



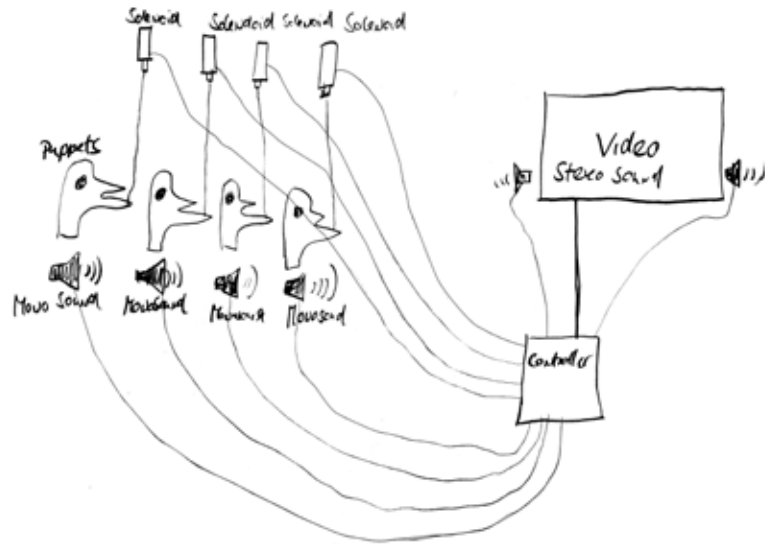
Felix Burger

SWAN HOOD

Little Boy's
Salvation
Show

ICON

This publication features film images, puppets, paintings, and all lyrics from Felix Burger's mechanical theater production »Swanhood - Little Little Boy's Salvation Show« which is shown from July 23 to October 4, 2026, at the Richard Wagner Museum in Bayreuth on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Bayreuth Festival and the 50th anniversary of the museum.



SWAN HOOD

Little Boy's Salvation Show

Written, produced, and directed
Felix Burger

Co-directed and videographie
Lion Bischof

Starring
Nicklas Hoffmann as »Swanboy«

Sounddesign and recording
Benedikt David

Ina Nikolow (Headstart Records)

Technical programming
Kees Redijk

Setconstruction and organisation

Arthur Beur
Philipp Schmidt

Recording »Gralsglockenklavier«

Agnes Ecker

Voices »Beasts of Ancient Mystery«

Korbinian und Olga

Lizza Schmitten

Harry Weggeli

Mechanical theater with talking puppets,
film, objects, and paintings.
Total playing time: 34 minutes loop

**... IF STUFFIES COULD TALK ...
FELIX BURGER'S WORK IN
BAYREUTH.**

Burger's works rarely take the form of single, autonomous exhibition pieces. Instead, he develops walk-in stage sets and microcosmic model worlds governed by deliberately destabilized systems of rules. His medial language is not confined to a specific genre: film, multi-channel audio arrangements, performative interventions, and mechanical figures function as recurring components within his installation-based settings. Narrative structures are fragmented and brought into correspondence with the spatial elements of the work. Conceptual considerations and formal criteria influence one another reciprocally. Traditional role models, cultural heritage, sociological power structures, and biographically shaped perceptions of the artist—often fragmentary images from his childhood—are dissected and rearranged into new constellations. The resulting environments form absurd intermediate worlds in which formal references to film history, fairground trash aesthetics, and operatic excess overlap. For the work »Swanhood – Little Boy's Salvation Show«, conceived by Burger at the invitation of the Richard Wagner Museum, he intertwines two visual and semantic systems that at first glance could hardly appear more opposed: the mythological iconography of Richard Wagner and Burger's subjective reconstructions of childhood fears, fantasies, and desires. From these elements, he forms a fairy tale ...

