

HERSCH
MEDEA

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MICHAEL HERSCH
MEDEA

Sarah Maria Sun
Schola Heidelberg
Ensemble Musikfabrik
Bas Wiegers

libretto by
Stephanie Fleischmann

WDR

• THE COLOGNE
• BROADCASTS

CHOR: Die Ströme, die Hügel, das Licht.
MEDEA: Morgenlicht...



Michael Hersch

MEDEA (2022)

Libretto by Stephanie Fleischmann

1	I	9:17
2	II	14:20
3	III	11:09
4	IV	12:44

Total: 47:30

Sarah Maria Sun, soprano

Schola Heidelberg

Sarah Kuppinger, soprano

Kanae Mizobuchi, mezzo-soprano

Julie Eggli, alto

Jörg Deutschewitz, tenor

Luciano Lodi, baritone

Tobias Schlierf, bass

Ekkehard Windrich, study

Ensemble Musikfabrik

Helen Bledsoe, flute

Peter Veale, oboe

Carl Rosman, clarinet

James Aylward, bassoon

Christine Chapman, horn

Marco Blaauw, trumpet

Bruce Collings, trombone

Maxime Morel, tuba

Benjamin Kobler, piano

Thibaut Surugue, piano

Dirk Rothbrust, percussion

Hannah Weirich, violin

Sara Cubarsi, violin

Axel Porath, viola

Dirk Wietheger, cello

Florentin Ginot, double bass

Bas Wieggers, conductor

Thomas Wegner, sound

An Attempt to Not Look Away

*et luctata diu, postquam ratione furorem vincere non poterat,
'frustra, Medea, repugnas:*

*...and after wrestling with it for quite some time,
no longer able to conquer madness with reason, she says to herself:
"Medea, it's useless to resist."*¹



In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid relates the tragedy of Medea, a Colchian princess and sorceress. With these words near the beginning of his account, her fate takes shape: the inescapability of murderous entanglements between divine providence and her own striving, fueled first by love and then by hatred and despair. Years after she abandoned her homeland in the Black Sea to live with her husband Jason in Corinth and to help him gain power and fame with her magical abilities, he leaves her for another woman leading to her exile. In revenge, Medea kills their two children. Her actions and the complex emotions undergirding them remain an important subject for artistic exploration. Composer Michael Hersch adapts Medea's tragedy in his new opera for soprano Sarah Maria Sun, the vocal ensemble Schola Heidelberg, and Ensemble Musikfabrik.

Hersch's *MEDEA*, with a libretto by Stephanie Fleischmann, immediately wrenches the audience into a psychological and emotional abyss. From the second measure, corrosive sounds of

two pianos at triple *forte* signal this extremity. With increasing clarity, Medea ponders her own actions in a harrowing monologue accompanied by a chorus that evolves from commentator and mirror to alter ego. Almost as a closing testimony, at once self-confident and traumatized, she turns to the judges, to the audience, to higher powers, and not least to herself, saying:

*Look at me. I am strange, foreign. You do not know me.
The hole in the sky that follows me wherever I fly.
The heaving ground beneath my feet laced with the dust,
the skin and bone of generations.*

With these lines Medea establishes herself as mysterious, strange, and other.²

BURDEN OF A BROKEN PAST

Soprano Sarah Maria Sun gives voice to a Medea who is strikingly unique. This partnership with Hersch, Ensemble Musikfabrik and Schola Heidelberg is also her first collaboration with the composer. Of their work together Hersch has said, “Sarah Maria Sun is both a remarkable musician and one of the most compelling stage presences working today, so the part is written with these characteristics in mind. In my opinion her voice is inextricably linked to her powerful stage presence and acting capabilities, and the work attempts to reflect this.”

