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SONV

Proceedings

2025

Editorial Note

Sounds of Now Vienna 2025 grew from a simple idea: when composers with different backgrounds, practices, and aesthetics share the same space, Vienna becomes less a backdrop and more a point of convergence. The festival's second edition was conceived as a place where contrasting approaches could be argued, tried, and—crucially—heard. In collaboration with colleagues across mdw[1] and beyond, we designed a format that braided together teaching, rehearsal, and performance so that each strand informed the others in real time.

The proceedings you are about to read document this encounter from multiple angles. They include reflections by faculty and guests, project notes from participating composers, and materials that trace the arc from first idea to public sounding. No single perspective is privileged here: technique sits next to intuition; notation is tested against practice; and aesthetics meet the realities of instruments and rooms. What holds these pages together is not a house style but a shared commitment to craft, curiosity, and dialogue.

If the first edition announced an ambition, this one insists on a method: open lessons, open rehearsals, and open ears. By placing composers alongside performers throughout, we encouraged a culture in which questions were asked publicly, and answers were provisional—carried forward to the next session, the next rehearsal, the next piece. In doing so, *Sounds of Now Vienna* continued to define itself not as a single viewpoint but as a forum in which many can meet, compare, and transform their work.

The texts that follow are therefore both record and invitation: a record of a fortnight in which diverse musical languages coexisted productively, and an invitation to extend the conversation—to read across approaches, to listen across traditions, and to imagine what these plural futures might sound like on the next page, in the next hall, and in the years to come.

Festival Results

Overview. The 2025 edition ran for twelve days (4–15 August 2025) and combined public one-to-one lessons, composer/performer presentations, open rehearsals, and three concluding concerts at mdw's FAL Hall. A broad international call (1 December 2024–28 March 2025) shaped the cohort and repertoire developed for the festival stage.

[1] University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (`https://www.mdw.ac.at/`)

Facts & Figures.

- **Submissions:** 55 applications from 15 countries across 5 continents.
- **Participating composers:** 26 composers from 14 countries (comprising institute participants and faculty/guest lecturers).
- **Performers:** 3 ensembles and 3 soloists (17 performers in total).
- **Concerts:** 3 programmes presenting 26 works, including 21 world premieres.
- **Access:** Hybrid participation enabled remote lessons, presentations, and rehearsals for affected international participants.
- **Documentation:** Full audio/video capture provided portfolio-ready materials for all presented works.

Geographic Reach. Countries represented among attending composers included: Austria; Australia; Canada; China; Croatia; Iran; Japan; Kazakhstan; Mexico; New Zealand; Spain; South Korea; USA; Vietnam.

Educational Impact. A substantial share of institute participants first encountered mdw through SONV activities. Several sought guidance on admission pathways and indicated plans to apply for studies in the winter semester of 2026, underscoring the festival's role as an on-ramp from curiosity to formal training.

Artistic Outcomes. Open rehearsal processes fostered rapid iteration between notation and practice, with performers contributing instrument-specific solutions and composers refining materials in situ. The resulting premieres reflect this dialogue: technically assured, sonically diverse, and grounded in collaboration.

Legacy. Beyond the concerts, the publicly accessible recordings form a durable showcase of the festival's scope and a calling card for participating artists. Together with these proceedings, they constitute a living archive of multiple perspectives meeting in Vienna—and a foundation for future editions.

On behalf of the Editorial Team
Sounds of Now Vienna 2025
www.soundsofnow.org
15th of August, 2025

A few thoughts about SONV

by Malgorzata Heinrich

When I was invited to the whole *Sounds of Now Vienna 2025* about eight months before the start, I was surprised initially. It is common, of course, for a critic to travel to various music festivals, but it's relatively rare to be taken so far behind the scenes. During SONV, I was invited to participate in every aspect of the event – workshops, masterclasses, rehearsals, and lectures in addition to the regular concerts. Thus, I had the opportunity to experience SONV from diverse perspectives, which proved crucial to understanding its essence.

Photo by María José Báez | Courtesy of SONV

The festival took place in a remarkable setting on a macro and micro scale. The city itself, with its rich musical history of Viennese schools, philharmonic and operatic traditions, can sometimes be overwhelming with the majesty of past glories. The same goes for the university, mdw, which has had many of the greatest names in the music world and history associated with it for decades. It's no wonder that young participants from all over the world gathered for the SONV in August.

It was a truly special group, full of ideas, sensitive and receptive, as composed of representatives of the youngest generation of composers; the vast majority are still pursuing their academic education at the time of writing. Although in many cases there still remained considerable uncertainty in their artistic endeavours, they came to Vienna to hone their craft and refine their musical language under the tutelage of experienced teachers, composers, and performers, as well as under the watchful guidance of the spirits of the Viennese past. They all created a close-knit, relatively small community, definitely contributing to the project's overall impact. Everyone had time for everybody else. Even outside of scheduled classes, there were hours of discussions, conversations and exchange of ideas. The teaching staff spared no time sharing their experiences, craft and secret tricks. The participants, in turn, contributed fresh ideas and new perspectives. All doors were open, and the atmosphere of shared work and collaboration lightened the weight of history.

However, it is fair to say that the participants did not shy away from it; contrarily, they did, in fact, draw a lot from the more traditional practices. Clear use of tonality occurred, side by side with more avant-garde tendencies. Microtones, dissonances and more complex harmonic relationships appeared alongside euphonious or even major-minor chords. Gentle simplicity stood next to breakneck figurations. All emerging from a vibrant kaleidoscope of inspirations. Literature, nature, personal experiences, the world of musical education and practice, social issues, opera, the musical traditions of the participants' home countries, and many others had become the starting point for the individual compositions, which were later worked on and refined in a multifaceted manner during SONV. Participants cultivated their technical skills with experienced and recognised composers. Their ideas were perfected during open discussions. Careful analysis of scores and collaboration on shaping expression took place with leading performers of new music, who brought up interpretive depths and presented the participants with the plethora of diverse technical, sonic, narrative, and even structural and textual options and possibilities, all embellished with lectures on performance, interpretation, and composing techniques, together with individual presentations by the participants.

This whole context and the many activities made the final concerts "only" the icing on the cake. A critical analysis focused solely on these performances, in isolation from the entire body of SONV, would definitely present a distorted picture. In the case of the festival, the most crucial element was not the final presentation but the process itself, which may have indeed posed a challenge for a music critic. Being a part of the whole Sound of Now was significant and insightful for me as a reviewer and journalist, and simply fascinating as a musicologist.

If I were to sum up SONV in a couple of words, it would be knowledge, collaboration, work with world-class artists, an open mind, and a variety of perspectives. It is certainly an enriching environment for a young composer. I hope for the festival's continued growth, and I wish all the participants I met this year all the success in their future endeavours.

Malgorzata Heinrich
Contemporary Music Magazine "*Glissando*"
University of Warsaw

Program, day by day:

Monday, 4th of August

Tuesday 5th of August

Wednesday, 6th of August

Thursday, 7th of August

Friday, 8th of August

Monday, 11th of August

Tuesday, 12th of August

Wednesday, 13th of August

Thursday, 14th of August

SONV Concert II

Friday, 15th of August

Lukas Ligeti

SONV Concert III

Why do you compose? Thoughts on Development of a Personal Style

Daniel Moser-Shibata

Abstract: This article challenges the prevailing imperative for radical originality in contemporary composition, arguing instead for a model of creativity grounded in conscious artistic influence, honed through a process of technical *imitation*, and conceptualised as an act of filtering. Drawing on the author's own compositional journey and works—including *Earlicker* (2010) for ensemble and *Ich ist ein Anderer* (2016) for string quartet—the discussion reframes the act of integrating influences not as derivative but as a vital method for developing a personal voice. Utilizing a music-semiotic framework, the article posits that a musical work functions not as a direct transmission of the composer's psyche but as an autonomous structure whose meaning is co-created by the listener. The composer's role is thus to filter a universe of sonic and cultural stimuli into a coherent aesthetic object that can, as much as possible, "explain itself."

Keywords: Composition, Originality, Influence, Intertextuality, Music Semiotics, Spectralism, Artistic Research, Contemporary Music.

Introduction: The Tyranny of the "Own Voice"

In the contemporary academic composition milieu, young composers are often burdened by the imperative to develop a unique and instantly recognizable voice. This pressure, while well-intentioned, can lead to a creative paradox: in the desperate avoidance of sounding like anyone else, one's music becomes defined chiefly by negation, potentially stifling genuine development. This article contends that this pursuit is a dangerous misplacement of energy. True artistic development is less a process of unprecedented invention and more one of sophisticated integration and filtering. As often apocryphally attributed to Stravinsky, "lesser artists borrow, great artists steal"—a maxim that points toward the transformative, rather than imitative, assimilation of influence.

My own path, from early works heavily inspired by ambient electronica (e.g., Aphex Twin) and the French spectral school to later engagements with the string quartet tradition via microtonal counterpoint, serves as a case study. It demonstrates that technical mastery and a personal sonic language are built not in a vacuum but through a dedicated process of studying, imitating, and ultimately reinventing the materials of others.

The Poetics of "Stealing": From Imitation to Integration

The composition *Earlicker* (2010) exemplifies this process. Its genesis was not a desire to create something utterly new, but to capture a soundworld I personally liked—one that existed at the intersection of several sources of inspirations. The title itself is an intertextual nod to both a character in James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* and the Aphex Twin track *Windowlicker*. The piece structure begins with a deconstructed "mad jazz trio" (saxophone, double bass, piano), an idea triggered by a scene of David Lynch's Lost Highway. This introduction gives way to a soundmass of sustained tones and gradual transformations, a direct technical and aesthetic engagement with the works of Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail.

This was not mere copying; it was a form of apprenticeship. By analyzing and attempting to recreate the complex aggregate sounds and polyrhythmic structures of spectralism, I was building a toolkit. The harmonic language, for instance, was partly based on Scriabin's late works, but its realization—for example, through the orchestral techniques of Salvatore Sciarrino—created a new sonic entity. This period of technical "imitation" is as crucial for a composer as studying etudes is for a violinist; it is the process of fixing the ropes on the mountain before one can free-solo.

The Semiotic Filter: Composer, Work, and Listener

A crucial theoretical underpinning of this approach is a semiotic model of musical communication. The process is not a direct line from the composer's intention to the listener's understanding. Instead, we

can conceptualise three distinct domains as described in Jean-Jaques Nattiez's *Music and Discourse* (Princeton, 1990):

1. **The Poietic Process**: The composer's act of creation, a "filtering" of their entire world experience—all the music they have heard, the art they have seen, the emotions they have felt—into the specific trace that is the score.
2. **The Trace**: The autonomous artwork itself (the score, the performance).
3. **The Esthesic Process**: The listener's act of perception and interpretation, where they decode the trace based on their own cultural and personal framework.

The composer's control ends with the trace. The famous Roland Barthes essay, *The Death of the Author*, is profoundly liberating here: the work must speak for itself. This reality makes it pretentious to compose with the primary goal of expressing one's inner feelings; it is far more productive to focus on creating a structure that is internally coherent and rich enough to sustain multiple listenings and interpretations. The goal is to write music that possesses what we might call *immanent sense*, where its logic and emotional impact are perceivable from its sounding structure alone, without requiring program notes to explain its external references.

Case Study: Microtonal Melancholy in *Ich ist ein Anderer* (2016)

This evolution toward a more integrated voice is evident in my string quartet *Ich ist ein Anderer* ("I is another", a quote from a letter by Arthur Rimbaud). Here, the "stolen" material is not a surface-level sound but a deeper aesthetic and semantic domain. The piece is an attempt to reclaim melody and late-19th Century expressive gesture for contemporary music, but through a microtonal harmonic language.

The immediate sonic inspiration was the mournful, coloristic world of Tristan Murail's string writing. However, the musical DNA—the gesture and counterpoint—owes a significant debt to Schubert. The piece represents a more advanced form of "stealing": it is no longer about recreating a sound but about fusing technical procedures (spectral harmony, microtonality) with a cherished historical expressive mode (19th century melancholy) to create a new, personal synthesis. The references are metabolised; they are present not as quotations but as foundational elements of a new musical grammar.

Kontrapunk (2022) for Chamber Orchestra

Moser's Chamber Orchestra work *Kontrapunk* (2022) demonstrates how long-term filtering of influences can lead to more autonomous results. A formative experience with Mahler's Second Symphony (recorded by Mehta in 1975) left him captivated by a single bass-drum accent. Decades later, he reimagined this gesture in his own orchestral context, not as a quotation but as a structural pivot around which a new composition was built.

Conclusion: The Freedom of the Filter

The journey from the overt intertextuality of *Earlicker* to the assimilated language of *Ich ist ein Anderer* and later works like *Kontrapunk* (2022) argues for a pedagogy and a personal practice that embraces influence. Composition is an act of filtering a near-infinite soundworld into a finite, coherent structure. To do this well requires a vast repository of internalized models.

