

Chaya Czernowin, Composer

Biography

"One of the most important living composers. Her oeuvre is diverse and large, her musical language radical and original. Her four operas are like shock waves for the genre. With her compositions, she makes existential themes a tangible experience for the audience. Like no other, she manages to constantly evolve, to search for new things and at the same time to keep a common thread running through all her works." - Jury of the German Music Authors' Prize 2022

Chaya Czernowin's works create an evolving sonic experience that is multi-sensory, accessing hidden, foreign and unfamiliar realms of existence. Nothing is taken for granted and risk serves as an opportunity for unpredictable growth and vitality. 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. 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.

Since the 1990s, Chaya Czernowin has written four operas and a myriad of orchestral and chamber works, with and without electronics, which have been performed worldwide. Her international break-through came after *Prima... ins Innere* at the Munich Biennale in 2000, which received the Bavarian Theatre Prize and was also named the best premiere of the year by Opernwelt magazine. In this opera, 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. In 2013, the work was presented in a new production as part of her residency at the Lucerne Festival.

Her second opera *Adama* was commissioned by the Salzburg Festival, where she was composer-in-residence in 2005/06, for Mozart's 250th birthday as a companion piece to his Singspiel fragment *Zaide*. It was performed in a new version at the Freiburg Theatre in 2017. *Infinite Now*, premiered in collaboration with IRCAM at Opera Vlaanderen in Ghent and presented again in Antwerp, Mannheim and Paris, was honoured by Opernwelt magazine in 2017 as the world premiere of the year. The opera is based on a story by Chinese author Can Xue and Luk Perceval's drama *Front*, itself based on Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Her fourth opera *Heart Chamber*, staged by Claus Guth, premiered at the Deutsche Oper Berlin in 2019 under the direction of Johannes Kalitzke.

Winter Songs, begun in 2003 and continued for several years, is a series that interprets the same septet in everevolving ways, creating a completely different musical experience each time. *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, the composer stretches our perception of time and provides distorted reflections of musical material.

One of the major ensemble works of recent years is *The Fabrication of Light*, premiered in 2020 by Ensemble Musikfabrik as part of the Acht Brücken festival. The English premiere took place in the fall of 2021 as part of the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, which also appointed Chaya Czernowin as 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 premiered at the Donaueschinger Musiktage in 2021: The JACK Quartet performed *Unhistoric Acts* with the SWR Vokalensemble under the direction of Yuval Weinberg. The world premiere of *Atara* for soprano, baritone and large orchestra also took place in 2021 at Wien Modern with Sofia Jernberg, Holger Falk and the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Christian Karlsen; the German premiere followed in 2023 with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Matthias Pintscher.

Another cycle was completed in 2022 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, the Ensemble intercontemporain premiered *Fast Darkness II* at the Philharmonie de Paris. The world premiere of another ensemble piece followed in 2023: Klangforum Wien under Uli Fussenegger performed *Seltene Erde – Alchimia Communicationis* at the Musik Biennale Zagreb.

Several important world premieres are scheduled for the current season: the orchestral work *Unforeseen dusk: bones into wings*, an orchestral new version of the a cappella composition *Vena III: Immaterial*, commissioned by the New York Philharmonic together with the Donaueschinger Musiktage, will be performed in Donaueschingen in October. This will be followed by the world premiere of *Ezov ("Moss")* at the Philharmonie de Paris with the Arditti Quartet on the occasion of the quartet's 50th birthday; the Wien Modern Festival will then present the Austrian premiere. A new work for orchestra and one amplified voice, which will be premiered by the Los Angeles Philharmonic in April, has an explicitly political background: *NO!* is an expression of the pain caused by the separation of refugee children from their parents under the Trump administration. In June 2025, the WDR Symphony Orchestra will give the German premiere of the work, followed by country premieres with the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra NOSPR and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. In summer 2025, a new work will be performed at the Darmstadt Summer Course, which can then be heard at the Time:Spans Festival in New York and at the Lucerne Festival: *CORE* will be written for flutist Claire Chase and largely follows Galina Ustvolskaya's 2nd Symphony in terms of its unusual instrumentation.

Teaching is central to Chaya Czernowin as a way of developing her own compositional practice. Her list of students includes many of the most active and appreciated younger and mid-career composers. In the 1990s, she was a regular guest lecturer at the International Summer Courses for New Music in Darmstadt. She has also repeatedly taught at the Composers Lab of the Klangspuren Schwaz festival. From 1997 to 2006 she taught composition at the University of California San Diego, before becoming the first woman to be appointed professor at the University of Music and Performing Arts 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.

Her CD of orchestral works *The Quiet* (the title refers to a work premiered by the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Brad Lubman in 2011) was released by WERGO in 2017 and was honoured with the German Record Critics' Award. 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 Kranichstein Music Prize (1992), the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation Prize (2003), the Rockefeller Foundation Prize (2004), the Fromm Foundation Award (2008), and the Guggenheim Fellowship Award (2011). She was composer-in-residence at the Salzburg Festival 2005/06, the Lucerne Festival 2013 and the Huddersfield Con-temporary Music Festival 2021 as well as featured composer at the Festival Musica Nova Helsinki 2013. She is a member of the Akademie der Künste Berlin (since 2017) and the Bayerische Akademie der Schönen Künste (since 2021) and sits on the board of the Europäische Musiktheater-Akademie. In 2022 she was awarded the Deutscher Musikautor:innenpreis in the category "Composition/Music Theatre". Her works are published by Schott.

Season 2024/25

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