

INDEX

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Welcome | 02 |
| Music Theatre NOW Network | 08 |
| Schedule of Events | 10 |
| Reflections on Music Theatre | 12 |
| Jury Statements | 18 |
| Winners | 26 |
| And/Or/Pro/methe | 26 |
| AquaSonic | 30 |
| Falling Awake | 34 |
| #freebrahms | 38 |
| 地狱变 Hell Screen | 42 |
| IYOV | 46 |
| Mitra | 50 |
| Musraropera | 54 |
| The Cave | 58 |
| The Howling Girls | 62 |

WELCOME

MUSIC THEATRE NOW – ENCOURAGING THE CURRENT MUSIC THEATRE SCENE

Since its inception, the Music Theatre NOW initiative has wanted to encourage "innovation". I consider this a wise approach. Why? If one looks at the creative process that the development of the performing arts follows—and this is true for music theatre as well—one can see that the creator is shackled by the chains of convention: strict rules showing how to and how not to. To avoid these shackles, one might follow what a recognized master has done or what others are doing. While this might help, trying to follow or copy another person can still be considered a form of constraint, though admittedly of a slightly different kind. In encouraging "innovation", the Music Theatre NOW initiative empowers the artist to focus on his or her vision and not on the inner barriers of the person or persons who want to create a work of art.

Since the presentation of the first Music Theatre NOW awards in 2008, I have seen that this kind of encouragement works. It was—and still is—with a feeling of great awe that I experienced the cultural diversity of individual and collective expression. What has amazed me most has been the multitude of ways in which the winners formulate their work. Each one is different. Each one is unique. Each one is authentic. Each one is an innovative creation. Each one is music theatre. The Music Theatre NOW Network not only encourages innovation, however.

It also promotes a degree of innovation that can be shared with audiences all over the world. It creates possibilities for festivals and venues with a strong commitment to showing innovative works to their audiences.

And yet no such endeavour could be successful without a group of dedicated people such as the members of the board of the Music Theatre NOW Network of the International Theatre Institute (ITI), the jury members of the competition who dedicated their time and wisdom to selecting the gems from over 400 entries, and the organizers of Operadagen who, for the second time, have offered their platform for the Music Theatre NOW initiative. I would like to express my gratitude to all of the people involved—including all of the artists who submitted their work.

For the International Theatre Institute (ITI), the world's largest organization for the performing arts, music theatre is an essential art form together with drama, theatre and dance. It is with honour and pride that the International Theatre Institute (ITI) has been able to support this important work, and we will continue to do so in order to help to support innovation in the diverse field of music theatre that reflects our world that is equally diverse.

Tobias Biancone

Director General, International Theatre Institute (ITI)

FROM THE HOST

For the second time, Operadagen Rotterdam is the proud host of Music Theatre NOW. Already back in 2013, we experienced the energy of this "competition and meeting" as a very rewarding opportunity for winners, presenters, and audiences.

MTNOW is one of the most important international competitions for new forms of music theatre in its infinite variety. It is a wonderful opportunity for composers and librettists, directors and performers, festival makers and curators, for publishers and presenters to meet in one place for a couple of days, and to see presentations of new music theatre from all over the world. In recent years, our festival has even presented the premieres of some of the of MTNOW winners. This year, for example, we are able to present winning productions

from Greece and Iran.

We are thrilled that many people involved in music theatre from around the world will gather here to hold discussions with artists and colleagues, and to discover a large selection of new works.

The slogan of the 14th edition of Operadagen Rotterdam is "Metamorphosis". Artists from Asia, America, Australia and Europe will present their individual views on changes taking place in the world.

Over the course of our ten day festival, we will demonstrate how innovation can go hand in hand with opera and music theatre through artistic projects that break new ground with unforeseen combinations of music, vocals, text, and images.

We hope you have a great time at this event, and on behalf our festival team: welcome!

Guy Coolen

MTN Board President and Artistic Director of Operadagen Rotterdam

HINDSIGHT IN SNAPSHOTS

Think back to ten years ago. What comes to mind? The global financial crisis? Or your first smartphone? Maybe a different job or living in a different city? Either way, you will probably find a number of snapshots of days gone by in your head like Polaroids in your personal photo album.

When Music Theatre NOW looks back at the past decade, we see nearly the development of an entire genre. Since its launch in 2008, each edition of the competition has been a snapshot of the state of music theatre. The 1,000 plus works from these past ten years constitute a new archive out of which the 63 winners provide a picture of international excellence. It is truly fascinating to witness how much has changed over just a decade in terms of technical resources for everyday life. Whereas ten years ago, you would have needed an actual camera in order to take a picture, today your smartphone is ready at hand. Ten years ago, hundreds of applicants from all over the world mailed DVDs—typically in PAL format—of their submissions to Berlin by post. For the fourth edition, we received more than 400 HD video files submitted as links, which we could easily access from anywhere in the world. The convenient accessibility of information

about new works has made the music theatre world a little smaller, and has helped to bring works from the other side of the globe to one's own country. Still, we at Music Theatre NOW remain committed to the idea that real-life, personal interaction is the ideal way for artists and presenters to meet and discuss their motivations and working processes.

For us, the memories of the fourth competition are already inscribed with the generous and essential support of the ITI Germany and the ITI Worldwide, both of which have accompanied us on our journey over these past ten years. We are also indebted to the Operadagen Rotterdam for their ongoing hospitality. We are thrilled to have them as our host for the second time in a row.

Bearing this in mind, we are extremely happy to welcome all of you to the fourth edition of the Music Theatre NOW meeting. It is our aim here to carry on the conversation about music theatre and its development through a global perspective. We hope that you will take home a lot of valuable memories and inspiring snapshots, both digital and mental. Who knows how these will appear to us in another ten years time.

Christian Grammel

(for the team of Music Theatre NOW)

MUSIC THEATRE NOW NETWORK

The Music Theatre NOW Network of ITI is committed to the artistic development of music theatre worldwide. From experimental projects to productions in opera houses, the network embraces all forms of music theatre including any hybrid theatrical forms in which music is a crucial and indispensable aspect of the performance. The network takes a special interest in music theatre outside of the Western European tradition and in contemporary work that reflects these other traditions.

The network's main task is the dissemination of information and audience education with the goal of raising awareness about music theatre around the globe. Through its expanding network, Music Theatre NOW wants to facilitate the production and presentation of music theatre and to stimulate cooperation and the exchange of productions among producers and presenters.

Organized in cooperation with ITI Germany and ITI Worldwide, Music Theatre NOW

consists of three elements: an international competition for the most interesting music theatre productions of the past years, a meeting where the winning productions are shown and discussed, and the ongoing creation of an international web archive of new music theatre. The network is a democratic body, in which the ideals of UNESCO concerning the acknowledgment of cultural diversity and the exchange of ideas and knowledge between peoples and nations are highly valued.

Members of the network are ITI members whose professional work is directly related to the creation, production, and/or presentation of music theatre. The group includes directors, composers, dramaturgs and producers of opera and music theatre from all over the world. While new members are occasionally invited to join, local organizations and individuals who work in the field of music theatre may also join the network by subscribing to the newsletter.

International Theatre Institute

Founded in 1948 by theatre and dance experts in collaboration with UNESCO, the International Theatre Institute (ITI) is the world's largest performing arts organization. ITI strives for a society in which performing arts and artists can thrive and flourish, while advancing UNESCO's goals of mutual understanding and peace. ITI advocates for the protection and promotion of cultural expressions, regardless of age, gender, creed or ethnicity. It works to these ends internationally and nationally in the areas of arts education, international collaboration, and youth training.

The purpose of the International Theatre Institute is to promote international exchange of knowledge and experience in theatre arts as a way to foster peace and friendship between peoples, to deepen mutual understanding, and to increase creative cooperation between all people in the theatre arts.



BOARD MEMBERS, MUSIC THEATRE NOW NETWORK

Guy COOLEN Belgium, President
Ana ABLAMONOVA Lithuania
Beth MORRISON USA
Roland QUITT Germany
Nick Rongjun YU PR China
Axel TANGERDING Germany
Shuang ZOU PR China

HONORARY MEMBER

Danny YUNG Hong Kong



SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

More information on shows and venues online at
www.operadagenrotterdam.nl

| Sat. May 18th | Sun. May 19th | Sun. May 19th | Sun. May 19th | Mon. May 20th | Mon. May 20th | Mon. May 20th | Mon. May 20th |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| 17:30 - 18:00 OPENING MTNOW MEETING Theater Rotterdam, location Schouwburg | 09:30 - 10:00 COFFEE Kriterion | 12:45 - 13:00 PRESENTATION NEW BRITISH MUSIC THEATRE Kriterion | 18:30 - 19:45 DINNER | 09:00 - 09:30 COFFEE Kriterion | 11:15 - 11:45 PRESENTATION 7: IYOV Kriterion | 14:25 - 14:55 PRESENTATION 10: FALLING AWAKE Kriterion | 19:30 - 20:15 TRAVEL BACK TO CITY CENTER In the city |
| 18:00 - 19:00 DINNER Theater Rotterdam, location Schouwburg | 10:00 - 10:15 OPENING / INTRODUCTION Kriterion | 13:00 - 14:00 LUNCH Kriterion | 19:00 - 20:00 SHOW: TOUJOURS ET PRÈS DE MOI Theater Rotterdam, location Schouwburg | 09:30 - 09:45 OPENING / INTRODUCTION Kriterion | 11:45 - 12:30 PANEL DISCUSSION 2: SOUNDS FROM THE PAST? REVISITING HISTORY AND HERITAGE Kriterion | 15:00 - 16:00 PANEL DISCUSSION 3 (WITH ALL WINNERS): HOW TO DO IT WHERE - INTERNATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES FOR PRODUCING NEW WORK | 20:00 - 21:00 SHOW: THE GAP Worm |
| 19:00 - 20:00 SHOW: UNKNOWN, I LIVE WITH YOU Theater Rotterdam, location Schouwburg | 10:15 - 10:45 PRESENTATION 1: AQUASONIC Kriterion | 14:00 - 16:00 FREE PROGRAM WITH VARIA SHOWS In the city | 19:45 - 20:15 WALK TO THE CAVE OR THE GAP In the city | 09:45 - 10:05 PRESENTATION 4: AND/OR/PRO/METHE Kriterion | 12:30 - 13:15 LUNCH Kriterion | 16:00 - 17:00 TRAVEL TO NIEUWE LUXOR In the city | 20:15 - 21:30 SHOW: I C O N Theater Rotterdam, location Schouwburg |
| 20:15 - 21:15 SHOW: PROMETHE/ PLAGUE (MTN WINNER) Theater Rotterdam, location Schouwburg | 10:50 - 11:20 PRESENTATION 2: #FREEBRAHMS Kriterion | 14:00 - 16:00 VIOLA, UNLOST, ORLANDO OR OPERA INSTALLATIONS IN TENT In the city | 20:15 - 21:30 SHOW: THE CAVE (MTN WINNER) Theater Rotterdam, location Schouwburg | 10:10 - 10:30 PRESENTATION 5: THE CAVE Kriterion | 13:15 - 13:45 PRESENTATION 8: MITRA Kriterion | 17:00 - 18:00 MEET NICOLE BEUTLER (SHOW: 8: METAMORFOSIS) Nieuwe Luxor | 22:00 - 23:00 SHOW: MYRIAM Theater Rotterdam, location Schouwburg |
| 22:45 - 23:30 SHOW: ORLANDO Theater Rotterdam, location Schouwburg | 11:25 - 11:55 PRESENTATION 3: MUSRAROPERA Kriterion | 16:00 - 16:30 WALK TO BOTANCIAL WASTELAND In the city | 22:00 - 23:00 SHOW: TOUJOURS ET PRÈS DE MOI Theater Rotterdam, location Schouwburg | 10:35 - 11:05 PRESENTATION 6: JIGOKUHEN/ HELL SCREEN Kriterion | 13:50 - 14:20 PRESENTATION 9: THE HOWLING GIRLS Kriterion | 18:00 - 19:30 DINNER | 22:00 - 24:00 SHOW: CLUB GEWALT X OPERA Theater Rotterdam, location Schouwburg |
| 23:30 - 02:00 PARTY! Theater Rotterdam, location Schouwburg | 12:00 - 12:45 PANEL DISCUSSION 1: OPENING UP AND CLOSING IN: DEALING WITH SPACE IN MUSIC THEATRE Kriterion | 16:30 - 18:30 BOTANICAL WASTELAND Theater Rotterdam, location Witte de With | 22:00 - 24:00 SHOW: CLUB GEWALT X OPERA Theater Rotterdam, location Schouwburg | 11:05 - 11:15 BREAK Kriterion | | | |

REFLECTIONS ON MUSIC THEATRE

ELEVEN YEARS OF MUSIC THEATER NOW

ROLAND QUITT

A few years ago, the Music Theatre NOW team accepted an invitation to talk about our work in Shanghai. We were very pleased to find ourselves welcomed by a packed audience; yet as we ran a video to introduce the winners of our competition, we saw a sea of distraught faces staring back at us with incomprehension and sheer horror. It took little time for us to figure out that our audience had come to hear the latest news about Disney musicals. The images and sounds we had brought not only clashed with the audience's expectations, it went completely beyond their basic understanding of music and theatre. Here was yet another example of the kind of misunderstanding the term "music theatre" runs into all over the world—even in Germany where it originated.