Therefore, the advice for emerging composers is not to obsess over originality from the outset, but to immerse themselves deeply in the music they love—be it Mahler, Murail, or Aphex Twin—and to learn its mechanics through imitation and analysis. This builds the technical and aesthetic toolkit necessary for genuine innovation. By acknowledging that we are all standing on the shoulders of giants, we free ourselves to see further. Our voice emerges not from avoiding the paths others have walked, but from learning to walk them so skillfully that we eventually find the confidence to carve our own unique trail into the unknown. The most personal element of a composition may not be a never-before-heard sound, but the unique filter through which the sounds of the world have passed.

Daniel Moser, *Earlicker* (2010)

Aphex Twin, *Windowlicker* (1999)

Alexander Scriabin, *Prometheus, The Poem of Fire, Op. 60* (1910)

Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 2 "Resurrection"* (1894)

James Joyce (1939). *Finnegans Wake*. London: Faber and Faber

Marcel Proust (1913). *À la recherche du temps perdu*. First volume: *Du côté de chez Swann*. Paris: Grasset

Arnold Schoenberg (1950). *Style and Idea: Selected Writings*. Ed. by **Leonard Stein**. New York: Philosophical Library

Roland Barthes (1967). "La mort de l'auteur". In: *Manteia* 5, pp. 12–17

Arthur Rimbaud and **Paul Schmidt** (1975). *Arthur Rimbaud: Complete Works*. Harper & Row

Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990). *Music and discourse: Toward a semiology of music*. Princeton University Press

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The Joy of Collaboration:
A Conversation with Composer Dai Fujikura

The following is an edited transcript of a conversation between composer Víctor Báez and composer Dai Fujikura, which took place as part of the Sounds of Now conference. As Fujikura had requested an informal chat rather than a prepared presentation, the discussion was entirely improvised, exploring his current compositional interests, his collaborative process, and his deep engagement with the art form of opera.

Photo by María José Báez | Courtesy of SONV

Víctor Báez (**VB**): Well, Dai, with that introduction out of the way, I'd like to ask you: what's new and interesting? Is there a general topic in music that's captivating you right now, or a project you're working on that has something especially compelling about it?

Dai Fujikura (**DF**): I don't teach regularly, only in summer courses, so my day-to-day life is almost exclusively composing. My process is a cycle of simultaneous projects. I'd start a piece, think it's genius for the first few minutes, and then inevitably get stuck. When I was younger, I'd suffer through it. Now, I simply set it aside and start a new piece. The cycle repeats: excitement, then getting stuck. When I return to the first piece later, with fresh ears, I can see it more clearly and find a way to progress. I'm always working on several pieces at once, and I find I really need to work this way.

Currently, I've just finished my fourth opera, *The Great Wave*, which is about the life of the artist Hokusai. The premiere is in Scotland next February. This is my first opera on a Japanese subject. My librettist, Harry Ross, and I had wanted to do this since 2017, but we received a series of "no's" from potential producers until, finally, we got the go-ahead last year.

VB: That leads perfectly to my next question. You mentioned your librettist, with whom you have opposite tastes, yet a long-standing collaboration. How do you navigate that process when you are composing simultaneously? For instance, do you ever ask him to change text, and does he ever ask you to change music?

DF: That's a very good point. I've been told by experienced opera producers that a common problem is composers obeying the librettist's words too slavishly. Librettists write words that look good on the page, but when sung, they can become too long. The music must take precedence. The composer has to be the one to cut and shape the text for the voice.

I'm fortunate that my collaboration with Harry is not like that. We've worked together for nearly 30 years. He is also an ex-singer and a theater producer, so he understands the practicalities of the stage and singing. When he sends a draft, I might say, "This section smells like you're just proving you did your research. Can we cut the 'how clever you are' part? I'm not going to put a melody on that." And he's fine with it. Or I might suggest a change to better fit a musical idea I have, like a scene where a character is making yuzu tea—I wanted to capture the smell of citrus in the music, so the text needed to lead into that.

I work with three screens, and we are on Signal chat all day, every day, during the process. I need him to be available because when I'm composing, I need a new word *now*. It's a constant, daily dialogue. I don't want a finished libretto handed to me; I need to see the drafts while they are still changeable.

VB: That's insanely interesting. The libretto is what makes or breaks an opera. A great score can't save a terrible libretto. From my perspective, an excellent libretto is invariably concise, fulfilling many functions—meaning, plot, sound, rhythm—with very little. What is your take on what makes a great libretto?

DF: For me, it's less about the libretto itself and more about the storyline and the freedom to interpret. With *The Great Wave*, the attraction was that Hokusai is a historical figure, but we know very little about him for certain. The first biography was written 40 years after his death and is apparently inaccurate. We don't know much about his wives or even when his talented daughter died. That ambiguity is gold for a libretto! It allows us to imagine and create.

For instance, we had a debate about how to start the opera. I wanted to start with thunder (Hokusai was reportedly struck by lightning twice). Harry wanted to start with his funeral. I eventually agreed with him because a funeral allows all the other characters to be on stage, talking about the legend of Hokusai right from the beginning, which is a powerful way to establish his mythic status.

VB: Your operas are large-scale, two-hour works. I've noticed a trend of composers writing pieces for, say, a soprano and a clarinet for 17 minutes and calling it a "chamber opera." What are your thoughts on this phenomenon, and what is it about the large-scale, afternoon-length opera format that attracts you?

DF: [Laughs] People can call their work whatever they want. If they want to call a seven-minute piece an opera, that's fine. I don't ask; I just feel lucky to be able to work on a larger scale.

My attraction to large forces comes from my youth. I originally wanted to be a film composer, specifically for Hollywood scores with huge orchestras and choirs. I had a massive misunderstanding: I thought you composed the music first, and then they shot the movie to the music! I believed music was the supreme art form. I was hired to do four films in Hollywood and was fired from all four. The funny thing is, when you get fired, you get to keep the money. My dream became to get hired for one movie a year and then get fired!

I found that opera is the medium where I can tell a story from beginning to end with music, and I have a great deal of creative control in collaboration with a librettist. With instrumental music, it's just me from start to finish. With opera, I get to work with another creative mind, which I enjoy. Furthermore, opera singers are superhumans—they act, sing, and do incredible things on stage. I love working with all that talent.

VB: Speaking of staging, how involved do you get with the production? It's famous that some composers hate the stagings of their work.

DF: My score is my score; that doesn't change. But once it's done, I fully trust the stage director. They were hired for a reason—they have a career and a vision. I don't want to get in their way. I want them to do their best work. So, I'm very hands-off. I might get a message months beforehand asking, "We're thinking of this kind of spaceship for *Solaris*, what do you think?" And I'll say, "Great, do your thing."

It's fascinating to see the same opera with completely different productions. In one staging of *Solaris*, a character's death was staged as if she were already a ghost on a haunted spaceship. I never thought of that! It was brilliant. I have my favourite productions, but I would never say which ones because I don't want to offend anyone. The beauty is in the different interpretations.

VB: A final, practical question for the many composers here who dream of writing a large-scale opera.

How does one actually begin that process? How do you go from an idea to assembling the army of people and resources needed to make it a reality?

DF: I wish I knew! It's difficult. The structure of opera houses is very different from orchestras. With orchestras, the music director/conductor often decides the programming. In opera houses, it's the intendant—the general director—who has that power. It's a very human process; everyone is worried about their own careers. You have to hope that your idea aligns with what the intendant finds useful or exciting for their own vision and career. It involves talking to a lot of people and a lot of persistence. We're all just trying our best.

VB: Well, we improvised our way through an hour, and it wasn't catastrophic—thanks to you. Thank you so much, Dai.

DF: Thank you.

Dai Fujikura, *The Great Wave* (1981)

Dai Fujikura, *The Great Wave* (1981)

Innocents, Rogues, and Jokers: Comic Alogism and the Subversion of Reality

Madeleine Bolz

Madeleine Bolz's presentation explored comedy in Russian literature and music after the Revolution, examining how humor provided critique while evading censorship. Drawing on Lesley Milne's framework of comedic archetypes—the Innocent, the Rogue, and the Joker—she focused on Gogol, Shostakovich, and Prokofiev. Central to her analysis is comic alogism, the disruption of logical and causal connections to reveal truth and subvert reality.

Gogol's story *The Nose* embodies the Innocent: its absurd premise of a man whose nose becomes a government official reflects both bureaucratic excess and human powerlessness. The humor lies in frustrated expectations and arbitrary resolutions, with the protagonist left without control. Shostakovich, in his opera based on Gogol, assumes the role of the Rogue. He twists the source material by fragmenting scenic, narrative, and musical plots, using percussive ostinati, distorted registers, and violent musical gestures to destabilize coherence, satirize Soviet realities, and advance his own artistic agenda.

Prokofiev, by contrast, exemplifies the Joker in *The Love for Three Oranges*. Beyond composing the music, he wrote a libretto that breaks the fourth wall, introducing characters representing tragedians, comedians, and eccentrics who interrupt the plot and parody operatic conventions. In this way, he constructs an alternate world that ridicules both opera and its audiences, creating a meta-theatrical landscape where expectations are constantly overturned.

Bolz concludes that these figures show different modes of comic subversion: Gogol's resignation, Shostakovich's opportunistic twisting, and Prokofiev's creation of new realities. Together, they demonstrate how comedy—through narrative absurdity, musical distortion, and theatrical play—became a vital strategy for critique, resilience, and survival in times of upheaval.

Lesley Milne, ed. (2004). *Reflective Laughter: Aspects of Humour in Russian Culture*. Anthem Russian and Slavonic Studies. London: Anthem Press

Nikolai Gogol (1998). "The Nose". In: *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol*. Trans. by **Richard Pevear** and **Larissa Volokhonsky**. Originally published 1836 in *Sovremennik*. New York: Pantheon Books

Dmitri Shostakovich, *The Nose (opera based on Gogol's story)* (1928)

Sergei Prokofiev, *The Love for Three Oranges (opera, including his libretto)* (1921)

Myth, Memory, and Message

Sofya Bulatova

Composer Sofya Bulatova's presentation explores how myth, memory, and message shape her artistic mindset. She begins with myth, focusing on her piece inspired by Orpheus and Eurydice. For her, myth in music is less about narrative plot and more about emotional inevitability, cycles, and transformation. In her *Pas de Deux: Orpheus et Eurydice* for flute (Orpheus) and cello (Eurydice), she reimagines the story with an alternative happy ending, using music to resist tragedy and create new possibilities. She links this to predictive coding in music cognition: the brain anticipates patterns, and composers can play with expectation and surprise to generate emotional depth.

She then turns to memory, presenting piano miniatures as sonic snapshots of personal and emotional states. Memory in music, she argues, is not a recording but a reconstruction of textures, echoes, and fragments. She connects this with Gestalt principles (similarity, proximity, continuation, closure) and echoic memory, showing how listeners perceive patterns across time and silence.

Finally, Bulatova addresses the concept of message as intention and resistance. In a solo cello piece, she uses fragile, bodily sounds—scratch tones, pressured bows, breath-like tremolos—to respond to political realities of oppression, gender, and survival. Through embodied cognition, she highlights how listeners experience music somatically: sounds are mapped onto bodily sensations and emotions. In conclusion, Bulatova affirms that composition is not only about beauty but about honesty, memory, and resistance. Even a single cello alone can carry a voice powerful enough to speak and endure.

Sofya Bulatova, *Pas de Deux: Orpheus et Eurydice* ()

Difluencias

Mateo Casado
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Mateo Casado presented his piece Difluencias, composed for Sounds of Now Vienna 2025 with the Mivos Quartet as performers. His starting point was not structural but sonic, drawing inspiration from gamelan music with its static, stepwise melodies, intervallic insistence, and irregular rhythms. To develop his own melodic language, he designed symmetrical scales with varied intervals, in contrast with more common scales that are based on only two different intervals.

In terms of quartet texture, Casado developed degrees of convergence and divergence (hence the title in Spanish "difluencias", which has a similar meaning to "divergences") from unison to polyphony through heterophony, a texture also characteristic of gamelan that particularly interested him. In the first movement he created several small sections with transitions between them that, among other parameters, have the effect of blurring harmonic fields.

Formally, the first movement combines two parts: heterophonic and polyphonic, each moving from convergence to divergence, later fragmented and interwoven. The second, slower movement translates rhythmic processes from the first movement into harmonic ones, going from harmonic divergence to harmonic convergence, ending with all instruments on a unison D. This movement creates a static

texture perturbed by pizzicato, ricochet, and *col legno* accents, by expressive gestures such as crescendi, tremolo, and vibrato, as well as by pauses.

Casado emphasized his interest in balancing irregular rhythms with clarity for performers and listeners, seeking textures neither too simple nor too chaotic. He acknowledged immersion in the quartet tradition (Haydn to Bartók) while pursuing his own voice. He concluded by framing composition as working with simple tools—repetition, variation, expectation—yet capable of producing rich, surprising results.

Mateo Casado, *Difluencias* (2025)

Making Your Own Opportunities

Reid Contreras Woelfle
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Reid Contreras Woelfle's presentation focused on career development and the importance of creating opportunities rather than waiting for them. Drawing from personal experience, he identified five pillars that are essential for an emerging composer to consider in their early career: performances, commissions, working, accessibility, and curiosity.

Performances are not only about having one's music played, but also about being present at concerts, meeting musicians, and building relationships that can lead to future collaborations. Professionalism and social skills, he emphasized, are essential to nurture alongside artistic ability.

