

# Ondřej Adámek, Composer and Conductor

## Biography

*"He avoids romantic pathos as much as esoteric, fanciful l'art-pour-l'art fabrications. As a result, Adámek's music remains comprehensible and purposeful at all times."* Süddeutsche Zeitung, Reinhard J. Brembeck, 7 March 2021

Composer and conductor Ondřej Adámek creates works that often unfold in processes of deformation: what begins as a poetic figure intensifies into overload, warning or collapse; grotesque gestures transform into physical discomfort – as if something that was meant to be a game has gotten out of control. To achieve this, he expands the expressive range of traditional instruments and voices through extended techniques, microintervals and breathing sounds. Born in Prague in 1979, Ondřej Adámek studied composition at the Prague Academy of Music and the Paris Conservatoire. In 2010, he came to Berlin as a guest of the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Programme; he now lives in Spain. During extended stays in France, Africa, Japan, India and Italy, he immersed himself in the musical cultures of these countries, which he repeatedly incorporates into his own music with great attention to sound details and inner structures. He frequently conducts not only his own works, which include orchestral, chamber, vocal and electroacoustic music.

The current season features once again major premieres of works by Ondřej Adámek as well as several engagements as a conductor. At the Musikfest Berlin, the Berliner Philharmoniker under François-Xavier Roth will premiere his homage to Pierre Boulez entitled *Between Five Columns*. He will conduct his new violin concerto for Christian Tetzlaff in February at the Musikkollegium Winterthur alongside works by Bartók, Webern and Schubert. The work will be premiered by the Orchestre National de France under Cristian Măcelaru, followed by further premieres with the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra under Jonathan Nott and the London Symphony Orchestra.

Last season, the Cologne Philharmonic Hall presented the German premiere of a music theatre work that had premiered to great acclaim at the Bregenz Festival in 2024: *Unmögliche Verbindung/Connection Impossible*, developed with director and author Thomas Fiedler in an intensive communicative process with the musicians of the Ensemble Modern, deals with moments of failed communication. In June 2024, his opera *INES* premiered at the Cologne Opera, also under his direction, in a production by librettist Katharina Schmitt.

The voice plays a central role in Ondřej Adámek's music – not only as the carrier of the text, but also as an instrument of breath, movement and human intimacy, with spoken or half-sung phrases, exhalations, phonemes and cries forming a multi-layered texture. The music theatre piece *Alles klappt* for six singers and two percussionists, performed to great acclaim at the Munich Biennale in 2018, is based on archive material from the Jewish Museum in Prague and on letters and postcards from concentration camps found in the Adámek family estate. With his ensemble N.E.S.E.V.E.N., Ondřej Adámek creates works that lie between concert and theatre, in which voice, gesture and presence are fully composed. The a cappella opera *Seven Stones*, which premiered at the 2018 festival in Aix-en-Provence and was performed again in 2022 at the Konzerthaus Dortmund, was the initial spark for the founding of the ensemble, which has since premiered several works: *Man Time Stone Time* was presented in Witten in 2019 with the WDR Symphony Orchestra under Michael Wendeborg and was staged again at the Festival Présence with the Orchestre de Radio France under Kent Nagano. In 2022, the music theatre piece *Reaching out* was included in the programme of the Biennale Musica Venezia as an Italian premiere, where it was awarded the prize for best production of the festival by the student jury.

One of his most important works in recent years is his violin concerto *Follow Me*, written for Isabelle Faust. Since its premiere in 2017 with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Peter Rundel, the violinist has also performed the work with the Orchestre de Strasbourg and the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra under Susanna Mälkki. The sheng concerto *Lost Prayer Book* toured Europe in 2019. Soloist Wu Wei performed with the Ensemble Musikfabrik under the composer's baton, the ensemble 2e2m under Pierre Roullier, the London Philharmonia Orchestra under Jonathan Stockhammer and ensemble AskolSchönberg under Bas Wiegers. The composition *Where are you?*, which was taken on a European tour by the London Symphony Orchestra under Simon Rattle with soprano Magdalena Kožená, also caused a sensation in 2021. Among other venues, the work, premiered by the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, was performed at the Lucerne Festival, the Musikfest Berlin, and in Antwerp, Luxembourg, Dortmund and Bucharest. The cello concerto *Illusorische Teile des Mechanismus* was premiered in the same year by Jean-Guihen Queyras with the Ensemble Resonanz under the baton

of Ondřej Adámek and was performed at the Acht Brücken festival in Cologne and at the Elbphilharmonie. As part of a new cycle exploring different musical cultures, Ondřej Adámek conducted the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group in 2022 with the new work *Whence Comes the Voice?*, which deals with Qawwali music. Korean Pansori singing was the focus of *Let me tell you a story*, which was premiered in 2023 by the Ensemble Modern under Tito Ceccherini at the Tongyeong International Music Festival, where Ondřej Adámek was also represented with other works as artist-in-residence. Another residency took him to the Avanti! Festival in Finland in 2024.

Always searching for sounds that go beyond the conventional orchestral apparatus, Ondřej Adámek developed the installation-based musical instrument Airmachine over many years of experimental work. The mechanical apparatus, featuring rubber gloves, horns, hoses and all kinds of valves, was created for the work *Körper und Seele*, which premiered in Donaueschingen in 2014 with the SWR Vocal Ensemble and the SWR Sinfonieorchester Baden-Baden und Freiburg under François-Xavier Roth. The Airmachine now has a musical life of its own and, having undergone continuous development, has been used in further compositions.

Ondřej Adámek's works have been awarded numerous prizes, including the Prix de Bourges (IMEB, 2003), the Prix Métamorphoses (Belgium 2002, 2004), the Hungarian Radio Prize (2004), the Composer's Prize of the Brandenburg Biennale (2006), the Prix Hervé-Dugardin (SACEM, 2009), the Grand Prix Tansman (Lodz 2010), the Prix George Enesco (SACEM, 2011) and the Composition Prize of the State Capital Stuttgart 2018. Ondřej Adámek spent time in Rome as a scholarship holder at the Villa Medici (2014/15) and the Villa Massimo (2022/23). The recording of *Where are you?* and *Follow me* with Magdalena Kožená, Isabelle Faust and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Peter Rundel and Sir Simon Rattle, released on the BR-KLASSIK label, was awarded the prestigious Premio Abbiati del Disco in 2022. His works have been published by Boosey & Hawkes since 2022.

Season 2025/26

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