Since the existence of this competition was barely known, it was largely based on the group's own recruitment of entries, a task Laura Berman was hired to perform in 2002. Laura caused a small internal scandal that year, since almost all of the applications she received were theatre projects centered around specific performers, which was hardly compatible with the competition's mission to cultivate a future contemporary opera canon. At that time, she and I shared a performative understanding of music theatre that questioned traditional hierarchies between music and theatre.

In the former GDR, however, taking opera seriously as a contemporary theatrical art also meant freeing it from the high tastes of elitism. The bourgeois separation between "low art" that aims to entertain and "high art" that pursues emancipatory goals had to be abolished

in favor of a new theatre that united both. For this reason, opera, operetta and musicals appeared side by side in the Komische Oper's program with equivalent artistic aspirations. Hence, from its very inception, the German term "Musiktheater" represented a new notion of theatre that would include other theatrical forms than just those immanent to opera.

Celebrities from both sides of the Iron Curtain acted as figureheads when a so-called "Music Theatre Committee" was founded by the ITI in 1969: Felsenstein was one, Broadway director Jerome Robbins the other. In the context of this naming process, "Music Theatre" appears to have found its way into English for the first time. As an umbrella term, the word provided a kind of provisional roof, creating a secluded space for exchange between capitalist makers of musicals and of communist makers of opera. In fact, it is probably thanks to the work of this group that *Fiddler on the Roof*, staged by Robbins on Broadway in 1964, was the first American musical to be produced in the GDR, where, in Felsenstein's staging, it remained the best-selling production of the Komische Oper until 1988.

As far as I know, the story of the Music Theatre Committee has never been written. Franz Egon Dostal, one of the last survivors among those involved at the time, once told me that those first meetings—at which there were around one hundred participants—were events of the highest diplomatic order. Rolf Ebermann, an employee of Felsenstein, succeeded in arranging these meetings despite ongoing struggles with the authorities. According to Dostal, the most significant part of these meetings took place late at night outside of the official conference program, when no one was taking minutes. The real work of overcoming borders began with the seventh vodka.

Not much of these heroic times could be felt anymore by the time Laura Berman and I entered into the Music Theatre Committee's sphere of influence in 2002. As per its mission, the ITI had achieved a great deal of cultural rapprochement during the Cold War; but the Berlin Wall had long since fallen. While the ITI was striving to reorient itself, a generational change was also approaching.

At that time, only a handful of people belonged to the Music Theatre Committee, which defined itself mainly by a competition it had initiated that ran on the basis of video submissions. In front of a rather modest number of interested spectators, these videos were presented to the public in the context of the Munich Theatre Academy, before the committee would then withdraw and, after some consultation, announce the winner of the 1,000 D-Mark “Rolf Ebermann Prize”. Since the existence of this competition was barely known, it was largely based on the group’s own recruitment of entries, a task Laura Berman was hired to perform in 2002.

Laura caused a small internal scandal that year, since almost all of the applications she received were theatre projects centered around specific performers, which was hardly compatible with the competition’s mission to cultivate a future contemporary opera canon. At that time, she and I shared a performative understanding of music theatre that questioned traditional hierarchies between music and theatre.

On my way back from Munich, I sketched out a scenario that would adapt the existing competition to the needs of contemporary music theatre as I saw them. One of these points was that such a competition would require far wider dissemination. This later became the basis for what is today called Music Theatre NOW, and while not only that name was Laura’s idea, it was her dedication and persistent work alone that secured the financial support of the ITI Germany and other sponsors—not to mention the countless other difficulties that had to be overcome—so that we were able to host the first Music Theatre NOW meeting in 2008.

And yet, during this period, little seemed certain. As representatives of the next generation, we eventually moved up into the Music Theatre Committee. Other members changed quickly, delivering rather little input of their own. While we tried to keep the group’s tasks open at first, it soon became clear what a beast it actually would be to combine the competition with a large international meeting and the creation of a publicly accessible archive, and, last but not least, to establish a functional team for the task of internationalizing the

MTN competition beyond Europe. Just as other ITI working groups dedicated to different areas of theater started to break with the formalities of their former committee structures, the Music Theatre Committee ultimately became the Music Theatre NOW Network. “Music Theatre” meant and means for us, on the one hand, a continuation of traditions that originated in the West over the course of opera’s four-hundred-year history and, on the other hand, of traditions from everywhere else where “opera” was never a necessary category, since their theatre was always essentially bound up with music. It is clear that, even in the West, these traditions are no longer to be found in opera alone, especially since they have been expanded by a formal language that owes its origin less to theatre than to a musical concept turned into performance.

As everyone knows, the idea of international networking is full of contradictions. Each networking opportunity evens out the peculiarities that the ITI seeks to preserve by its commitment to safeguarding cultural diversity in this era of global commercialism. The more MTN has been able to move beyond a Eurocentric perspective, and, for example, to incorporate the Chinese region, the clearer the problem of comparing theatrical forms from different cultural spheres has become. The meaning and justification of MTN does not lie in such comparisons, but rather in using international networking as a means to promote contemporary forms of artistic expression that, all over the world, are finding it increasingly difficult to defend themselves against the pressures of commercial power and standardization. Many artists who explore new avenues in music theatre hardly ever reach the larger audience that their work deserves. Their budgets are often too small to allow for longer performance runs or comprehensive PR. Many a group has attracted international attention through MTN before even receiving due notice in their home country. Often MTN leads to additional performances, new project commissions, and acquaintances with producers and festival makers from outside the work’s original geographic context. At the same time, MTN also has an effect on the work’s recognition back home, and facilitates future work there.

The archive associated with the competition—which includes all projects submitted—also acts as a multiplier, providing a source not just for scholars but for producers as well.

The MTN meeting was held for the first time in Berlin in 2008. In cooperation with the Swedish Centre of the ITI, a second meeting took place in 2013 in Jönköping, Sweden as part of the Scenkonstbiennalen. Since then, MTN has dropped anchor at the Operadagen Rotterdam, where it encounters not only a broader audience, but also a broader group of international festival scouts. It would be hard to find a better place in the world to meet today.

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE QUALITY OF A PRODUCTION IF THERE IS NO AUDIENCE TO SEE IT?

SHUANG ZOU

Before an audience is able to enjoy the quality of a production, some unforeseen obstacles might have to be overcome. This is especially true in China, where the genre "music theatre"—which is translated as 音乐剧场—represents a very new term for our audiences. This term consists of two elements: 音乐 for "music" and 剧场 for "theatre". In Chinese, the translation conveys more emphasis on the "theatre" than on the "music". Hence, many people in China might mistake "music theatre" for "spoken theatre with music". On the other hand, music theatre is neither "opera" (歌剧), which is mainly understood as the "classical" Western repertoire, nor is it "Xiqu" (戏曲), the traditional form of Chinese musical theatre that reaches back over 1,000 years and with over 100 regional branches, of which Peking, Cantonese or Kunqu Opera are only a few.

Given that music theatre represents a very exciting and diverse genre that opens up many possibilities for artists and audiences as well, we have undertaken strong efforts to include music theatre in our program at the Beijing Music Festival.

Alongside our introduction of music theatre, we have also put an emphasis on co-productions to expose our audiences to the multitude of already extant works. When these international productions come to Beijing, it gives our audiences the opportunity to meet the co-producers and creative teams, who can share their views on the genre. In this way, the dialogue that was such a key part of the exchange between the institutional partners can be continued with the audience.

Today we have very curious audiences—much more so than ten years ago. Audiences for classical works have grown younger, which means that they are accustomed to new forms of representation and storytelling. There are no longer any barriers preventing them from getting an introduction to rare repertoire or new works in the form of theatre. In fact, today theatre seems to have become much more attractive than attending a classical concert.

Beyond our general audiences, the genre of music theatre has prompted awareness amongst composition students and young directors to think about music theatre as a new model for cross-disciplinary work for the stage. It expands their creativity, while making both classical and contemporary classical music much more accessible. There is a sense of inclusiveness that music theatre represents, which stands out for this new generation of Chinese musicians and artists.

Over the next ten years, I think music theatre will become a well known genre in China. Only then will we really be able to evaluate the new work that has emerged. Perhaps we will discover more exciting artists and musicians or perhaps music will become something else, far advanced beyond that of our own day and age. Personally, I hope to find something free of any boundary between creative works and medium, where form and content go hand in hand or even become inseparable from one another. Especially with young artists discovering the freedom of interdisciplinary work, music theatre certainly is still an ongoing discovery, and its definition is still to be created with practice over time. This all promises to be very interesting.

JURY STATEMENTS

The 2018 edition of the Music Theatre NOW competition saw 436 applications by artists from all over the globe. These submissions represent a multitude of approaches to the genre of music theatre. The submissions demonstrate the critical role of "heterogeneity" and an "intersectional perspective" across music theatre practices today. This cultural and aesthetic plurality is reflected as well in the composition of the jury panel. The jurors' diverse backgrounds and expertise allowed us to approach and discuss the diversity of the submitted works in terms of both their form and content.

Despite the variation among each juror's aesthetic preferences, everyone valued those productions that took creative risks. Artists, we agreed, must acknowledge and address the existing expectations of their immediate geographic, institutional, and cultural contexts, while also challenging those expectations, often beyond the cautious programming of art institutions. Innovation should be evaluated in relation to the specific context of the work's creation. Therefore, in our evaluation process we privileged artists who demonstrated trust in their communities and audiences, but who were not afraid to challenge their preconceptions. We privileged projects that embraced complexity, whether on the level of politics, dramaturgy or staging choices. We favored new creations and original material, as well as original approaches to extant forms. We also gave priority to those works that explored themes related to the socio-political challenges of our times.

We did not apply a narrow definition of the music theatre genre. Instead, we allowed the artists' submissions to guide us. We reviewed each work in its national and regional context, privileging those projects that pushed the genre beyond where it currently stands in that local context. Many of the submitted projects are pan-national, involving artists from different cultural and artistic backgrounds. We focused on the works' artistic and political significance, not on how well known or established the makers are in their respective fields.

Similarly, we decided to acknowledge the variety of forms of music theatre as represented by all the works that were submitted to this edition of the Music Theatre NOW competition. We leave it to the artists to redefine and expand the parameters of music theatre through their processes of experimentation. We are well aware that music theatre comes from a history of clearly defined terms. We searched for new paths of creativity and engagement with the audience. We examined how artists link their local context with international trends and developments.

While we may not have come up with a tightly articulated definition of music theatre, through the selection process we explored the complexity of the field. We feel that the definition of music theatre as a genre shouldn't evolve in one direction only. Moreover, music theatre today has been fed by creative tensions present in the field. We believe that the genre will thrive most of all through precisely this diversity of approaches and creators.