A SMALL BOY STANDS BEFORE HIS FATHER'S CLOSED STUDY AND LISTENS. INSIDE, HIS FATHER WORKS. THROUGH THE DOOR, FRAGMENTS OF SOUND DRIFT OUT, HALF-HEARD, HALF-SUNG: PURE ... PURE IN THE SWAN ... BEFORE ANY GUILT ... BORN IN A NONVIOLENT SPACE ... A

TERRESTRIAL AXIS ... INTO THE SKY ... FREE FROM ALL LINEAGE ... FREE ... FREE ... THEY TUMBLE, FADE, RETURN, OVERLAPPING AND BREAKING APART, FRAGMENTS OF WORDS AND TONES, ECHOING, DISSOLVING, RISING AGAIN. VULNERABLE ... NOT WEAK ... NO RESISTANCE ... AXIS BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH ... AUTONOMY... INDEPENDENCE ... DETACHMENT ... SO SHALL HE BE, MY DEAR SWAN! THE WORD SWAN, APPEARING LIKE A REFRAIN. AROUND THIS CREATURE, EVERYTHING SEEMS TO TURN; IT BECOMES THE SILENT CENTER OF THE FATHER'S INTENSE CONCENTRATION. THE FIGURE OF THE SWAN FASCINATES THE BOY. BACK IN HIS OWN ROOM, HE MAKES A DECISION: HE NO LONGER WANTS TO BE A CHILD, BUT A SWAN—THE VERY SWAN AROUND WHICH EVERYTHING REVOLVES! TO GIVE HIS IMPENDING TRANSFORMATION AUTHORITY, HE SUMMONS HIS FAVORITE STUFFED ANIMALS AS A JURY. WOLF [THE FIRE DRAGON], FLITZI [THE CHAMELEON], HERBERT [THE MANATEE], AND MIKEY [THE BABY DINOSAUR] ARE TO TEST THE BOY'S SWAN-LIKE APTITUDE IN FOUR TRIALS BEFORE THE TRANSFORMATION CAN BE COMPLETED: **FIRST TRIAL - PURITY. THE BOY BEGINS AN EXCESSIVE**

WASHING RITUAL. HE SCRUBS SKIN AND HAIR, REPEATING THE MOTION AND INTENSIFYING IT. THE STUFFED ANIMALS RESPOND WITH DISAPPROVAL. WHAT IS DEMANDED IS NOT BODILY CLEANLINESS, BUT A STATE OF INNER PURITY. **SECOND TRIAL - VULNERABILITY. THE BOY PARTICIPATES IN A STAGED MEDIEVAL TOURNAMENT. RIDING A HOBBY HORSE, HE JOUSTS AGAINST A DARK KNIGHT. HE WOBLES REPEATEDLY BUT DOES NOT FALL; HIS RESISTANCE IS ENTIRELY PASSIVE. THE JURY REMAINS DISSATISFIED. ONLY A FINAL, RITUALIZED BLOW LIFTS HIM FROM THE STEED, APPEASING THE JUDGES. **THIRD TRIAL - AXIS BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH.** THE BOY BECOMES A HUMAN CAROUSEL; HIS BODY ROTATES AS AN AXIS. GONDOLAS ARE LIFTED INTO THE SKY, THE ROTATION REMAINS STABLE, DEFYING EVERY STORM. THE STUFFED ANIMALS ACKNOWLEDGE THIS TRIAL AS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED. **FOURTH TRIAL: AUTONOMY.** THE BOY STANDS BEFORE A WHACK-A-MOLE GAME. FROM THE VARIOUS OPENINGS OF THE BOARD, NEOCLASSICAL MODEL HOUSES EMERGE ONE AFTER ANOTHER. THE HOUSES FEEL SIMULTANEOUSLY FAMILIAR AND ALIEN, EVOKING BOTH CLOSENESS AND REJECTION. THE JURY DEMANDS THE**

COMPLETE DESTRUCTION OF THE BUILDINGS, AND THE BOY HESITATES.

Felix Burger's »Swanhood - Little Boy's Salvation Show« is a film-installation work exploring the reproduction of cultural symbol systems and their ritual inscription into the body. Kinetic puppets in the exhibition space interact with a film projection, forming a dialogical apparatus. In artificially reduced images, play, ritual, and discipline intertwine into an ambivalent scenario. Starting from the figure of the swan in the Wagnerian cosmos—a charged bearer of purity, order, and salvation—the work fragments this figure in a playful manner. Burger's mechanical theater examines the mechanisms of cultural transmission, the production of obedience, and the fragility of symbolic order once it is decontextualized and enacted physically. Meanings are not deconstructed but shifted: from discourse into practice, from concept into gesture. The child appears not as a naive subject but as a precise executor of a language whose seriousness he adopts without sharing its semantic foundation. In this way, a space emerges in which myth is not explained, but performed.

