

Michael Jarrell, Composer

Biography

With each newly created work, Michael Jarrell enriches his musical self-portrait; it reflects a constant quest for clarity and precision in his compositional work. The oeuvre of this Swiss-born composer, who also studied fine art, is inspired by the interplay between these two disciplines. He has been strongly influenced by both the music of Edgar Varèse and the art of Alberto Giacometti. Consequently, Michael Jarrell's working method is characterised by the connection between compositional practice and visual thinking. His Assonances, for instance, on which he has been working since 1983, present themselves like a sketchbook. In *Congruences* (1989), his first major work for electronics, the composer drew inspiration from spatial and geometric concepts.

His major works also include *La Chambre aux échos* (2010), which he composed for the Ensemble intercontemporain to mark Pierre Boulez's 85th birthday, and the cello concerto *Émergences* (2012), dedicated to Jean-Guihen Queyras. This was followed in 2014 by the world premieres of his piano concerto *Reflets*, performed by Nicolas Hodges, and the concerto for string quartet and orchestra *Spuren*, performed by the Arditti Quartet and the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra. As a Fellow at the Berlin Wissenschaftskolleg in 2015/16, Michael Jarrell completed his viola concerto *Émergences - Résurgences* for Tabea Zimmermann. *Aquateinte*, his oboe concerto for François Leleux, was also composed during this period. In 2017, his violin concerto for Ilya Gringolts, *Des nuages et des brouillards*, received its world premiere.

Stage works are also of particular significance to his compositional practice. His monodrama *Cassandre*, composed in 1994 based on the novella by Christa Wolf, was staged in various venues following its world premiere at the Théâtre du Châtelet, including in English, German, Italian and Spanish versions; most recently, the Ensemble Modern under Bas Wiegers presented the work to great acclaim at the Salzburg Festival in 2025, together with the actress Dagmar Manzel. In addition, he composed the opera *Galilei* in 2006 and the music theatre piece *Le père* for the Schwetzingen SWR Festival in 2010. His monodrama *Siegfried, nocturne* for male voice and ensemble followed in 2013. The opera *Bérénice* was a resounding success in 2018 at the Palais Garnier in Paris, with Barbara Hannigan in the title role.

In recent years, compositions for a wide variety of ensembles have been created, ranging from solo works such as *Le point est la source de tout...*, which was premiered by Emanuel Pahud at the Pierre Boulez Saal in Berlin in 2020, or the *Albumblätter* for solo piano, performed by Eric Le Sage in 2021, right through to large-scale works such as the violin concerto *4 Eindrücke* (2019), dedicated to Renaud Capuçon, the *Sechs Augenblicke*, premiered in 2022 by the Orchestre National des Pays de la Loire under Pascal Rophé, and the clarinet concerto *Passages* for Martin Fröst, premiered in 2024 with the Orchestre Suisse Romande under Jonathan Nott. In 2023, the Wien Modern festival presented *4 Iles d'un archipel* for percussion, ensemble and electronics, performed by the Ensemble Musikfabrik under Enno Poppe with soloist Dirk Rothbrust. In 2025, the choir Les Métaboles, together with the Ensemble intercontemporain under Pierre Bleuse, gave the world premiere of *...il semble que ce soit le ciel qui ait le dernier mot...* The ensemble had previously premiered *Reflections II*, also under Pierre Bleuse, together with Hidéki Nagano.

Michael Jarrell studied composition with Eric Gaudibert in his native Geneva, attended various masterclasses at Tanglewood, and continued his studies with Klaus Huber in Freiburg. Between 1986 and 1988, he was in residence at the Cité des Arts in Paris and took part in the computer music course at IRCAM; a year later he was a guest at the Villa Medici in Rome and subsequently at the Istituto Svizzero in Rome. His work has been recognised with numerous awards, including the Prix Acanthes (1983), the Beethoven Prize of the City of Bonn (1986), the Prix Marescotti (1986), the Composer Prize of the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation (1990), the Music Prize of the City of Vienna (2010) and the Swiss Music Prize

(2019). In 2004, he was appointed Chevalier des Arts et Lettres in Switzerland. He has been Professor of Composition in Vienna since 1993 and in Geneva since 2004.

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