

Chaya Czernowin, Composer

Biography

"Alive, intuitive, wild, and as boundless as pure experience – is music capable of such things? I've heard such music – rarely – but it was life-altering. To work toward this requires a difficult balancing act: you must be so sensitive in your perception it is as if you were without skin, while at the same time maintaining the analytical clarity, precision and concentration of a surgeon with a scalpel."

Chaya Czernowin's music is anchored in immediate sensory experience. It explores the relationship between the present and the submerged experience of the past or an imagined future through finely woven compositions, which at times erupt powerfully, as they explore the extremities of our perception. Geographically and musically, the composer is a traveller: born in 1957 in Haifa, she took her first steps in composition in Israel under Abel Ehrlich and Yitzhak Sadai before continuing her studies under Dieter Schnebel in Berlin with a DAAD grant. After a period at New York's Bard College, the composer completed her doctorate at the University of California, San Diego as a student of Roger Reynolds and Brian Ferneyhough. During a period of travelling and composition, further grants and fellowships allowed her to work in Japan (Asahi Shimbun Fellowship, NEA grant) and Germany (Akademie Schloss Solitude).

Her orchestral and chamber works, both of which often incorporate electronic elements, have been performed at renowned contemporary music festivals across Europe, Asia and North America. Having explored fragmentation and instrumental identities in chamber works such as *Afatsim* (1996) and *String Quartet* (1995), her international breakthrough came after *Pnima... ins Innere* at the Munich Biennale in 2000, which received the Bayerischer Theaterpreis and was also named the best premiere of the year by Opernwelt magazine. In this piece, based on a story by David Grossmann, the composer tackles the archaeology of memory and thus indirectly her own history as the daughter of two Holocaust survivors. Her second opera, *Adama* (2006), was commissioned by the Salzburg Festival for Mozart's 250th birthday as a companion piece to *Zaide*; a new version of the opera was performed at Theater Freiburg in 2017.

Winter Songs, begun at the same time as these two operas, is a continuing series that interprets the same septet in ever-evolving ways in order to achieve ever new musical experiences. *Maim* (2001-2007) for large orchestra, soloists and electronics, explores the physicality and flexibility of musical material. In *HIDDEN* for string quartet and electronics, written in 2013/14 and later recorded by the JACK Quartet in 2016, the composer stretches our perception of time and provides distorted reflections of musical material.

Her critically acclaimed opera *Infinite Now* premiered in 2017 under the direction of Titus Engel at the Opera Vlaanderen in Ghent and was performed in Antwerp, Mannheim, and Paris. Based on a story by the Chinese author Can Xue as well as Luk Perceval's drama *Front*, itself based on Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the opera was named best of the year by Opernwelt magazine. In the same year, the cello concerto *Guardian* was premiered in Donaueschingen by Séverine Ballon and subsequently presented at the Rainy Days in Luxembourg, as well as the Ostrava New Music Days. In 2019 the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under Thomas Dausgaard presented the British premiere of her shortest orchestral work, *Once I blinked nothing was the same*. Also in 2019, SWR presented *Habekhi (Crying)*, a new work for Ensemble Experimental, singers, and electronics, before her opera *Heart Chamber*, directed by Claus Guth, premiered at the Deutsche Oper Berlin under the baton of Johannes Kalitzke.

The ensemble work *The Fabrication of Light* was premiered in 2020 by Ensemble Musikfabrik as part of the Acht Brücken festival. The English premiere of the work took place in autumn 2021 at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival,

which also invited Chaya Czernowin to be composer-in-residence. The Neue Vocalsolisten premiered the "Sound Theatre" *Vena III: Immaterial* at the ECLAT Festival in 2022. The work was created as part of the Vena cycle, the second part of which was heard for the first time in autumn 2021 at the Donaueschinger Musiktage: the JACK Quartet interpreted *Unhistoric Acts* with the SWR Vokalensemble under the direction of Yuval Weinberg. The centrepiece of the past season was the world premiere of the work *Atara* for soprano, baritone, and large orchestra, which took place at Wien Modern with Sofia Jernberg, Holger Falk, and the ORF Radio Symphony Orchestra Vienna conducted by Christian Karlsen; the German premiere of the work will follow in March 2023 with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Matthias Pintscher.

Chaya Czernowin will start the 2022/23 season with the world premiere of *Moonwords*, the last part of her trilogy *Fast Darkness*, at the Ultima Festival in Oslo with Ensemble Temporum. *Fast Darkness I*, performed by the Riot Ensemble and bass clarinetist Gareth Davis, was on the Wien Modern programme in 2020; in 2021, Ensemble intercontemporain launched *Fast Darkness II* at the Philharmonie de Paris. The world premiere of another ensemble piece will follow in April 2023: Klangforum Wien under Uli Fussenegger will perform *Seltene Erde – Alchimia Communicationis* at the Zagreb Music Biennale.

Teaching is central to Chaya Czernowin as a way of developing her own compositional practice. From the 1990s to the present, she has been a regular guest lecturer at the International Summer Courses for New Music in Darmstadt. From 1997 to 2006 she was a professor of composition at the University of California, San Diego, before holding the same post of Professor at the University for Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. In 2009 she was called to Harvard University, where she continues to teach as the Walter Bigelow Rosen Professor of Music. From 2003 to 2017, she led the International Masterclass for Young Composers, which she co-founded with Jean-Baptiste Joly, director of Schloss Solitude, and her husband, composer Steven Takasugi. She has also taught young composers at the Tzllil Meudcan Festival in Israel as well as at numerous international seminars.

The Quiet, a recording of orchestral works released on Wergo in 2017, was awarded the Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik. Other recordings of her works have been released on Mode Records, Col Legno, Deutsche Grammophon, Neos, Ethos, Telos and Einstein Records. Chaya Czernowin has received numerous awards, including the Kranichsteiner Musikpreis (1992) the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung Composers' Prize (2003), the Rockefeller Foundation Prize (2004), the Fromm Foundation Award (2008), a Guggenheim Fellowship Award (2011) and the Heidelberger Künstlerinnenpreis (2016). She was composer-in-residence at the Salzburg Festival in 2005/06 and the Lucerne Festival in 2013, and is a member of the Akademie der Künste Berlin (since 2017) and the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts (since 2021). In 2022 she was awarded the German Music Authors' Prize in the category "Composition/Musical Theatre". Her works are published by Schott.

Season 2022/23

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