Jury of the 2018 edition of the Music Theatre NOW competition

And/Or/Pro/methe

And/Or/Pro/methe is a theatrical event staged in a traditional style, but which takes tradition as far as it can go. The singing is both extreme and controlled, stretching the human voice to its limits. There is no compromise or surrender to Western standards of vocal art. The result is a performance of great honesty and integrity.

Liu Sola

AquaSonic

We as the jury were struck by the incredible commitment and dedication it took to bring *AquaSonic* to life. The creators managed to find original and engaging ways to play quirky and fascinating mechanical instruments, to use breath and elicit song, all while remaining enveloped, as it were, in a fluid "otherworldliness" underwater. The production is also striking for its stage design which features cleverly amplified, human-size fish tanks. The result is radical and immersive music theatre that clearly reflects a willingness to work into the unknown.

Neo Muyanga

The Cave

Elli Papakonstantinou's *The Cave* took us by storm with its powerful sound and visuals from the very first minute, very much like today's worldwide "reality": a cacophony of social media, "news", non-stop visual information, and the voices of the multiple channels of information that bombard us from dawn to dusk. Is this "reality" or are we still trapped in Plato's cave?

Shoshana Polanco

Falling Awake

In the first place, *Falling Awake* makes the spectator completely "fall for it" and willingly surrender to the melodic and visual beauty woven into a seemingly trivial narrative. Eventually, it shakes us awake to face the cruel exploitation of the young girl in the opera we've been uncritically following. Lasse Schwänenflügel Piasecki's artistic strategy controls and transgresses his spectators' perception in order to reveal the mechanics of manipulation and social exploitation in a most tangible manner. A pertinent reminder and a plea for more critical approaches to the stories we take part in over the course of our own lives.

Krystian Lada

#freebrahms

A work of extreme boldness, a play on words, a parody, an excavation, a negation, and an act of supreme love, *#freebrahms* peels open a canonical work to show its inner workings and essential truth. This piece commands the audience to suspend both disbelief and any ideas or preconceptions they may have not only about Brahms, but also about what it means to attend an orchestra concert. This work commands us to question our perception of temporality, that is, our assumption that time is a linear progression. The work proposes a different experience of time: one that is plastic, non-linear, sometimes even circular, and very much subject to a shared perception by those who are experiencing it collectively: audience and performers together.

Limor Tomer

The Howling Girls

Adena Jacobs and Damien Ricketson turn us inside out with *The Howling Girls*. Their attempt to express trauma specifically located in female bodies succeeds not only onstage, but also pierces our audience-bodies. The soundscape and staging of this piece are ambitious and non-apologetic, giving much needed time, space and voice to pain, and giving us, as audience members, permission to experience it.

Shoshana Polanco

IYOV

An ensemble of Ukrainian singers and musicians revisits the classical form of oratorio and requiem in the most honest and profoundly musical way possible. *IYOV* evolves in the spirit of togetherness and pure belief in the transformative power of the human voice. The universal message of the work is well rooted in the cultural genealogy of the artists.

Krystian Lada

地狱变 | Hell Screen

The instrumentation is elegant and intelligent, covers a wide range, and produces a musical texture that smoothly transitions between the sounds of traditional Chinese Xi Qu, animal sounds, and modern music while the vocals (especially the male part) draw on both Chinese and Western opera traditions to create a piece of distinctively contemporary music.

Liu Sola

Musraropera

The locus of this work, Musrara, has seen centuries of conflict and cooperation, discord and harmony, conflict and coexistence. Through a deeply researched, participatory process, the creative team has crafted a sensitive and multilayered approach, which takes on this palimpsest and reveals its multiple truths. This is the power of artistic expression: to allow us to see beyond rhetoric. In *Musraropera*, there are no passive observers. Everyone is implicated. Everyone is part of the problem/solution. We're all in it together.

Limor Tomer

Mitra

Inspired by the true story of an Iranian psychoanalyst's correspondence with a colleague in the West about her struggle to remain sane while being wrongfully incarcerated, this story is harrowing and speaks to the sense of precarity and sadness that arguably appears to define our contemporary time. The production succeeds in excellently articulating an overwhelmingly clinical desolation, as a psychiatric ward in Tehran is brought into being using a sensitive mix of stark lighting, strict linearity of set design, filmic stereo projection and an unsettling soundscape.

Neo Muyanga

JURY

Krystian Lada is a dramaturg, librettist and stage director, who is active in the fields of opera, classical music, and theatre. His work explores alternative forms of artistic collaboration and art curating, and aims at developing new platforms for social interactions in post-migrant societies. Lada is the founder and artistic director of The Airport Society—a nomadic cooperative of artists, activists, and social entrepreneurs that initiates projects connecting recent developments in opera, technology, and society. From 2013–2016, Lada held the position of Director of Dramaturgy, Empowerment and Communication at the Belgian Royal Opera La Monnaie in Brussels. Prior to that, he studied dramaturgy and literary studies at the University of Amsterdam. As a dramaturg, he has collaborated with a range of stage directors and visual artists, incl. Pierre Audi, Ivo van Hove, Mariusz Trelinski, Berinde De Bruyckere, Tobias Kratzer, Yuval Sharon, and Kirsten Dehlholm (Hotel Pro Forma). He has also collaborated on opera and theatre projects with i.a. La Monnaie, The Dutch National Opera, National Theatre of London, Polish National Opera, Opera in Poznan, National Forum of Music in

Wroclaw, International Choreographic Centre in Amsterdam, and Studio Minailo. He has written libretti for composers such as Katarina Glowicka, Dariusz Przybylski, Andrzej Kwieciński and Annelies Van Parys. Lada has also initiated and curated several series of events and programs, incl. United States of Opera (a forum for contemporary opera makers) and Fringe FUEL (a creative activism and professional empowerment program for artists).

Neo Muyanga is a composer, musician, and librettist. Born in Soweto, he studied madrigal singing in Trieste, Italy. In 1996, he co-founded (with Masauko Chipembere) the acoustic pop duo Blk Sonshine, and in 2008 he co-founded (with Ntone Edjabe) the Pan African Space Station, a platform that hosts cutting-edge pan-African music and sound art on the internet. His recorded albums include: Blk Sonshine (1999), the listening room (2003), fire famine plague and earthquake (2007), good life (2009), Dipalo (2011), toro tse sekete (2015), and Second-hand reading (2016). His other published works include: the music plays, memory of how it feels (2010), the flower of shembe (2012), and the opera heart of



redness (2015). An alumnus of the Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD (2016), he was also named Composer-in-Residence at the Johannesburg International Mozart Festival (2017) and at the National Arts Festival of South Africa (2017). He tours widely both as a solo performer, bandleader, and choir conductor. He is also a research affiliate at the University of Cape Town's Drama School and the Centre for African Studies.

KRYSTIAN LADA Dramaturg - Brussels

NEO MUYANGA Composer - Cape Town

SHOSHANA POLANCO International Producer - Mexico City

LIU SOLA Composer - Beijing

LIMOR TOMER - General Manager of Concerts and Lectures at the Metropolitan Museum of Art - New York City

Shoshana Polanco is a creative producer who was born in Buenos Aires, and currently resides in Mexico City. She currently works at La Teatrería in Mexico City, and is the associate producer of Taking the Stage Mexico, a new British Council initiative. She is in charge of developing new collaborations between the theatre and other local institutions as well as international networking. Because of her international scope as a citizen and arts worker, she has been invited to be part of the programming panel of the 2016 Made in Scotland showcase at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, to participate on the international advisory panel of PAMS choice 2015 in Seoul, Korea, and to serve as curator for Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation's Southern Exposure in 2015 and 2017. Shoshana has been an active member of ISPA (International Society for the Performing Arts) since 2014 when she was one of their global fellows. She currently sits on their membership committee, and was part of the planning committee of the 2017 NYC Congress, co-chair of the 2016 NYC Congress, and was recently appointed member of the ISPA board. Wherever she goes, Shoshana loves to build bridges—not walls—that bring together artists from all over the world. She also loves to present innovative work to audiences who may not have otherwise been exposed to that type of work before. She is a firm believer that art can make us better people, and

thus allow us to live in a better world. She holds a BA (Magna Cum Laude) from the CUNY Baccalaureate Program, Area of Concentration: Women in Performance. She is the mother of Anais and Aaron.

Liu Sola (aka: Liu Suola) is a composer, librettist, vocalist, music producer, artistic director, costume designer, leading vocalist, and author. After graduating from the Central Conservatory of Music with a degree in composition, she published her award-winning novella *You Have no Choice*. Since the 1980s, Sola has scored many Chinese and international film sound tracks, as well as TV and drama productions. She has composed music for orchestra, ensemble, opera, modern theatre, modern dance, and art exhibitions. Her range of musical styles includes: classical music, jazz, early music, rock, traditional, and contemporary music. Her earliest works include her US album *Blues in the East* (Polygram/produced by Bill Laswell), while her most recent work *China Beat* is a recording of performances by the Chinese instrumental music virtuoso group *Liu Sola & Friends Ensemble* from their national tour in 2017. Sola's musical works also include compositions for chamber opera such as *Fantasy of the Red Queen* (2006) performed by Ensemble Modern and the *Liu Sola & Friends Ensemble*. The chamber opera *The Afterlife of Li Jiantong* (2009), for which Sola wrote both the music and

the libretto, was performed by Theatre of Voices conducted by Paul Hillier. Her novels include *Chaos & All That* (1989), *Nv Zhen Tang/ La Grande ile Des Tortues – Cochons* (2000), and *Cursed By Fascination* (2011). Her recent book about her ensemble, *The Nomadic Life of Sounds*, will be published soon. She was the curator of the Pompidou Centre/ Chengdu: X Music Festival (2018-2019).

Limor Tomer was born in Israel, and moved to the United States at age 13. She earned a bachelor's and a master's degree at the Juilliard School and studied for her doctorate in aesthetics at New York University. For ten years she was a professional classical pianist in solo and orchestral performances throughout the United States and Europe. Tomer then transitioned from performance to arts management, working closely with Harvey Lichtenstein at BAM on projects ranging from BAM Rose Cinemas to launching and programming the BAMCafe. Following her tenure at BAM, she became Executive Producer for Music at WNYC radio, where she produced such award-winning programs as: "24:33", a John Cage celebration; "A Beautiful Symphony of Brotherhood", about the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; and launched the Peabody-award winning web-based new music station Q2 (recently renamed "New Sounds"). Tomer served as Adjunct

Curator for Performance at the Whitney Museum from 2005-11, where she created the performing arts department and performance shows including: "Christian Marclay: Festival, a collaboration with David Kiehl", "Steve Reich @ the Whitney", and "Meredith Monk Music @ the Whitney". In July 2011, Tomer joined the Metropolitan Museum of Art as General Manager of Concerts and Lectures, where she launched MetLiveArts, the world's largest museum-based performance series, which features >90 classical and contemporary performances ranging from dance to theatre to music to sound installation to performance art to hybrid forms from around the world. Tomer was invited to serve as Performance Curator for the inaugural 2016 and 2017 June Events at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (Athens, Greece) where she presented dance and music performances in multiple venues around the SNFCC campus. She serves as a member of the National Curatorial Council of The Hermitage Artist Retreat in Sarasota, FL.

AND/OR/PRO/METHE

This interview was conducted with
director Mehdi Agahikeshe and music director Navid Gohari.

MTNOW. *And/Or/Pro/methe* is a performance about oppression and resistance. Why did you choose to make a piece about this topic in Tehran in 2018?

Mehdi Agahikeshe. The activities of Beyn Theatre Group are arranged into different projects that involve a main performance in addition to smaller additional performances, expeditions and special musical and physical studies conducted for the work's development. Our current project is titled "The Contemporary Human's Tragedy Project" of which *And/Or/Pro/methe* and *Promethe/Plague* are the two most recent outcomes. "The Contemporary Human's Tragedy Project" investigates how human beings today confront the growing violence of and in our world. War, abuse, murder—these all represent different forms of violence that have profound influences on the lives of human beings. The causes and effects of these different forms of violence have created such deeply rooted disorders. It's almost as if

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

And/Or/Pro/methe is an adaptation of *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus. This work was prepared by investigating practices of mourning in Yazd during the month of Muharram. *And/Or/Pro/methe* is an ongoing work-in-progress. For this reason, after the premiere, Beyn Theatre Group continued to rehearse and develop the production. By the end of this process, the work took on a new title: *Promethe/Plague*

violence has come to shape our destiny as humans, and we have no alternatives available to change this; yet Beyn likes to hope an alternative world could still exist!