While the conceptual framework of Burger's work resonates with skepticism, critical distance, and cynical exaggeration toward Wagner's absolutist operatic vision and his insistent concepts of purity and heightened mythology, the technical execution reveals an unreserved reverence for the theatricality of film and opera from past centuries. The settings abound with analog tricks, mechanical devices, revolving stages, precise lighting, handcrafted props, and a sound design constructed solely from the four tones of the »Gralsglockenpiano«. In this meticulous craftsmanship, Wagner, despite conceptual critique, attains a singular formal ennoblement, simultaneously honored, reflected upon, and subtly interrogated.

[O. Zeidler]







Prolog

Once there lived a little Boy
Who'd grown quite bored of games and joy

From father's room came sounds so fine
The singers' voices quite divine

He made a plan, both smart and bright
»I'll play the swan in noble light«

But swanhood is no easy thing
It asks for more than just a wing

A crew was formed with stitched-on grins
With bottom eyes and cotton skins

Us judges - once just toys you see
Now beasts of ancient mystery

Four trials must be passed with grace
Then little boy joins swanlike race

Kapitel I
[seht alle her wie ich mich schrubb
es steht vor euch ein sauberer Bub]

To be a swan, you must be clean
Not just in armpit, toe or spleen

No bubbled bath or foamy scrub
Will fool the room, this holy club

We seek the juice, the sacred brew
The liquids deep inside of you

1



mit Nachdruck gesprochen [#1]

You wash your body and your face
Yet inner pureness hides its place



mit mehr Nachdruck gesprochen [#2]

You wash your body and your face
Yet inner pureness hides its place



mit deutlich mehr Nachdruck gesprochen [#3]

You wash your body and your face
Yet inner pureness hides its place



dominant gesprochen [#4]

You wash your body and your face
Yet inner pureness hides its place



Kapitel II
[ich bin so klein, mein Herz ist rein
drum lass uns besser Freunde sein]

To be a swan, you must endure
All fights and trials, shy and pure

No rage or anger should you show
Though foes may strike their fiercest blow

No clash of claws, no battle's roar
You're silence on the tempest's shore



Jury simuliert gesanglich eine Trompetenfanfare,
anschliessend Ansage [feierlich gesprochen]

A gloomy night, so grim and sly
Invites you to where the shadows lie

He wants to shove you to the ground
And give your body one more round

The lances itch for their pointed play
Our tournament starts: Hipp Hipp Horray



Zwischenruf [#1]

You hold yourself firm on the horse
If you don't fall, you'll feel remorse



Zwischenruf [#2]

You hold yourself firm on the mare
Strength should not be your highest care



Zwischenruf [#3]

