota mit großem Jubel aufgenommen. Den vier Vorstellungen wohnten ca. 3000 Zuschauer bei. Zusätzlich wurde die Vorstellung vom 26. Januar im Livestream im kolumbianischen Fernsehen gezeigt und erreichte dadurch ein Millionenpublikum. Vor und nach den Aufführungen gab es für die Luxemburger Künstler reichlich Gelegenheit, sowohl mit den Intendanten aus Los Angeles (Andreas Mitisek) und Bogota (Ramiro Eduardo Osorio Fonseca) als auch direkt mit dem Publikum und mit einheimischen Künstlern in Kontakt zu treten. Solche Gastspiele stehen sehr oft am Beginn längerer künstlerischer Freundschaften und tragen die Luxemburger Theaterszene hinaus in die Welt.

## Auch bei der Presse fand *The Black Cat* einhellige Zustimmung.



Die *Broadway World* aus Los Angeles schreibt: „In *THE BLACK CAT* Hoffmann kept his audience involved and entertained for the piece’s 80-minute-duration.”

*Press-Telegram* meint: „The onstage action, which is skillfully directed by Frank Hoffmann, is accentuated by dancers Sylvia Camarda and Jean-Guillaume Weis.(...) *The Black Cat*’s witch’s brew of baroque arias, pop songs, dancing and multi-media effects is as perversely captivating as it is perplexing.”

Die *Los Angeles Times* zeigt sich auch sehr angetan von den beiden Luxemburger Tänzern: „Weis is a former member of Pina Bausch’s Tanztheater Wuppertal, and both his nonchalance and Camarda’s acrobatically risqué feline impersonation are clearly derived from Bausch’s wonderful Wuppertal world. (...) Sexiness turns into rough black-cat sex, with the cat woman as signifier of predatory femininity that then gets confused when Weis becomes the cat. The production is never less than compelling to watch.”

*LA Weekly* resümiert: “*The Black Cat* is a dark, disturbing Edgar Allan Poe short story about murder and remorse, and the operatic version that received its U.S. premiere from Long Beach Opera over the weekend at the Beverly O’Neill Theater was staged with an artful, fanciful flair and imbued with a stirringly strange combination of evocative dance and a pairing of unexpected musical partners. In this presentation by music director Martin Haselböck, director Frank Hoffmann and visual artist Virgil Widrich, *The Black Cat* alternates between traditional music by Johann Sebastian Bach, performed live by organist-conductor Haselböck and Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra, and febrile dream sequences enacted to a soundtrack of prerecorded songs by David Sylvian, former leader of the English new-wave band Japan. (...) As the cat Pluto, Camarda prowled the stage with an aptly feline poise that made her interactions with Weis and Schlitz sensual and captivating.”



***El Espectador*** aus Bogota bringt den künstlersichen Anspruch des Abends auf den Punkt: “Partiendo del famoso relato del escritor inglés Edgar Allan Poe, el director de cine y teatro Frank Hoffmann, el director de orquesta Martin Haselböck y el creador de películas y multimedia Virgil Widrich se unen para este proyecto multidisciplinar. Todas las acciones se desarrollan al ritmo de la banda sonora creada por Haselböck, en la que utiliza cantatas de Johann Sebastian Bach, obras del compositor contemporáneo David Sylvian, así como creaciones de Ernst Krenek, Martin Haselböck y Ülo Krigul. (...) Una obra multidisciplinar llena de contrastes donde el público puede esperar emocionantes cambios extremos: desde el conjunto musical barroco hasta el uso de elementos multimedia, como la interpretación intercalada de las cantatas de Bach y la música más contemporánea de David Sylvian, incluyendo en todo momento el canto, el baile y la actuación.”

***El Tiempo*** aus Bogota fokussiert auf die verschiedenen Ebenen des Abends: “Ya de por sí, la historia que Edgar Allan Poe cuenta en su novela corta 'Black Cat' es aterradora, y ahora toma otras dimensiones en el montaje. Tiene un impacto dramático muy potente, que permite confrontar dos mundos diferentes, el primero es la meditación de este personaje en la celda de la prisión, cuando está mirando hacia atrás en su historia, y el otro es la forma narrativa de la historia. (...) Virgil Widrich construyó una partitura de videos que funcionan como escenografía y también como imágenes que cuentan historias. Es como si las paredes de la celda cobrarán vida.”

# **BROADWAY WORLD**

## **BWW Review: THE BLACK CAT at the O'Neill Theater Long Beach**

[by Maria Nockin Jan. 20, 2019](#)

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THE BLACK CAT is multimedia stage work that tells [Edgar Allan](#) Poe's gothic story with action, music, dance and projections. On January 19, 2019, Long Beach Opera presented its United States premiere at the Beverly O'Neill Theater. Tenor Aaron Sheehan sang the long solo tenor part of the Narrator on short notice, because the original singer had been unable to get his visa for the USA in order due to the government shut down.