Commissions may occasionally arrive by chance, but more often they are self-created. Contreras Woelfle highlighted the role of "champions" (performers who believe in one's work) and suggested using grants to enrich such collaborations. He explained how grant applications usually fit into three general categories (career development, creation/research, production/presentation) and advised applying with a clear idea where your project fits within those categories.

On working, he noted that composers often wear many hats, such as teaching, volunteering, administrative and/or non-musical jobs. These roles still possess the potential to build broader networks and visibility.

Accessibility, in his sense, means making one's work easy to find and understand. Some examples include updating portfolios, using social media effectively, and communicating your art in a way that is digestible beyond specialist circles.

Finally, Contreras Woelfle highlighted curiosity as the composer's greatest tool in sustaining growth. Ultimately, having a dedicated system for listening, analyzing, and transcribing music presents the greatest opportunity to foster a greater depth of knowledge.

He closed with a quote from a masterclass he attended, hosted by musician Derrick Hodge—"Love what you love and keep taking new information to inform that"—framing continuous learning as the core of the composer's artistic life.

Personal website, *reidcontreraswoelfle.com*

The Bored Spartan: Leisure as the Foundation of Artistic Creation in a Productivist Age

Víctor Báez

Abstract: This article critiques the modern overvaluation of work and the concurrent devaluation of constructive leisure. Drawing from Bertrand Russell's socioeconomic arguments and Aristotle's ethical philosophy, it posits that true human flourishing and artistic innovation occur not within the sphere of obligatory work but within well-employed leisure time. The discussion challenges the increasing pressure on artists to adopt entrepreneurial, product-oriented mindsets, arguing that this leads to creative alienation. The philosophical framework is exemplified through the life and work of Samuel Beckett, presented as an archetype of creative idleness. Finally, the theoretical principles are demonstrated through a compositional case study by the author: a piece for six vocalists that embodies these ideas through its aesthetic of implication, repetition, and semantic fragmentation.

Keywords: Leisure, Creativity, Aristotle, Bertrand Russell, Samuel Beckett, Music Composition, Alienation, Entrepreneurship, Aesthetics.

Introduction

The prevailing cultural narrative extols the virtue of work, often conflating productivity with human worth. This article argues that this ethos is not only socioeconomically problematic but is also profoundly detrimental to artistic practice. The central thesis is that leisure—*scholē* in Aristotle's terms—is the primary space wherein the uniquely human capacities for thought, community, and art are cultivated, while work remains a secondary necessity for meeting material needs.

This exploration was catalysed by Bertrand Russell's 1932 essay, *In Praise of Idleness*, in which he contends that 'there is far too much work done in the world [and] that immense harm is caused by the belief that work is virtuous' (Russell, 1932). While Russell's analysis is socioeconomic, this article seeks to explore the deeper, more personal implications for the artist, arguing that the compulsion to constantly produce and market oneself constitutes a form of spiritual and creative theft.

Philosophical Foundations: From Aristotle to Alienation

The argument finds its oldest and most robust foundation in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. For Aristotle, leisure is not mere rest or recuperation for further work; it is the highest purpose of human life. Work is a means to an end—the maintenance of life—an activity shared with all animals. Leisure, conversely, is the end itself: the time dedicated to politics, philosophy, contemplation, and the arts—the activities that constitute the good life and define the human condition (Aristotle, c. 350 BCE).

Aristotle illustrated this principle with the example of the Spartans, who could not flourish in peace because their constitution educated them only for war, not for the constructive use of peace-time leisure. They were, in essence, "bored Spartans"—adept at doing but incapable of *being*. This historical example finds a chilling modern counterpart in an observation by Argentine writer Ernesto Sabato (1975), who warned of children raised in urban environments so disconnected from natural processes that they would grow into alienated, neurotic adults, trapped in a functional relationship with their psychoanalysts. This alienation is the direct result of a life unbalanced towards either compulsive work or, in reaction, what might be termed "junk leisure"—mindless consumption and distraction that fails to nourish the human spirit.

This dynamic creates a destructive spectrum for the modern individual—ranging from **workaholism**, where identity is wholly subsumed by professional activity, to **perpetual anxiety**, the futile attempt to balance impossible demands, and finally to **junk leisure**, the squandering of free time on passive, non-constructive pursuits. The author proposes an antidote to this triad of alienation: the intentional, constructive engagement with leisure through practices such as artistic creation.

The Artist in the Marketplace: Rejecting the Entrepreneurial Model

This philosophical stance brings the contemporary artist into direct conflict with a prevailing trend in arts education and culture: the mandate to become an "entrepreneur." This model encourages the artist to view their work as a product and themselves as a brand to be marketed. While a pragmatic concession to economic reality may be necessary, enshrining this mindset as a primary value is corrosive. It reduces

art to a commodity and the artist to a mere producer, effectively ensuring the very alienation Sabato described.

An alternative archetype is found in the life of Samuel Beckett. His biography—abandoning a promising academic career, wandering Europe, working menial jobs like driving a school bus (ferrying a young André the Giant, no less), all while penning masterworks like *Waiting for Godot*—epitomises a life not led by productivist goals. His artistic output, characterised by gaps, silence, and meaning derived from absence, is a direct aesthetic correlate of a life that valued depth of experience over professional achievement. Beckett's work succeeds not because he marketed it effectively, but because it resonates with the fundamental human conditions of uncertainty, waiting, and the search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless void—conditions best understood through a life rich in experiential, rather than purely productive, value.

Compositional Case Study: Embodying Philosophical Idleness

These ideas were synthesized into a compositional project: a piece for six vocalists. The human voice, being both instrument and performer, is a uniquely suited medium for exploring these themes. The piece consciously incorporates extra-musical, theatrical elements to become a staged work concerning its own creation and meaning.

The composition operates on principles gleaned from Beckett's aesthetic:

- **Fragmentation**: Text is broken and reassembled, challenging the linear narrative.
- **Repetition**: Phrases are repeated with minute alterations, questioning the stability of meaning. As one vocalist states, "Its meaning is embodied mainly through repetition. A single musical gesture is largely meaningless."
- **Implied Meaning**: The audience is tasked with deriving significance from the spaces between the words and the juxtaposition of images, much like the audience of *Waiting for Godot* must confront the void left by Godot's non-appearance.

The libretto is self-referential, featuring performers who introduce themselves and their function, only to have that function subverted and deconstructed. Words are diagnosed ("De-interested is a made-up word"), and logical loops are created ("It depends on what is meant by gesture. What is meant by musical is meant by meant"). This is not mere absurdity; it is a deliberate artistic strategy to model a mind at leisure—playing with language, questioning assumptions, and rejecting utilitarian communication in favor of exploratory expression. The piece itself becomes a performance of constructive leisure.

Conclusion

The pressure to constantly produce and market art is a cultural trap that stifles the very depth and authenticity it purports to sell. By returning to the philosophies of Aristotle and Russell, and by looking to exemplars like Beckett, a path is revealed that privileges the quality of being over the quantity of output. Artistic innovation and profound human connection are born from the fertile ground of well-employed idleness—time spent in contemplation, play, and deep engagement with the world without an immediate transactional goal. The composed piece serves as a practical demonstration that such philosophy can directly inform artistic structure and content, creating work that critiques the age of productivity from within its very fabric. The challenge for the contemporary artist is not to work harder, but to have the courage to be a modern Spartan who has learned the art of peace.

Christopher J Rowe and **Sarah Broadie** (2002). *Nicomachean ethics*. Oxford University Press

Carnes Lord et al. (2013). *Aristotle's politics*. University of Chicago Press

Bertrand Russell (2020). *In praise of idleness: And other essays*. Routledge

Sabato, E., *Interview on A Fondo [Television broadcast]. TVE.* (1975)

Learning from Gaspard: Ravel's Harmonic Language Today

David Lu

David Lu presented his festival piece, which was strongly inspired by Ravel, especially *Gaspard de la Nuit*. He prefaced that his interest lay less in instrumentation than in harmonic language, particularly how Ravel achieves impressionistic color through extended use of tertiary progressions.

Drawing parallels to jazz chord substitutions, Lu argued that Ravel frequently pivots between chords a major or minor third apart, creating fluid harmonic shifts that blur traditional tonal logic. Using pop-style chord notation, Lu analyzed passages from Gaspard de la Nuit and Ravel's songs, highlighting dominant ninth harmonies moving by thirds, often alternating major and minor. He compared this to jazz practice: too many major thirds outlines an augmented sonority (Prokofiev-like), while too many minor thirds recalls diminished structures (Bartók-like). Alternating them, however, yields the characteristic Ravel sound.

He also referenced "axis theory" (applied to Bartók) as another framework for understanding these harmonic pivots. Lu then shared his own trio, applying these concepts. While not imitating Ravel's piano trio directly, he tested his theory by sequencing ninth and dominant chords through tertiary motion, layered with contrasting textures and glissandi. He acknowledged consciously avoiding Ravel's trio model, yet admitted that hearing another colleague's analysis made him reconsider this choice.

Discussion afterward centered on whether his analysis framed Ravel as "jazz-like" or simply revealed overlapping harmonic tools. Lu emphasized that he borrowed jazz terminology mainly as a practical lens, since Ravel's harmonies can be understood as substitutions and extensions familiar to jazz musicians.

Ultimately, Lu presented his piece as both homage and experiment—an exploration of Ravel's harmonic mechanisms, reimagined in his own language for the festival performance.

Maurice Ravel, *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908)

Marius Constant, *Orchestration of Gaspard de la nuit* (1990)

Maurice Ravel, *Piano Trio in A minor* (1914)

Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 2* (1894)

Ernő Lendvai (1971). *Béla Bartók: An Analysis of His Music*. London: Kahn & Averill

Instructions, Specificity, and Absurdity in the Score

Benjamin Marshall

Ben Marshall, a composer from Brisbane currently studying at Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, presented on the role of instructions in scores and the tension between precision, openness, and absurdity. Coming from a jazz background, he values performer agency, but also explores how detailed instructions can shape or distort rehearsal dynamics.

Prompted by scores from composers such as Aperghis, Tsangaris, and Bauckholt, Marshall investigated how a few words can produce vastly different interpretations. Using volunteer demonstrations, he showed how layered verbal cues (e.g. walking speed, gestures) highlight questions of clarity, rehearsal efficiency, and performer autonomy. He asked: when does specificity empower, and when does it become exces-

sive—akin to a script rather than a score? In a piece for Ensemble Platypus, he embedded references to his experiences observing orchestral rehearsals, probing issues of motivation and labor ("Do you want to be here? Are you being paid?"). In another project for flute, recording engineer, and camera operator, the notation combined conventional musical detail with stage directions, including disruptive interactions between performers and technicians.

These experiments explore how specificity can frame rehearsal outcomes while leaving interpretive space as a means of highlighting each performer's individual identity. Marshall concluded that composing with words involves anticipating performer questions—where, how, why—and deciding whether to answer said questions precisely or leave them shrouded in obscurity.

Richard Wagner, *Der Ring des Nibelungen (Ring Cycle)* (1876)

William Shakespeare (2006). *Hamlet*. Ed. by **Ann Thompson** and **Neil Taylor**. The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series. London: Bloomsbury

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Composition Through Deconstruction

Evan Losoya

Composer Losoya presented his piece Fan Faire's Deconstructed for two pianos, based on Ligeti's Fanfares (Etude No. 4). His method of "deconstruction" involved dismantling the original work's musical DNA–melody, accompaniment, intervals—and reassembling it into a new context. Ligeti's piece features a relentless ostinato, shifting melodies, and horn-like fanfares built from thirds, fifths, and sixths.

Losoya inverted the melodic intervals, stripped away the ostinato, and slowed the pace to create a meditative harmonic landscape. Instead of virtuosic propulsion, his version dwells on triadic sonorities, inviting performers to shape timing freely through dialogue rather than fixed counts. He then compiled an "intervallic dictionary" of Ligeti's etude, cataloguing dyads and their frequencies. The perfect fifth ($G^\sharp$–$D^\sharp$) appeared most often, becoming a structural anchor.

Drawing on corpus linguistics, Losoya treated intervals like words in a language: collocations revealed which intervals commonly surrounded the fifth, and these informed the harmonic layering of his piece. The work alternates material between the two pianists, echoing Ligeti's hand exchanges, and gradually introduces fragments of the original ostinato.

Using silent-key resonance and altered subdivisions (3+2+3 expanded to 4.5+3+4.5), he produced shifting accents and unexpected emphases. The result is a spacious, improvisatory two-piano meditation that both honours and transforms Ligeti. Rather than reproducing the etude's drive, Losoya reimagines its harmonic language through processes of inversion, cataloguing, and linguistic analogy, ending with an expansive improvisation.

