

Vito Žuraj, Composer

Biography

The premiere of the evening doesn't need to hide either and deserves to be included as a repertoire in a canon of the immediate present that has yet to be written: Vito Žuraj's "Automatones" - contemporary or-chestral music - is entertaining and yet incredibly complex, well constructed and irritating in the best sense of the word at its finest. The Slovenian composer is well on his way to making a name for himself. Münchner Merkur, 16.10.2023

Vito Žuraj's work is characterized by powerful and meticulously crafted compositions, tailor-made for the performers and often incorporating scenic elements and spatial sound concepts. Born in Maribor in 1979, his works have quickly gained recognition at major concert halls and festivals, interpreted among others by the New York Philharmonic, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic, Ensemble Modern, and the RIAS Kammerchor.

Following the success of his first full-length opera *Blühen*, which was staged by Brigitte Fassbaender with the Ensemble Modern at Oper Frankfurt in 2023 and was named World Premiere of the Year by Opernwelt magazine, another work created in collaboration with librettist Händl Klaus will take centre stage in the 2024/25 season: the Helsinki Chamber Choir and Ensemble Recherche under Nils Schwenckendiek will premiere *INNEN* as part of the Musica Nova festival in Helsinki. Based on Beethoven's hearing loss and Monet's eye disease, *INNEN* deals with the effects of disabilities and illnesses on artistic creation. The current season will also see the North American premiere of *Anemoi*. The work, premiered to great acclaim by the Berliner Philharmoniker under François-Xavier Roth in May 2024, draws its inspiration from the octagonal Tower of the Winds on the Roman Agora in Athens with its depiction of the Greek wind gods and it will be performed by the Esprit Orchestra in Toronto in March 2025.

Vito Žuraj studied composition with Marko Mihevc in Ljubljana and then continued his studies with Lothar Voigtländer in Dresden and Wolfgang Rihm in Karlsruhe. His experience with the technology and aesthetics of electronic sound generation – gained during a master's program in music technology with Thomas A. Troge and at the ZKM Karlsruhe, and consolidated through co-operations and training with the Experimentalstudio of the SWR and IRCAM – serves him not only for his own compositional work; as a professor of composition and music theory at the Music Academy of the University of Ljubljana since 2015, he initiated and established an electronic music studio, parallel to his lectureship in Karlsruhe from 2007 to 2021.

An avid tennis player, Vito Žuraj uses this experience as inspiration for a now extensive series of works, including 2011's *Changeover* for instrumental groups and orchestra, premiered with the Ensemble Modern and the Frankfurt Radio Symphony under Johannes Kalitzke, and later performed by SWR Symphonieorchester, ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the Slovenian Radio Orchestra. *Hawk-eye*, a concerto for French horn and orchestra, is another example of the series and was performed by the Slovenian Philharmonic and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, both times under Matthias Pintscher, and the Konzerthaus Orchester Berlin with Simone Young.

Numerous ensembles and orchestras regularly perform works by Vito Žuraj. He has long been closely associated with the Ensemble Modern, which has premiered many of his works, including *Runaround* (2014), *Überall* (2013), *Restrung* (2012) and *Warm-up* (2012) and which presented a portrait programme around his music at the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg in 2017. The Klangforum Wien took his 2013 composition *Fired-up* on tour to Milan, Paris, and Vienna. The partially staged composition *Insideout* was premiered by the Scharoun Ensemble conducted by Matthias Pintscher at the Salzburg Festival in 2013 and reprised by the New York Philharmonic in 2014 and Ensemble intercontemporain in 2016. *I-formation*, a work for two orchestras and two conductors written for the 30th anniversary of the Kölner Philharmonie, premiered in 2016 with the WDR Symphony Orchestra under Jukka-Pekka Saraste and the Gürzenich Orchester Köln under François Xavier-Roth. The ensemble piece *Tension*, performed at the Wittener Tage für Neue Kammermusik with the Klangforum Wien in 2018 under Emilio Pomárico was reprised in Vienna under Peter Rundel. In addition, the Philharmonia Orchestra premiered the English version of his farce *Ubuquity* for soprano and ensemble in 2018. For the SWR Vokalensemble and the SWR Symphony Orchestra, he wrote the composition *Der Verwandler*, which is inspired by the alchemist Johann Friedrich Böttger, inventor of European porcelain. *Hors d'oeuvre* for chef-performer and chamber orchestra was last performed in 2023 at the Romaeuropa Festival in Rome with the Ensemble Modern; the work dealing with rituals in cuisine and

composition was launched in 2019 by the WDR Symphony Orchestra under Peter Rundel together with star chef Daniel Gottschlich.

In 2020, Vito Žuraj celebrated great success with *Begehren – zersplittert (Désir – éclaté)*, a concerto for microtonally retuned harp and strings, premiered at the Cologne Philharmonie by soloist Marion Ravot and the Munich Chamber Orchestra. In 2021, the premiere of his orchestral work *Api-danza macabra* also took place in Cologne, interpreted by the WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln under the baton of Cristian Măcelaru. The work has subsequently been performed by the Gürzenich Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic, and Slovenia

Philharmonic. Also in 2021, Jean-Guihen Queyras premiered the cello concerto *Unveiled* for at the Ljubljana Festival with the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra under Kerem Hasan. The work was then performed in Cologne with the Gürzenich Orchestra under François-Xavier Roth and named a recommended work at the International Rostrum of Composers 2022. In addition to *Anemoi*, two other orchestral works were premiered last season: *L'idiot triste* for trumpet and string orchestra – with a paraphrase of the trumpet intro from Viktor Ullmann's chamber opera *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* composed in Theresienstadt – was performed with the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra and Jeroen Berwaerts; Ensemble Resonanz and the Aichi Chamber Orchestra played the work as co-commissioners at the Elbphilharmonie and the Aichi Prefectural Art Theatre respectively as country premieres. This was followed in October 2023 by the highly successful world premiere of *Automatones* by the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Sir Simon Rattle; the Automatones, man-made creatures from Greek mythology, are seen as archetypes of artificial intelligence.

In 2016, Vito Žuraj received the Claudio Abbado Composition Prize from the Karajan Academy of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. The prize included a commission for his composition *Alavó*, which was performed in Berlin, Paris, and Lucerne. Vito Žuraj has also been honoured with the city of Stuttgart's Composition Award and the Prešeren Sponsorship Prize, the highest decoration for artists in Slovenia. In 2014, he was a fellow of the German Academy in Rome Villa Massimo, the Akademie der Künste in Berlin and the ZKM Karlsruhe, in 2020/21 of the International House of Artists Villa Concordia in Bamberg and in 2023 of the Civitella Ranieri Foundation. At the beginning of 2019, he was appointed for a period of three years as a member of the jury that selects the scholarship holders for Villa Massimo, Casa Baldi in Olevano, the German Study Centre in Venice and the Cité des Arts in Paris.

Recordings of Vito Žuraj's works have been released on the Neos label, among others, with the most recent being the portrait album *Alavó* in November 2021. Another portrait CD, *Changeover*, was already released in 2015 by Wergo in the edition of contemporary music of the German Music Council.

2024/25 season

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