Viennese conductor and organist Martin Haselböck conceived the idea for the piece and conducted the ensemble of which he is artistic director, the Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra. His concept involved combining the music of Bach with that of modern songwriter David Silvian and that worked well for telling the Poe's tale, but it was the Baroque instrumentalists who stole the most honors.

Musica Angelica's Concertmaster Ilia Korol and Violin II YuEun Kim, Violist Ashley Salinas, and oboist Steven Hammer were absolutely incredible, playing perfect counterpoint during scene after scene. Although their playing was more in the nature of accompaniment, Cellist Alexa Haines-Pilon and Bassist Malachai Bandy added much to the sound of this marvelous ensemble led by Organist and Conductor Haselbröck.

After each Bach piece, one of Silvian's thoughtfully conceived songs brightened up the scholastic mood created by the older music and added some modern thoughts to Poe's story. In it, the nameless man is led astray by drink and his obsession with the actions of a black cat who, had he not harmed it, might never have wished him evil.

Poe pointed out the dangers of alcohol. Virgil Widrich's film projections, which were painted and animated by Oleg Prodeus, showed the audience visual interpretations of the man's drunken visions. The projected images of the burning house were a study in filmed fire and the scene in which the walled up body is revealed simply jumped out of the background screen.

Writing in the program, theater and film director Frank Hoffmann describes the stage design as "foremost a film-moving images, scenes and stories. In the third dimension, the singer, the dancers, and the musicians merge with the virtual space ... to become one total spatial experience." In THE BLACK CAT, Hoffmann kept his audience involved and entertained for the piece's 80-minute duration.

Although the Narrator tells of a man who is quite obviously insane, the audience accepts the Narrator's claim that the man is sane, even though he gouges out the cat's eye and later kills it. When he tells of the man murdering his wife with an axe "by accident," the audience realizes the man's mental state. Is a nineteenth century man guilty of a crime he does not understand?



He contemplates eternity and the two violinists and the violist play an incredibly intricate trio. Tenor Sheehan adds to the pathos of his situation when he sings of the tortures of the damned.

Actor and assistant director Jacques Schiltz acted the part as Sheehan sang it. Dancers Sylvia Camarda and Jean Guillaume Weis portrayed the murderer's pre-execution dreams. Weis's interpretation of a cat thoroughly amused all of us who know how cats act around their often unrewarded caretakers.

## **PRESS TELEGRAMM**

### **Long Beach Opera's 'Black Cat' overcomes government shutdown to prowl on stage**

The partial shutdown of the U.S. government had a significant impact on the Los Angeles music scene Saturday when British tenor (and Bach specialist), Nicholas Mulroy, who was scheduled to sing the leading role in Long Beach Opera's production, "The Black Cat," was denied entry to the country.

According to Long Beach Opera's artistic director, Andreas Mitisek, the date indicated on Mulroy's work visa had been entered incorrectly. But when an attempt was made to contact immigration officials to make the necessary correction, they were informed the office was closed due to the shutdown.

Jacques Schlitz, Jean-Guillaume Weis and Silvia Camarda, from left, in "The Black Cat"  
(Photo by Keith Ian Polakoff)

This left the company with only a few precious rehearsal days left to solve the problem. But Saturday, the show did go on at the Beverly Neill Theater with assistant director, Jacques Schiltz, portraying Mulroy's character (silently) on stage, while tenor Aaron Sheehan sang the role offstage accompanied by members of the period instrument ensemble, Musica Angelica.

A self-described "musical mash up," "The Black Cat" freely combines the crime-and-punishment plot of Edgar Allan Poe's gruesome 1893 short story with arias and incidental music by Johann Sebastian Bach and contemporary British pop songs by David Sylvian.

The onstage action, which is skillfully directed by Frank Hoffmann, is accentuated by dancers Silvia Camarda and Jean-Guillaume Weis. The action takes place in front of (and is integrated into) a cleverly animated set design by Virgil Widrich. The overall effect, however, tends to feel like several jigsaw puzzles that have awkwardly been forced to fit together.

The source of the project actually dates back to 2008 when Martin Hasselböck, the music director of Musica Angelica, collaborated with John Malkovich to produce a play with music about Jack Unterweger, the notorious "Vienna Woods Strangler." As conceived by Malkovich, Haselböck and Austrian writer Michael Sturminger, "Seduction and Despair" (which was presented at the Santa Monica High School auditorium) combined a narrative delivered by Malkovich with musical selections by Gluck, Boccherini, Vivaldi, Haydn, Handel, Weber and Mozart.

Had all gone according to plan, Mulroy would have sung the succession of arias drawn from Bach's cantatas that are meant to express the state of mind of a prisoner condemned to die for the murder of his wife. The recorded songs by Sylvian with their droll lyrics add a sense of contemporary angst to the equation.

As in the short story, the prisoner recounts the events that have brought him to this dismal end as a series of flashbacks. We watch the disintegration of his marriage, due in no small part to his addiction to alcohol, the appearance of the sinister cat, the murder of the wife and the attempt to wall up the corpse.

Camarda, a lithe and sensuous dancer, alternates between the role of the love-starved wife and the big black cat — a slinky, kinky feline. But as the mind of the central character becomes more deranged, the role of the cat is taken over by Weis, which results in a bizarre twist of sexual identities and emotional motivations.

