

EUROPEAN HERITAGE AWARDS CEREMONY

Burgtheater, 5 May 2014, 20.00 hrs

Speech by Plácido DOMINGO

President of Europa Nostra

This is such a special night for me. I feel like I am welcoming you to my home town: Vienna! How can I describe what Vienna means to me? Over the years it has become my muse...my temple...my harbour. And YOU, the Viennese public, you are the most generous public in the world!

This is indeed a very special night for me. For the first time, I appear on the stage of one of Vienna's many theaters, not as an artist, but as the President of a European organisation with such a symbolic name – EUROPA NOSTRA...OUR EUROPE. Our mission is to give a VOICE to Europe's amazing cultural heritage: tangible heritage - like the stunning architecture and the famous Klimt frescos of the Burgtheater... or intangible heritage - like the immortal music which was just performed for us by The Philharmonics.

Let me first praise our award winners. We are so proud of your achievements. We know that behind each award, there is the dedication and team-work of so many professionals and volunteers... so many competent and passionate men and women who care for our cultural heritage...who have managed to breathe a new life, give a new future to Europe's historic monuments and sites. Through your commitment, you have embodied Europa Nostra's ideals. We are indebted to you, we admire you and tonight we celebrate your success!
(applause)

And is there a better way to celebrate your success, especially here in Vienna, than through music? Music performed by the moving voices of the legendary Vienna Boys' Choir and the children's choir Superar. SUPERAR....What a wonderful Spanish verb...TO SURPASS...TO SURMOUNT...TO PREVAIL...what a great name for a great initiative supported



The Voice of
Cultural Heritage
in Europe

La Voix du
patrimoine culturel
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by the ERSTE Stiftung! An initiative which uses music to open the hearts and minds of the young, and to enrich their lives and give them hope for the future.

And thank you, my dear friends from The Philharmonics. It is always a real treat to listen to you! Your "K.u.K Rhapsody" has proven to us so vividly that many different cultures and sounds can produce a beautiful and harmonious melody! Just as the poetic play of lights and colours created by the Viennese artist Victoria Coeln has enchanted this theater and our senses.

Many thanks to all of you for coming - from all over Austria and all over Europe - to the Burgtheater for our celebration of the "Heritage of Europe"...the "Sound of Europe" ...and... the "Colour of Europe".

This evening is indeed a celebration of "the best of the best" in the field of heritage. But this is also a perfect occasion to address the bigger picture, the bigger issues.

(short pause)

We live in an age of great challenges...of great transformations.....

an age in which the core values of the European project are questioned, both inside *and* outside Europe.

There is a lot of fear and anger, in us and around us:

....

because many people today are facing hard times...

...because too many of our young Europeans cannot find a job...

But there is also hope! And this is what I wish to focus on tonight.

Europe has a great asset that is still underestimated and thus underused. This is our art, our heritage, our culture. Europe is so much more than a geographical entity, an economic partnership or a military alliance. Europe is a beautiful symphony of cultures! And I am convinced that by drawing from the “soft power” of its cultures, Europe will prevail: SUPERAR!

But to prevail, we have to give Europe a new drive. We must find a new way of expressing Europe’s core values, a new language, a new melody, a ‘New Narrative for Europe’, as we have been invited to do by the European Parliament and by President Barroso. We must formulate the right arguments, find the words that inspire and instill positive emotions to help European citizens reconnect with the European ideal.

Can we not perceive Europe as a huge concert hall...and us, the Europeans, as a grand orchestra and choir? Are we not an impressive and powerful musical ensemble - with talented players and singers from all backgrounds and cultures -, that resonates across the Globe?

Over the years we have learnt to listen more carefully and adjust to each other’s voices..., we have learnt to seek harmony within our diverse expressions and views..., and to regard our diversity as our richness and source of mutual inspiration. We have indeed learnt to play a European symphony that continuously evolves; a symphony which is constantly enriched by new instruments, new melodies and new arrangements. But we have to work hard on it, again and again, until we get it right. We will make mistakes. We may play out of tune; we may hit a wrong note or get the timing wrong. But once the musicians start feeling the rhythm, the timbre and the pulse of their fellow musicians... once they become united by the joy of their interplay, the magic comes to life. I have experienced this so many times in my life!

Let us however not forget the vital role of the conductor! Just like every orchestra or choir needs the enabling leadership of an inspiring conductor, Europe and Europeans need visionary and committed leaders. Leaders who seek to bring Europeans

closer together and not further apart...leaders who know how to listen to the aspirations and voices of the young generation...and who motivate us to employ all our talents in furthering the European project.

We are therefore honoured by the presence tonight of eminent Austrian members of the European Parliament and also of Minister Ostermayer. Thank you for sharing our belief that investing in art and heritage is a sound investment for our society....for our economy....for our future! And thank you for supporting us in promoting culture and its benefits in Europe as a whole.

Madam Commissioner, Dear Androulla,

It has been a real joy to conduct - together with you - our "European Heritage Awards Ceremony". We have done this in Amsterdam...in Lisbon...last year in Athens...and now in Vienna.

Tonight, I wish to thank you, on behalf of all Europeans who care for culture. You have been our effective Ambassador in Brussels. You have shown vision and determination in promoting the "Creative face" and the "Creative potential" of Europe. And even in these difficult times, you have managed to secure more funding for culture in Europe! Can there be better proof that the right woman in the right place can make a real difference? Let us hope that many more European leaders will be inspired by the Power of your Example!

(applause)

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As an artist and as the President of EUROPA NOSTRA, I believe that the key to understanding Europe is through our Culture...Our Symphony of Cultures.

Our "chorus" is held together by shared ethical and aesthetical values, and also by our mutual respect and trust. We draw our strength and inspiration from all those cultural treasures which we inherited from past generations. They form the fertile soil on which our vitality, our creativity and our success as a continent will continue to grow.

This is why we need an ambitious strategy for cultural heritage in Europe. We congratulate Commissioner Vassiliou on her initiative to prepare the first ever Communication by the European Commission on Cultural Heritage as a Resource for Europe. Europa Nostra and all heritage professionals and volunteers in Europe have high expectations from this policy document and stand ready to work with the European Union on its implementation.

We also urge the new European Parliament to give culture its rightful place in Europe's future priorities!

Dear Friends,

Let us embrace Europe's multitude of cultures and let us celebrate their creative interaction.

...As engaged citizens of our individual cities, regions and countries...

But also as engaged citizens of OUR EUROPE!

Thank you!