

Selecting the Cast

On Saturday 18 April, there is great excitement in the village as the selected actors will be announced. There are twenty one principal roles and two actors are chosen for each. A procession makes its way to the theatre, where, on stage, a choir and orchestra are already seated and a Bavarian television crew prepares to broadcast live the renewal of the vow of the people of Oberammergau to present every ten years a re-enactment of the last days of the life of Christ.

The vow was first made in 1633 when the village was spared from the plague. The first passion play was performed in 1634 and 2010 will be the 41st time the villagers have fulfilled their vow.



Oberammergau orchestra and choir

Who will play Jesus?

Martin Norz made the part his own in 1990 and also 2000. Many think he will play Jesus again. What goes on in Martin's mind as he awaits the announcement? Martin was 25 years old when he first accepted the role, perhaps, now 44, he is too old. There is intense rivalry in the village among the many amateur dramatic societies. The previous evening, the leaders of these had argued the case for their favourite protégés. Discussion had been heated as the director presented his choices for each role.

The service ends and crowds gather outside as slowly and dramatically the names of the principal actors are chalked onto a large board.



Frederick will play Jesus, but which Frederick? Slowly, his surname is spelt out ... Mayet! A cheer goes out, as a stunned Frederick looks on. The director has chosen new, young talent! Frederick was asked to express his initial feelings. He had very little to say. We are reminded in a big way that all of the actors are ordinary villagers. Frederick was a teenager in 2000, when he played the disciple John.

Next year, he will share the role of Jesus with Andreas Richter, who in 2000 played the part of the priest, Archelaus. Andreas will be 33 years old when he takes on the role, the same age as Jesus was when he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. We are reminded that Jesus and his disciples were young men.

Each actor will be given the freedom to interpret the part in their own way. By the time of the first performance on 15 May 2010 both young men will have grown in to their role and will take their place in a distinguished line of Oberammergau Jesus's of the past.

What of Martin Norz? This time, he will portray Judas, sharing the part with Carsten Luck, who played Judas in 2000.

Famous Families

Certain families in the village form the core of a great passion play tradition and Anton Priesinger is an example of this. Now 40 years old, this will be his fifth Passion Play season. Family members have participated in the play since 1900. Anton's grandfather played Jesus in 1950 and 1960 and produced the play in 1970. In 1990 Anton played Archelaus and in 2000 took on the major role of Judas.



Alistair congratulates Anton Priesinger

What role will he have next year? The answer is Caiaphas. Surprisingly, we find out that this is the largest speaking role in the performance. Two Antons will share the role, the other being Anton Burkhart who played Jesus in 2000.

Two ladies produced wondrous performances, both playing Mary and also Mary Magdalene in the previous two passion play seasons.

Next year, Ursula Burkhart and Andrea Hecht, now both approaching 50 years of age will share the role of Mary. Two very excited young ladies, Barbara Dobner and Eva Reiser, both in their early twenties, will take on their first principal role and share the part of Mary Magdalene.

There is no A and B cast. Lots are drawn to see who will play in the prestigious premier performance. One will play in the first performance, the other will play in the highly emotional last performance.



There are an additional 120 larger and smaller speaking parts in the play.

Altogether, more than 2,400 villagers will take part. The oldest expected participant was born in 1916 and participated in the 1922 performance. Next year, God willing, will be his 11th Passion Play season! The play is a powerful motivating life force. Many more people die in the years following a play, than immediately preceding. It is not unusual for mothers to bring babes in arms on to stage with them so that they can later boast their participation only a few days or weeks old!

During the summer of 2009 the villagers "will get in the mood" for next year!

The village is presenting a musical play about the history of the village. Called "The Plague" the first of several performances will take place in the Passion Play theatre on 3 July. The intention is to use this series of performances to try out some new ideas which may be incorporated into next year's main event. Rehearsals begin in earnest in the autumn and will continue daily through the winter months, when the village will be enveloped in snow!

Next year, the Oberammergau Passion Play season will commence on Saturday 15 May ending 102 performances later on Sunday 3 October 2010.