What may be a puzzle that doesn't quite fit together, "The Black Cat's" witch's brew of baroque arias, pop songs, dancing and multi-media effects is as perversely captivating as it is perplexing.

*Jim Farber is a Los Angeles-based freelance writer.*

*21. januar 2019*

## LOS ANGELES TIMES

# Review: Government shutdown hits the Long Beach Opera stage, but 'The Black Cat' goes on

By [Mark Swed](#), Los Angeles Times, 22. Januar 2019

Dancers Jean-Guillaume Weis and Sylvia Camarda in Long Beach Opera's production of "The Black Cat" at the Beverly O'Neill Theater. (Keith Ian Polakoff / Long Beach Opera)

Writing in his cell as he awaits the gallows, the narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat" curiously figures that what was to him "little but Horror" will to many appear "a mere series of household events" and "less terrible than *barroques*."

"Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the commonplace."

The Viennese early music specialist, organist, conductor and composer Martin Haselböck has found a way to do just that in his "Black Cat" production for tenor, two dancers and video, with Baroque and contemporary music, and an early music ensemble. Given its premiere at the Théâtre National du Luxembourg in 2012, the show then toured Austria and Germany.

Saturday the production arrived at Long Beach Opera before heading off to Bogotá, Colombia.

The small-scale production seemed tailor-made for Long Beach Opera and the Beverly O'Neill Theater. Haselböck happens to be music director of the Long Beach period-instrument group Musica Angelica. He was also mastermind of two striking music theater experiments for John Malkovich, "The Infernal Comedy" and "The Giacomo Variations."

Even so, reducing "The Black Cat" to the commonplace — however elevated by Bach's anything-but-terrible *barroques* — has its Poe-sized perils.

The idea here is to contrast a series of tenor arias from Bach cantatas with pop songs by David Sylvian to give different perspectives on Poe's dark tale of a domestic bliss torn asunder by demon drink. Under the influence of alcohol, a cat-loving husband abuses his docile wife and becomes violent toward his pet, a black cat that he comes to perceive as bewitched.

He blinds the cat, then hangs it from a tree. His house burns down. He gets nastier new digs and a demonic new black cat. Swinging an ax meant for the cat, he instead splits the skull of his wife, whom he buries in a basement wall. The caterwauling cat, also inadvertently buried, gives the murderer away.

Directed by Frank Hoffmann, the production was meant to begin with British tenor Nicholas Mulroy in a cell, singing the aria "Und wenn der harte Todesschlag" (And if the harsh stroke of death), consoled by a crucifix on the wall and the presence of Jesus.

Only it wasn't Mulroy onstage. It was the show's assistant director, Jacques Schiltz, who here, like the cat, wasn't where he was supposed to belong. Mulroy was still in Vienna, unable to complete the paperwork for his visa because of the U.S. government shutdown. His vocal replacement was tenor Aaron Sheehan, who stood with Musica Angelica on the side of the stage. It's hard to say, not having seen the original production, but Bach coming from the beyond seemed about right.

Projections by Virgil Widrich on three video screens offered both the real world and, through Oleg Prodeus' digital painting and animation, the narrator's mental disorientation. Cell quickly became domestic setting. A couple, dancers Sylvia Camarda and Jean-Guillaume Weis, came to breakfast accompanied by a Bach gavotte that startlingly but also charmingly was soon replaced by a recording of Sylvian's jovial "It's a Wonderful World."

When his wife steps out, husband sneaks a flask. Wife is transformed into sexually seductive cat in black halter top and torn tights. No choreographer is credited, but Weis is a former member of Pina Bausch's Tanztheater Wuppertal, and both his nonchalance and Camarda's acrobatically risqué feline impersonation are clearly derived from Bausch's wonderful Wuppertal world.

You know quickly where this is headed as the scenes shift back and forth from convict seeking Bachian solace in his cell to ever more ruinous flashbacks of distorted reality. The video is almost always effective, conveying both inner and outer worlds. Sexiness turns into rough black-cat sex, with the cat woman as signifier of predatory femininity that then gets confused when Weis becomes the cat. The production is never less than compelling to watch. Sheehan proved a quick study and agile tenor. Musica Angelica turns on a Baroque dime.

But the music itself doesn't take long to lose its dramatic power. Bach's arias efficiently serve up all-purpose spiritual angst, but that is in part because for these purposes their actual textural content remains only vaguely relevant. Like the Bach, Sylvian's songs become darker as the situation deteriorates, but Bach-rock shock is only good for one or two times. And in this context Sylvian's also vaguely relevant songs lack the substance needed for narrative development.

Furthermore just as the music is becoming more predictable, the dance and video head in a more sensational direction. Yes, a Bach violin concerto (arranged from a harpsichord concerto) works just fine underscoring copulation, but Bach-for-all-occasions ubiquity also lessens the effect of the sacred cantata excerpts. They are meant to restore the narrator's sanity as he awaits execution, which should be the real "Horror." But we knew that all along.

