



Thanks to his charismatic stage presence and his inimitable turns on both the silver and small screens, Philipp Hochmair has earned a permanent place in the hearts of critics and audiences alike. The Austrian actor now not only works in the German-speaking world but has also gained a foothold in France. At the beginning of the year he made a French series and in May will once again feature as a guest on the red carpet in Cannes. Lisi Brandlmaier talks to Philipp Hochmair, the new “Everyman from Salzburg”, about his love for France and comes away with a few “must-visit” insider tips for Cannes provided by this exceptional talent.

France is something of a second home to you. Where does your love for France come from?

My love for France started very early. When I first started studying acting at the Max Reinhardt Seminar in Vienna aged 19, I found out about the opportunity to spend a semester abroad in Paris. So I immediately started learning French. For me, France was the byword for experimental, avant-garde theatre. Back then I really admired Ariane Mnouchkine and Peter Brook. These two geniuses of the theatre and their companies were regular guests at the Wiener Festwochen festivals. I was very impressed by their theatrical language, and I always dreamed of working with these two artists. I actually spent the third year of my studies at the Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique (CNSAD). There I also had the opportunity to watch Peter Brooks rehearse Hamlet. And then, through an actor friend of mine who worked at the Théâtre du Soleil, I was also able to get to know the great Ariane Mnouchkine. So my dream of meeting these two giants of world theatre actually came true!

Yes we Cannes!

Leading actor Philipp Hochmair talks about his Cannes and his love for France and acting.

Text: Lisi Brandlmaier

What was it about them that impressed you so much?

Both had their own theatre as a base where they were able to develop their own quite inimitable narrative styles: Brook at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord and Mnouchkine at the Cartoucherie de Vincennes. They both showed me a completely new and different form of theatre. Mnouchkine's production of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* lasted for hours and was for me world theatre on a scale I'd never before seen. Peter Brook, with his multicultural theatre, was utterly ahead of his time. What has fortunately become completely normal nowadays, meaning an ensemble of actors from different cultures and nations, was already axiomatic for him.

Both of their theatres are in Paris. You studied in Paris in 1995 and 1996. What was it about this city that fascinated you so much?

Paris is a very cosmopolitan city. On the one hand it has a quite dazzling romantic flair which is very different from that of my hometown, Vienna, and on the other hand I had to organize my life and assert myself in a different language in a foreign country. The French also have a completely different system for training actors. I lived in a chambre de bonne, or former maid's room, of nine square metres within walking distance of the CNSAD, and the only place I could stand upright in my room was under the open skylight! A truly romantic life for a drama student, la vie de bohème!



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“Quand les poules auront des dents.”

Philipp Hochmair

And you were nonetheless drawn back to Germany?

Yes, to collaborate with the Hamburg theatre director Nicolas Stemmann, with whom I'd studied in Vienna. Back then, we founded our own theatre company, so to speak, in Hamburg and gained a very high profile there. We were then able to incorporate into our work what I had learned in France from those masters of the theatre. Before then, I had my first encounter with film in Paris, under the film director Claude Berri in his film *Lucie Aubrac*. I spent two days filming and for the first time experienced day-to-day life on a real film set, in a big war film set in the 1940s. I was so overwhelmed by my experiences on set that I was completely knocked out and had to stay in bed for a week to recover! My first experience with film, if you like, was in France.

One of your first films, *Der Glanz des Tages (The Shine of Day)* by Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel, was even shown in French cinemas. How did that come about?

The film had its premiere at the Locarno Film Festival in 2013 and won an award there. It was then presented at the Premier Plans film festival in Angers and was released in French cinemas with the title *L'Éclat du Jour*.

2013 was evidently a successful year for you. At any rate, your Faust was

also chosen to open La FabricA, a theatre in Avignon.

Yes, that was an enormous honour! A production by Hamburg's Thalia Theatre by my director Nicolas Stemann, with myself in the role of Mephisto, was selected to open a completely new theatre in Avignon. Great theatre got made there. We were even on the front page of the French newspaper Le Monde.

And these successes continued – in 2014, there followed a tour of your monologue on Goethe's Werther in France!

Yes, a bilingual version of my monologue *Werther!* based on Goethe's epistolary novel premiered at Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne. From there we embarked on a tour through the entire French-speaking world. So I returned to France as a bilingual actor...

You've been an ensemble member at Vienna's Burgtheater and Hamburg's Thalia Theatre and you've toured France with your Werther monologue – how different is French theatre life from German theatre life?

In my view, the way French theatres operate is more informal and therefore less institutional. In France, I had for example a closer relationship with the stagehands. I was always looked after by the same group of stagehands, with whom I ultimately went on tour. That is how a personal relationship – practically a friendship – came about. In Hamburg and at the Burgtheater everything was noticeably more anonymous.

French cinema is also quite different from German-language cinema. Last year, *Die Wannseekonferenz* (The Wannsee Conference), shown on television at home, was released in cinemas in France. Why do you think the film was shown in cinemas in France, and what makes it so special?

