

## Lifestyle | Features



Owner Susanne Schreiber (right) watches as a customer shows her antigen virus test upon entering Schreiber's hairdressing salon in Vienna. — AFP photos



A hairdresser and her customer wear FFP2 protective face masks in a hairdressing salon in Vienna.



## Austrians rush to get haircuts but only after a test

Austria's hairdressing salons were among the businesses reopening on Monday as the country's third virus lockdown eases but a negative COVID test result is now a prerequisite for a visit to the barber. Schools, shops and museums are also opening for the first time since late December and school pupils also have to be tested twice a week to attend classes. Brisk demand was seen at the various public

virus testing stations set up by Vienna city authorities.

Even at the recently installed center in the city's famous Schoenbrunn Palace, extra slots had been made available in anticipation of high demand. Welcoming her first clients in weeks, Viennese hairdresser Susanne Schreiber said: "On the one hand I feel relieved that we are able to work again, but on the other hand there is the obsta-

cle of testing, which some customers aren't taking very well". Complaints from hairdressers about the new rules have surfaced in the Austrian press, with some pointing out the difficulty of getting tested in rural areas. Neighboring Slovenia has also brought in mandatory tests for hairdresser visits and similar services but the measure has not been adopted widely in Europe.

Schreiber's first customer at 9:00 am

sharp was a woman who only gave her first name, Martine. She said she was "very, very happy to come back" and was spoiling herself for her 49th birthday. Martine was not fazed by the test requirement. "For me it's not a problem, because my parents belong to an at-risk group and I always get tested before visiting them anyway," she said. Austria, with a population of 8.8 million, is currently recording around 1,000 new

infections a day, a figure that has remained stubbornly high despite the weeks of lockdown. Experts are particularly worried by the situation in the western region of Tyrol, where the South African variant of the virus has been circulating, prompting the government on Monday to advise against non-essential travel to the region. — AFP



Gheorghiu, shown here in 2012, said she felt a "human and professional need" to support the Met. — AFP

## Famed soprano Gheorghiu to sing in aid of Met musicians

Romanian soprano Angela Gheorghiu has announced she will lend her voice to help the musicians of New York's Metropolitan Opera (Met), deprived of their pay because of virus-related cancellations of their shows. "On February 21, through the wonders of technology, I will perform for you Dvorak's 'Song to the Moon' and Anton Pann's 'Tatal Nostru' (Our Father) in a special arrangement by (composer) Andrei Tudor," she wrote on Facebook late Sunday. Considered one of the world's greatest opera singers, Gheorghiu, 55, will perform in Bucharest alongside pianist Alexandru Petrovici, to the accompaniment of the Met Orchestra from New York.

Tickets for the performance, which can be watched online, have gone on sale for \$15 (12.5 euros). Gheorghiu said the proceeds would "benefit over 150 Met musicians in need". In an interview with the Romanian channel Digi24, Gheorghiu said that the musicians "had not received their salaries for a year and were in a very difficult situation". The soprano rejected the term "charity concert", stressing that she felt a "human and professional need" to support the cause. "An artist is important only alongside one's artistic family," she said. "Without an orchestra or choir we cannot do anything."

Gheorghiu will perform for the recital in Bucharest's elegant Athenaeum concert hall, built by the French architect Albert Galleron and inaugurated in 1888. "This is my cathedral," Gheorghiu said of the venue, recalling that she gave her first recital there at the age of 17. The Met's general manager Peter Gelb told AFP in September that his institution was going through "the most difficult period" in 137 years of existence. The last eight weeks of the 2019-20 season and the whole of the following one have been cancelled, which is expected to result in a shortfall of \$154 million. — AFP

## Soviet spy gadgets to go under hammer in Beverly Hills

Cyanide-filled fake teeth and cigarette packs concealing cameras are among the Soviet spy gadgets going under the hammer at a Beverly Hills auction this week. Many retro espionage devices in the sale by US-based Julien's Auctions-known for Hollywood and pop culture memorabilia-would not be out of place in a classic James Bond movie, including microphones hidden within pens, ashtrays and porcelain plates. "The people that actually created these things were the pioneers of miniaturization," said director of gallery operations Kody Frederick.



A Soviet KGB spy fake suicide tooth is displayed during an auction preview for The Cold War Relics Auction.

"Everybody now carries a camera, everybody now has a microphone," but many of the auction's spy gadgets hail from an era when cell phones were "as big as six bricks," Frederick told AFP. Miniature cameras fitted inside women's handbags, belt buckles, shoebrushes, birdboxes, signet rings and ties-and used by real secret agents-are all going on the block. "People are looking to get their hands on really unique, different pieces from a time when digital didn't



A German Minifon P55 miniature steel wire recorder and spy wristwatch with hidden microphone is displayed during an auction preview for "The Cold War Relics Auction - Featuring the KGB Espionage Museum Collection" at Julien's Auctions in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP photos

exist and analog was the way of life," Frederick added.

Following the fall of the Soviet Union, many of the items were discarded in Eastern Europe and eventually made their way to New York's short-lived KGB museum, which opened in January 2019 but closed last year due to the pandemic. Among those for sale this Saturday, both on-site in California and via the internet, are a fake tooth containing deadly cyanide expected to fetch up to \$1,200. "The tooth was designed to shatter when bitten a certain way so that captured agents could end their own lives when necessary to avoid torture or the release of compromising information," explains the auction catalog.