You hold yourself firm on the steed
That's not the right way to succeed

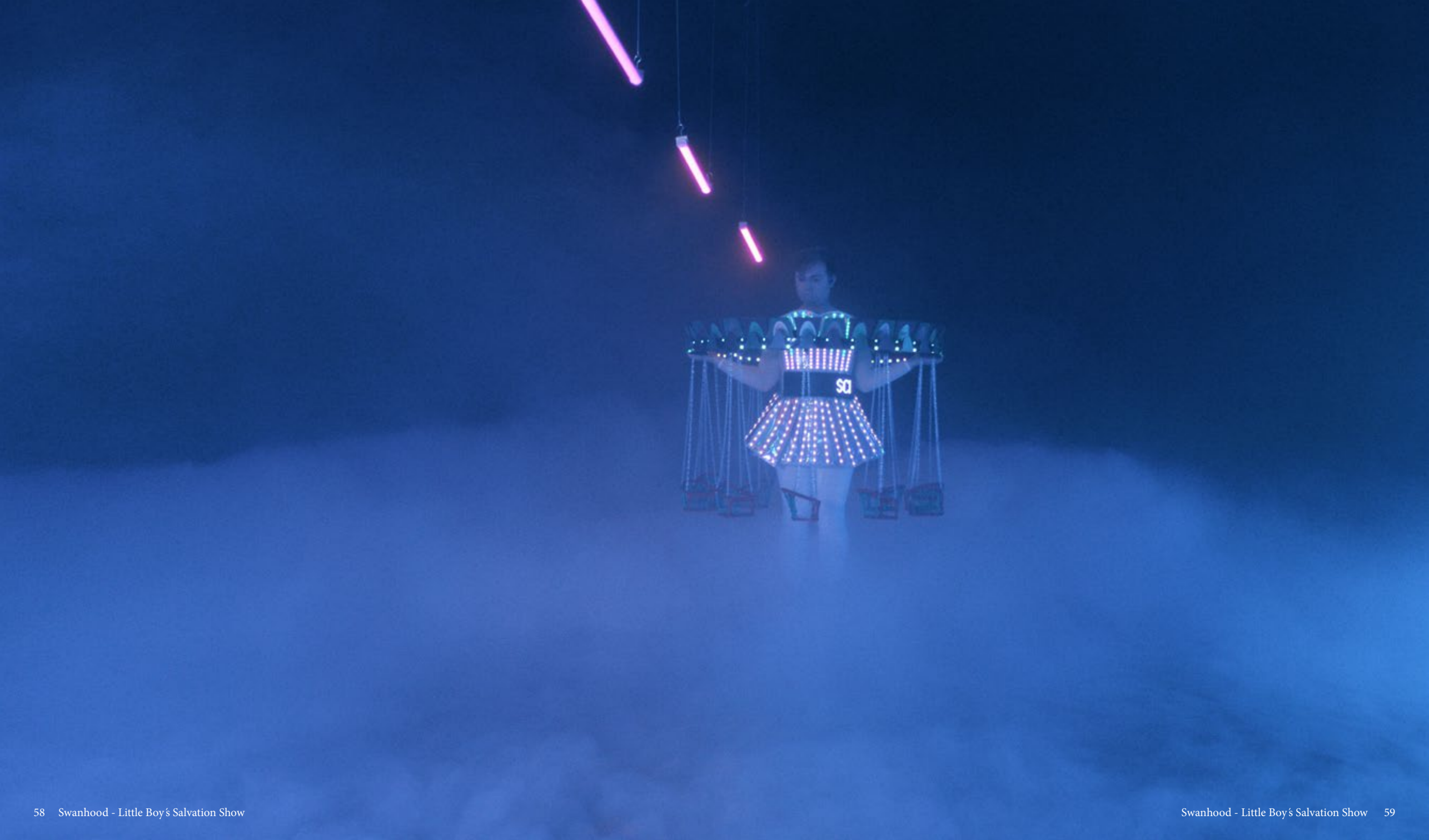


Kapitel III
[ganz schlau bin ich, und gar nicht dumm
drum dreh ich mich im Kreis herum]

To be a swan you must revolve
Straight lines disturb what you resolve

Your turning keeps the balance right
So humankind won't lose its light

Your circling brings a gentle peace
To all who come, and go and cease



Drehbefehl [#1]

Now you must prove, now you must show
So hang on tight, spin fast, spin slow

So spin around in dazzling art
And make all people smile from heart

12



Drehbefehl [#2]

Now you must prove, now you must show
So hang on tight, spin fast, spin slow

You are the axle, pure, divine,
Linking the earth to sky's bright line



Chorgesang nach der Melodie von »Risseldy, Rosseldy« treibt Karrusell an

La La La La La La La La
Laa Laa Laa Laa Laa Laa
Laa Laa Laa Laa Laa Laa
Laaa Laaa Laaa Laaa Laaa Laaa
Laaaa Laaaa Laaaa



Drehbefehl [#3]

Now you must prove, now you must show
So hang on tight, spin fast, spin slow

A storm rolls in, so wild, so tall
Yet you stand firm, you never fall



Kapitel IV

[sein Angebot ist furchtbar lieb
doch meine Seele ist kein Dieb]

To be a swan, you must unbind
The veins that hold the common mind

Forget the house from which you came
Family ties are chains of shame

No force shall steer your lonely art
You float apart, a sealed-off heart



Frage der Jury

Your father shines, the brightest star
his aura lights both near and far

He seeks to keep his legacy
and walk with fame and dignity

We feel the suspense, the tension runs high
How do you react, what's your reply?



Nachfrage der Jury mit Nachdruck [#1]

We feel the suspense, the tension runs high
How do you react, what's your reply?



Nachfrage der Jury mit leichter Aggression [#2]

We feel the suspense, the tension runs high
How do you react, what's your reply?