MTNOW. In addition to oppression and resistance, *And/Or/Pro/methe* takes up specific religious rituals. Which in particular?

Mehdi Agahikeshe. *And/Or/Pro/methe* is based on *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus. As we developed the piece, we gained inspiration from the traditional mourning



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PRODUCTION FACTS

Length 40 MINUTES | Cast size 4 SINGERS
| Space BLACK BOX (150 SEATS) |
Language(s) FARSI, ENGLISH | Premiere In
formation INTERNATIONAL FADJR THEATRE
FESTIVAL (MOLAVI VENUE) TEHRAN 26
JANUARY 2018 | Producer BEYN THEATRE
GROUP MEHDI AGAHIKESHE

ceremonies of Muharram—the first month of the Islamic calendar and one of the four sacred months of the year—in the Iranian city of Yazd. In Iran, the month of Muharram involves an ancient tradition of conducting mourning ceremonies rooted both in Islam as well as in Iranian culture. We incorporated gestures from these ceremonies into our performance such as beating your chest, weeping during the mourning hymns, and producing strong percussive beats.

It should be noted that in the process of creating our artistic projects, members of Beyn Theatre Group conduct multiple activities outside of the studio, such as observation, communication, and research. They also engage with sounds and physical traditions from different regions. Through this, we collect physical and metaphysical material that we can then use to confront the world outside.



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MTNOW. *And/Or/Pro/methe* includes what you describe in the brochure as "songs" written by "the group"? How does a group compose music? Can you describe this process?

Navid Gohari. All of the music used by Beyn Theatre Group is performed by the actors, obscuring the line between actor, singer and musician. The music itself is usually created by one of two methods: 1) using folklorish/ ritualistic songs from all around the world and Iran; 2) creating music out of vocal and musical materials based on folklorish/ ritualistic songs. With the first method, music and songs from Iran and different parts of the world that have vocal and dramatic potential for the project are selected as primary material. Then using techniques of improvisation and focusing on qualities like "musicality", performers create original songs and compositions in rehearsal. With the second method, the group makes original songs and lyrics based on folkloric and/ or ritualistic musical material. Sometimes the lyrics of the original songs have no meaning in relation to the drama. In these cases, the group pays more attention to the "energy" of the sound. In the end, as music director, I ultimately bear the final responsibility of creating, selecting and/or tweaking the musical composition.

MTNOW. One of the key tenets of Beyn Theatre Group is its commitment to "the performer as the main element of performance". In what way does *And/Or/Pro/methe* fulfill this?

Mehdi Agahikeshe. In *And/Or/Pro/methe*, we developed the main performance by emphasizing human actions such as: physical activities, vocal gestures, breathing models, etc. As a result, *And/Or/Pro/methe* is a performance in which the performer is the most important component. In general, Beyn Theatre Group's main goal is to search for a quality of musicality in the outside world using the actor as the main component of the performance. Beyond typical musical properties, "musicality" should be considered as an inherent quality in nature and human behavior. Hence, studying nature and human actions—which intrinsically contain aspects of dialogism, polyphony, harmony and appeal—is the group's main focus.

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CAST & CREW

Cast Performers. SARAH AKBARI, NAHAL FARJADI, TAHERE HAZAVEH, MOHAMMAD MAJD TAHERI, AND HAZHIR MORADI

Crew. MEHDI AGAHIKESHE Stage Direction
NAVID GOHARI Music Direction
MEYSAM KHOYI Dramaturgy Advisor
MOHSEN TAMADDONINEJAD Artistic Coordinator
Amir Hoseyn HEYDARI Stage Management
ZHILA RAFIYI Assistant Stage Management
ALI KOOZEGAR Light Designer
SAMIN SALEK Make-up
AMIR MOGHATAA Graphic Design
RA STUDIO Graphic Materials

AQUASONIC

This interview was conducted with
composer Laila Skovmand.

MTNOW. *AquaSonic* incorporates a variety of original instruments in order to explore the world of underwater acoustics. What drew you to this format? What is the idea behind this work?

Laila Skovmand. *AquaSonic* is the result of asking simple questions in the search for complex answers. In 2004, I asked myself the question, "Is it possible to sing in and under water?" This set off a long and very complex journey that lasted for over a decade, challenging the 200,000 year-old human tradition of expressing music through the air. What does it do to us humans when our norms and habits are fundamentally challenged? Can it help us to find new answers, new understandings of who we are as human beings? Of our origins? Our existence? Our ability to invent, adapt, survive and evolve as a species and how we relate to our surroundings?

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Five performers submerge themselves in glass water tanks to play custom-made instruments and sing underwater. Transformed inside these dark, aquatic chambers, the musicians produce sounds that are both eerily melodic and powerfully resonant. *AquaSonic* is the culmination of years of research into the possibilities of submerged musical performance to break barriers and challenge existing paradigms. The artists conducted a host of experiments in collaboration with deep-sea divers, instrument makers, and scientists to develop entirely new, highly specialized subaqueous instruments. These include an underwater organ or "hydraulophone", a crystallophone, a rotacorda, percussion and a violin. The team also perfected a distinctive vocal technique for underwater singing. The result is an extraordinary concert experience: a submersion into a magical new universe of sounds and images.



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Also, *AquaSonic* is only the first part of an exploration that will eventually take the form of a quadrology about human evolution: a compound work made up of four distinct concerts about our origins, our instincts, our emotions and our intellect.

PRODUCTION FACTS

Length 1 HOUR | Cast size 2 SINGERS,
3 INSTRUMENTALISTS | Space PROSCENIUM
OR BLACK BOX | Language(s) NONE |
Premiere Information OPERADAGEN
FESTIVAL ROTTERDAM 27 MAY 2016 |
Producer BETWEEN MUSIC, FUTUREPERFECT
PRODUCTION, AND AARHUS 2017

MTNOW. *AquaSonic* does not include either text or mise-en-scène. What distinguishes this piece from, say, a concert? What makes it a work of music theater?

Laila Skovmand. The performativity of the show is not created by text, but is more comparable to choreography. The narrative is created in the polyphony between the music, the dramaturgy, the light, the performers, and the water. The performers are submerged by an element—namely water—that radically changes everything, whether performatively, choreographically or philosophically. *AquaSonic* has so many strong symbols and narratives, both related to the mythological and psychological symbol of water, not to mention the fact that water has, in our day and age, become a symbol of climate change and the immigration

crisis. The audience feedback we get often takes the form of interpretations of these symbols, for example, the sirens of Greek mythology, a post-apocalyptic world, climate change, refugees, isolation, loneliness, a future without hope—a future with hope. Strangely, the critics rarely reflect on these topics.

MTNOW. Can you speak to the process of creating the music for *AquaSonic*? It appears that all of the performers have memorized their parts. Or are some passages improvised?

Laila Skovmand. All of the music is composed with no improvised sections. So, yes, the musicians had to learn the entire piece by heart. The development of the music has been a long journey. Before *AquaSonic* there were not really any

instruments created for underwater music, so in the beginning I only had a small range of notes that could be produced. The initial composition was created out of variations within these strict limitations. As the process developed, we invented and developed new instruments, which gave us a wider range of musical possibilities. For the final version, I chose to keep some of that initial music, so that the composition also acts as a representation of the evolution of an entire genre.

One thing that has been important to me is that the music has a melodic and rhythmic structure that is recognizable for the audience—so that they can clearly hear the difference between the music both above and underwater—so that they can sense what the water does to the sound. For example, at the beginning of the concert, a melody is played on a solo violin, but what you really hear is the difference between a violin playing underwater versus a violin playing in air. Underwater, the sound of the violin becomes very thin. This is because it lacks the high overtones and undertones—it sounds like a recording from the 1920s actually, which, for me, is a sound that takes me back in time. This range between old sounds and our futuristic scenography gathers a past, a present and a future, all of which occur at the same time, challenging linear timelines and mindsets.



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CAST & CREW

Performers/ Musician. LAILA SKOVMAND, NANNA BECH, MORTEN POULSEN, MORAN LE BARS AND ROBERT KARLSSON

Crew. LAILA SKOVMAND Artistic Management/ Composition
ROMAN KOMARS AND ANDERS BOLL Sound Design RUNE HAIKEN TØNNES Light Design
CLAUS MADSEN Technical Direction

CAST & CREW

Cast. MORTEN GROVE FRANDSEN
Sukkerfar SARA FUSAGER Monde
Allesdatter ASTRID KJÆR Puppeteer
ELLEN KRISTIANSEN Automatone
ZHANG XIN T Chinese boy MALTE JO
FRID-NIELSEN Man from the audience

Crew. Lasse SCHWANENFLÜGEL
PIASECKI Composer/Author/Director
JANNIE RASK DE VITT Set Design
and Costumes MARIE BROLIN-TANI
Choreography JAKOB HULTBERG Conductor
RAPHAEL SOLHOLM AND MALTE
HAUGE Lighting Design MALTE
HAUGE Lighting Technician BLACKBURST
LYDTEKNIK / V. FREDERIK ROSENKJÆR
Sound Design and Technician SEPPI NIELSEN
Electromagnetic Instrument MARTIN
STUMMANN Piano Tuner ANDREAS
HOLM STAGEHAND Coordinator FILIP
DE MELO Festival Chauffeur ANNE
SOPHIE GERTZ Producer REGIN
PETERSEN Administrative Leader
KARSTEN KROGH ANDERSEN Chairman of
HearMyEyes LASSE SCHWANENFLÜGEL
PIASECKI Artistic Leader SIGNE
LAUSEN Performance Manager MAXINE
DEVAUD Production Assistant ARNE
RASK KRISTINE BAKKEN Fundraiser FEI
NIE Interpreter YING-HSUEH CHEN AND
JENS KAAD Chinese Lyrics

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FALLING AWAKE

This interview was conducted with
composer/ librettist/ stage director Lasse Schwanenflügel Piasecki
and set and costume designer Jannie Rask de Vitt.

MTNOW. You not only composed the music and created the mise-en-scène for *Falling Awake*, you also wrote the text. Do you always write your own libretti? What does a composer gain from creating his or her own texts? Might he or she lose something as well?

Lasse Schwanenflügel Piasecki. I always work like this. I prefer to develop unified artistic concepts across multiple disciplines. In the beginning of the process, Jannie and I tested different visual ideas involving singing. We tried having a singer strapped to a rotating wheel. This added a sort of real fragility and friction to the singing. Then, I needed to find a reason, a basis, for writing an opera around this situation. This led me to consider two phenomena: 1) the drive to edification; 2) emotional singing as a manipulative force. Together, these make for the perfect opportunity to control the minds of the audience. Traditional opera and even more so musicals are great examples of how these powerful tools of emotional manipulation can be used to promote the moral improvement of society. This shares

certain characteristics with fairytales, of course, reminding us of the romanticism behind morality.

MTNOW. On that very subject, several elements of *Falling Awake* appear to draw on the narrative conventions of fairytales. Why would a composer choose to work in this tradition? What does it offer you musically, in comparison to, say, more "realistic" subject matter?

Lasse Schwanenflügel Piasecki. The world is so simple in fairytales—everything is either good or evil. Rulers need these oppositions in order to preserve the right to exercise their power. Today with "fake news" and "alternative facts", the best manipulator wins the battle over truth. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to be critical of these narratives. I imagined the music for *Falling Awake* to be like the gingerbread house Hansel and Gretel discover in the dark wood: the exterior sweet like sugar with melodic earworms that compel the audience to join in and celebrate whatever is happening on stage. This concept fits into the idea of

Falling Awake as a picture of a normative family, social group, or society that gradually goes too far in the direction of suppression—without anyone even noticing. To accomplish this musically, the audience is manipulated by melodic beauty to the point that they find themselves singing along during the cruelest moment in the opera. This is similar to the fairytale of the Pied Piper from Hamelin, and offers a kind of reminder that we have a choice to stop singing along, if society or politicians or even someone close to us should go too far.