## Deadly umbrella

The collection includes a replica of the "Bulgarian umbrella" used in 1978 in London to fatally poison Bulgarian dissident Georgi Markov in one particularly infamous Cold War episode. It is esti-



A Soviet KGB ashtray with hidden microphone "bug" is displayed during an auction preview for The Cold War Relics Auction.

mated at between \$3,000 and \$5,000. But other initially announced items including a lipstick tube and a pen designed to fire bullets had to be withdrawn due to California's gun laws. Spy enthusiasts will have to content themselves with clandestine devices used to store sensitive microfilm or other documents, including cufflinks, high-heeled shoes, hollowed-out coins... and even a "rectal concealment capsule."

Alongside the double-agent gadgets, Cold War relics for sale will include Che Guevara's 1942 school report card, and letters signed by him and fellow Communist revolutionary leader Fidel Castro. One Castro missive contains plans to infiltrate Havana, and is predicted to draw bids up to \$1,500. Further objects relate to the US-Soviet space race, such as NASA spaceship designs, vintage astronaut equipment and archive film stock including footage of the low-gravity testing of "various fecal and urine collection devices." — AFP

## PARIS OPERA TO SEEK OUT NEW TALENT IN DIVERSITY DRIVE

The Paris Opera vowed an overhaul of its recruiting practices on Monday as it launched a drive towards greater diversity in the heart of its elite ballet company, orchestra and dance school. The issue has already sparked fierce debate in France with right-wingers accusing the Opera's new director-general Alexander Neef of bringing American-style culture wars into the cloistered world of its arts scene. But with Black Lives Matter protests roiling France, and deepening debate over its colonial legacy, Neef remains unrepentant about the need for greater diversity, and on Monday promised a shake-up of the 350-year-old institution.

The Opera will implement recommendations from a new report, including an active effort to send recruiters out into the world in search of new talent, rather than relying on dancers coming to them. "The objective is not that the school recruits less talented students to meet diversity objectives, but to search for great students wherever they can be found," the report said, calling for decentralized exams in towns across France and its overseas territories. Neef told AFP he was proud the Opera was the "first large cultural organization in this country to have launched such a thing. There are others for sure that will follow." "As an organization that is so large and that is so deeply connected to

the past... we shouldn't be afraid of asking not only these questions, but all kinds of questions," he said.

## 'Ballet blanc'

The report highlighted other specific areas of concern, including the sensitive question of "anatomical criteria" in the selection process-to move beyond "old and tenacious ideas" about black bodies as somehow ill-suited to classical dance. It also touched on the tradition of "ballet blanc" (white ballet) — where dancers appear all in white tutus and black performers are rarely seen-making the point that skin color was never referenced when they were originally designed in the 19th century.

Paris Opera will appoint a dedicated "diversity and inclusion officer", Neef said, following the lead of New York's Metropolitan Opera which named its first person to that role last month. A consulting body of experts from inside and outside the Opera will also look at what these issues mean for its repertoire. In 2015, the Opera's ballet director Benjamin Millepied met resistance after he ended the use of blackface for "La Bayadere" and renamed its "Danse des Négrillons" ("The Dance of the Little Negroes") as "The Dance of the Children." Neef himself made waves recently when he told Le Monde newspaper that "some works will no doubt disappear from the repertoire." — AFP

## SUPREMES SINGER MARY WILSON DIES AGED 76

Motown singer and the Supremes co-founder Mary Wilson has died, US media reported yesterday. She was 76. She founded the US group aged 15 while living in a Detroit housing project, according to Variety, and continued with the band long after lead singer Diana Ross' departure, eventually going on to be inducted into the 1988 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. "Mary Wilson was extremely special to me. She was a trail-blazer, a diva and will be deeply missed," said Berry Gordy, founder of Motown records who were behind many of the band's hits. She died at her Las Vegas home on February 8, her publicist Jay Schwartz told ET News.

Only two days ago Wilson uploaded a short clip to YouTube celebrating Black history month and announcing: "exciting news about The Supremes, Florence Ballard and unreleased materials." The circumstances around her death have not been released, her publicist said. Born March 12 1944 in Greenville, Mississippi, Wilson was brought up by her aunt and uncle, before moving to Detroit with her mother when she was 12.

There she began singing and with Ballard founded the group that would eventually become known as the Supremes. Despite limited early success, the band struck success in the late sixties with hits like "Stop! In the Name of Love" and "Baby Love". But following Ross's



In this file photo singer Mary Wilson arrives for the Ryan Gordy Foundation 60 Years of Motown Celebration at the Waldorf Astoria in Beverly Hills. — AFP

departure in 1970 for a solo career the group never regained its dominance on the US charts, but did enjoy some hits such as "River Deep, Mountain High" and "Stoned Love". Wilson continued to perform with Jean Terrell-remaining a constant during the shifting cast of members until the group finally folded in 1977. In 1988 she was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a member of the Supremes.

Little heard of in the intervening years, she burst back onto the public stage with her 1986 memoir "Dreamgirl: My Life As a Supreme", detailing her time in the band and her relationship with Ross. In 1974 she married Pedro Ferrer, but the couple divorced in 1981. She is survived by their two children, daughter Turkessa and son Pedro Antonio Jr., as well as 10 grandchildren. — AFP



In this file photo Paris Opera dancers perform at the Palais Garnier during a dress rehearsal of "Giselle".