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## **Villa Aurora – Pipe Organ**

### **Inaugural Concert**

Sunday, 5 December 2010, 7 pm

Villa Aurora in Los Angeles

Anrede,

*„Ich vergesse nicht, daß Sie viel Schlimmeres durchgemacht haben, dem ich entging; aber das haben Sie nicht gekannt: Das Herzasthma des Exils, die Entwurzelung, die nervösen Schrecken der Heimatlosigkeit. ... Langsam, langsam setzten und ordneten sich dann die Dinge. Erste Häuslichkeiten fanden sich, in Frankreich, dann in der Schweiz; ... Dann kam der Ruf an die amerikanische Universität, und auf einmal, in dem riesigen freien Land, war nicht mehr die Rede von „Takt“, es gab nichts als offene, unverschüchterte, deklarierte Freudwilligkeit, freudig, rückhaltlos ... Ich selbst ... habe mir an dieser herrlichen, zukunftsatmenden Küste mein Haus errichtet, in dessen Schutz ich mein Lebenswerk zu Ende führen möchte.“<sup>1</sup>*

*I do not forget that you have suffered much worse, which I was spared; but there is something which you have not known: the asthmatic heart of exile, the uprooting, the anxious suffering of having no place to call home ... slowly, slowly the first things became established and ordered. The first home comforts were discovered, in France, then in Switzerland ... Then came the call to the American university, and, suddenly, in this vast free country, people were no longer talking of “tact”, there was nothing but a free, unintimidated*

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Mann, Warum ich nicht nach Deutschland zurückkehre, aus *Thomas Mann: Meine Zeit. Essays 1945 – 1955* (Fischer, 1997), S. 34/35

*openly-declared will to appreciate life, joyful and unreserved ... I myself built my home on this wonderful coast, which **breathes future**, and within the refuge of this home I intend to complete my life's work.* <sup>2</sup> No one less than Thomas Mann said this about the Californian Pacific coast.

The situation for **Marta and Lion Feuchtwanger** was similar: they decided not to return to Germany from a trip to the United States in 1932. Thanks to the intervention of influential friends, they finally made it to Los Angeles in 1941 after a long journey through various European countries; and in 1943 they took up residence in the Villa Aurora.

**“Aurora”, the red light of dawn** – what a name for a villa, especially the villa of someone living in exile! How luminous and life-affirming the Californian Pacific coast must have seemed to a Jewish artist who had just escaped the darkness and horror of tyranny in his native Germany?!

At the time, **Lion Feuchtwanger** was **one of the most-read German authors**; his historical novels (including “Power/Jew Süß”, “Success” and “The Opermanns”) were extremely popular, especially abroad. Lion died in 1958, whilst his wife Marta lived on for almost 30 years and administered his legacy.

Let us return once again to the early years: The joy at this second chance to live was reflected in the Feuchtwanger's lifestyle during the 1940s. Marta and Lion Feuchtwanger provided an “open house” for a **large circle of friends** in California; here, people met to talk and attended musical soirées, discussions and parties. The list of guests is impressive: the Manns, the Werfels, Bertolt Brecht, Arnold Schönberg, Kurt Weill, Hanns Eisler, Alfred Döblin, Ludwig Marcuse, Bruno Frank, Albert Einstein, Fritz Lang, Charly Chaplin and Marlene

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Mann, Warum ich nicht nach Deutschland zurückkehre, from *Thomas Mann: Meine Zeit. Essays 1945 – 1955* ( Fischer, 1997), pp. 34/35; unofficial translation

Dietrich – to name just a few. So it is no wonder that the Villa Aurora has been described as the “Weimar of German exile”<sup>3</sup>.

It was in large part due to the intervention of the Friends and Supporters of Villa Aurora that this place - a place of such importance in the context of German-European exile - has been preserved. The **Villa Aurora, this small corner of the world, which lives and breathes Germany’s literary and intellectual history**, is still today what the Feuchtwangers made it - - **an international meeting place for artists**.

**Since December 1995, the Villa Aurora has been an artists’ academy**, artists’ residence and research institute, a guesthouse and centre for transatlantic dialogue. Every year, artists and intellectuals from across the world spend several months as guests in this house on the “coast which breathes future” as it was described by Thomas Mann. More than 250 grant recipients have since stayed, worked and lived here. I wish to thank all those whose initiative and enthusiasm made the Villa Aurora to what it is today.

**Not all émigrés** who found refuge here in Los Angeles in the 1930s and 1940s **were as prosperous as the Feuchtwangers...** that is something easily forgotten when contemplating this delightful and elegant villa.

And yet this house is the last cultural monument to German and European exile; it is the only such monument available. This location has a particular role to play in making clear to future generations that we have learnt from history and that the émigrés driven out by the Nazi regime are part of our own culture.

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<sup>3</sup> Harold von Hofe, former Director of the Feuchtwanger Institute at the University of Southern California

This unique site of cultural heritage recalls German and European exile. And it is impressive that for the past 15 years now, the Villa Aurora has served writers, musicians, composers, film makers and photographers **again** as a temporary place of work.

The essential difference of this cultural organization to other such institutions is its presence in two locations: Los Angeles and Berlin. Activities at the Villa Aurora focus in particular on **cultural exchange between Berlin and Los Angeles**, Germany and the USA – ties for which post-war Germany owes such an infinite debt of gratitude.

The Villa Aurora today deliberately cultivates close contacts with the cultural institutions of Los Angeles: the Feuchtwanger Memorial Library at the University of Southern California, Goethe-Institut Los Angeles, German American Cultural Society (Los Angeles), J. Paul Getty Trust Los Angeles and Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles ... This is a long list and I could continue. The list of German institutions with which the Villa Aurora has ties is equally impressive.