György Ligeti, *Fanfares, Etude No. 4* (1985)

György Ligeti, *Études, Book I (includes Fanfares)* (1985)

Georg Friedrich Haas, *Hommage à György Ligeti* (1984)

Tony McEnery and **Andrew Wilson** (2001). *Corpus Linguistics: An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

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Research as a Compositional Practice

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Abstract: This article posits artistic research not merely as an academic requirement but as a foundational methodology for contemporary musical composition. Drawing from a four-year transdisciplinary research project, it argues that adopting a research-oriented mindset—characterized by defined problem spaces, bespoke methodologies, and collaborative, transdisciplinary creation—can liberate the composer from traditional constraints and preconceptions. This approach shifts the focus from crafting a fixed, authorial "work" to designing situations and processes that generate unforeseen artistic outcomes. The article outlines key tenets of this practice, including the re-evaluation of tools, the fetishization of notation, and the embrace of collaborative uncertainty, concluding that such a framework offers a robust and generative model for navigating the complexities of contemporary art-making.

Keywords: Artistic Research, Transdisciplinarity, Composition, Collaboration, Methodology, Notation, Situational Art, Process.

Introduction: Beyond the "Drill"

In the landscape of contemporary music, composers often operate within a nebulous zone between tradition and innovation. This text, derived from a lecture-presentation, articulates a personal framework for navigating this terrain: the adoption of artistic research as a core compositional practice. This is not presented as a universal solution, but as a viable and liberating methodology that has proven generative in my own work as a composer and educator in transmedia performance.

The central proposition is that by treating a new piece not as an act of pure expression but as a "working your way through a problem space," the composer can sidestep the "crippling fear of making the next best piano piece" and engage in a more open, systematic, and collaborative discovery process. This essay will explore the principles of this approach, illustrated with examples from my recent research project, *Smooth Spaces in the Audio Corporeal Arts*.

1. The Tenets of a Research-Led Practice

The research model in art is distinct from its scientific counterpart. Its value lies not in objective, reproducible results but in a rigorous process of inquiry that yields new aesthetic knowledge and artefacts. This process is built on several key tenets.

Defining the Problem Space: The Centrality of the Question. The crucial pivot from a standard artistic endeavor to an artistic research one is the formulation of a driving question or "quest." This question—such as "What does 'lightness' mean musically?" or "How can we create a behavioral linkage between a dancer and a light installation beyond simple mapping?"—becomes the project's engine. It doesn't need to be measurable in a quantitative sense, but it must be *intersubjectively checkable*. It allows the team to discern whether they were successful or not, providing a shared focus and a criterion for evaluation that is internal to the project's goals, not external market or critical forces.

Methodology: Design Your Process. Once a question is defined, the researcher must design a methodology to explore it. This is a radical departure from habitual practice (e.g., a pianist composing at the piano out of habit). It involves consciously asking, "Is this the best approach for that thing I want to achieve?" The methodology is a bespoke framework that ensures consistency and rigor. For instance, a project might involve stages like "collision," where all elements are brought together experimentally, or involve creating a movement alphabet for a boom operator. This designed process, as sculptor Elizabeth King notes, "saves us from the poverty of our intentions," leading to discoveries that initial desire alone could not foresee.

2. Liberatory Insights for Compositional Practice

The research model offers powerful insights that can be extracted and applied to any compositional practice, even those not formally embedded in a research grant.

2.1. Thinking Transmedially: The Stage as a Palette

The concert format is merely a subset of stage work. Every element on stage—lighting, movement, posture, props, amplification—is part of the composer's palette. Thinking transmedially means considering all available affordances. If a string player is sitting idle for a long period, that is a dramatic and visual choice to be considered as seriously as a harmonic one. The score is just one component of a larger situational installation.

2.2. Questioning Found Tools

Composers must critically examine their default tools. Writing pitches on manuscript paper, or directly into notation software like Sibelius or Dorico, pre-determines certain outcomes. The interface makes decisions for the user. If the artistic goal is X, one must ask: is a score the best way to achieve it? Perhaps it requires an action score, a graphic score, a piece of code, or a video. The tool must serve the question, not the other way around.

2.3. The Score as Fetish: "The Plan is Nothing, Planning is Everything"

There is a pervasive fetishisation of the musical score. It is crucial to remember that the score is not the music; it is a communication tool, a set of instructions for performers who will, in turn, communicate with an audience. As the aphorism goes, "Planning is everything, the plan is nothing." The intellectual work and effective communication are paramount; the physical score itself is often secondary, seen only by "nerds" and performers. While scores can be beautiful art objects (as in "eye music" or conceptual scores), their primary function is utilitarian. Relieving the pressure for the score to be a perfect, immutable artefact can be profoundly liberating.

2.4. Embracing Collaboration: Relinquishing Control

True transdisciplinary collaboration necessitates a relinquishment of authorial control. It is frightening but essential. It requires entering a space where "your opinion is not the only one or not the best one." This requires explicit negotiation of roles and power dynamics from the outset. As one student's experience showed, unclear hierarchies can lead to friction. Successful collaboration requires a designed framework that clarifies agency and responsibility, transforming potential conflict into a source of creative richness.

3. Case in Point: The Output as New Territory

The proof of this method is in its ability to generate novel artistic territory. The work *Organic Decay* for saxophone and live electronics, created with Joel Digert, serves as an example. By subjecting our collaboration to a strict, documented methodology for exploring the extended saxophone, we arrived at a piece that "wouldn't have been possible in a different way." The value is not that it is the "best" saxophone piece, but that it is a rigorously documented and captured instance of newfound artistic knowledge. The research process itself becomes a significant part of the artistic contribution.

Conclusion: The Situation Maker

Adopting an artistic research mindset fundamentally reorients the composer's role from that of a solitary genius transmitting a fixed vision to that of a "situation maker"—an organizer of temporal events who designs processes, poses questions, and curates collaborations. This approach does not negate expression

but filters it through a structured, collaborative, and questioning practice. It liberates the creator from the weight of tradition and expectation, allowing them to play, experiment, and discover. In the words of Picasso, "I never made a painting as a work of art; it's all research." Embracing this ethos allows the contemporary composer to navigate the complexities of the field not with anxiety, but with the curious and systematic spirit of a researcher opening up new fields of sonic and performative possibility.

Artacho, *Six memos for a pianist and a self-playing piano* (2022)

Artacho & Diegert, *Aubiome* (2018)

Adrián Artacho et al. (2023). "Six memos for a pianist and a self-playing piano – sketches on an artistic investigation of spatial phenomena". In: *Handbook Music and Motion*

Joel Diegert and **Adrián Artacho** (2021). "Aubiome: A Collaborative Method for the Production of Interactive Electronic Music". In: *Journal for Artistic Research*

Beneath the Waves: A Brief Introduction to Select Black Composers

Kevin Cromer

Kevin Cromer (Manhattan School of Music) introduced his talk "Beneath the Waves" by reflecting on how the contributions of Black composers to Western classical music have often been underacknowledged, despite their roles as "wave makers" and paragons of their respective aesthetic eras. He highlighted key figures across different eras, including:

Joseph Boulanger, Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745–1799), a virtuoso violinist, fencer, conductor, composer, and soldier of Caribbean and French descent, was highlighted for his chamber and solo violin works. He was a central figure of the Classical era whose prolific output demonstrates both virtuosity and innovation, and Cromer made a point to highlight his works as exemplars of Classical string writing.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912), a British Romantic composer of Creole and English heritage, was highlighted for his expressive and influential text settings and art songs. Educated at the Royal College of Music, he became closely associated with Edward Elgar and gained fame for his cantatas on The Song of Hiawatha. Cromer praised the expressive quality of his works and pointed to Coleridge-Taylor as a paragon of Romantic text settings.

Florence Price (1887–1953), a 20th-century American composer from Arkansas, was highlighted for her symphonic output and cultural background from which she drew inspiration. Deeply influenced by both the African-American spirituals she grew up with and Dvořák, she created a distinctive symphonic voice that nonetheless echoes Dvořák's Romanticism. In 1932, she became the first African American woman to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra (the Chicago Symphony). Cromer emphasized her blending of spiritual traditions with classical forms, noting the reciprocal cultural influence between Price and Dvořák, as he drew large inspiration from African-American spirituals.

Julius Eastman (1940-1990), a contemporary composer from New York, was highlighted for his impact on postmodernism and minimalism. Visceral and unapologetically human, Eastman's body of work is as elusive and enigmatic as it is striking and imposing. Cromer highlighted how Eastman had been (and largely still is) systematically removed from the prominence he is owed in Western Classical academia.

Through these brief snapshots, Cromer illustrated the richness and the neglect of Black composers' legacies, urging listeners to engage with their music and recognise their essential role in shaping the

classical canon.

Database, *Black composers at Juilliard* (`https://www.juilliard.edu/music/black-composers`) Online resource by the The Juilliard Library.

Double Concerto for Two Violins and String Orchestra

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Babak Samanei, an Iranian composer now based in New Zealand, presented his recently recorded Double Concerto for Two Violins and String Orchestra with the Auckland Philharmonia. Written for exactly 25 players, the work gives each musician an independent line, creating a dense texture where everyone functions almost as a soloist, though the two featured violins remain most prominent.

Formally, Samanei described the piece as unfolding in a spiral structure: ideas emerge one by one, each carrying forward elements of the previous, akin to theme-and-variation or rondo but without strict adherence to either. The music emphasizes collective texture rather than a single leading voice, building cohesion through evolving motivic links.

His compositional process balances pre-planned structure with real-time responsiveness. Comparing it to driving a car, Samanei explained that while he envisions the overall form, harmonic and contrapuntal decisions are made "at the moment," shaped by what comes before and what follows. Cohesion is maintained not through fixed harmonic schemes but through continuity of gesture and texture.

A key intervallic focus is the perfect fourth, explored ascending and descending across the work. The concerto gradually develops through layers of textural transformation, sometimes meditative, sometimes more dynamic, with each idea derived from the prior.

Group photo following the recording of Babak Samanei's Double Concerto for Two Violins and String Orchestra with the Auckland Philharmonia, April 2025. *Photo by Chris Watson, SOUNZ Filmmaker | Courtesy of SOUNZ Centre for New Zealand Music*

The soloists in the premiere recording are violinists Mark Menzies and Mark Bennett, both closely involved in New Zealand's contemporary music scene. At approximately 30 minutes, the concerto offers an expansive meditation on texture, interval, and dialogue, blurring distinctions between soloist and ensemble while showcasing a spiral growth of ideas.

Babak Samanei, *Double Concerto for Two Violins and String Orchestra* (2024)

Theodor W. Adorno (2002). *Essays on Music*. Trans. by **Susan H. Gillespie**. Selected, with introduction, commentary, and notes by Richard Leppert. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press

Jacques Attali (1985). *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Trans. by **Brian Massumi**. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Michel Foucault (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. by **Alan Sheridan**. First published in French as *Surveiller et punir* (1975). New York: Pantheon Books

René Girard (1977). *Violence and the Sacred*. Trans. by **Patrick Gregory**. First published in French as *La violence et le sacré* (1972). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press

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Storytelling in Contemporary Music

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Makenna's presentation explored storytelling as a central thread in her compositional practice. She emphasized that every story demands unique musical treatment. Each element that could be used to musically illustrate a story's components was explored through examples from her own works.

The setting in which a piece is performed is defined by the story the composer wishes to express and shapes the sonic environment. In *Nakalele*, for woodwind quartet, inspired by the constantly changing landscape of Maui's blowhole, Nakalele, Makenna originally envisioned an outdoor performance to encompass the natural phenomenon of the blowhole. When that wasn't possible, she staged the piece in the entryway of a concert hall, treating the ensemble as a sound installation. Audiences are invited to walk among performers, blurring boundaries between performance and experience.

Makenna presenting at SONV 2025. *Photo by Yvonne New*

Makenna then talked about her piece *GRHMNK*, which is shaped through the use of space. Dedicated to her mother and best friend, both deaf in their right ears, Makenna used space to place the audience in the aural soundscape of her mom's experience with hearing impairment. To evoke this particular experience of impaired perception, she placed flute and clarinet in different physical locations—one visible, one hidden—so listeners experienced disorientation and disguised sound properties.

In *sNOw*, performers embodied roles connected to family secrets. This gave the audience freedom to project their own interpretations while the performers' characters conveyed the underlying drama. Makenna argued that people can be used as characters in a piece of music, but the people involved in creating the piece are equally vital to the success of the storytelling.

Referential musical figures provide symbolic weight. In an early work, entitled *Imma See For Myself*, about "knocking on heaven's door," Makenna incorporated literal knocking on instruments and objects, including a box inherited from her great-aunt, layering personal symbolism with theatrical gesture.

Across these projects, Makenna demonstrated how storytelling in music can merge sonic, spatial, and symbolic dimensions, engaging performers and audiences in shared acts of story- and music-making.

Makenna Graham, *Nakalele* (2024)

Makenna Graham, *GRHMNK* (2023)

Makenna Graham, *sNOw* (2025)

Makenna Graham, *Imma See for Myself* (2022)

Fun Things I've Done in the Last Few Years

Yvonne New

Yvonne New, a composer from Auckland (Tāmaki Makaurau), shared highlights of her journey into composition after a long career as a physics teacher and dean. Having left teaching in 2018, she completed

a bachelor's degree in Music composition and a master's degree in Music Composition, bringing with her a love of mathematics, science, and sound experimentation.

