

RALF PLEGER

DIRECTOR, FILMMAKER

A captivating storyteller acclaimed for his striking imagery and deep feeling for fantasy, Ralf Pleger is among today's most innovative filmmakers.

He has earned international recognition for his music films and portraits of major cultural figures, including the Emmy-nominated *Wagnerwahn – The Wagner Files* (2013), *The Beethoven Files* (2012), and the ECHO Klassik Award-winning *Tchaikovsky – Confessions of a Composer* (2015). He has often created his films for theatre, opera and multimedia collaborations, a hallmark of his determination to combine entertainment with unorthodox narrative forms and profound artistic experiences.

Pleger is currently working on an international co-production starring Egyptian soprano Fatma Said, exploring the world of Mohammed Abdelwahab, Egypt's most famous 20th-century composer, which will be released in 2027.

His film *The Florence Foster Jenkins Story*, starring Joyce DiDonato in the role of 'the worst singer of all time', won the Jury Prize for Originality at the 2017 International Festival Golden Prague, in recognition of its 'original and unconventional production techniques'.

Pleger explores new visual formats, using holography and interactive settings in directing the 'Art Lab' scenes of the international TV series *The Art of Museums* (Arte 2019). His pilot episode about the Museo del Prado in Madrid was awarded Best Documentary at the Gulf of Naples Independent Film Festival in 2019.

During the pandemic, Pleger created the concert film '*Cameron Carpenter at Konzerthaus Berlin*' (2020) and devised dramaturgy and lighting for a staged performance of Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* at Konzerthaus Berlin, with Philippe Jaroussky and Anna Prohaska (2021). His 2024 Arte series *Schrecklich schöne Bausünden (Terribly Beautiful Eyesore)* examined the stories of 'ugly' architectural and sculptural works, receiving the 2025 German Prize for Monument Protection.

Alongside his film work, he is an established stage director. His production of *In War & Peace – Harmony Through Music*, created for Joyce DiDonato, toured more than 40 renowned concert halls and theatres worldwide between 2016 and 2019, including Carnegie Hall New York, Teatro Real Madrid, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées Paris, Wiener Konzerthaus, Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing, Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires and Emirates Palace Auditorium in Abu Dhabi.

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MAESTROARTS

In collaboration with visual artist Alexander Polzin, Pleger directed Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* at Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels in 2019 and at Teatro Comunale di Bologna in 2020, praised as 'a model example of staging Wagner for the new millennium' (AISE News). Their partnership continued with Mozart's *Mitridate* (2022), co-created with choreographer Fernando Melo at Malmö Opera and Royal Danish Opera. iScene Denmark called the production a 'dream come true' that offered a 'great sensory experience'. This new type of collaboration between director, visual artist and choreographer, with the three artforms intrinsically connected, redefines the creation of opera and inspires Pleger's future projects.

Born in 1967 in a small town in Brandenburg, East Germany, Pleger studied Musicology, Art History and Italian in Berlin and Milan. Freelancing as a dramaturge, he contributed to various international opera productions, including for Berlin State Opera Unter den Linden and Innsbrucker Festwochen, while simultaneously working as an author and director.

His earlier films include *The Maestro-Maker* (2008), a portrait of Finnish conducting teacher Jorma Panula, awarded the Czech Crystal Award at the 2008 International Festival Golden Prague; *Handel – The Film* (2008), which aired on the First German Television networks; *Cape of Good Voices* (2009), documenting young peoples' unapologetic passion for opera singing in the provinces of South Africa, and featuring a surprise appearance of Desmond Tutu; *China's New Odeons* (2012); and the four-part series *Vocal Battle on the High Seas* (2013), about a singing competition on a cruise ship.

He has also created a range of film portraits combining musical topics with narrative and visual elements, including regular collaborations with ensemble *Salut Salon* (2010, 2015, 2025); *Horsepower Performances* (2010), following the adventures of pianist Markus Groh; and *Drama Queens* (2012), featuring Joyce DiDonato, fashion queen Vivienne Westwood and crime writer Donna Leon.

Pleger has directed music videos including *We Care For You* (2021) commissioned by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, to a song by Ute Spiegel. In 2022 he directed Gramophone-winning viol ensemble Phantasm in a performance of Bach's *Fantasia in G*, set in a simulated space station.

Music lies at the heart of Pleger's entire output. Rejecting borders between artistic forms and categories, he blends techniques from different genres to bring stories to life in fresh ways.