

Vito Žuraj, composer

"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 orchestral 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 successful world premiere of his first full-length opera *Blühen* after a libretto by Händl Klaus, which could be seen at Oper Frankfurt last season stage directed by Brigitte Fassbaender with the Ensemble Modern under the direction of Michael Wendeberg that was named World Premiere of the Year 2023 by Opernwelt magazine, the 2023/24 season will focus on three orchestral works: *Le fou 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 premiered in October with the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra and Jeroen Berwaerts; as co-commissioners, Ensemble Resonanz and the Aichi Chamber Orchestra will perform the work in March 2024 at the Elbphilharmonie and the Aichi Prefectural Art Theater, respectively, as country premieres. The premiere of *Automatones* by the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Sir Simon Rattle followed also in October 2023 as part of the musica viva series; the Automatones, man-made creatures from Greek mythology, stand as archetypes for artificial intelligence. A new work for the Berliner Philharmoniker under François-Xavier Roth will be heard in May: *The Tower of the Winds* refers to the octagonal building on the Roman Agora in Athens with its representation of the Greek wind gods. Other season highlights in autumn 2023 included a concert by the Ensemble Modern at the Alte Oper as part of the Frankfurt Book Fair, of which Slovenia was the current Guest of Honour, as well as a performance of *Hors d'oeuvre* for chef-performer and chamber orchestra at the Romaeuropa Festival at the Auditorium Parco della Musica in Rome with Ensemble Modern. The work deals with rituals in cuisine and composition and was launched in 2019 by the WDR Sinfonieorchester under Peter Rundel together with star chef Daniel Gottschlich.

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 programme 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 Sinfonieorchester, 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. Vito Žuraj has long been closely associated with the Ensemble Modern, which has premiered and performed more than 15 of his works, including *Runaround* (2014), *Übürall* (2013), *Restrung* (2012) and *Warm-up* (2012). The Ensemble Modern featured a retrospective programme on his compositions at the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg in spring 2017.

Numerous other ensembles and orchestras regularly perform works by Vito Žuraj. 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.

In 2020, Vito Žuraj celebrated great success with *Begehren – zersplittert (Désir – éclaté)*, a concerto for microtonally retuned harp and strings. The world premiere in the Cologne Philharmonie was performed by soloist Marion Ravot and the Munich Chamber Orchestra; the piece was also heard at the Grand Théâtre de Provence. In June 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 also been brought to life by the Gürzenich Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic, and Slovenian Philharmonic. 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 subsequently performed in Cologne with the Gürzenich Orchestra under François-Xavier Roth and named a recommended work at the International Rostrom of Composers 2022.

In 2016 Vito Žuraj was awarded the Claudio Abbado Composition Prize by the Karajan Academy of the Berliner Philharmoniker. 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 2012 and the Prešeren Advancement Award, the highest decoration for artists in Slovenia.

In 2014 he held a scholarship at the Villa Massimo in Rome, the Akademie der Künste in Berlin as well as the ZKM Karlsruhe and in 2020/21 at the International Artists' House Villa Concordia in Bamberg. He is currently a jury member of the Academy Music Theatre Today of the Deutsche Bank Foundation and a Fellow of the Civitella Ranieri Foundation.

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.

2023/24 season

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