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Haunting the Concert Hall: Olga Neuwirth Ghosts & Vampirs

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Olga Neuwirth's "Ghosts & Vampires" brings an intriguing proposition to Vienna's Musikverein: contemporary music can inhabit a concert institution without taking the form of a conventional concert. Presented as a multimedia installation within "Musikverein Perspektiven: Elfriede Jelinek," the work opens with a vernissage on 31 October 2026 in the Metallener Saal. Jointly produced by the Musikverein and Wien Modern.

It promises an encounter across artistic disciplines, inviting audiences to reconsider how they enter, experience and interpret a musical space. The designation "multimedia installation" is essential to understanding the event. This is not advertised as an orchestral performance or a staged opera, and approaching it with those expectations would obscure its distinctive possibilities. Instead, the format invites consideration of relationships between media, surroundings and spectatorship. The published listing does not specify the installation's individual components, so its precise audiovisual language remains to be discovered.

That openness is itself appealing: the audience arrives not with a familiar sequence of movements, but with the prospect of finding its own bearings. From a contemporary-music perspective, such a proposition shifts attention from the execution of a score towards the conditions of perception. Where does the work seem to begin? What directs the visitor's attention? How does the surrounding room influence what becomes significant? These are critical questions rather than claims about what Neuwirth's installation actually does. They identify the intellectual excitement of encountering music beyond the habits of seated, forward-facing listening.

"Ghosts & Vampires" is an exceptionally evocative title. Ghosts suggest persistence: something absent that nevertheless continues to make itself felt. Vampires suggest a different disturbance, unsettling distinctions between life and death, attraction and threat. Read as interpretative possibilities rather than a declared programme, these figures offer fertile ground for thinking about contemporary art. They encourage questions about what returns, what survives and what draws its energy from the past.

The opening on 31 October adds an atmospheric coincidence, but the title need not be reduced to seasonal entertainment. Its imaginative strength lies in ambiguity. A haunting can be intimate or historical; a vampire can be frightening, seductive or absurd. Without prescribing a single meaning, the words prepare

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visitors for an encounter in which recognition may coexist with uncertainty. Such uncertainty can be productive, making room for curiosity rather than demanding an immediate explanation.

The installation belongs to “Musikverein Perspektiven: Elfriede Jelinek,” curated by Bernhard Günther, Stephan Pauly and Claus Philipp. That framework matters because it places Neuwirth’s contribution within a wider act of artistic consideration. However, the event listing does not identify a particular Jelinek text or describe her precise contribution to this installation. It is therefore more accurate to distinguish the composer’s work from the programme’s overarching focus than to assume a specific collaboration unsupported by the published information.

Artistically, this distinction strengthens rather than diminishes the encounter. A curatorial framework can create meaningful proximity without requiring every work to illustrate the same idea. For audiences, the interest lies in exploring relationships while remaining attentive to difference: between literature and music, between an individual artwork and its institutional setting, and between what a programme announces and what direct experience may reveal.

Further presentations are listed from 31 October through 4 November, allowing the installation to extend beyond its opening occasion. This continuing presence suits an event whose appeal depends on exploration rather than the singular drama of a concert premiere. The Musikverein’s schedule identifies admission arrangements separately, including numbered tickets for the vernissage and tickets available on the day for the subsequent installation presentation.

The most attractive promise of “Ghosts & Vampires” is discovery. Its announced format asks listeners to become visitors, and visitors to bring their full attention to an unfamiliar artistic situation. Without anticipating its effects or inventing its materials, one can welcome the ambition behind this presentation: an opportunity for contemporary music to unsettle routine, stimulate interpretation and make a celebrated concert institution feel newly open to possibility.

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