

Künstlerhaus ■■■ Schloß Balmoral

Stiftung Rheinland-Pfalz für Kultur

Villenpromenade 11 | 56130 Bad Ems

“KEEP IT SIMPLE”

I, now, don't remember, exactly, where and when we first met... sometime in 2000-1? In any case, sometime in the spring of 2002, Danièle Perrier invited me to make a performance of a new work at Balmoral on July 12, 2002... which, I happily accepted.

As usual... when starting a new work..., I researched, researched, researched. And the research was FRUITFUL! I discovered that Bad Ems had been a major and elegant “Kurort” at the end of the 19th century... a “must” destination for any “prominent” person in Europe at that time.

I, also, discovered that, for several seasons, Richard Wagner had leased the whole Schloss Balmoral to accommodate his family and entourage... more or less, at the same time... that Feodor Dostoyevsky was sleeping in a simple boarding house in Bad Ems, while gambling... and losing... at the Casino.

As much as we know, these two, great 19th century, “cultural heroes” never met in Bad Ems (or elsewhere). Thus, I became fascinated with the question: “What would they have talked about, if they had met?”

So, after much, much reading (real books... remember, this was before internet), I developed a list of 40 or more questions, which I imagined, either Wagner or Dostoyevsky, might want to ask each other.

For whatever reasons, I decided that a “TV TALKING & COOKING” show would be a good model/format for presenting this “imaginary conversation”. Thus, the title of the performance became “Ben’s Bar: The Show that Talks Hard and Cooks Good”! Two dear friends volunteered to be “Richard W.” and “Feodor D.”.

The visual/staging presentation was simple: As “moderator”, I stood in the middle of a long table, with “Wagner” (preparing and cooking a “Leipziger Allerlei”) to my left, and “Dostoyevsky” (preparing and cooking a “Russian Borscht”) to my right. My original idea was to read, to either of the two protagonists, long and complicated questions, to which they should respond with equally long and complicated answers

Fortunately, at the last minute..., I decided to scrap the prepared answers... and instructed “Wagner” and “Dostoyevsky” to respond only with a “Yes” or “No”... (“Ja”/“Nein”... or, “Da” or “Nyet”) to all questions... suggesting that, they were too busy cooking to be concerned with grand (or trivial) philosophical questions.

AND it worked!!!!... better than I had hoped. The “Allerlei” and “Borscht”, later served to the audience... were wonderful! And, nobody became bored with long-winded answers.

SO, THE BIG LESSON LEARNED AT SCHLOSS BALMORAL WAS, SIMPLY... ”KEEP IT SIMPLE”!!!

Ben Patterson

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Wiesbaden