Her creative process often employs mathematical patterns, sequences, and spectral analysis. One project transformed the pulse of a circular saw into orchestral textures by extracting frequencies and mapping them to instruments. Another, *Fort Knox*, was a percussion piece using Nerf guns—complete with thousands of foam bullets—though never staged due to health and safety concerns.

New also presented *Cacophony of Silence; Echoes of War in Domestic Spaces*, an eight-speaker array installation featuring the voices of women from war-torn countries, layered with domestic sounds. The piece highlighted overlooked aspects of wartime life—food shortages, blackouts, childcare—while audiences navigated multiple languages as overlapping "conversations."

Other works included a piano piece built on fifths and sevenths, a violin trio based on Fibonacci sequences, and *Ballooning*, a piano quintet for Ensemble Platypus inspired by spiders' dispersal through electrostatically-charged silk. Here, scientific explanation and musical imagination converged: baby spiders' silk threads repel each other and lift into the air, a phenomenon she translated into a musical texture.

Closing her talk, New reflected on the courage it took to leave a secure profession for music. She encouraged others to embrace risks and pursue what makes them happiest, underscoring how science, mathematics, and personal experience continue to shape her artistic voice.

Personal website, *https://www.yvonnenew.com*

Yvonne New, *Fort Knox* (`unperformed,c.2020s`)

Yvonne New, *Ballooning* (`2025`)

Compositional Strategies between Historical Research and Yiddish Song

Miguel Segura-Sogorb
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This contribution Segura-Sogorb's composition *In droysn iz fintster* for strings, harp, and piano, focusing on the creative process and contextual background. The work was commissioned within the mdw research project Klingende Zeitgeschichte (If These Objects Could Speak – The Resonance of Contemporary History), which explores the university's 20th-century history, particularly Austria's fascist past, Nazism, and its aftermath, through object-based studies. Each composer involved was asked to respond musically to two archival objects, contributing to a podcast series accompanying an exhibition at the mdw library. Segura-Sogorb's piece also served as his final ensemble project under Jaime Wolfson at the mdw, while he studied composition with Clara Iannotta.

The first archival object was the Lexikon der Juden in der Musik, a Nazi lexicon of Jewish musicians that, strikingly, continued to be used at the mdw library after 1945. Entries such as those of Max Graf and Fritz Kreisler were updated decades later, raising questions of ideology versus academic necessity. The second object concerned the conditions for blind musicians under National Socialism. While Nazi educators such as Josef Bartosch promoted music training for the blind, this was accompanied by exclusion, persecution, and structural violence.

Rather than directly illustrating the archival texts, Miguel's goal was to create a musical language capable of evoking their atmosphere, while functioning both in a podcast and as autonomous concert music. For this purpose, he turned to Yiddish folk song—specifically nostalgic love songs dealing with loss and fear of loss—as a culturally and emotionally resonant repertoire. Drawing from Ruth Rubin's archive and

informed by workshops with Isabel Frey, Segura-Sogorb isolated fragments from twelve songs. These were subjected to time-stretching via spectral tools (notably Spear), producing polyphonic textures with microtonal inflections and meaningful artifacts. In parallel, harmonic material was derived from folk-song analysis, including modes such as the Dorian with a raised fourth. The title *In droysn iz fintster* is borrowed from one of these songs.

A central challenge was integrating the piano and harp into the soundscape. For this, the composer employed piano preparations using Blu-Tack, producing inharmonic, bell-like sonorities that were analyzed spectrally and transcribed for strings. Extended techniques (e.g. glissandi with magnets on strings) further linked instrumental timbres. Glissandi, prominent in both folk sources and extended techniques, became a structural and motivic device across the ensemble.

The piece unfolds in two movements. The first emphasizes time-stretched material and spectral derivations, contrasted with prepared-piano melodies carrying the harmonic "signature" of the folk songs. The second revisits earlier materials in fragmented, collage-like configurations, reflecting on the repression of blind musicians as structural violence—represented musically through abrupt cut-offs, noise-silence transitions, and gestures of nervous searching. Techniques such as cantilena (a wandering, fragmented line across instruments) and rapidly shifting blocks underline this dramaturgy.

Formally, the work avoids classical schemes, favoring ad hoc dramaturgical processes. Repetition occurs as varied recurrence rather than closed cycles, yielding forms best understood as spirals that unfold over time. Through this process, *In Droysn Iz Fintster* negotiates between archival history, Yiddish song, and experimental sound strategies, placing the human dimension at the centre of remembrance.

mdw, *Klingende Zeitgeschichte im Ohr (podcast)* (2025-09-27)

Miguel Segura-Sogorb, *In droysn iz fintster (Outside is Dark)* (2025)

Helmut Lachenmann, *Tableau* (1988)

Ivan Wyschnegradsky, *24 Préludes (in Quarter-tone System), Op. 22* (1934(rev.1960-70))

Hannah Arendt (2006). *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Originally published 1963 (Viking Press). London: Penguin Classics

Rüdiger Safranski (2014). *Romanticism: A German Affair*. Trans. by **Robert E. Goodwin**. Translation of *Romantik. Eine deutsche Affäre* (München: Carl Hanser, 2007). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press

Theo Stengel and **Herbert Gerigk** (1940). *Lexikon der Juden in der Musik: Mit einem Titelverzeichnis jüdischer Werke*. Berlin: Bernhard Hahnefeld Verlag

Michael Klingbeil (2005). *SPEAR (Sinusoidal Partial Editing Analysis and Resynthesis)*. https://ccrma.stanford.edu/software/spear/. Audio analysis and resynthesis software used for time-stretching/spectral work.

A Vietnamese Mother's Letter to Nixon

Ky Nam Nguyen

Ky Nam Nguyen presented her piece, *A Vietnamese Mother's Letter to Nixon* for mezzo-soprano, chamber ensemble, and live electronics. The work was premiered on November 17, 2023, at Florida State University by the Polymorphia New Music Ensemble.

The work is based on the letter written by the mother of Nguyễn Thái Bình, a South Vietnamese student who graduated with honors from the University of Washington. Binh's anti-war activities during his time in the US led him to a tragic death in Vietnam, as he was accused of being an "air pirate" and shot to death with five bullets in the chest. While that accusation is still highly controversial, Nguyen Thai Binh's legacy remains a significant, authentic Vietnamese voice amidst the American students' peace movements.

After his tragic death, his mother, Mrs. Lê Thị Anh, pleaded for a fair investigation into his death in a letter to President Nixon of the United States. Ky Nam Nguyen's composition is based on the entire letter. Combining Western contemporary techniques with elements from Vietnamese language and music, Ky Nam Nguyen portrays Mrs. Le Thi Anh's emotional spectrum within the letter. The composition encompasses the diplomatic formalities, the maternal love, pain, indignation, and the burning questions for Nixon regarding the suspicious circumstances of her son's murder. Nguyen employed diverse vocal techniques such as singing, speaking, yelling, sprechstimme, and required instrumentalists to sing at climactic moments to amplify the mother's anguish. Vietnamese names are sung to melodic fragments alluding to "điệu Oán," an elegiac pentatonic mode in Vietnamese traditional music, and reflect the tonal nature of the Vietnamese language. Elsewhere, dissonant tritones evoke traditional "speak-singing" styles while intensifying dramatic tension. Text painting is also employed: for example, the line "five bullets in the chest" is underscored by five sharp dissonances.

Through these strategies, the piece captures the raw pain of a grieving mother, a story that resonates with the darkness and brutality of the "Vietnam Era."

Ky Nam Nguyen, *A Vietnamese Mother's Letter to Nixon* (2023)

Portraying Identity Through Music

Hyowon Shon

Hyowon Shon, a South Korean composer studying composition and oboe at Indiana University, presented how her works explore both cultural and personal identity.

For the cultural aspect, she highlighted *Will-o'-the-Wisp* for violin and gayageum, inspired by the ghostly lights of folklore and the playful dokkaebi (Korean goblins). Central to her approach is writing for traditional instruments, particularly the gayageum, a 12-string zither known for its earthy tone and pitch-bending flexibility. Unlike related instruments such as the Chinese guzheng, the gayageum is plucked with the fingertips rather than nails or plectra, producing a softer sound. Shon researched its performance practice, including sanjo improvisations and ensemble playing, and sought to translate its expressive qualities into contemporary composition.

In her duo for violin and gayageum, she experimented with technique transfer between traditions. For example, she notated wide vibrato for the violin to mirror the pitch bends of the gayageum, fostering timbral dialogue between the two instruments. This blending of traditional Korean sonority with Western string writing became a way to reconcile her Korean heritage with her Western musical training.

Shon emphasised that, although raised in Korea, her formal education was Western-oriented, so incorporating traditional instruments required conscious study and adaptation. For her, this process itself became part of expressing cultural identity—re-learning and re-integrating aspects of her heritage into her music.

Through these explorations, Shon framed her composition as a space where personal background, cultural memory, and new musical possibilities meet, offering both continuity and transformation of identity.

Hyowon Shon, *Will-o'-the-Wisp* (2025)

Waiata: Aotearoa's Indigenous Song Tradition

Grace Wellik

Grace Wellik is a New Zealand (Tāmaki Makarau)-based composer. She is the 2025 Young Composer-in-Residence for the Auckland Philharmonia, and is currently a postgraduate student at the University of Auckland.

Wellik introduced the role of waiata through her presentation, exploring waiata as not only music but first and foremost an oral tradition. Waiata is a tool to communicate and storytell, expressing genealogy (whakapapa), events, relationships, and how the land (whenua) has changed over time.

She began with concepts central to Te ao Māori (the knowledge, understandings, and practices of the Māori people) and the Māori worldview. According to this worldview, memory is embedded not only in the people but also in the environment, mountains, and rivers. Wellik explored the following quote from the book He Ara Uru Ora: Traditional Māori Understandings of trauma and Well-Being by Dr Tākirirangi Smith:

> *"Memory can be located within the human body, within the environment, within objects, within the realm of ancestors, within a mountain, within a river. Mountains and rivers can be regarded as living beings with memory. As humans we have memory but this is connected to collective memories in the present, past and to our environments. For Māori, memory recall is triggered as a human response within the ngākau... An individual carries their whakapapa with them, and is therefore always connected to the external environment, as whakapapa began with the Sky Parent, the Earth Parent and the creation of all things, human and non-human within the environment."*

Wellik then went on to explain how waiata exists in many diverse forms, exploring five in detail: mōteatea (chants), waiata aroha (love songs), waiata tangi (mourning songs), karakia (prayers), and waiata-ā-ringa (action songs with dance). Each carries strict protocols and spiritual power, from guiding the dead to blessing land and people.

She demonstrated features such as pūkana (facial expression releasing spiritual energy), poi (balls on cords used as extensions of the arms), and haka (ceremonial dance), noting that composers of waiata specify melody and actions, while harmony is improvised, making each performance unique. The karanga (call) is initiated by a female caller, inviting ancestors and visitors into the space.

She concluded that waiata is less a genre than a cultural lifeline that binds past and present, people and land, through embodied song.

Tākirirangi Smith (2019). *He Ara Uru Ora: Traditional Māori Understandings of Trauma and Well-Being*. Ed. by **Rāwiri Tinirau** and **Cherryl Waerea-i-te-Rangi Smith**. Part of the He Kokonga Whare Research Programme (HRC 11/793). Whanganui, Aotearoa/New Zealand: Te Atawhai o Te Ao: Independent Māori Institute for Environment & Health

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Hilarious but Serious: Play, Absurdity, and Contemporary Music

William Shiu

William Shiu, a Hong Kong–born composer and multi-instrumentalist who studied in Hong Kong and Belgium, described his eclectic practice and his ensemble The Maniacs, a platform for contemporary music in Hong Kong. He characterises his style as "hilarious but serious," using humour, games, and everyday references to explore sound in unexpected ways.

His works span installations, orchestral music, and experimental performance. *Poo-Wee-Pee* is a sound-video installation based on toilets, using Max/MSP to trigger sounds from bouncing shapes, while *Stop It, Get Some Help* (for orchestra, commissioned by Ereprijs Xtra in the Netherlands) dramatizes the "five stages of relationships" with a meme-inspired title. In *Auntie, I Don't Want to Work Hard Anymore*, he critiqued Hong Kong's work/life attitudes through satire.

Shiu often reimagines familiar materials: in *London Bridge is Falling Down*, only saxophone mouthpieces are used to distort the nursery rhyme; in *Hopscotch*, performers jump on numbers to generate rhythms; in *My Nose Is Itchy*, massed performers follow graphic instructions to create playful, quasi-ritualistic soundscapes. Many of his works involve video scores with colors, shapes, or symbols directing performers, blurring improvisation and structure.

Audience engagement and participation are central. His piece *The Secrets of My Family* assigns players to color groups, each responding vocally or instrumentally to visual prompts on screen, creating layered improvisations. Shiu envisions large-scale realizations with hundreds of participants, emphasising collective energy and humor.

By combining satire, childhood games, pop culture, and experimental notation, Shiu creates a body of work that is playful yet conceptually rigorous, making contemporary music accessible while challenging norms of seriousness and performance.

