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Twenty-Four Hours in the Life of a Woman

Reichenau Festspiele, 06.07.2026 [ENA]

The Festspiele Reichenau staging of 24 Stunden aus dem Leben einer Frau in the Neuer Spielraum offers an exquisitely focused, emotionally charged encounter with Stefan Zweig's famous novella—an intimate chamber piece that feels both timeless and acutely contemporary. Under the direction of Gordon Greenberg, with a dramatisation by Thomas Kahry and Greenberg himself, the production becomes a finely tuned exploration.

It is the exploration of risk, memory and the volatile power of a single day to upend an entire life. At the conceptual heart of the evening lies Zweig's central question: how can one ever "win" life if one never dares to risk it? The performance takes this line not as an abstract motto, but as a felt tension that runs through every exchange and gesture. In the protected frame of a conversation with a stranger, Mrs. C. begins to recall a decisive moment from her past—a twenty-four-hour whirlwind in which she experiences more love, danger, humanity, betrayal and insight than in all the preceding decades.

The staging honours this memory framework, allowing the narrative to unfold as an act of confession and self-interrogation rather than a simple flashback. Gordon Greenberg's direction reveals a keen sensitivity to Zweig's psychological precision. He and Thomas Kahry translate the "vibrierender Text" into an atmospheric theatrical experience that retains the novella's subtle interiority while opening it to the sensual possibilities of stage, sound and movement. Scenes are shaped with an elegant economy: nothing feels superfluous, yet the emotional transitions are given time to breathe.

Moments of silence and hesitation are treated with the same care as spoken lines, making the performance feel like a continuous negotiation between speech and the unsayable. Alena Hoffmann's work on stage and costume design provides a crucial visual framework. The space of the Neuer Spielraum is transformed into a milieu that suggests both the safety of a "geschützter Rahmen" for Mrs. C.'s recollections and the seductive, dangerous atmosphere of the gambling world in which her fateful encounter takes place. Costumes trace shifts in social status and inner state: Mrs. C.'s wardrobe subtly mirrors her movement from controlled, respectable distance to emotional exposure and, finally, to an almost stark clarity in retrospect.

The design invites the audience into a dance of surfaces and depths, reflecting the production's invitation "zum Tanz, zum Wagnis, zum Leben." Julia Wagner's dramaturgy and work as regieassistenz help to maintain the piece's delicate balance between narrative drive and thematic resonance. She ensures that the

Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

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production's structural elegance never slips into mere formalism, keeping Zweig's questions about moral judgement, empathy and the weight of single decisions firmly anchored in the characters' lived experience. As part of the production team together with Tina Schmidt, Wagner also supports the cohesive integration of technical elements—light and mask.

The cast, limited to four actors, forms a tightly interwoven ensemble. At its centre stands Julia Stemberger as Mrs. C., delivering a performance of remarkable nuance and emotional intelligence. Long associated with Reichenau, Stemberger brings deep familiarity with Zweig's world to the role, embodying a woman whose carefully constructed life is cracked open by a brief, intense encounter. Her Mrs. C. moves convincingly from guarded self-possession to raw vulnerability and, ultimately, to lucid self-knowledge, making the act of telling her story the evening's true dramatic engine.

Opposite her, Nils Arztmann's Teo embodies the pull of obsession and risk with compelling immediacy. His portrayal captures the mix of charm, fragility and danger that draws Mrs. C. out of her habitual orbit, revealing how quickly compassion can blur into attraction and how moral clarity can be clouded by the urgency of another's need. Sona MacDonald as Agnes offers a grounded, resonant counterpoint, her presence articulating the social and emotional frameworks within which Mrs. C.'s actions will be judged. MacDonald's seasoned stage authority lends weight to moments of counsel, confrontation and quiet observation.

Alex Kapl, in various roles completes the ensemble with a performance that moves fluidly between character and atmosphere. As pianist and figure within the gambling world, he underscores the piece's musical and rhythmic dimensions, providing a living soundtrack to the shifting emotional tides. His contributions help to frame Teo and Mrs. C. not as isolated psychological cases, but as individuals caught in a larger social and sensory environment.

Taken together, the artistic team—Greenberg, Kahry, König, Wagner, Schmidt and the four actors—succeeds in making 24 Stunden aus dem Leben einer Frau what it promises to be: an "atmosphärisches Erlebnis," a carefully crafted yet passionately felt encounter with the moment when life's apparent stability gives way to risk. In the intimate setting of the Neuer Spielraum, the audience is invited not only to witness Mrs. C.'s confession, but to reflect on their own thresholds of courage and caution. It is a production that honours Zweig's fine psychological instrument while amplifying its resonance for a present in which the decision to risk—to feel, to act, to step beyond the familiar—remains as perilous and as necessary as ever.

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Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
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