

steirischer herbst '25: *Never Again Peace*

18.9.–12.10.25

The 58th edition of steirischer herbst takes its title from the play *Nie wieder Friede* (1934–36) by the German-Jewish writer and anti-fascist **Ernst Toller**. Bored by the heavenly peace on Olympus, Napoleon makes a bet with Francis of Assisi: Are humans peaceful, or can they be tricked into war on the spot? A telegram without a sender, declaring war by the “hereditary enemy,” quickly topples the pacifism of the small country of Dunkelstein. Peace hymns are rewritten into war songs, foreigners are branded as culprits, the masses shout “War!”

The play turns the pacifist slogan “Nie wieder Krieg” (No more war) of the interwar period—made famous through Käthe Kollwitz’s iconic 1924 poster—upside down. Toller’s indictment of a Europe that fell under the spell of fascism could not be more relevant today. Institutions founded to prevent the return of war and genocide are crumbling. The postwar order, to which especially we in Europe have grown accustomed, is eroding. Vladimir Putin’s Russia is waging a bloody war of aggression, which it justifies by claiming to fight fascism. While “Never again” was chanted as a warning by Buchenwald survivors shortly after the camp’s liberation, the phrase “Never again is now” has become the rallying cry of an Israeli government that uses the threat of a new Holocaust to continue its war against Hamas indefinitely — and to fully extend it to Gaza’s civilian population. Given the amount of bloodshed since 1945, “never again” rings hollow.

Even in Styria, parallels to Toller’s Dunkelstein can be drawn: since the far-right Freedom Party won the state elections, cultural institutions and NGOs have had their funding cut. At the same time, nationalism, bigotry, anti-immigration policies, and the rollback of anti-discrimination laws are experiencing a troubling renaissance.

1938–1984–2025

Both Toller and George Orwell described how quickly the meaning of words can be turned into their opposite: Freiheitsplatz (Freedom Square) in the center of Graz has been renamed several times, most recently in 1938, shortly after the Nazis took power. On 26 June, artist **Ahmet Ögüt** symbolically renames it once again—from Freiheitsplatz to Freiheitsplatz—prompting passersby to reflect on the concept of freedom.

The official start of the festival on 18 September is marked by a newly commissioned work by the renowned collective **LIGNA**. Their audio performance

invites visitors to embark on a journey through political systems, mass phenomena, and ideas of freedom. The opening day continues with a new piece by **Manuel Pelmuş** and **Frédéric Gies** at Helmut List Halle: Kurt Jooss's seminal anti-war ballet *The Green Table* (1932) serves as their starting point. Afterward, **Ivo Dimchev** sets the tone for the opening party with an extravagant, genre-defying performance.

BAU

This year, the festival's nomadic character takes it to a vacant industrial site in Gries, a district traditionally home to many migrants, but that also votes strongly on the right. Here, steirischer herbst transforms the former Bauer distillery into an intricate metaphor for a fragmented and contradictory society.

For the duration of the festival, the site is renamed **BAU**. Like the location itself, the German word has a wide range of meanings, from den to construction site to prison. The festival reveals this multiplicity through new artistic works. With its varied uses, architectural styles, labyrinthine structure, and almost dystopian dilapidation, the building immerses the audience in a dreamlike state.

Across its many floors, visitors encounter intertwined stories of growing oppression and escapes to freedom, of eternal wandering and forced hiding. In the curatorial imagination, the building at times resembles a ship used by anti-fascists fleeing occupied France, an alpine fortress the Right retreats to as at the end of World War II, a *Magic Mountain*-like sanatorium filled with fragile hope, and a hotel with guests awaiting their uncertain transit.

Performances

In addition to the performances mentioned above, this year's program offers a wide range of newly commissioned artistic works, spanning from stage productions to cheeky interventions in public space. **Augustin Maurs**, who explored the dark side of music last year, turns his attention to a musical phenomenon that reflects deep-rooted societal fears in *The Story of the Wolf Tone*. In *Violenza 2025*, **Michiel Vandavelde**, **Pankaj Tiwari**, and **Eneas Prawdzic** examine who is shaping the minds of the next generation, as right-wing ideologies are on the rise among young men everywhere. Influencers and propaganda offer identity, belonging, and purpose—but at what cost?

OMAS GEGEN RECHTS & Friends have their own way of countering these developments—more precisely, by walking backwards against them in their *RÜCKwärtsParade*.

For this edition, **Theater im Bahnhof** is collaborating for the first time with **Das Planetenparty Prinzip**. The two independent theater ensembles from Graz have formed a pact to tackle the hot-button issue of inheritance in *Erben: Wer kriegt das Haus?* at Helmut List Halle. **manuskripte** presents *Die Exhumierung "Hödlmosers,"* a literarchaeological docufiction—including a local cold platter, film screening, and discussion—aimed at bridging the divide between folk and avant-garde culture.

Franz von Strolchen once again tells an absurd story inspired by real events in *The Great Resignation*: a former actor works at a car rental agency, where a self-driving car starts talking to him. What starts as a car wash turns into a dialogue about giving up, being human, and the looming threat of being replaced.