Personal website, *https://williamshiu.com/*

Website of *The Maniacs*, *https://williamshiu.com/themaniacshk/*

Manzanita

Negar Gharibi

Negar Gharibi, an Iranian composer currently studying at Penn State University, presented her piece Manzanita, recorded by the Band on a Can All-Stars. The work stemmed from her inspiration with nature, specifically her first encounter with a tree called Manzanita that primarily grows on the West Coast of North America. She decided to transform this special experience of seeing the tree into a composition by reflecting on how it sounded to her and how she could base her music on her musical language. She thought about all the details of this experience, from entering the forest to encountering the tree, and searched for all the related details. She then decided to capture the tree's unique features into sounds—such as shiny, curved burgundy and silver branches and delicate silver green leaves, along with pink flowers—creating contrasting sonic images, including long, smooth gestures and short, point-like sounds. From this, she developed a structure representing three stages: entering an unfamiliar environment (confusion and curiosity), the sudden encounter (surprise), and discovery (integrating the details into a whole).

Musically, Gharibi explored the interaction of two distinct materials: the whole-tone scale and the Abu Atā scale from Persian classical music. She assigned pitches specific roles—for instance, A as a central tone, B as a dissonant color, and chromatic neighbors (C, $C^\sharp$, D, $D^\sharp$) as transitional elements—so the

scales became structural rather than merely modal sources.

In the middle section ("encounter"), she emphasised rhythmic tension and surprise, with layered gestures and syncopations. In the final section ("discovery"), she transformed Abu Atā by incorporating Khosrow va Shirin, a melodic-rhythmic framework derived from Persian poetry. Using techniques akin to Klangfarbenmelodie, she fragmented melodies across instruments—distributing lines between guitar, cello, vibraphone, and piano—while layering them against the whole-tone texture.

Gharibi described her compositional process as balancing pitch organization with timbre, using contrasts and integrations to mirror her personal experience of the tree. The result is a work that bridges Persian and Western traditions, turning natural perception into a structured but evolving soundscape.

A Pier's Arrival

Shouye Huang

Shouye Huang, a New York–based composer, presented his new solo piano work A Pier Without Arrival, written for the festival. It is both a personal reflection and a historical meditation, beginning with the image of an abandoned pier in Manhattan—silent, empty, yet filled with echoes of memory.

The work connects this image to the history of 19th-century Chinese laborers who built the American transcontinental railroad. Many arrived at piers like this, endured harsh working conditions, and never returned home. Huang conceived the piece as a tribute to their resilience and contributions, embedding layers of memory and rootedness within its musical fabric.

The composition balances two layers: echoes of the past, fading and unsettled, conveyed through sparse textures and electronic sounds; foundations of continuity, expressed through harmonic grounding on the acoustic piano, often colored by jazz-influenced chords.

Technically, Huang combined fixed-media electronics with live piano. Electronic textures—generated and processed in Max/MSP—mirror or converse with the piano, creating shifting atmospheres of distance and arrival.

Huang emphasised the use of simple pitch materials—such as major thirds and single-note repetitions—to build an atmosphere of waiting and resonance. His notation employs boxed fragments, offering performers specific materials while leaving room for flexibility and interpretation.

The result is a work that interweaves personal imagination with collective memory, honoring forgotten histories while reflecting on presence, absence, and arrival.

Shouye Huang, *a Pier's Arrival* (2025)

(T)räume IIa for Violin and Playback: The Expansion of an Instrument and Its Spatial Context

Marko Markuš

Since 2017, Marko Markuš has been teaching historical orchestration at this institution, and since 2023 also historical composition techniques. Over the past few years, he has been working on a compositional cycle in which acoustic instruments are combined with their "digital shadows." The most recent contribution to this cycle is a piece for violin and playback, composed in 2023/24.

The work explores the violin as a generator of unfamiliar sonorities. The playback part, realised with samples from the Contimbre 2 sound library and additional recordings, is conceived not as accompaniment but as an equal partner. It can be performed as fixed media or triggered interactively. At times, it blends seamlessly with the acoustic sound, while at other moments it diverges into alien, dreamlike territories. This duality may be understood metaphorically as a dialogue between presence and shadow, or between consciousness and subconsciousness.

The piece is structured as a closed form in three sections. The opening presents a sparse cell that gradually develops through limited but carefully chosen techniques—initially only *col legno* and *pizzicato fluido*. Later, harmonics are introduced, marking a subtle expansion of the sound palette. A breaking point then occurs through bow overpressure, leading into a contrasting second section in which the solo violin separates from its virtual counterpart. By the beginning of the third section, however, the instrument becomes "trapped" again, and the third section returns to the initial material.

An important compositional principle was to restrict the playback exclusively to violin sounds, avoiding extensive digital manipulation. This limitation sharpened the focus on timbral exploration: extended techniques such as muted *col legno*, *battuto*, and various *sul ponticello* and *sul tasto* positions were tested and notated with precision. The notation raises challenges, since it often requires the performer to reproduce specific contact points or muting gestures that yield unconventional pitches and resonances. The aim is not to create mere effects but to establish a dialectic between sound events that gradually shapes the dramaturgy of the piece.

This method of composition continues a working approach first developed in *(T)räume Ia* for flute and playback (2022), later expanded in *(T)räume Ib* for large ensemble. The idea is that an acoustic instrument serves as the starting point for sound dramaturgy, with the potential for orchestral elaboration. However, such expansions raise questions of sound quality, intonation, balance, and practical feasibility that are not always satisfactorily resolved. The violin piece emphasises the fragile boundary between the audible presence of the performer and the immersive texture of the playback. At some moments, the listener cannot clearly locate the origin of the sound, producing a dreamlike ambiguity. The title *Träume* (with T in parentheses, suggesting both "dreams" and "spaces") reflects this poetic dimension.

Future projects in the cycle will feature solo instruments, duos, and possibly even larger formations, continuing the exploration of acoustic instruments shadowed by their digital reflections.

Helmut Lachenmann, *Toccatina for violin solo* (1986)

The Collaborative Ghost

Benjamin Zervigón

Ben Zervigón's talk The Collaborative Ghost explores how composers engage with the past, memory, and collaboration in shaping their practice. Beginning with George Oppen's poetry, he asks: what in music is alive, dead, or "not dead"? Drawing on his piano studies with his first piano teacher, Mrs. Lien, he recalls learning to see composers as people rather than untouchable icons, contrasting this with the museum-like reverence he later observed in conservatory culture. He challenges the idea of music as "greater than can be played," suggesting instead that repertoire be approached with the same excitement as new commissions.

Improvisation, for Zervigón, blurs the boundaries between performance and composition, with memory, inheritance and influence guiding invention. He highlights how philosophical and political legacies of individual composers carry as much weight as technical innovations. This leads to the central question: "Which composers do we admire for their spirit, for their way of instigating music? Are these the same composers from whom we take compositional techniques?"

Zervigón then turns to his own works, showing how composition is an act of performance shaped by

"ghosts" of influence. He discusses the impact of New Orleans' operatic and spiritual traditions through his mentor, Roger Dickerson, as well as the complex filter of time and memory on melodic cultural memory.

Zervigón concludes by examining the general frailty of memory and how that frailty informs performance practice and compositional trends. For Zervigón, composition is both personal and communal memory work: a way of reanimating the "not dead," conversing with history, and creating spaces for community and resilience in turbulent times.

Duke Ellington, *Come Sunday* (1943)

Blind Uncle Gaspard, *Natchitoches (French Town)* (1929)

George Oppen (1968). *Of Being Numerous.* New York: New Directions

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Behind the Curtain

Laura Nobili
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Laura Nobili, a Canadian composer in her second year at Manhattan School of Music, spoke about her journey toward becoming an opera composer through an analysis of her previous dramatic works and plans for her future comic opera. Nobili began composing at the age of 12, and her passion for opera began at age 13 after seeing Rossini's "The Barber of Seville" with her younger brother who was 10 years old at the time. This experience sparked her ambition to write an opera of her own. Nobili noticed that she was among the very few teenagers attending her local opera company, and over the years contemplated on the elements which allowed Rossini's "The Barber of Seville" to make such a significant impact on her and her brother despite their young ages. She concluded that creating relatability despite language barriers through comedy, lovable characters, and understandable vocal writing that serves the plot and character development, are key components in writing opera that is accessible to people from a wide range of backgrounds and age ranges. In her own work, Nobili seeks to create accessible opera that appeals to a diverse audience by emphasising relatability, humor, and memorable melodies.

Nobili's first experience with writing a large-scale dramatic work was an operatic-style musical based on Shakespeare's "Macbeth," written when she was 16 years old. Her goal was to produce the work on her own, finding students from her high school to participate in the cast. In terms of writing, Nobili began with an analysis of Shakespeare's text, and carefully compressed the story. She identified key motivic elements, such as important symbols, characters, and continual themes, and designed recurring musical units (similar to leitmotifs, yet not quite as developed as leitmotifs) to create a connection through the entire story. She then isolated sections for arias to represent emotions or characters' inner dialogue, and wrote music to set the atmosphere of the scene, leaving all the main action to spoken dialogue. In reflection, Nobili decided that this approach to operatic writing created pacing issues, which placed emotional responses at a much higher significance than the events that created these reactions, an issue which she improved upon in her next dramatic composition.

While she was producing and directing "Macbeth the Musical" which premiered on May 17, 2023, Nobili was working on her second dramatic work, which was entitled "Gatsby," based on F. Scott Fitzgerald's story. This piece had a much greater resemblance to American musical theatre, and was a lot more accessible for performance by inexperienced singers, which was a major obstacle when producing "Macbeth the Musical". In "Gatsby," Nobili expanded on her use of leitmotifs. Rather than simply appearing in various places throughout the story, they served as the basis for the entire musical itself. The pacing in "Gatsby" was also significantly improved by compressing the story further until only the most important events remained (resulting in a reduced cast size, which improved the efficiency of rehearsals), and allowing the music to drive the plot, in addition to existing as an expression of a character's emotional response.

In 2024, Nobili attended the Opera Lucca Institute summer festival and studied under Maestro Raphael Fusco. In this festival, two of the arias from "Macbeth the Musical," were performed, which encouraged her to revisit and revise her score. Just a year after the premiere, Nobili decided that although she still enjoyed the thematic material of the score, the dramatic pacing was proving insufficient since the story was not condensed enough. This prompted her to write "Heaven and Hell," which is entirely sung-through, and relies on the music as the engine of the action in addition to expressing each character's innermost emotions. The thematic material is substantially optimised, utilising its potential to a much greater extent.

Currently, Nobili is working on her newest project, *Tomatoes*, which is a comic opera rooted in her Italian family traditions of making tomato sauce. Combining influences from Rossini, Mozart, Vivaldi and Verdi, the opera blends humour, family conflict, and cultural memory into a story that resonates beyond its Italian setting. Nobili aims to create music that is both entertaining and meaningful for audiences of all ages, ensuring opera's vitality for the future.

Gioachino Rossini, *Il barbiere di Siviglia (The Barber of Seville)* (1816)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Le nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of Figaro)* (1786)

Laura Nobili, *Macbeth (student opera)* (2023)

Laura Nobili, *The Great Gatsby (musical adaptation)* (2023)

Laura Nobili, *Heaven and Hell (new version of Macbeth)* (2024)

Laura Nobili, *Tomatoes (comic opera)* (2025)

William Shakespeare (2015). *Macbeth*. Ed. by **Sandra Clark** and **Pamela Mason**. The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series. London: The Arden Shakespeare

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925). *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons

Key Noise and Timbre in Pianism: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Implications

Ian Pace

In his presentation, Ian Pace examined a neglected parameter of the piano that he terms key noise: the audible sound of the finger striking the key, distinct from the hammer's impact on the string. He argued that attention to this phenomenon is crucial for understanding timbral possibilities at the instrument, and that it carries implications both for performance practice and compositional approaches.

The paper traced historical conceptions of pianistic touch from the late eighteenth century to the present. Early treatises by figures such as Hummel and Kalkbrenner framed tone primarily as a matter of articulation and finger technique, while later pedagogues—including Chopin, Liszt, Talberg, and Rubinstein—developed diverging schools of touch emphasising legato, orchestral breadth, or finger brilliance. From the nineteenth century onward, pedagogical debates frequently revolved around whether timbre could be varied independently of dynamics.

By the early twentieth century, researchers such as Eugène Tetzel, Leonid Kreutzer, and Otto Ortmann demonstrated scientifically that hammer velocity—and thus dynamics—was the only variable under direct control of the pianist at the moment of string impact. Tone colour, they argued, cannot be altered independently. Nevertheless, performers and pedagogues continued to insist upon a personal "tone," a discourse that persisted throughout the twentieth century.

Pace highlighted the intervention of Ludwig Riemann, who introduced the concept of key noise as an audible element shaping pianistic timbre. Later writers including Ortmann, Martinsen, and Bartholomew acknowledged this factor, but its importance was largely overlooked in mainstream pedagogy. Pace argued that key noise is, in fact, a primary means by which pianists can generate perceptible timbral differences at equal dynamic levels.

Drawing on his own training with George Chandor and his subsequent practice, Pace outlined technical approaches that increase or minimise key noise: variations in finger height, wrist rotation, staccato throws, or "thrust" motions, all alter the percussive component of the sound. He illustrated these differences with repertoire ranging from Beethoven, Chopin, and Debussy to Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Boulez, as well as contemporary works by Bussotti, Lachenmann, Sciarrino, Cassidy, and Barrett that explicitly foreground key noise.