MTNOW. *The design of Falling Awake features a number of mechanical objects and enclosures that themselves become a kind of "spectacle". What about Falling Awake—the text, the music, or some combination thereof—led you to design such a stark and mechanistic world?*

Jannie Rask de Vitt. Designing *Falling Awake* was very different from other operas I have worked on, because the visual concept was

developed at the same time as the text and score over a process of around five years. To achieve visual coherency, I sought inspiration in the music, especially in the seemingly jolly and entertaining songs that conceal the underlying exploitation and abuse. I wanted to create a similar visual space with an overall sense of decay and "wrong-ness", even though the audience was presented with what appears to be joyful and entertaining objects like the wheel of fortune, TVs, and exhibition cages. Lasse also has a very strong opinion about every item and action on stage, and many sounds from the story are incorporated in the music. Incorporating the orchestra into the scenography allowed the audience to see the origin of each sound, while also supporting the already blurred lines between actors and musicians. Musicians appear as actors on stage. They move around and among the singers. They play each other's instruments, some of which have been made or modified by Lasse. These become strong elements of the piece both visually

as well as acoustically. The exchanging of instruments and use of scenic sounds in the score creates an interaction between the auditory and the visual that is typical

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Falling Awake is an opera about taking a critical approach to any narrative forced upon us. A young woman, Monde, discovers that her life is controlled by a libretto. As an authoritarian protocol, the libretto determines Monde's life and her fate. It robs her of her agency. It revokes any possibility of escape from its prescribed parameters. And so in response, Monde refuses to sing. The story follows Monde as she falls in love with a Chinese boy who sings on television. Envious of his daughter's affection, Monde's father spends all of the money he had intended for his daughter's education on an old mechanical doll and a magic spinning wheel instead. The opera opens with a pleasant picture of a normative family (or society) that gradually takes on deeply repressive characteristics. To depict this, the opera manipulates the audience with melodic beauty to the point where even the spectators sing along as Monde is cruelly exploited. This scene acts as a reminder that we as citizens always have the choice not to sing along. Each of us is the protagonist of our own life, and we are all an audience to the lives of others. We therefore have the responsibility to act as critical actors in our collective story.

for Lasse's work, and represents a central focus of my design for this opera.

MTNOW. *Falling Awake* is one of the few works selected by Music Theatre NOW that features something resembling a classical music ensemble. Do you think there is a place for the classical orchestra in the future of music theatre?

Lasse Schwanenflügel Piasecki.

I prefer to think of the "ensemble" as ten committed musicians: some have skills for bowing, others for blowing. What they bow on or blow into is up to the imagination. In general, I conceptualize music and lyrics so that they fit the characters. If the character is naive or childish, the lyrics and music should express that. I decided that the father figure should be a countertenor—singing in the same register as his daughter—to emphasize his childish behavior, and I wrote music for children's instruments to be handled by adult musicians. I also worked with ensembles inside the ensemble; in the songs of the antique puppet, I turn the ensemble into an early music group, and when the father tries to sell ice-cream, and later his daughter to the audience, the ensemble transforms into a hammered dulcimer/ street-music-inspired ensemble.

PRODUCTION FACTS

Length 1 HOUR | Cast size 4 SINGERS, 1 ACTOR, 1 PUPPETEER, CONDUCTOR AND 10-PERSON SINFONIETTA | Space BLACK BOX (165 SEATS) | Language(s) DANISH, CHINESE, ITALIAN (ENGLISH SURTITLES AVAILABLE) | Premiere Information FOLKETEATRET COPENHAGEN 25 MAY 2017 | Producer KLANG – COPENHAGEN AVANTGARDE MUSIC FESTIVAL



© Credits Louise Eriksen

#FREEBRAHMS

This interview was conducted with choreographer and stage director Ela Baumann, artistic director, co-composer and hornist Juri de Marco and board member, co-composer and trombonist Alistair Duncan.

MTNOW. The title of your work is *#freebrahms*. From what is Brahms being freed? And why does he need to be liberated?

Juri de Marco. Yes, the title is *#freebrahms*, but there is more to that name than one might think at first glance. We [the STEGREIF.orchester] formed over three years ago, because we wanted to free ourselves from aspects of the concert tradition. We all love classical music, but the performance format didn't feel entirely authentic to us. We set ourselves two simple goals: to perform without a conductor and without sheet music. We also see improvisation as a key element of our musicality and strive to create space for it in our performances of classical music. „Aus dem Stegreif“ is a phrase in German that means "impromptu" and implies "freedom", "flexibility", and "skill". Improvisation has a long and beautiful history in classical music, and we wanted to revive this tradition in our performances. Because we are freed from fixed positions on stage, we can

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Following up on Beethoven and Schubert, the STEGREIF.orchester has now come to "free" Johannes Brahms. *#freebrahms* is a participatory exploration of the classical music concert. STEGREIF.orchester's innovative approach leaves out the conductor, music stands and sheet music. Each musician plays entirely from memory to combine canonical musical works with improvisation informed by the original material, opening up completely new approaches to classical music for the audience. Incorporating jazz, "world music", and electronic instruments, the ensemble creates space for improvisation and movement. Liberated from the confines of the traditional orchestral setup, the musicians become part of a site-specific choreography designed to strengthen the musical experience and break the barriers between audience and orchestra. The concert hall and the auditorium become one stage. Performed at the Konzerthaus Berlin, the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, and the Schleswig-Holstein Musikfestival, *#freebrahms* occupies spaces of historical tradition, and infuses them with fresh air.

CAST & CREW

STEGREIF.orchester. 1. VIOLINS Sebastian Caspar, Anne-Sophie Bereuter, Celia Schann, Aaron Müller, Jenny Lippl 2. VIOLINS Bartosz Nowak, Maria Reich, Franz Berlin, Sonja Schebek VIOLA Lukas Hanke, Nina Kazourian, Shir-Ran Yinon CELLO Abel Selaoce, Julia Bilat, David Fernandez BASS Jakob Petzl, Stephan Goldbac WOODWINDS Helena Montag, Nikola Djurica, Laura Totenhagen, Anne Fliegel, Sebastian Lange BRASS Konstantin Döben, Juri de Marco, Nuria Rodriguez Diaz, Alistair Duncan, Jonas Ubat RHYTHM SECTION Bertram Burkert, Christian Betancourt, Philippos Thönes

Crew. ELA BAUMANN Choreography
JURI DE MARCO Artistic and Musical Direction
ALISTAIR DUNCAN, WOLF KERSCHEK Composition



© Credits Iken Keune



move in ways that strengthen the music and incorporate elements specific to the space where we are playing. Brahms himself does not need to be freed, because his work is already complete and speaks for itself.

MTNOW. Part of your project appears to be re-imagining Brahms' music in other cultural traditions. What interests you about this kind of generic exploration? And in what way does it relate to your idea of freeing yourselves from the classical concert tradition?

Juri de Marco. We see this kind of exploration of genre as both a delicate matter of balance and of continuing the tradition of internationalism in European classical music. Brahms himself wrote pieces influenced by his travels. We are a very international orchestra and have been able to find outlets for our musical origins in classical music. Therefore, authenticity is highly important to us. That's why we incorporate Balkan colors with our Serbian clarinetist, or elements from rock with our electric guitarist, who had his formative musical experiences in rock bands, or salsa from our Venezuelan drummer. It is a great joy for us to be able to share the richness of these origins with each other and, in turn, with the audience.

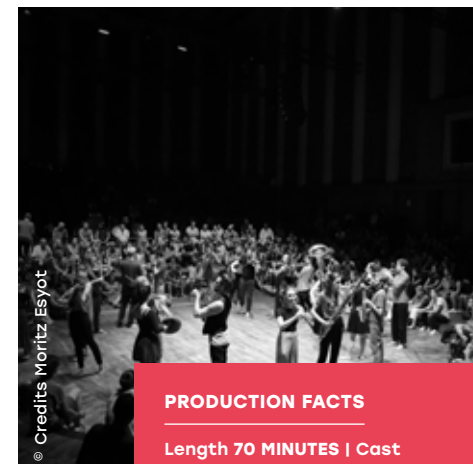
MTNOW. What then makes #freebrahms a work of music theatre and not, say, a concert? Where do you draw the distinction between these two forms?

Alistair Duncan To us, a concert is a performance in which music is the only medium of expression. In #freebrahms we included movement and dance as secondary media of expression. This is in line with our ethos of liberating the performers: movement allows us to take our interpretation, our sensations, and our emotions into the space where we're performing in order to create a choreographed musical performance that integrates our whole bodies.

MTNOW. Indeed, judging from the multiple large-scale movements executed by the entire orchestra, choreography seems to play a key role in this work. So, how was this choreography developed? Was the movement created before the music? After? Or were movement and music developed simultaneously?

Ela Baumann. The process of developing the group movements closely followed the collective reinterpretation of the music. At first, the choreographic work focused on feeling the whole group in space, improvising, and reacting to the other performers' movements. The choreography is, as with certain parts in the music,

partially open for improvisation and individual interpretation. It does have some fixed parameters, however, like the speed and quality of the movement or basic spatial composition, but the movement has to be able to respond to the musical interpretation as well as to the spectators who are also able to move freely around the room as we do.



PRODUCTION FACTS

Length 70 MINUTES | Cast size 30-PERSON ORCHESTRA THAT ALSO SINGS AS A CHOIR | Space CONCERT HALL, AUDIENCE STANDING | Language(s) ENGLISH & GERMAN | Premiere Information KONZERTHAUS BERLIN 21 APRIL 2018 | Producer STEGREIF. ORCHESTER

地狱变 | HELL SCREEN

This interview was conducted with
composer 李景元 (Li Jingyuan) and conductor 俞极 (Yu Ji).

PRODUCTION FACTS

Length 30 MINUTES | Cast size 3 SINGERS,
1 TRADITIONAL CHINESE ACTOR, 5-PERSON
MIXED CHOIR, CHAMBER ORCHESTRA WITH
CONDUCTOR | Space PROSCENIUM WITH
ORCHESTRA PIT (500 SEATS) | Language(s)
MANDARIN (ENGLISH SURTITLES) |
Premiere Information CONCERT HALL OF
THE CENTRAL CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC
BEIJING 12 OCTOBER 2016 | Producer
CENTRAL CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC
(BEIJING)

MTNOW. 地狱变 (*Hell Screen*) is based on a
story from the Heian Period in Japan. What
role does this story play in Chinese culture?
Is it a popularly known story?

李景元 (Li Jingyuan). I wouldn't say that
the story *Hell Screen* is very well known
to our audiences, although Akutagawa
Ryunosuke is certainly a very important
Asian writer—perhaps his most famous
work is *Rashomon* which was adapted to film
by Akira Kurosawa. *Hell Screen* is, however,
a powerful example of how artists think in
our own time. The audience not only sees
a story about an ancient landlord and his
servants, but they also witness the brutal
demise of an artist who has disturbed the
balance of art and ethics. This relationship
between art and ethics is something
that artists today continue to face. It
was also important to me how the piece
demonstrates "oriental" aesthetic concepts.

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俞极 (Yu Ji). I would agree that the story
is probably new to most members of
our audience, but because Japanese
culture shares many important aspects
with Chinese culture, it seems unlikely
that people would have any trouble
understanding the story, even if it's foreign.

CAST & CREW

Performers/Musicians. 张月 (ZHANG YUE)
Soprano 李丹阳 (LI DANYANG) Tenor
於敬人 (YU JINGREN) Baritone 佟波 (TONG
BO) Chinese Opera Role

Crew. 李景元 (LI JINGYUAN) Composition
俞极 (YU JI) Musical Direction 钱小寒
(QIAN XIAOHAN) Stage Direction 徐琰 (XU
YING CHINA) AND 李景元 (LI JINGYUAN)
Libretto 徐琰 (Xu Ying) Stage Art Design
邓文 (DENG WEN) Lighting Design

MTNOW. On the one hand, the mise-en-scène, vocal techniques, and harmonic scoring of 地狱变 (*Hell Screen*) engage on multiple levels with formal traditions from "Peking Opera", for example, the role of the monkey. On the other hand, there are clear European influences in much of the harmonic structure. Can you speak to how the score negotiates between these two traditions?