The desire to specifically reinforce **transatlantic relations** ties in with **Germany's self-image as a "nation of culture"**. Only a lively cultural exchange and dialogue within the framework of an artists' academy can build sustainable bonds and can create a **network amongst opinion-formers in both societies**. A collection of interchangeable events will have no lasting effect. After all, it is artists and intellectuals who, through the power of their ideas, pioneer development in a society - including economic development. Artists form an avant-garde in the best sense.

Two nights ago we opened the exhibition "Transatlantic Impulses - 15 Years Villa Aurora" at the Academy of Arts in Berlin - a retrospective of the work of this artists' academy. The Villa Aurora Forum in Berlin has dedicated itself to enhancing the **visibility** of this **"cultural exchange"**.

The Forum in Berlin presents the artistic work of the grant recipients with exhibitions, film screenings, readings, concerts and publications.

Receiving a grant from the Villa Aurora is a particular accolade for any artist. Many of the grant recipients have since made names for themselves in the German and international art and literature scenes. There is thus every reason to celebrate this 15th birthday of the Villa Aurora as we know it today.

And I am the more delighted that on the occasion of the Villa Aurora's 15th anniversary as an artists' residence, also the organ has finally been fully restored - thanks to many generous donations from Germany and California! And I am here tonight to express a heartfelt gratitude to all those benefactors!

**Today, on 5 December**, the anniversary of the opening in 1995, the sounds of the Villa Aurora organ, will sound again at a celebratory concert. We have already heard and will later hear more works from composers and artists who were frequent guests of the Feuchtwangers in the historic villa during their exile.

The organ in the Villa Aurora was built in 1928/29. I learned that it was rather common at that time to include an organ in ones house – as a means of entertainment to the owners and their guests. What a wonderful idea! The organ is quite similar to the film and theatre organs of the silent movies era - its wide range of registers and sounds leaves the player with virtually unlimited possibilities of effects.

In the 1940s the organ was played by famous German emigrants such as Bruno Walther, Hanns Eisler, Kurt Weill, Bert Brecht, Arnold Schönberg and Ernst Toch as well as the house's owner **herself**, Marta Feuchtwanger. For the last 50 years the instrument remained silent and went into utter disrepair.

I hope you will forgive me if I do not go into detailed descriptions of pneumatic and electronic mechanisms of the now well-functioning organ. I am so pleased that on the occasion of the Villa Aurora's 15th anniversary as an artists' residence we will again be able to experience the authentic acoustic impressions of the time of Eisler, Schönberg and Chaplin.

**Thomas Mann bid farewell to America after 15 years**, since he found that his "already very advanced age" gave an "increased urgency to an almost anxious desire to return home to the old earth, in which I would like to be laid to rest<sup>4</sup>. Lion Feuchtwanger remained in California and died there, as did Marta, who outlived him by many years. In the course of their life in exile, the Villa Aurora had in the end become what their friend Thomas Mann described as a "true castle by the sea".

**Even for today's generation**, being here is certainly not something to be taken for granted –not something which all of us take for granted or which could be taken for granted until relatively recently.

**Angela Merkel**, our current Federal Chancellor, for example, described her relationship to America in the following way during her speech to Congress in November 2009:

"The land of unlimited opportunity – for a long time it was impossible for me to reach. The Wall, barbed wire and the order to shoot those who tried to leave limited my access to the free world. So I had to create my own picture of the United States from films and books, some of which were smuggled in from the West by relatives. What did I see and what did I read? What was I passionate about? I was passionate about the American dream – the opportunity for everyone to be successful, to make it in life through their own personal effort. I,

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Mann, Warum ich nicht nach Deutschland zurückkehre, from Thomas Mann: Meine Zeit. Essays 1945 – 1955 ( Fischer, 1997), pp. 34/35; unofficial translation

like many other teenagers, was passionate about a certain brand of jeans that were not available in the GDR and which my aunt in West Germany regularly sent to me. I was passionate about the vast American landscape which seemed to breathe the very spirit of freedom and independence. Immediately in 1990 my husband and I traveled for the first time in our lives to America, to California. We will never forget our first glimpse of the Pacific Ocean. It was simply gorgeous. I was passionate about all of these things and much more, even though until 1989 America was simply out of reach for me. And then, on November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall came down. The border that for decades had divided a nation into two worlds was now open.“ (Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel before the United States Congress on 3 November 2009 in Washington)

We have recently celebrated the **20th anniversary of German reunification** - and we are grateful for the fact that reaching this magnificent coast has become easier and can now be taken for granted more than was the case only a few years ago.

I hope that, in the years to come, the Villa Aurora continues to enjoy a rich and lasting German-US cultural exchange, with a team which is both creative and reliable. And I wish the grant recipients a stimulating and inspiring stay at what is possibly the most important landmark of German-European exile.

**Johann Sebastian Bach** is quoted to have said: “There is nothing to playing the organ. You only have to hit the right notes at the right time - and the instrument plays itself.” I am sure that the wonderfully gifted and talented Christoph Bull will teach us differently. His vibrant and electrifying playing will echo the sounds and concerts of the exiled German musicians who once played the very same instrument.

After all, it is the **artists, the creative minds**, who **hold so much promise** for many of us, who **look to the future and provide new impetus** through their work - inspired by the **atmosphere of the** “coast which breathes future”.

I would like to thank all those who worked at the restoration of the organ. And most importantly I wish to thank those whose generous donations made the restoration of Villa Aurora’s organ possible! Earlier I learned from a friend that the best thing that can happen to an organ is - **to be played!** Let’s be entertained – let’s hear the beautifully restored organ of Marta and Lion Feuchtwanger!

Thank you very much.