Finally, Pace proposed a taxonomy of pianistic "schools" defined not only by aesthetic lineage but also by bodily mechanics: elbow-dominant, shoulder-dominant, Russian high- or low-wrist approaches, French finger schools, the "weight" technique, and the "feelers" who keep fingers in constant contact with the keys. He suggested that composers and performers alike can benefit from greater awareness of these physical strategies, as they expand the range of timbral resources available at the piano.

Notation and Interpretation in Lachenmann's Pression: Comparing the 1969 and 2010 Versions

Matthias Lorenz
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Lorenz's workshop addressed the question of how notation shapes musical result, taking Helmut Lachenmann's Pression for solo cello as a case study. He highlighted the radicality of the original 1969 score (Helmut Lachenmann: "Pression", Breitkopf & Härtel BG 865, Kassel, Germany 1972), which required performers to reconceive instrumental technique, and contrasted it with Lachenmann's revised notation from 2010 (Helmut Lachenmann: "Pression", Breitkopf & Härtel Edition Breitkopf 9221, Kassel, Germany 2011). Lorenz recounted his own experience with the work: initially daunted by the score, he only found clarity once he began experimenting with the cello in hand. This highlighted a central theme of

his workshop—that notation is not a neutral medium but directly influences how musicians approach sound production.

Matthias Lorenz addresses participants during his presentation. *Photo by María José Báez | Courtesy of SONV*

In the first part of the session, participants attempted to devise notational strategies for the opening gestures of Pression. Their solutions—graphic symbols, time indications, or staff adaptations—converged surprisingly closely with Lachenmann's original system, which employs percussion-style notation, stems indicating right and left hand, and a schematic representation of the cello fingerboard. Lorenz emphasized the originality of this 1969 notation: unprecedented at the time, it convincingly communicates both actions and resultant sounds. The second part focused on the 2010 revision. While Lachenmann claimed to have altered only the notation, Lorenz argued that the character of the music also changes. The new version replaces open time-space notation with bar lines, meters, and more verbal instructions. This shift, Lorenz suggested, makes the music feel more constrained, less fluid, and more "square." Moreover, inconsistencies in spatial proportions (e.g., unequal spacing of quarter notes) complicate performance. By comparing passages in both versions, Lorenz showed how structural perception differs. In the 1969 score, gestures emerge as open units, allowing the performer to shape larger trajectories. In the 2010 version, bar structures impose new groupings and obscure some potential connections. Even small changes, such as dynamic prescriptions or added bowing instructions, alter the expressive outcome. In the end, Lorenz focused on a pause with a fermata at the very beginning, added in the 2010 version, which is obviously an attempt to ensure that the performance starts out of silence. A participant (not a cellist) played both beginnings and there was a striking difference between them, changing the approach to the piece as a whole.

Non-cellist participant Mateo Casado attempts his performance of a passage of Helmut Lachenmann's *Pression*. *Photo by María José Báez | Courtesy of SONV*

Hence, Lorenz concluded that Lachenmann's revision, while seeking clarity, paradoxically not only reduces interpretive openness. Notation does not merely document sound but also frames the performer's imagination and physical engagement. For Lorenz, the comparison illustrates how changes in notation—even when ostensibly neutral, fundamentally affect the meaning and experience of a work.

Matthias Lorenz (Apr. 2025). "Helmut Lachenmann: Pression 1969 und Pression 2010". German. In: *DIE TONKUNST* 19.2. Section: MODERNE – Musik des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts, pp. 220–225

Exploring String Subharmonics

Matthias Lorenz, Víctor Báez

In their joint presentation, Víctor Báez and Matthias Lorenz explored the technique of string subharmonics on the cello, framing it both as a physical phenomenon and as a compositional resource. Báez introduced subharmonics as tones produced below the open string pitch through specific combinations of bow pressure, speed, and placement—an effect that remains only partially explained in acoustical research. He traced his own doctoral investigations into the subject, which resulted in a series of etude-like works for string instruments employing subharmonics.

Lorenz demonstrated the production of subharmonics in practice, highlighting their unstable yet identifiable pitch content, their distinct timbral quality compared to traditional cello sound, and their depen-

dence on subtle control of bowing parameters. The performers emphasized the challenges and potential of this sound world, noting the absence of standardized notation and the technique's limited use among composers and string players. Báez presented his own notational solutions, which prioritize clarity and consistency, especially through the use of simplified square note heads for octave-lower subharmonics.

The session culminated in the performance of Báez's cello piece, conceived as both a concert work and a practical introduction to subharmonics for advanced cellists. Discussion underscored the technique's openness as a compositional field, its physical delicacy, and its capacity to expand the expressive palette of the instrument.

Víctor Báez, *Coatlicue barría la escalera del templo* (2020)

Extended Techniques for the Flute: A Practical Overview for Composers

Eric Lamb

In his presentation, Eric Lamb offered an overview of extended techniques for the flute, highlighting their execution, notation, and limitations. The session was framed as both a demonstration and an open discussion, aimed at clarifying common misconceptions and providing composers with practical tools for writing effectively for the instrument.

Lamb emphasized that the flute is a particularly fruitful entry point into extended techniques, due to its long twentieth- and twenty-first-century solo repertoire and close collaborations between flutists and composers. He grouped techniques into four categories: articulation, timbre, pitch, and polyphony.

Articulation. Beyond traditional tonguing, flutists can employ flutter tongue (with front or back of the tongue), tongue pizzicato (a pitched "popping" effect), and key clicks. He noted that "slap tongue" is a clarinet technique and should not be applied to the flute. Tongue rams, which produce a resonant pitched attack a seventh below the fingered note, are especially impactful but require clear notation (including the fingered note, not the sounding pitch).

Timbre. Techniques such as whistle tones, harmonics, and alternative fingerings allow subtle coloristic variation. Harmonic fingerings, for instance, can be alternated with standard fingerings to produce shimmering timbral trills. Whistle tones work best in the upper register and require a quiet context.

Pitch. Glissandi can be achieved through rolling the flute, sliding fingers on open-hole keys, or combining both methods. Certain notes, however, do not permit finger glissandi. Microtones are possible through half-holing, alternate fingerings, or embouchure adjustment, though tempo and intonational stability must be considered. Lamb stressed the usefulness of published fingering resources, especially the handbook by Carin Levine.

Polyphony. Singing and playing simultaneously generates ring-modulation effects; inhaled and exhaled sounds create contrasting textures. Multiphonics are achievable through specialized fingerings and overblowing, though stability varies. Lamb advised composers to adopt a consistent fingering notation system throughout a score. Circular breathing is possible but rare among flutists; when used, it is most effective in higher registers and legato contexts.

Throughout, Lamb underscored two key points: (1) extended techniques must be written with an awareness of acoustic context—many effects work best in intimate settings or with amplification—and (2) clarity and consistency of notation are paramount. He concluded by recommending that composers familiarise themselves with seminal repertoire (Berio Sequenza I, Ferneyhough Cassandra's Dream Song, Sciarrino's solo works, Saariaho's NoaNoa and Laconisme de l'aile) as models of idiomatic writing.

Carin Levine and **Christina Mitropoulos-Bott** (2002). *The Techniques of Flute Playing I.* Kassel, Germany: Bärenreiter

Robert Dick (1986). *Tone development through extended techniques.* Multiple breath music Company

Pierre-Yves Artaud and **Gérard Geay** (1980). *Flûtes au présent: traité des techniques contemporaines sur les flûtes traversières à l'usage des compositeurs et des flutistes.* Editions Jobert & Editions musicales transatlantiques

Luciano Berio, *Sequenza I per flauto* (1958)

Brian Ferneyhough, *Cassandra's Dream Song* (1970)

Kaija Saariaho, *Laconisme De L'aile* (1982)

Kaija Saariaho, *NoaNoa for flute and electronics* (1982)

Thinking Differently about Playing Together

Lukas Ligeti

Lukas Ligeti's presentation detailed his long-standing artistic inquiry into developing novel compositional and performative methodologies, heavily inspired by conceptual frameworks found in various African musical traditions. He positioned his work not as an imitation of these traditions, but as a creative response that uses them as "conceptual foils" to expand the possibilities of contemporary Western art music.

The core of Ligeti's argument centred on the transformative potential of rethinking musical *interplay*. He introduced this concept through a detailed analysis of the court music of the Kingdom of Buganda (Uganda), specifically the *Amadinda* xylophone music. He highlighted its defining characteristics: equidistant pentatonic tuning, the interlocking of two parallel-octave melodies played at high speed by musicians who each perceive their own part as the "on-beat," and the emergence of "phantom melodies" that are not played by any single performer but are perceived by the listener. This system, Ligeti argued, represents a sophisticated and non-Western way of conceptualising rhythm, ensemble synchronisation, and auditory perception.

Ligeti traced how these initial encounters with African musicology, particularly through the work of Gerhard Kubik, catalysed his own compositional development. He presented several of his works as case studies in translating these concepts into his unique artistic voice:

1. ***...for Amadinda...*** (1992): A piece for four marimbists that adopts the Amadinda's fast pulse and interlocking techniques, creating illusions of acceleration and deceleration within a stable temporal framework. This piece demonstrated how such techniques could be notated and performed by Western-trained percussion ensembles.

2. **Solo Drumming and *"Groove Magic"*** (1993): Ligeti described a personal system for solo drumming based on polymetric patterns of limb motion, leading to extremely long cyclical phrases. This was expanded in *Groove Magic* for 11 musicians, an extreme implementation of poly-tempo structures where each performer played to a separate click track, achieving a precision in complex polyrhythms hitherto difficult for mixed ensembles.

3. **Experimental Intercultural Collaboration**: Ligeti outlined his philosophy of "experimental intercultural collaboration" through his work with groups like *Beta Folly* and *Burkina Electric*. This approach emphasises creating new music through a collaborative, process-oriented dialogue between musicians of diverse cultural and disciplinary backgrounds, without a predetermined hierarchy or outcome. He illustrated this with examples that subjected African musical ideas to European developmental techniques and combined African pop ensembles with symphony orchestras, focusing on innovative solutions for coordination and musical cohesion.

4. **Speech Rhythms and Microtonality**: In later works, such as *La parole seule*, Ligeti explored using the free-flowing rhythms of spoken language as a foundational element for composition, with instrumentalists playing in rhythmic unison with recorded or live speech. He also discussed his engagement with microtonality, not as a systematic endeavour (e.g., Just Intonation), but as an intuitive exploration, often juxtaposing different tuning systems (e.g., tempered piano with flexible-pitch instruments using seventh harmonics or quarter tones) to create novel harmonic landscapes.

Throughout the presentation, Ligeti emphasised that his goal is to foster "new ways of thinking while playing together." This involves developing techniques—from complex notation and click tracks to choreographic conducting and networked improvisation systems—that challenge performers' cognitive and perceptual habits. He concluded by framing this artistic research as a vital response to the evolving landscape of music and technology, arguing that training musicians to think and interact in these unconventional ways ensures the continued relevance and innovative potential of human musical creativity.

Lukas Ligeti, *Groove Magic* (1993)

Lukas Ligeti, *Incandescence* (2017)

Lukas Ligeti, *La parole seule* (2020)

Lukas Ligeti, *Suite for Burkina Electric and Orchestra* (2016)

Steve Reich, *Different Trains* (1988)

Gerhard Kubik (1960). "The Structure of Kiganda Xylophone Music". In: *African Music: Journal of the International Library of African Music* 2.3, pp. 6–30

Gerhard Kubik (1962). "The Phenomenon of Inherent Rhythms in East and Central African Instrumental Music". In: *African Music: Journal of the International Library of African Music* 3.1, pp. 33–42

Kofi Agawu (2003). "How Not to Analyze African Music". In: *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions*. New York: Routledge

Concert Programs

Wednesday, 13th of August

mdw / Future Art Lab / Konzertsaal

SONV Concert I

Ian Pace, Eric Lamb, Jan Satler

Photo by María José Báez | Courtesy of SONV

Jan Satler, *piano*

Adrián Artacho, *electronics*

Shouye Huang, *A Pier Without Arrival** (2025), for piano and fixed media.

Photo by María José Báez | Courtesy of SONV

Eric Lamb, *flute*

Marko Markuš, *(T)räume Ia* (2022), for flute and fixed media.

Daniel Moser, *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (2023), for flute.

Makenna Graham, *shellEy** (2025), for flute.

As my first composition for solo flute, I decided to dedicate this piece to my university flute professor, Shelley Younge. This piece transports the audience through my development as a flautist under her tutelage. When I began my studies with Shelley, the first thing I remember her telling me was that I have "perfect embouchure." However, I was an extremely quiet player, struggled to produce a quality sound in the extreme low and high registers, and my fingers were not well-developed technically. Throughout the last four years, I have worked hard to develop my sound, and train my fingers to tackle challenging passages. The material of this piece is grounded in everything Shelley has taught me about how to perform canon repertoire well. The gradual dynamic growth of the piece represents the development of my sound through time.