李景元 (Li Jingyan). First of all, since the story comes to us from the ancient Orient, I wanted to bring something clearly Oriental to the musical language. For example, I integrated some traditional Chinese instruments such as the pipa and some percussion into a larger Western chamber orchestra.

俞极 (Yu Ji). This combination of the pipa and Chinese percussions with Western

instruments creates a really "ethnic" sound. And yes, there are European influences throughout the whole piece, but nowadays all people learn Western music.

李景元 (Li Jingyan). Additionally, I required the opera singers to occasionally sing and speak using traditional Chinese vocal techniques. And, of course, there is the role of the monkey, which is written for a traditional Chinese opera performer. This kind of performer, I feel, can easily imitate the physical and vocal expressions of a monkey. I didn't incorporate Oriental elements into a Western modern musical atmosphere in order to set a specific "style", however. On the contrary, I wanted to expand the possibilities for musical expression. This combination is my attempt to inspire the audience to think about particular issues facing all human beings, even if the story happens to take place in the Orient.



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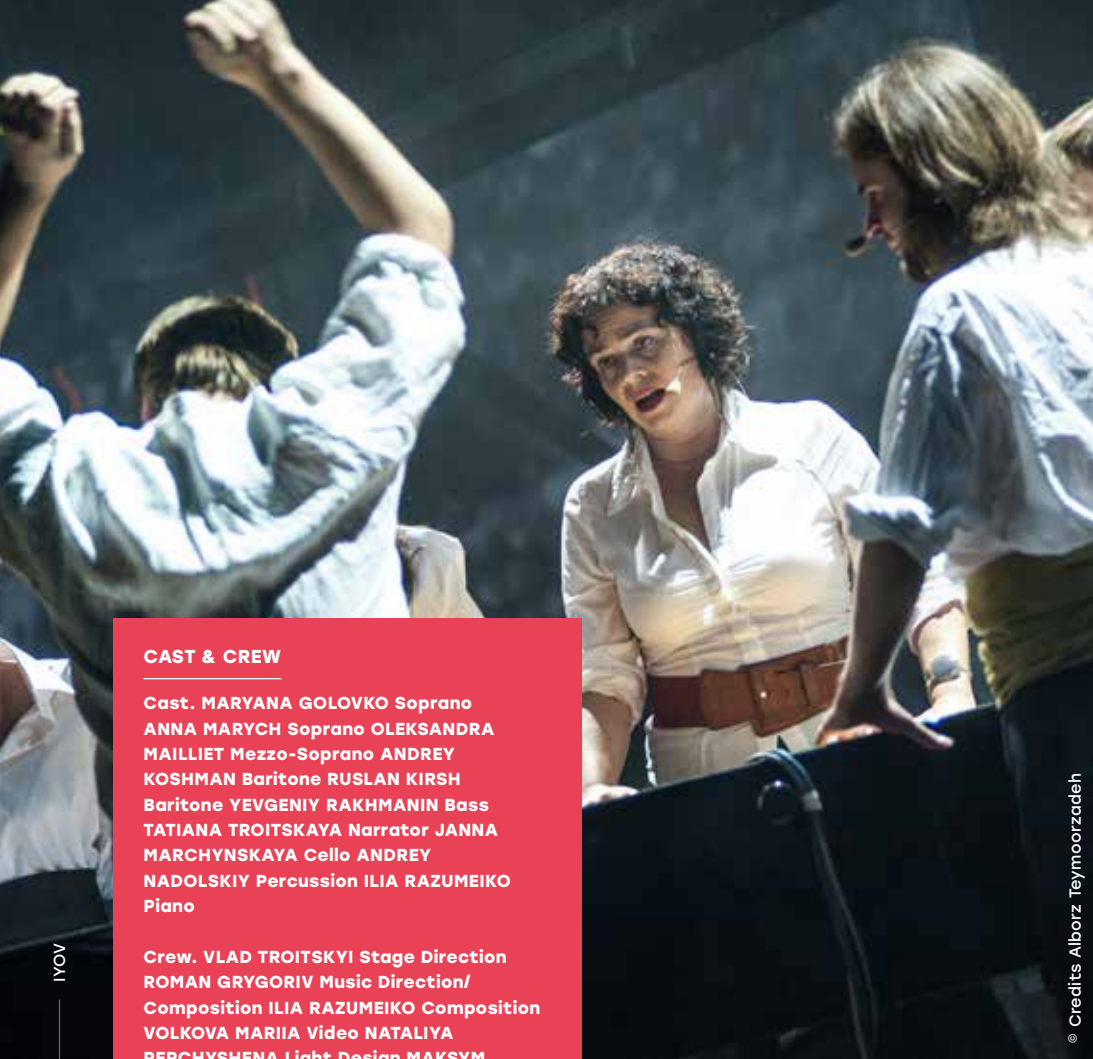
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MTNOW. 俞极 (Yu Ji), from your position as the conductor, what do you find most compelling about 李景元 (Li Jingyan)'s musical writing in this opera? His use of the voice? His engagement with text? Where do we hear his unique musical signature most clearly?

俞极 (Yu Ji). As a composer, (Li Jingyan) has an unusually mature voice. He never includes unnecessary music or text. Each note and word has a specific reason behind its appearance. Personally, I think the opening is a very signature part. The use of the choir backstage near the end of the piece is also quite impressive.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

地狱变/ *Hell Screen* is a story from the Heian Period of Japan. During that time, the conflict between the aristocracy and the court intensified, and the people suffered. Yoshihide, then known as "the greatest painter in the land", was serving the Lord of Horikawa exclusively. His daughter was also a maid there, with her pet monkey. 地狱变/ *Hell Screen* is a tragedy. Tragedy, above all other forms of art, addresses human flaws in the most thorough and determined way while bravely contemplating the most horrific answers. When writing a tragedy, the artist walks a tightrope between the ultimate pursuit of art and a particular code of ethics. In 地狱变/ *Hell Screen* the character Akutagawa Ryūnosuke discusses precisely this human curiosity and weakness. Li Jingyuan's music integrates several different musical techniques, including contemporary Western compositional technique, Chinese traditional opera, and the imitation of animal sounds. The deployment of these techniques is not aimed at setting a specific style for the opera, but, on the contrary, it seeks to expand the possibilities of musical expression. The opera also poses several open-ended questions, prompting the audience to reflect on our inherent flaws as human beings and the relationship between art and ethics.



CAST & CREW

Cast. MARYANA GOLOVKO Soprano
ANNA MARYCH Soprano OLEKSANDRA
MAILLIET Mezzo-Soprano ANDREY
KOSHMAN Baritone RUSLAN KIRSH
Baritone YEVGENIY RAKHMANIN Bass
TATIANA TROITSKAYA Narrator JANNA
MARCHYNSKAYA Cello ANDREY
NADOLSKIY Percussion ILIA RAZUMEIKO
Piano

Crew. VLAD TROITSKYI Stage Direction
ROMAN GRYGORIV Music Direction/
Composition ILIA RAZUMEIKO Composition
VOLKOVA MARIIA Video NATALIYA
PERCHYSHENA Light Design MAKSYM
TARAN Sound Design

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IYOV

About the artists: stage director Vlad Troitskyi,
composer/ conductor/ author Roman Grygoriv,
and composer/ author Ilia Razumeiko

Vlad Troitskyi is a stage director and art director of DAKH Centre of Contemporary Arts, as well as the founder of the ethno-chaos band DakhaBrakha. Troitskyi was born in Ulan-Ude, Russia in 1964. He graduated from the Radio Technician faculty of Kiev Polytechnic Institute in 1987 and finished his post-graduate studies at Kiev Polytechnic Institute in 1990. In 2002, he received his diploma in acting and directing from the Russian Theatre Art Academy in Moscow. Troitskyi is the founder, director and art director of DAKH Centre of Contemporary Arts, where he has directed over 35 performances. In 2004, he founded the DakhaBrakha ethno-chaos band, and in 2007 he launched an audio-visual-theatre-literature-philosophic art project for the GogolFest. He is also the founder of the Dakh Daughters Band. In Hungary, Troitskyi has directed Korngold's *Die Tote Stadt*. In 2014, he staged the improvisational opera *Coriolanus* based on Shakespeare's tragedy. Between 2015 and 2017, he staged the operas *IYOV*, *BABYLON*, and *ARK*.



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Roman Grygoriv is a Ukrainian composer, conductor and author of chamber, vocal, symphonic works, and theatrical music. Grygoriv was born in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine. He studied at the National Music Academy receiving a masters degree in composition. He is also chairman of the artistic foundation PORTO FRANKO, founder and director of international festivals, such as: the Frank Opera fest, Porto Franko (Ukraine), MOZART 2014 (China), and Music from Europe in 2015-2016 (China). He has also served as artistic manager of

international festivals including: the O-Fest from 2013-2015 (Ukraine). Since 2011, Grygoriv has worked as a composer and artist for the National Presidential Orchestra of Ukraine. Since 2014, has been a member of the National Union of Composers of Ukraine. In 2015, he created the opera-requiem *IYOV* for the GogolFest together with composer Ilia Razumeyko and director Vlad Troitskyi. In 2016, that same group created two further operas: *UnSimple* and *BABYLON*. In 2017, they created the opera-ballet *ARK* and the trap-opera *Wozzeck*.

Ilia Razumeiko is a Ukrainian composer and the author of chamber, vocal, and symphonic works. Razumeiko was born in 1989 in Zaporozhia, Ukraine. In 2007, he graduated from Zaporozhia Music College having studied music theory. From 2007-2012, he studied at the Kiev Conservatory under Professor A. Gavrylets' composition class and from 2012-2013 he worked at the National Theatre of Operetta of Ukraine. From 2013-2015, he studied composition at the Vienna Conservatory under Professor Martin Lihtfus. Since 2015, he has been studying electro-acoustic composition under Professor Karlheinz Esel. Together with composer Roman Grygoriv, he has organized several international festivals such as: the Frank Opera fest, Porto Franko (Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine), O-Fest-2013 (Kyiv, Ukraine), MOZ-ART 2014 (Shenzhen, China), Interior II (Vienna, Austria), and Music from Europe in 2015 (Harbin, China). In 2015, they co-created the opera-requiem *IYOV* for the GogolFest. In 2016, they co-created two further operas: *UnSimple* and *BABYLON*. During the 2016/17 season, they co-created the operas *ARK* and *Wozzeck*.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Job ("Iyov" in Hebrew) is the central character of the Book of Job in the Bible. This is a story of his life, pride and disbelief, the search for life's meaning and death, hope and regret. At the centre of our scene is a prepared piano that turns into a real orchestra. The pianist and singers use a wide range of percussion instruments such as snare drum, triangle, and ride cymbal. They use coins, keys, fingers and nails to play, pluck, and tap the piano strings and body. The instrument sounds at times like a harpsichord or drums or occasionally like a synthesizer or electronic sounds generator. The music in *IYOV* combines minimalism and the avant-garde, neoclassicism and rock. Polyphonic choral episodes and instrumental interludes alternate with passages that explore the full range of the human voice: from classical, jazz and folk techniques to breathing, screaming, whispering and overtone singing. The music dramaturgy is based on the contrast between a compilation of recitatives (based on the Book of Job) and parts of the Requiem, that is, the Catholic Mass, which refers to traditional Latin texts. The opera-requiem *IYOV* is a synthesis of Ancient Greek drama, baroque opera, oratorio, Requiem, and postmodern theatre. It is the mystery surrounding the birth of a new sound from within the piano and a demonstration of the endless possibilities of the human voice.