The composer notes that his MEDEA may be presented fully staged, semi-staged, or unstaged. “The graphic nature of much of the text along with musical elements does not require an openly visual corollary. We attempt to convey both abstract elements and those confronting various realities through the music and text so they might allow for equal clarity or opacity in varied staging scenarios.” Drawn

by her spiritual and emotional conflict, Hersch takes the Medea archetype and makes it modern. In addition, there is an expressive kinship between Hersch’s music and Fleischmann’s libretto, which forge an austere unit. “Fleischmann and I have worked together before. We share, I think, certain sensibilities, with a tendency toward starkness and a sincere hope to have achieved this through the score, disallowing any excess. The world of the piece was broadly shaped for us through the writings of Seneca and Euripides, as well as that of Christa Wolf, and our reactions to these. The elements of Medea allowed for a continual intersection of retrospect and impending crisis. The horror of the story also provides for a kind of structural disequilibrium, which lends itself well both to musical integration and decoupling from the text, sometimes simultaneously.”

Fleischmann has spoken to this further, noting that “the text is a meditation on the events that have accrued to manifest the myth of Medea, as well as an exploration of the fallout of this story, which continues to reverberate into the future. A looking back in order to move forward in whatever way may be humanly possible. A rumination on what it is to be haunted by, indeed, imprisoned by, the weight of a despicable, broken past ... an investigation of the confrontation of self; of individual and community; of remorse and the impossibility of undoing the unthinkable.”

STRATIFICATION OF BRUTALITIES

Medea’s actions violate the norms of humanity and yet she, at times, is capable of tenderness. Georg Büchner, in his stage drama *Woyzeck* builds on this polarity, describing people’s capacity for self-destruction: “Every person is an abyss – it makes you dizzy, when you look into it.” Hersch and Fleischmann not only focus on Medea’s actions, but also on the psychological conditions and circumstances

that shaped her experience. “I have always been deeply interested in human beings who find themselves in situations facing threat (whether externally or internally), and how they - individually and/or collectively - react to these situations,” explains Hersch. “Medea’s story is one where threat and its consequences are present from all directions, in almost every dimension. Much of my work over the past several decades has focused on threats and consequences from within, in the form of illness. However, in recent years I have shifted increasingly to subjects where threats and consequences of violence from without loom large.”

Yet, Hersch recognizes that external and internal are not (always) to be considered separately, both spheres are intimately interwoven, external influences cause inner reactions, inner anxieties and fears have consequences in our perceptions of the external world and our dealings with it. The soundworld of MEDEA accounts for this. The piece had a long period of gestation: “The musical framework for Medea shifted multiple times throughout the compositional process and took several years to complete. I originally conceived of it as a work for a single voice and ensemble, but as I went further into the compositional process it became clear that the sound palette was expanding and pushing out onto larger canvases. Fleischmann and I determined that the vocal ensemble would serve as a manifold character comprising the multitude of figures in Medea’s life, as well as the tangle of shattered elements within her own nature. It was a challenge to find a way into capturing these stratifications of brutalities, both subtle and overt.”

Hersch meets the challenge of rendering Medea’s polarities into sound with a music of harsh expressivity, vast dynamic contrasts, and lurching melodic curves; a music which evolves a life of its own. For example, MEDEA begins with an expansive instrumental

overture in which the catastrophe is not just adumbrated but is already present. This state of urgency is initially brought to bear by instrumental means, even before the word itself joins in.

AN ATTEMPT TO NOT LOOK AWAY

The opening music plays a decisive role in igniting further musical progression. It repeats, not by chance, shortly before Medea’s entrance. These sounds not only constitute focal points at central moments of the score, but they are, moreover, in their vertical materiality also nuclei for horizontal lines, interconnections, vibrations. On the foil of these brightly erupting and then sustained sounds, the onset of the voice, deliberately tentative, asserts itself. The first words (“Look at me.”) rise a quarter tone on the subsequent ‘T’; this microtonality gently expressing estrangement and alienation.

MEDEA makes great demands not only on the solo voice, but also on the chorus and ensemble. Composing for Sun, Schola Heidelberg, and Ensemble Musikfabrik gave Hersch complete freedom to compose his vision for the music comprehensively: “Writing for musicians of this caliber allows a composer to push their imagination to its limits, knowing that most any sound, any gesture ... any mode of musical communication will be explored with absolute commitment and conscientiousness.”