Photo by María José Báez | Courtesy of SONV

Ian Pace, *piano*

Hyowon Shon, *Sunglint** (2025), for piano.

Ky Nam Nguyen, *Pour Henriette** (2025), for piano.

I have just finished my composition doctoral dissertation this year (2025), and an important part of that dissertation is stories of many Vietnamese women who lived through the wars of the 20th century. That was when I learned more about Henriette Bùi Quang Chiêu (1906–2012), the first female medical doctor in Vietnam and the first Vietnamese woman to earn a medical degree in France. Since then, I have been harboring the idea of composing a piece dedicated just to her.
Henriette lived in a time when few French women could attend medical school or pursue their medical careers after marriage. But she, a Vietnamese woman under colonial rule, was determined to be a doctor no matter the odds. She went to France, attended a medical school, and graduated in 1934. Then, she returned to Vietnam to practice medicine. Despite facing gender and racial discrimination, like being paid ten times less than her male French colleagues, she never gave up. When the hospital administration required her to wear a Western-style dress to work, she kept wearing the áo dài to assert her identity as a Vietnamese woman. Her "battle" was the hospital, where she stood against French colonialism in Vietnam and proved her worth as a Vietnamese doctor.
Henriette was a free and strong-willed woman in every sense. According to Nguyễn Ngọc Châu, the son of her lifetime lover, Henriette lived boldly: she played sports, wore high heels, swam in pools, drove a car, enjoyed fine wine, conversed freely with men, and smoked cigarettes (a habit dating back to anatomy classes in France, where students smoked to mask the odor of cadavers). Such simple activities were once far beyond what many Vietnamese women could even dream of, and in pursuing them, she powerfully challenged the expectations placed on women of her time.
Pour Henriette (For Henriette) is my musical reflection on her life, and I think of it more like a bagatelle, a quick sketch, than a full portrait. It follows a simple ABA form. Part A, "a lonely walk along the Seine," revolves around a persistent F-sharp pedal point, a haunting motive, and a yearning melodic line. To me, these elements evoke the emotions behind Henriette's choice to leave the marvelous Paris for her poor and war-torn homeland under French colonial rule. Part B, marked as "more lively," features flowing harmonic textures and fragmented melodies inspired by Vietnamese pentatonic folk music. As mentioned by Nguyễn Ngọc Châu in an email to me, Henriette loved Western classical music. Therefore, I attempted to create a style reminiscent of French Impressionism, which I assume she might have encountered during her years in Paris.

Víctor Báez, *Mikropornografie II* (2023), for piano.

"Pornography is the quadraphonics of sex. It adds a third and fourth track to the sexual act. It is the hallucination of detail that rules. Science has already habituated us to this microscopics, this excess of the real in its microscopic detail, this voyeurism of exactitude."

— Jean Baudrillard

* world premiere

Thursday, 14th of August

mdw / Future Art Lab / Konzertsaal

SONV Concert II

Matthias Lorenz, Trio Immersio

Photo by María José Báez | Courtesy of SONV

Matthias Lorenz, *cello*

Sofya Bulatova, *Sonata for Solo Cello: Bone of Her Bone** (2025), for cello.

Sonata for Solo Cello: Bone of Her Bone was born out of deep sorrow and anger in response to the brutal oppression of women under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Witnessing the erasure of women's rights, education, and voices in the 21st century is unbearable — yet it is a reality so many endure silently, under threat and behind closed doors.

As a woman from Kazakhstan, I feel this pain not from a distance, but as something hauntingly

familiar. Our histories echo with struggles against patriarchal control, political repression, and cultural silencing. My own experiences, gender, and feminist beliefs connect me to the women of Afghanistan in solidarity, grief, and defiance.

The title Bone of Her Bone is not a religious reference, but a symbolic expression of shared identity, resilience, and trauma. It suggests something deeply internal — the unbreakable core of a woman whose body, spirit, and autonomy are targeted, yet never truly taken.

This work is a lament, a resistance, and an offering.

Kevin Cromer, *Endling** (2025), for cello.

Miguel Segura, *Soliloquio No. 1* (2019, rev. 2023), for cello.

Photo by María José Báez | Courtesy of SONV

Trio Immersio:

Mariam Vardzelashvili, *piano*

Vira Zhuk, *violin*

Ofer Canetti, *cello*

Dai Fujikura, *Pitter Patter* (2016), for violin and piano.

Reid Contreras Woelfle, *Here and Then** (2025), for violin, cello, and piano.

Grace Wellik, *Blurred Light and Drifting Waves** (2025), for violin, cello, and piano.

Laura Nobili, *Santuario della Madonna di San Luca** (2025), for violin, cello, and piano.

The summer after I graduated high school, I was accepted to a summer festival in Lucca, Italy. My grandparents immigrated to Canada from Italy, and my family was extremely excited to travel to Italy with me, and explore our heritage. It was our first vacation and we spent a month traveling around Italy, while also accommodating the schedule of my program. While I was thrilled to be learning about my culture, discovering a new country, and developing my musical skills through the summer festival, the entire trip felt bittersweet. This was my last opportunity to spend time with my family before moving to New York for my post-secondary education at Manhattan School of Music. While many of my friends were excited to start the next chapter of their lives, I was dreading leaving my home, my family, and my country. Our first destination on our tour of Italy was Bologna, home of the oldest operating university, and famous for its remarkable cuisine. Atop a forested hill, there lies an ornately decorated church - the "Santuario della Madonna di San Luca". A steep pathway of steps, shielded by porticos leads from the base of the hill to the church, and eagerly, my mother and I decided to take the journey. Once again, this moment felt bittersweet, with memories of our previous adventures flooding back to me, and the unshakeable understanding that this would be our last before my life changed forever after moving to Manhattan. The complexity of my emotions, paired with the magnificent scenery and enormous sense of accomplishment after reaching the church, inspired me to compose this piano trio, named after the Santuario della Madonna di San Luca.

Madeleine Bolz, *Piano Trio No. 1** (2025), for violin, cello, and piano.

Piano Trio No. 1 was written for the Sounds of Now Vienna during their 2025 music festival. The idea for the trio came to me during a spring thunderstorm. There was perfect balance in the cracks of thunder, the whipping trees with their vibrant leaves, and the rain that drenched the Earth for more flowers to bloom. I wanted the piano texture to help personify both the gentle rhythm of the rain, while the violin and cello conversed much like trees and flowers do. I want to thank Trio Immersio for their time helping bring this piece to life.

David Lu, *Piece for Trio** (2025), for violin, cello, and piano.

* world premiere

Friday, 15th of August

mdw / Future Art Lab / Konzertsaal

SONV Concert III

Mivos Quartet, Ensemble Platypus

Photo by María José Báez | Courtesy of SONV

Mivos Quartet:

Olivia de Prato, *violin I*

William Overcash, *violin II*

Victor Lowrie Tafoya, *viola*

Nathan Watts, *cello*

Mateo Casado, *Difluencias** (2025), for string quartet.

Structured as a diptych, the first part uses melodic materials inspired by gamelan. The simultaneous melodies unfold through varying degrees of convergence and divergence between them (the Spanish word in the title has a meaning close to "divergences"). As an intermediate state between unison and polyphony, the piece explores heterophonic textures (several simultaneous versions of the same melody), a device also characteristic of gamelan. The four instruments, with their timbral homogeneity, merge into a net that shifts across different speeds, registers, articulations, etc. In the second part, the convergence-divergence axis is applied to different harmonic materials (scales)

coexisting at the same time. These generate a slow, static texture that contrasts with the livelier, more unstable first part, in which each instrument stands out through punctual perturbations on its notes or through accents produced by various percussive performance techniques. This meditative atmosphere intensifies its sense of stillness through pauses with sustained sounds, which interrupt the polyphonic flow. These are inspired by the way long notes punctuate certain passages of the Messe de Nostre Dame by Guillaume de Machaut (ca. 1300-1377), where they follow the articulation of the text.

Babak Samanei, *Burnt Sunflowers** (2025), for string quartet.

Burnt Sunflowers is shaped by tensions between desire, conflict, and renewal. The sunflower, traditionally a symbol of vitality and light, here appears as scorched and fragile — its form marked by fire, its radiance interrupted. This imagery resonates with cycles of human longing and rivalry, where what is most desired can also become the site of destruction. The music draws upon these paradoxes: gestures emerge, collide, and dissolve, forming unstable structures that resist permanence. In this way, the work reflects on the sacrificial dynamics that underlie human experience — where beauty and violence are entangled, and where something new may only emerge through loss. Rather than offering a fixed narrative, the piece unfolds as a series of unstable encounters, inviting each listener to trace their own path between fragility and transformation.

Negar Gharibi, *Shear** (2025), for string quartet.

In the stillness of migration, identity begins to crack. Each rupture craves a new echo, until the self becomes both wound and shelter. This piece explores that fragile state between collapse and reconstruction.

”He braids the echoes of vanished cries,
threads unraveled from centuries of distant voices.
From clouds—stretched like bruised lines across the hills—
he conjures the wall of a dream never built.
Since the sun’s pale gold drained from the waves,
and climbed, burning, to the quiet shore,
the jackal’s cry — and a lone village man —
have sparked the secret fire within his home.”

"Phoenix" - Nima Yooshij

Benjamin Zervigón, *Mother Water Ash** (2025), for string quartet.

“Mother gone to water
City gone to drowned
I plan to disappear and tell you nothing
She said”

-Nicole Cooley

The germ of this quartet came to me as a dream, born out of the imagery of Nicole Cooley and J. Bruce Fuller’s poetry. As described in the titles, I dreamt that I was boated out to an old oil rig near the edge of the continental shelf by a friend. We fished from the rig as massive, fantastical waves washed us and the surreal oceanscape away. After the flush of waves receded, we were left on the floor of the Gulf of Mexico- cross hatched by oil pipes and rotten sealife. In real life, these often leaky pipes are hidden under the water, out of sight and out of mind, connecting the oil rigs which pepper the Gulf. It is quite common to fish from oil rigs. Propaganda often refers to abandoned rigs as “artificial coral reefs.” This could be considered a literal program for the piece.

The music grasps at a distant, cherished memory. This memory is unsettled (perhaps even guilt tinged)- but you find comfort in its familiarity. It’s a desire for a place, a person, a state of being-

maybe all of these things- that cannot be reached. Throughout the discourse, any hope of actually reaching this memory is erased, leaving one with a fading impression of something which was once tangible and objective.

Musically, I hope to express these feelings through a gradual transformation of a near purely melodic idea into a purely harmonic idea which continuously approaches but never reaches unison/octave. Finally, this directional process breaks into discrete sound blocks of pure timbre, rhythm, harmony and melody. Much of this drama is meant to replicate the mathematical phenomenon of approaching limits- something I find incredibly relevant to contemporary life.

Lukas Ligeti, *Entasis* (2023), for string quartet.

Photo by María José Báez | Courtesy of SONV

Photo by María José Báez | Courtesy of SONV

Ensemble Platypus:

Jake Mann, *clarinets*

Annette Fritz, *violin*

Loredana Apetrei, *viola*

Irini Liu, *cello*

Ivar Roban Krizic, *contrabass*

Jan Satler, *piano*

Marisa Algari, *conductor*

Evan Losoya, *Seb was here** (2025), for bass clarinet, violin, viola, cello, and piano.

You might be wondering: Who's Seb, and what's he doing vandalizing my piece?
Seb is short for sebum, the Latin word for tallow or grease, and the origin of many words for soap.

Many of these words share a loose phonetic skeleton: a fricative followed by a vowel and then a bilabial plosive, like the sounds /s/ /o/ /p/ in soap or /x/ /a/ /β/ in jabón. In different languages, this structure appears in a variety of flavors, offering subtle regional variations on a shared shape. This duality– the word's shared history and the material reality—is echoed in the process of saponification, the chemical transformation of fat or oil into soap. This piece reflects on linguistic convergence, cultural residue, and the transformative alchemy behind something as humble as soap.

Yvonne New, *Ballooning** (2025), for violin, viola, cello, contrabass and piano.

The title Ballooning refers to the delicate journey of young spiders as they ascend to a high point, release silken threads, and float away on the wind. This composition evokes the tension, wonder, and fragility of their airborne dispersal—a fleeting moment of risk and instinct, carried aloft into the unknown.

Benjamin Marshall, *Rehearsal** (2025), for bass clarinet, viola, cello, and contrabass.

Photo by María José Báez | Courtesy of SONV

Adrián Artacho, *Ricercar** (2025), for clarinet, violin, viola, cello, contrabass, and piano.

> The title refers to the original meaning of ricercare— "to search." The piece unfolds as a succession of motives that follow one another without development or resolution. Its inner workings draw on different combinations of interval sets, letting melodic figures emerge naturally in a stream-of-consciousness flow. Echoing the restless spirit of curiosity, the music never settles, ultimately returning to its point of departure.

Wai Yau Shiu, *I love sextet, but the sextet doesn't love me** (2025), for bass clarinet, violin, viola, cello, contrabass, and piano.

> I love sextet, but the sextet doesn't love me.
> I love the music, but it doesn't love me.
> I love the word, but it doesn't love me...

Photo by María José Báez | Courtesy of SONV

*world premiere

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