PRODUCTION FACTS

Length 75 MINUTES | Cast size 6 SINGERS, 6-PERSON CHOIR, 4 INSTRUMENTALIST (PREPARED GRAND PIANO, CELLO, DRUMS) | Space site SPECIFIC (1,000 SEATS) | Language(s) LATIN, ENGLISH (OR THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THE PERFORMANCE LOCATION) | Premiere Information GOGOLFEST, KYIV, 21 SEPTEMBER 2015 | Producer NOVA OPERA



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CAST & CREW

Performers/ Musicians. CLARON MCFADDEN Soprano MITRA KADIVAR, JAKUES-ALIN MILLER Voices SIMON AUGHTERLONY Performer LAURENZ SCHÄFTER Child ICTUS: MICHAEL SCHMID flute GERRIT NULENS percussion GEORGE VAN DAM violin EVA REITER Paetzold recorder and bass violin MM SOLISTS ENSEMBLE OF LA MONNAIE vocals

Crew. JORGE LEÓN Stage Direction EVA REITER Composition GEORGE VAN DAM Choral Parts GEORGES-ELIE OCTORS Musical Direction ISABELLE DUMONT Dramaturgy THIBAUT VANCRAENENBROECK Scenography SILVIA HASENCLEVER Costume Design ALIOCHA VAN DER AVOORT Video Design JORGE LEÓN, ALIOCHA VAN DER AVOORT, THOMAS SCHIRA Images PETER QUASTERS Light Design ALEXANDRE FOSTIER Sound Design POLINA BOGDANOVA Choral Coach

MITRA

This interview was conducted with director Jorge León and composer Eva Reiter.

MTNOW. *Mitra* is of course an interdisciplinary work that incorporates a variety of artistic media, but what makes it especially unique is perhaps how it was compiled out of different kinds of documents such as typed letters and video-recorded interviews. One could even call *Mitra* an epistolary work, but would you call it "documentary"?

Jorge León. What inspired *Mitra* was the online publication of an email correspondence—which I discovered by chance—between two psychoanalysts: Mitra Kadivar and Jacques-Alain Miller. So, indeed, the genesis of this project was a document, but I wanted to explore it in an artistic context. I was convinced that the content of the correspondence could be carried by an artistic form that, on the one hand, hosts the reality of the emails and their unfolding narrative, and, on the other hand, also extrapolates to wider notions such as isolation or solitude. I also wanted to question normative assumptions of "sanity". In order to address these aspects, we developed a piece that straddles across cinema, music, singing and performance.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Mitra Kadivar, an Iranian psychoanalyst, establishes a school of psychoanalysis in Tehran and plans to transform her private lodgings into a care-centre for drug addicts. Her neighbors are against it and file a complaint with the argument that she is mad. Subsequently, Mitra is forcibly interned and diagnosed as psychotic. When she was interned in 2012, her students worked to have her freed, by corresponding with the French psychoanalyst Jacques-Alain Miller. Miller then attempted to have her released through e-mail exchanges.

A cross between opera, documentary film and installation, the *Mitra* project explores mental suffering in a psychiatric institution through the true story of Mitra Kadivar. This is a story of resistance and solidarity where the truth is revealed through the eye of the camera, the singing voice, and the sound of music. This work is a collaboration between film director Jorge León and the contemporary music ensemble Ictus who together have focused on this example of female heroism in order to bear witness to the resistance of our fragile, rebellious human nature.

MTNOW. Given *Mitra's* extensive interdisciplinarity, what makes it a work of "music theatre" specifically? Is there a way to imagine the piece as a form of documentary music theatre?

Jorge León. I was struck by the dramatic power of this correspondence and although the emails don't have a literary essence, the sharp rhetoric and precise nature of their written form in combination with the urgent situation they highlight drove me toward a theatrical set up. It made a lot of sense to treat this correspondence as a contemporary tragedy. Also, I wanted to emphasize the power of a single person's voice: its political power, of course, but also its

emotional power. Lyric singing is a form, which I feel communicates and comes nearest to the emotional truth of the human being.

MTNOW. As a work of music theatre, what relationship did the music in *Mitra* have to the other elements of the production during the development process? Is the music a foundation? A response? Or both?

Eva Reiter. Jorge first used the actual email exchange as a foundation for the writing of, let's say, an "opera libretto" respecting the thread that the correspondence draws. I started my musical approach with this "libretto", from which the format of the musical piece slowly evolved. The staging of

Mitra was then developed on the basis of a very precise and quite complex score that I composed.

Originally Jorge wanted the music to be written by two different composers. He liked the idea of the exchange, having two different personalities corresponding with each other as happens between *Mitra*

PRODUCTION FACTS

Length 70 MINUTES | Cast size 1 SINGER, 1 DANCER, 6-PERSON CHOIR, 4 INSTRUMENTALISTS | Space BLACK BOX (300 SEATS) | Language(s) ENGLISH, FRENCH | Premiere Information LES HALLES DE SCHAERBEEK, BRUSSELS, 5 SEPTEMBER 2018 | Producers MUZIEKTHEATER TRANSPARANT AND ICTUS. Coproduction in collaboration with KUNSTENFESTIVAL-DESARTS BRUSSEL, LES HALLES DE SCHAERBEEK, THÉÂTRE DE LIÈGE I.K.V. IMPACT, DE MUNT/LA MONNAIE, PRESENT PERFECT VZW, GMEM MARSEILLE, ACTORAL MARSEILLE AND LES FILMS DE FORCE MAJEURE. WITH THE SUPPORT OF FEDERATION WALLONIE-BRUXELLES, INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL MARSEILLE FID, CAMARGO FOUNDATION, IRCAM, CNC DICRÉAM, THANK YOU & GOOD NIGHT PRODUCTION, INTERREG V EUREGIO MEUSE RHIN & WALLONIA, TAX SHELTER OF THE BELGIAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND ÖSTERREICHISCHES KULTURFORUM

Kadivar and Jacques-Alain Miller. But eventually, I took responsibility for the complete musical dramaturgy, and George van Dam wrote the chorus parts, which appear at several moments within the piece. During the development process, Jorge would send me sound recordings that he had collected for the film version of *Mitra*, which he had been filming in a psychiatric hospital in Aix-en-Provence. I then selected some of this sound material to be used as one of the basic elements of the tonal scenery I was creating in my musical piece. By using the original sounds of those spaces, I aimed to give access to the world into which we were gradually delving. These sounds remained one of many sources I used for my creation. I also received some video interviews that Jorge had made with *Mitra* Kadivar, and which inspired me a lot for my work. One of the strongest musical moments, for us, is the "Solitude-Aria" which was based directly on one of these interviews. Whenever I had completed my compositional work on a specific scene, I would send the music to Jorge who would then create the visual elements in order to complete the opera's scenery and staging. This form of exchange is fundamental to our collaboration.



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MUSRAROPERA

This interview was conducted
with composers Milena Kipfmüller and Klaus Janek.

MTNOW. The title of your piece is *Musraropera*. What does this mean? What is Musrara?

Klaus Janek. Musrara is a very special and historically charged quarter of Jerusalem situated between the Palestinian area of Damascus Gate and the ultra-orthodox Mea Shearim. It can be seen as a mirror of the city and of Israel that reflects the complexity of the Middle East and the diverse cultural, religious and political backgrounds of its people. All of the ambiguities and different visions of how we would like to imagine our lives are condensed in the few streets of Musrara. *Musraropera* focuses on this almost metaphorical area to create fictive and real dialogues of voices that normally would never meet and interact openly in every day life.

MTNOW. In addition to "Musrara", your work's title also includes the word "opera". In fact, you describe the piece as a "mobile-radiophonic-opera". Why opera? How does your piece engage with the operatic tradition?

Klaus Janek. Opera has a connotation that is deeply linked to a classical tradition. We definitely admire and relate to that, for example within the musical structures, as well as in the formality of the work and its contextualization of musicians and singers. At the same time we are convinced that each generation

PRODUCTION FACTS

Length 50 MINUTES | Cast size 1 SINGER,
2 INSTRUMENTALISTS | Space site
SPECIFIC WITH AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION |
Language(s) ENGLISH, FRENCH, HEBREW,
ARABIC | Premiere Information MUSRARA
MIX FESTIVAL JERUSALEM 29 MAY 2018
| Producer SOUNDING SITUATIONS AND
NAGGAR INTERDISCIPLINARY SCHOOL OF
ARTS AND SOCIETY



needs to translate the meaning of terms into its own time. Technologies, discourses and political contexts change and must have an influence on the understanding of artistic terminology; so we deliberately expanded the audience's expectations

about "opera" into today's context or, more specifically, into a piece staged in Jerusalem today. The terms "mobile" and "radiophonic" suggest that there is something more to discover in this piece, something that might be unusual and/or surprising.

MTNOW. In your summary of *Musraropera*, you describe Musrara as a "mirror of the city". Given the proximity of the Israeli West Bank barrier to this area, would it be appropriate to say that this mirror has a blind spot? Is *Musraropera* also a mirror?

Milena Kipfmüller. To create a politically relevant piece in the context of the conflicts that have been happening for decades in Israel is a big challenge; but that interested us a lot. We understood the quarter of Musrara as a mirror of the situation of the Middle East. Perhaps the piece itself could be better described as a "microcosmic metaphor". We do not see our piece as a mirror, but more as a stage in the symbolic sense of Ancient Greece—as a place where different conflicts, concepts, ideas and debates are exposed and put next to one another such that

"tragedy" is formed by the honest speeches of each protagonist. The blind spots are very important. We cannot avoid them, but they have to be accepted as part of the understanding process: as a warning for all of us that we always have to keep our eyes open, change perspectives, and continue looking and listening so that the blind spots move and the picture gets more precise every time we change our position. With our work we don't want to present the truth or our opinion. We try to create a theatrical dispositif to unveil the strangeness of the real, and how conflicting and multiple truths have to constantly fight for their existence.

CAST & CREW

Performers/ Musicians. LAILA SHUALA Singer NITAI LEVI CLARINET SHIRA Harpaz Double Bass

Crew. KLAUS JANEK, MILENA KIPFMÜLLER Stage Direction/ Composition
FABIENNE MÜLLER Costume Design

MTNOW. In what way does the piece acknowledge or engage with the city's invisible borders, or even its actual ones? Does "transgression" play a role here?

Milena Kipfmüller. Although this is not necessarily visible at first sight, visible and invisible borders were definitely a topic featured in the staging of the piece. By not playing a big role within our dialogues, the borders become even more visible in reality. We had amazing and very valuable interviews with people in the neighborhood. There were also individuals who did not want to talk to us. This too can be seen as a border we were unable to pass, a visible blind spot. But, in general, the encounters and conversations we had were very open, honest and generous, which probably would not have happened had the cast spoken to one another directly. Perhaps we ourselves became the holes in the borders, open checkpoints for words, and these voices could only actually speak to each other in the context of a fictional opera. The transgression of the barriers happened only in our constructed artistic fiction. This was the way we found to create an optimal situation, so people could imagine the possibility of those exchanges happening in real life as well—like a rehearsal for reality. This is what theatre and music are able to do.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Musraropera is a mobile-radiophonic-opera developed in a historically-charged quarter of Jerusalem situated between the Palestinian area of Damascus Gate and the ultra-orthodox Mea Shearim. Musrara is a mirror of the city and Israel that reflects the complexity of the Middle East and the diverse cultural, religious and political backgrounds of its peoples. Our story engages with voices from this neighborhood and individual visions of the future that link the here and there, the past and the future. In a "post-truth" time, we strategically stage this pre-truth opera as a fictive rehearsal to transform the uncertain present. The imbalance between the global north and the global south, exported wars and Eurocentric perspectives is evolving and will only be decided by our acts rooted in the wider discourse of the surrounding neighborhoods. Composers and directors Klaus Janek and Milena Kipfmüller use these voices as musical elements, composed and melted into a fictive disharmonic choir. A mini-orchestra moves through the streets and is captured live and transformed electronically. The space is the city itself and staged using FM transmitters and radios and other everyday objects selected for their position in the local and global discourses. These objects render the space a movable, choreographed set design. The finale takes place at a soccer field, where games are played, still one team against the another, still friendly, still exhausting, together and playful.