Finally, **Helga Lázár** adapts Ernst Toller's *Nie wieder Friede* as a virtuoso puppet play depicting an eternal cycle of destruction and reconciliation and brings the overarching theme to a close in a bizarre, apocalyptic variety show.

herbst cabaret and deathmatches

Humor, satire, and gritty social criticism are once again animating Forum Stadtpark's basement in the **herbst cabaret**. This year features six new shows by **Zaid Alsalame**, **Charlotte Gash**, **Lau Lukkarila**, **Liina Magnea**, **Seven Trials Theatre Troupe**, and **Edwin Ramirez**. In addition, the closing event of steirischer herbst '25 takes place as a special edition of the herbst cabaret with **Isabella Sedlak** and **Yousef Sweid** at Dom im Berg.

The popular **herbst deathmatches** also return, with provocative thinkers aiming to convince the audience of their positions on urgent issues of our times.

herbst education

This year, too, **herbst education** offers a wide-ranging program that enables exchange, encounters, and hands-on experimentation, joining artists and curators in picking up a metaphorical flashlight to illuminate dark corners and spark discussions. herbst education's hub is located at the BAU, right next to the exhibition.

Artists and collectives

Carla Åhlander and Gernot Wieland, Zaid Alsalame, Angélique Aubrit & Ludovic Beillard, Candice Breitz, Pauline Curnier Jardin, Ivo Dimchev, Eva Ďurovec, Charlotte Gash, Gelitin, Pedro Gómez-Egaña, Max Höfler and Andreas Unterweger, Dana Kavelina, Helga Lázár, LIGNA, Lau Lukkarila, Liina Magnea, Augustin Maurs, Nástio Mosquito, Stephan Mörsch, Olaf Nicolai, Ahmet Öğüt, Illya Pavlov, Manuel Pelmuş and Frédéric Gies, Edwin Ramirez, Isabella Sedlak and Yousef Sweid, Seven Trials Theatre Troupe, Haim Sokol, Mounira Al Solh, Franz von Strolchen, Theater im Bahnhof and Das Planetenparty Prinzip, Philippe Vandenberg, Michiel Vandevelde, Pankaj Tiwari and Eneas Prawdzic, Maria Vilkovisky and Ruthie Jenrbekova (Kreolex zentre), zweintopf, and others

Six Characters of Hotel W. with contributions by Tomer Dotan-Dreyfus, Miklavž Komelj, Madame Nielsen, Maria Stepanova, and others

Festivals-within-the-festival

As usual, two festivals-within-the-festival accompany steirischer herbst. The 58th **ORF musikprotokoll** runs from **2 to 5 October** and deals with *regel:bruch* (rule-breaking), questioning musical and perceptual orders. What can music be today? Numerous commissions to contemporary musicians explore different ways of dealing with rules and expectations. **Out of Joint – the literary festival within steirischer herbst** takes place from **30 September to 3 October** under the title *ich krieg die krise* (I'm having a crisis), focusing on the many crises of our time. Austria's three leading philosophers present their latest books: **Konrad Paul Liessmann, Franz Schuh, and Robert Pfaller.**

Partner Program

Various cultural institutions and artists from Graz and Styria host their own projects as part of steirischer herbst. The partners in 2025 include **APORON 21, Camera Austria, esc medien kunst labor, Forum Stadtpark, Grazer Kunstverein, Graz Museum, Haus Lebt 2025, HDA – Haus der Architektur, KRA, KULTUMUSEUM, Kunsthaus Graz, manuskripte, OMAS gegen RECHTS & Friends, Oper Graz, Pavelhaus, Rhizom, < rotor > Zentrum für zeitgenössische Kunst, QL-Galerie, Schaumbad – Freies Atelierhaus Graz, and Schauspielhaus Graz.**

Ö1 Festivalpodcast

The collaboration between the public broadcaster **Ö1** and steirischer herbst once again takes form in the accessible and successful **festival podcast**, now in its fifth year. Bringing contemporary art in its various forms into focus, promoting interdisciplinarity in the arts, and providing space for reflection on current events—this is what connects Ö1 and steirischer herbst. The festival podcast invites listeners to engage in further conversations and reflections—both on Ö1 and at [sound.orf.at](https://www.sound.orf.at).

steirischer herbst '25 is curated by Ekaterina Degot, David Riff, Gábor Thury and Pieter Vermeertel, assisted by Beatrice Forchini, Tobias Ihl and Lukas Michelitsch, and created by all participating artists, speakers, and partner institutions, as well as the festival's whole team.

The complete program will be published on **11 August**. Online ticket sales also start on this day.

Online accreditation for press and professionals opens in August as well. For prior registration and further information, please contact press@steirischerherbst.at.

Images: www.steirischerherbst.at/press

About steirischer herbst

Every autumn since its founding in 1968, steirischer herbst has provided a platform for new productions, provoking and shaping public debates in a variety of forms across disciplines and media. Reinventing itself many times over, the festival has always redefined the terms of the conversation about what culture might mean in a changing contemporaneity, as seen in Graz, Austria's second most populous city.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

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