The film has great historical significance in Germany and should be accessible to a wide viewership. Given that 20 January 2022 was the 80th anniversary of the Wannsee Conference, it was right to make the film permanently ac-



Philippp Hochmair on the red carpet at the 76th Cannes Film Festival in 2023.

cessible to everyone, on television and for streaming. The film was mostly seen in cinemas abroad and therefore could also be approached from a more artistic perspective. In 2023, I was able to take part in the cinema release in France thanks to my knowledge of French. Acting the role of Reinhard Heydrich has certainly been one of the biggest challenges of my career to date.

Reinhard Heydrich, whom you portray in this film, was one of the worst mass murderers of all time. Is there a French figure who, as an actor, you would particularly like to portray?

There is a wonderful film adaptation of the life of Molière by Ariane Mnouchkine – Molière as a film character, as a cultural phenomenon, and the era he lived in, have always really appealed to me. The clash between Molière, a

free spirit, and the strictures of life at court has always attracted me. *Hotel de France*, a film by Patrice Chéreau inspired by *Uncle Vanya*, the play by Chekhov, also fascinates me, because it too combines cinema and theatre in a brilliant way. *La Révolution*, a Netflix series directed by Aurélien Molas, shows how it's possible for something like this to work today: a historical drama told in an entirely modern style. This means that I also particularly enjoyed filming the series *Deep* with Aurélien Molas in Nantes for six weeks at the beginning of the year.

What is *Deep* about?

I'd describe it as a ground-breaking Nazi Western! The title *Deep* refers to a super-submarine which makes it possible to travel through time, and the protagonists get caught in various time-warps during World War II. I play the bad guy of the series, a cold-blooded SS commander.

How do you prepare for a role like that?

The difficult thing about this story was understanding the interplay of all the time-travel taking place and maintaining a certain weightlessness, despite the jumps in the narrative. Before filming started, I went to Nantes to have a look at the historical locations. That was certainly an important part of my preparation. When you film in a real warship, in an actual Nazi-era submarine port, you can slide into the role automatically...

And now you're in France once again – you're attending your fourth consecutive film festival in Cannes. What is it that makes the Cannes Film Festival so unique, compared to other European festivals?

What I was able to experience with Peter Brook and Ariane Mnouchkine in Paris as an acting student, I can now experience 30 years later in Cannes, the epicentre of international cinema. Here you can watch both international and French films of the highest quality as part of the festival programme.

What does a day in Cannes look like for you?

I get up very early and, instead of breakfast, I watch my first film of the day. I see three to five films throughout the day and eat and sleep as the schedule allows. It's a race without stopping for breath to get tickets for all sorts of premieres. And in between there are meetings with fellow actors, directors and producers. And, if time allows, I have a quick dip in the sea to clear my head for the next films I'll be watching.

Why are festivals like this one so important in the film industry?

The direct contact you can have with people from the industry at festivals like this one is unique. The best thing about here is that you can get a feel for current trends in world cinema.

What is your favourite French saying?

Quand les poules auront des dents! Which means when hens have teeth, or, less literally, when pigs fly. So theoretically sometime, but in actual fact never!

You are an accomplished and enthusiastic cook. What is it that you most like about French food?

Those French dishes which are very unusual for us and are a total anachronism in this age of veganism and vegetarianism, for example pig's trotters. But it is French eating culture more than anything else which interests me. This culture of celebrating food together. Even just the way waiters announce dishes is an experience. In practically every restaurant the waiter will take the time to explain every detail of a dish. This creates the tranquillity necessary for genuine enjoyment.

Your favourite café in Cannes?

La Californie! From here you have a direct view of the Palais des Festivals, you can relax and watch the hustle and bustle, whilst enjoying high-quality French bistro classics.

And your absolutely favourite venue?

The Hotel Eden Roc in Antibes! A five-



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star legend amongst hotels that's famous for its exclusive location on the Côte d'Azur and its first-class service, and is an exclusive meeting point for cinema's great and good.

Do you, as a Cannes expert, have any insider tips for a visit to the town?

There is an island off the coast of Cannes, the Île Sainte Marguerite, which is a tranquil piece of paradise with pristine beaches, pine forests and a historic prison that you can even visit. Or the Marché Forville: this covered market in the centre of Cannes is a popular meeting place for locals. Authentic, and lovely for a quick lunch! There is also Musée de la Castre, a museum housed in a medieval fortress on the hill of Le Suquet, the oldest part of Cannes, with charming cobbled streets, historic buildings and a breathtaking view over the town and the sea. The museum has an impressive collection of artworks, ethnographic objects and ancient artefacts.

Are you going to have time to visit these places during the Cannes Film Festival?

Sure! *Quand les poules auront des dents!*

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us!



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1. Hôtel du Cap-Eden-Roc
Bang on the beach, a hotel to make the connoisseur's heart beat faster.
oetkercollection.com

2. Musée de la Castre
Houses a very interesting collection of art and objets d'art.
cannes.com

3. Île Sainte-Marguerite
An island paradise off the coast of Cannes offering an idyllic retreat.
france.fr