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Cave is a cyber punk opera based on the popular film *The Matrix*. Located at the intersection of opera, cinema and new technologies, this radical performance calls for critical reflection on "fake news" and "post-truth" through a reinterpretation of Plato's famous "Allegory of the Cave". In Plato's allegory, humans are chained inside of a cave, facing the interior wall on which they see the shadows of the outside world, but not the world itself. In so doing, they interpret "reality" to be these shadows. *The Cave* explores how a two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional world translates into the world today in the form of misconceptions that we may have regarding what's going on, as for example in the domains of politics, society, and ethics. In *The Cave*, the four-person cast uses shadow puppetry, new media, visuals and music. With sarcasm running through the piece, mythological creatures pass in and out and shadows from another world appear all too close to ours.

THE CAVE

This interview was conducted with stage director Elli Papakonstantinou.

MTNOW. Your piece *The Cave* questions the truth behind what one would normally call "reality", a topic that has interested theatre since Ancient Greece. What makes music theatre an apt form for investigating this topic? Why music? Why theatre?

Elli Papakonstantinou. Plato believed that music connects us with the truth and the knowledge that is ascribed to all humans. The ancient word "μῦσθαι" –which means "search for the truth"–shares the same root with the words "muse" and "music". Music is the logos of the universe. It is the vehicle that connects human beings to the source of knowledge that transcends all existence. And based on my experience, this is right. I mean, it feels right. Music, vibrations, electro-acoustic soundscapes and vocalizations interconnected with a stream of visuals felt like the right path for inviting the audience to experience different layers of realities and to raise the question of truth that is so fundamental to all. I have been working with music and text,

combining new media and visuals for the last years, so I would say that this is probably my way to express myself. When I direct, I understand music, spoken word and visuals as different elements

CAST & CREW

AN ODC ENSEMBLE PRODUCTION
Concept/ Libretto/ Directing ELLI PAKONSTANTINO
Musical composition/
Orchestration TILEMACHOS MOUSSAS
Video Design/ REAL-TIME video/ **Set**
and Costume Design PANTELIS MAKKAS
Performers and singers BLAINE L.,
 REININGER ANASTASIA KATSINAVAKI, VIVI
 PETSU MARILENA CHRISOHIDI Shadow
 puppet designer TASSOS KONSTAS
 Dramaturgical Collaboration STELLA
 RAPTU TANJA DIERS Assistant Director
 KATERINA DRAKOPOULOU Lighting
 design OLYMPIA MYTILINAIU Piano,
 Music Coaching ANASTASIA KATSINAVAK,
 Santoor MARILENA CHRISOHIDI Pedals/
 Effects BLAINE L. REININGER Photography
 Credits KAROL JAREK, ELIAS MORAITIS
 Communication NICOL VOTSI Production
 manager KONSTANTINA ANGELETOU Danish
 producer TANJA DIERS

of a larger musical work. In other words, I see and hear everything as music, and my role as the director is to balance all these elements into one whole. In that sense, I don't know if I "direct" or "write" the work, since these roles are all interconnected. Sometimes, I even conduct live on stage, treating each part as components of one big music score. I want everything to be created live on stage, carried out by the performers—which can be very challenging at times—but I think that this contributes to the freshness and the flow of the piece. Because everything eventually is music.

PRODUCTION FACTS

Length 1 HOUR | Cast size 4 SINGERS, 2 INSTRUMENTALISTS, 1 PEDALS OPERATOR, 1 LIVE VIDEO PERFORMER | Space PROSCENIUM OR BLACK BOX (300 SEATS) | Language(s) ENGLISH, SOME GREEK | Premiere Information GREEK ART THEATRE KAROLOS KOUN ATHENS 31 JANUARY 2018 | Producer ODC ENSEMBLE SUPPORTED BY THE GREEK MINISTRY OF CULTURE THE EUROPEAN UNION (CREATIVE LENSES) AND THE DANISH ARTS COUNCIL

MTNOW. From Shakespeare to Kleist, several canonical Western dramatists have dedicated serious thought to the relationship between truth and knowledge. Rather than a drama, however, you chose to take a work of philosophy as the textual basis of your piece. Why?

Elli Papakonstantinou. I didn't want to work on a canonical play, but rather to challenge myself with the impossible task of dramatizing a philosophical text. In my contemporary confrontation with an image-based culture, I see that technology has undermined our ability to trust what we see, yet we have not adequately grappled with the effects of this on our notions of truth. We have become accustomed to verisimilar rather than true things, often rejecting the demands of discipline and



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patience that true things require of us. The allegorical narrative has the capacity to carry us out of the ordinary and the mundane and to provide us with a different perspective altogether. Philosophy—and Plato in particular—elevates us to different vistas from where we can create associations and maybe even look behind the veil. In the performance, I have inserted some other texts that gesture toward some of the challenges we face nowadays, like "fake news" or the counterintuitive claims of quantum physics. I wanted to talk about some of the greatest challenges of our times, but also to tune into a path of spiritual awakening. That is what Plato's teaching is all about. His allegory provides a frame for people to make their own associations. In that sense, it is an open dramaturgy that doesn't draw conclusive arguments.



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MTNOW. Beyond these theoretical considerations, what did the development process of *The Cave* look like? How was the text created? The music?

Elli Papakonstantinou. We developed this piece in Athens with very scarce resources (subsidized by the Greek Ministry of Culture), and had very little time to pull it all together. So, with little time to prepare and to plan the work in phases, we (the composer, the performers, the visual artist, the dramaturgs and myself) entered the rehearsals and developed this piece in a very intense and dense way, whereby we would rehearse during the day and then we would all go away, develop work, and come back to test it the following day. Now, writing a new libretto and testing new ideas on visuals and writing a new score all at the same time is very demanding. All of the collaborators had to dedicate their full attention. I think that there is something about the density of this rehearsal period that enters into the piece itself. I remember it as a sleepless period. In a way, this unorthodox process of developing *The Cave* was rewarding as it kept everyone's expectations and interactivity levels high—but I wouldn't necessarily repeat it!

THE HOWLING GIRLS

This interview was conducted with composer Damien Ricketson.

MTNOW. The music of *The Howling Girls* encourages the listener to think about process, in particular on account of its lengthy passages featuring only minor vocal, rhythmic, and/or harmonic adjustments. How was the music developed? Are parts of the performance improvised? Is there a score?

Damien Ricketson. *The Howling Girls* is structured like a single utterance: it begins in the engine-room of the lungs, moves to the fleshy organ-pipe of the throat, to the crucible of the mouth and eventually ruptures from the body to the external world. With regards its development, the first thing to note is that the work doesn't follow the typical process of creation or hierarchy of authorship traditionally associated with opera. *The Howling Girls* is a co-created work with director Adena Jacobs and, as such, it is impossible to separate the staging from the music:

the sensory integration of sound and image stems from a singular collaborative conception. A score does exist. However, it only partially represents the work. The music is also encapsulated in the immersive electronic orchestration and written into the bodies of the performers via in situ development and structured improvisation.

MTNOW. The vocal techniques and tradition you use seem to reference the European avant-garde of the 1970s, for example Schnabel's *Glossolalie* or Stockhausen's *Gesang der Jünglinge*. Do you see a connection between your piece and this tradition? And do you see yourself as part of a contemporary avant-garde?

Damien Ricketson. Perhaps the European avant-garde is inscribed in the extraordinary voice of Jane Sheldon and, via her collaborative contribution, finds its way into the expressive vocabulary

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CAST & CREW

Performers/ Musicians. JANE SHELDON Soprano THE HOUSE THAT DAN BUILT (GRACE CAMPBELL KITTU HOYNE KIRI JENSSEN EMILY PINCOCK, JAYDEN SELVAKUMARASWAMY AND SYLVIE WOODHOUSE) Vocal Ensemble

Crew. DAMIEN RICKETSON Composition ADENA JACOBS Stage Direction JACK SYMOND Musical Direction/Theremin/Keyboard EUGYEENE TEH Set and Costume Design JENNY HECTOR Light Design BOB SCOTT Sound Design DAMION HOLLING Production Manager CECILIA NELSON, MILLIE SIMES Stage Management DANIELLE MAAS Assistant Director HUW BELLING Assistant Conductor TYLER HAWKINS Assistant Designer AMANDA AGNES Costume Maker DANIELLE O'KEEFE Director (The House that Dan Built)

of *The Howling Girls*. However, my personal reference points during the creative process were a series of experimental vocal works emerging in Australia in the wake of the #metoo movement including Eve Klein's *Vocal Womb*, Liza Lim's *Atlas of the Sky*, and Cat Hope's *Speechless*. Where I am conscious of direct historical connections, they are to figures such as vocalist Joan La Barbara.



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PRODUCTION FACTS

Length 65 MINUTES | Cast
 SIZE 1 SINGER, 5-6 PERSON
 CHOIR (TEENAGE GIRLS), 1
 INSTRUMENTALIST/ CONDUCTOR
 | Space PROSCENIUM
 STAGE OR BLACK BOX (286
 SEATS) | Language(s) N.A.
 | Premiere Information
 CARRIAGEWORKS (BAY 20)
 SYDNEY 28 MARCH 2018 |
 Producer SYDNEY CHAMBER
 OPERA

Her seminal *Circular Song*, for example, can be felt in Sheldon's ingressive singing (sounding the inhale) that characterizes her "endurance tone"—which goes nearly unbroken for thirty-six minutes! As with many composers, I am hesitant to align myself with a label, "avant-garde" or otherwise. That said, I am conscious that I seem to reflect a body of composers that is currently interested in seeking a very visceral corporeal mode of expression that often extends beyond the purely sonic.

MTNOW. Your music makes extensive use of ritualistic acoustic allusions including the sound of breathing and overtone singing. How do you negotiate using these techniques to represent the unconscious without ending up reproducing the very misogynist and/or exoticist clichés you explicitly aspire to interrogate?

Damien Ricketson. The compositional techniques used in *The Howling Girls* draw heavily on the unconscious vocalisations we make in high emotional states—gasps, cries, wails—sounds that speak far more directly than the rational organization of language. Jacobs and I were inspired in part by the feminist writings of Elaine Showalter, who proposed an understanding of hysteria as an alternative proto-language to communicate a message of power and protest that, for various reasons, cannot be verbalised. Trying to

compose with involuntary sounds is, of course, contradictory and potentially risky. Indeed, if we view composition more broadly as an act of attempted control, I am cognizant of the contradiction inherent in my own role instituting musical control over performers, particularly the mostly young and female cast. Jacobs, however, brought with her an impressive body of experience in working with young and untrained actors not only as performers but as co-devising artists—her critically acclaimed *On the Bodily Education of Young Girls* and *The Bacchae*, for example, are astonishing theatrical statements reclaiming feminine power. The creative development of *The Howling Girls*, therefore, employed various strategies, notably an embedded series of "circle sessions", to carve out a dedicated space into which the teenage performers could freely and authentically construct meaning and material and allow the full creative potential of the concept to be realised. Interestingly, the latter section of the work includes a sequence of "speech-choir" passages that are a political manifesto that the young women created and articulate in their own imaginary language. This remains their secret. To this day, neither Jacobs nor I know their demands.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Howling Girls is an experimental wordless opera exploring the medium and metaphor of the voice. Created by director Adena Jacobs and composer Damien Ricketson, the work is inspired by an anecdote that emerged in the wake of the September 11th terror attacks in which five teenage girls arrived at separate hospitals unable to swallow because they believed some debris or body parts from the destruction had lodged in their throats. The doctor who examined them found no physical obstruction. This haunting image has been read as a collective expression of trauma and hysteria. Jacobs and Ricketson's non-verbal creative response, featuring soprano Jane Sheldon and a troupe of teenage performers, critiques the dominant patriarchal depiction of female hysteria – a history of not being believed and of speaking a language deemed irrational and unintelligible – and recasts it as a subversive mode of communication with the power to disrupt and undermine familiar systems. The throbbing chorus of young voices, together with an immersive orchestration of theremin, keyboards and electro-acoustic music, attempts to communicate in a proto-language beyond the rational: a landscape of sensations that bypasses the brain and works directly on the body reconstituting the voice anew.

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