

## „The Occidental Culture Is at Risk“

**Mr. Welsler-Möst, how does one feel among Nobel prize winners, scientists and philosophers of world renown.**

Wonderful! Through such meetings you are at least not professionally blinkered. I attended the Waldzell Meeting as representative of the arts. If you think about a meaningful future, then you must also consider the past. Europe looks back on a long tradition; it cannot just simply cut off its roots.

**Is it doing that?**

Europe is weakening. Not just in the cultural sphere but also in the political and the economic spheres. Only if it pools its strengths, will it be strong enough for the challenges of the future, that center on globalization. Europe has to examine its culture, and rediscover its identity.

**Why, did it lose its identity?**

Yes, we are suffering from a massive loss of identity. Because culture is getting more and more reduced to a big fashion, to a lifestyle event, that is being marketed, packaged and sold.

**What is bad about ‘Aida’ being performed in front of the Pyramids or opera performances in the stone quarry?**

That the package is becoming more important than the product. But culture must stay true to its high standards, its convictions and its origins.

**Otherwise?**

Otherwise the occidental culture is at risk. I am a very liberal person and don't want to seem reactionary, but before we examine the issue of Islam or whether Turkey should join the EU, we should bethink the two pillars of our occidental culture, the Hellenistic and the Christian culture, and bring these closer together again.

**You are conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra and musical director of the opera house in Zurich. In your opinion, can music change the world?**

Music changes people who come into contact with it, certainly. Because this highly developed art form addresses levels that cannot be grasped with our mind. Emotional, spiritual levels. Why else does the last aria in the Matthäus Passion bring me to tears?

**And which music makes Franz Welsler-Möst happy?**

The sunrise choir in Haydn's 'Creation.' Medical research has shown, for example, that the hearts of people who watch an exciting opera performance beat in harmony. That plants that you play Bach to grow faster, and cows that listen to Mozart produce more milk. Why should music then not change the world?

**In case the ‘Blueprints for a Future with Meaning’ that were developed at the Waldzell Meeting, were handed over to state leaders of all continents, what music would you accompany it with?**

One of the oldest hymns of the world: “Komm, schöpfergeist, auf uns herab!” – 8<sup>th</sup> symphony by Mahler, first measure.

**Does a famous and sought after conductor like you listen to music privately as well?**

Rarely. Because one shouldn't overstrain the ear. And because music, when I think about it, rings in my mind anyway. For example, when I climb a mountain in the morning or when I sit behind the wheel in the car – I don't need to play a CD.

**What do you hear?**

Usually Bruckner and Mahler.

**Mr. Franz Welser-Möst, do you have a role model?**

In the past, I used to admire Karajan, Bernstein and Furtwängler immensely. At some point I realized that they boil water, too. That none of them can be a genius 24 hours a day.

**How did you get that scar on your forehead?**

I had a serious car accident when I was 18. At that time I did not know whether I would ever be able to walk again. I escaped death by a hair's breadth.

**How did this event influence your life?**

After that everything changed... The happy little dog became a globetrotter, someone who learned how to let go. Basically, the accident was the impetus to become conductor. I could no longer play the violin and piano due to damage to nerves on two fingers.

**Do you believe in fate since then?**

I believe in the deeper meaning of chance. Something 'falls into one's lap'. The accident, by the way, happened exactly on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Franz Schubert.

**Do you celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> of November since then?**

Yes, it has remained my second birthday. I have discovered that I not only had the accident on Schubert's death anniversary but also in the exact hour of his death.

**Ambassador of Music**

The native of Linz gained international attention with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and became musical director of the orchestra, which he directed until 1996. Already at age 30 he joined the ranks of the international top conductors. In autumn 1995 he took over the post of chief conductor at the Zurich Opera House and in the following 7 years there regularly produced up to 5 premieres per season. In September 2002 he was appointed musical director of the Cleveland Orchestra. Welser-Möst received the Gramophone Award, the Japanese Record Academy Award, as well as two Grammy nominations for his numerous CD recordings. In 2003 he was distinguished by Musical America as 'Conductor of the Year'.