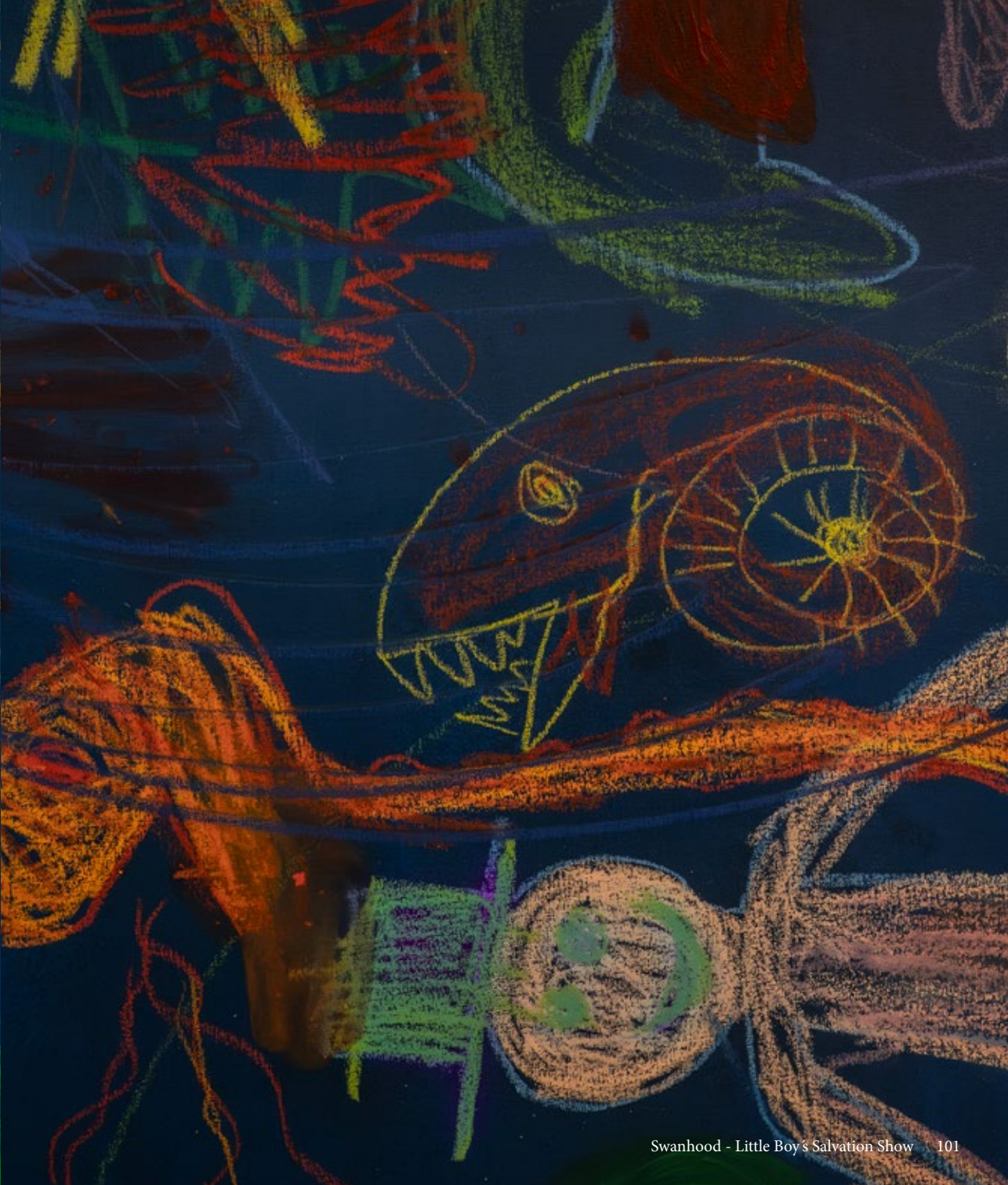
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We feel the suspense, the tension runs high
How do you react, what's your reply?













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Impressum

Conception publication

Felix Burger

Grafikdesign

Vincent Freitag

Richard Wagner Museum
mit Nationalarchiv und Forschungsstätte
der Richard-Wagner-Stiftung Bayreuth
Wahnfriedstraße 2 / D 95444 Bayreuth
www.wagnermuseum.de

ICON Verlag Hubert Kretschmer
Türkenstraße 60 UG / D 80799 München
+49 / (0)89 1234530
www.iconverlag.de

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The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie. Detailed bibliographic data are available on the internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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Felix Burger - **ICON** 2026





ISBN 454938212458