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European journey of affects

Schlosskirche Bayreuth, 14.09.2026 [ENA]

The famous singer's Petr Nekoranec’s recital Viaggio in Europa, presented together with the harpsichordist Katerina Ochmanová in the Schlosskirche Bayreuth, offered precisely what the title promised: not a superficial anthology of national styles, but an intelligently conceived passage through the expressive geography of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Europe.

The programme’s guiding idea—the transformation of human feeling into vocal rhetoric—was ideally suited to Nekoranec’s distinctive artistic profile. The concert placed the listener at the crossroads of several Baroque traditions: Italian recitar cantando, English theatrical eloquence, and the heightened refinement of French lyric tragedy. The choice of repertoire was compelling because it made clear that “Baroque style” was never a single language. Rather, it was a network of vivid, sometimes sharply contrasting responses to the same fundamental question: how can the voice make emotion immediate, persuasive, and physically palpable?

In this respect, the programme’s journey from Monteverdi’s world to that of Purcell, Lully, Charpentier, Rameau, Handel, and Vivaldi had considerable dramatic force. The concert did not treat these composers as isolated monuments. Instead, it suggested a continuity of expressive ambition across national borders: the pursuit of a singing voice capable of turning text, gesture, harmony, and ornament into an experience of genuine emotional presence. The festival’s own description rightly foregrounded this shared concern with the intimate relationship between words and music, even as each national tradition developed its own musical accent.

Petr Nekoranec brought to this demanding terrain a tenor instrument of uncommon flexibility and brightness. His voice has the essential qualities required for this repertoire: a focused, silvery upper register, agility without display for its own sake, and a natural responsiveness to verbal nuance. Above all, he understands that Baroque vocal music is not merely about beautiful sound. It is about speech elevated into song.

His singing was at its most persuasive where the line could unfold with apparent spontaneity. Phrases emerged with a fine sense of direction, while ornaments functioned as extensions of meaning rather than decorative additions. This is crucial in music shaped by the doctrine of the affections: a turn, a suspension, a sudden dynamic shift, or a delicately delayed cadence can reveal far more than technical accomplishment.

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Nekoranec used such details to create a vocal narration of rare immediacy.

The Italian repertory, with its heightened sensuality and rhetorical directness, allowed him to exploit the supple, speech-like side of his artistry. In the English sphere, one sensed his affinity for Purcell's extraordinary ability to fuse song and theatre. And in the French repertoire, where emotional intensity is so often filtered through poise, dance-derived rhythm, and formal elegance, he responded with admirable stylistic discipline. The result was not a collection of vocal "numbers," but a sequence of changing emotional states: tenderness, longing, vulnerability, agitation, dignity, and finally the exhilaration of virtuosity.

Katerina Ochmanová was much more than an accompanist. Her harpsichord playing supplied the recital with a refined yet alert dramatic foundation: rhythmically alive, harmonically sensitive, and always responsive to the singer's breathing and rhetorical timing. In this kind of programme, the continuo player must be both collaborator and co-narrator, shaping the musical terrain while leaving room for the voice to inhabit it freely. Ochmanová achieved that balance with impressive assurance.

Her contribution was especially valuable in the intimate acoustic setting of the Schlosskirche. The space encouraged concentrated listening and magnified the smallest gestures of musical communication: a harmonic shadow beneath a phrase, the articulation of a dance rhythm, or a moment of suspended silence before a cadence. The concert's chamber scale therefore became an artistic advantage, bringing the listener unusually close to the delicate machinery of Baroque expression.

Viaggio in Europa was a recital of intelligence, stylistic awareness, and genuine communicative warmth. Petr Nekoranec and Katerina Ochmanová demonstrated that the emotional force of Baroque vocal music does not depend on grand operatic spectacle. It can arise, just as powerfully, from a single voice, a harpsichord, and the patient, imaginative attention to the relationship between word and sound.

At Bayreuth Baroque, this European journey became a vivid reminder that the music of Monteverdi, Purcell, Lully, Rameau, Handel, and Vivaldi remains not only historically fascinating but urgently alive: a theatre of human feeling, distilled into sound.

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