Fleischmann’s libretto provides the framework which on the one hand delimits the music; and on the other hand motivates it as a moment of counter-tension to work towards the dissolution of language. ‘Look at me’ are the first and ‘Towards the sun’ the last words of the libretto, creating an arc which contains Medea’s oscillation between self-recognition and catharsis, justification and displacement, protest and traumatic resignation.

“Medea,” says Fleischmann, “was the granddaughter of Helios, the sun god. In both the Euripides and the Seneca, she absconds from the scene of the crime in a chariot that traverses the sky. In the Euripides she says, in two short sentences, that she is sorry for what she has done. But how does she carry the burden of her horrific crime with her past that moment? It is her escape ‘towards the sun,’ her embrace of the part-god in her, freeing herself of the laws of gravity that encumber us humans, and leaving the bodies of her children behind, that is the regret which pursues her to the end of time. Might she ever be absolved? From her first directive, Medea asks, and we ask, that the Chorus, that Medea herself, as well as the audience, not look away from what has happened. This work is an attempt to not look away.”

— Egbert Hiller

Translated from the German by Beatrice Sasha Kobow and Jennifer Stager

NOTES

1. Yelena Baraz and Jhumpa Lahiri, trans. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7.10-11, excerpt from translation in progress.
2. From Euripides’ *Medea* (431 BCE, Athens) to Pasolini’s 1969 film starring Maria Callas, artists have long interpreted Medea as playing with a dichotomy of fear and fascination. Luigi Cherubini’s opera *MÉDÉE* (1797 / 1802) portrays Medea celebrating her revenge as terror-inducing sorceress. The opera gained popularity in 1953 with Maria Callas’ interpretation of the title part and Callas went on to play the figure of Medea with heightened intensity (and without singing a single note) in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s 1969 film ‘*Medea*’. Pasolini explores the motive of foreignness or alterity and underlines her outsider role in society.

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation for a piece titled "Medea". The score is written on multiple staves, with various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. It includes performance instructions such as "draw in breath", "the base of the throat...", and "splitting upwards". Instrumental parts for strings (Str.), woodwinds (Fl., Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn, Trumpet), and percussion (T.P.) are visible. The score is densely annotated with performance directions and musical symbols.







MEDEA *an opera in one act*

music by Michael Hersch

libretto by Stephanie Fleischmann

1 I

MEDEA

Look at me.

I am strange, foreign.

You do not know me.

The hole in the sky

that follows me

wherever I fly.

The heaving ground beneath my feet

laced with the dust,

the skin and bone,

of generations.

Generations.

Millennia.

Fields of children

killed

over a wandering glance,

a lazy eye,

a dinnerplate

heaped higher,

the promise

of power

CHORUS

The Granddaughter of the sun.

She's still here.

In the light and in the shadow

of the tattered day

streaming through the trees,

the tar-pitched nights.

We cannot erase her.

She is still with us.

Still here, even gone.

gone awry.
The promise of freedom
undercut
by weakness,
retribution.

You don't know me.
But you think you know
what I've done.
You think you know
what I've done.
You think you know—

You hate me
for how I stand here
before you, glaring back.
You hate me
for my fluency with healing.

Necromancy,
you call it.
You are afraid
to let me impart
what I know,
to let me look inside
and see you,
to let yourselves be healed.

2 II

—the bile buried in your bowels,
the smoldering coal of spite
you won't snuff out,
the hot burn of envy, lack,

Still here, even when gone.
We cannot erase you.
Still here,
even when gone.
Grandchild of the sun.
I cannot erase you.
Still here
even gone.

The drone
of your difference
rings my alarm
like a hammered knee,
an infected tooth.

Afraid
I'd have to face—

of wanting,
of wanting...

Tender morning light,
latticed hills,
days and nights,
free of terror,
free of terror,
devoid of fear.

I left all I'd known
not for him,
the man I loved—
Jason. His sea-gray eyes,
his golden fleece—

I left my home not for him,
but because I wanted to lance the bile,
make strong the weak,
suture this ransacked world

with what I knew.

Morning light.
Silvering streams.
Terror.
Days and nights.
Free of fear.

Jason / The Argonauts /
Slap-dash ship slipping past
Scylla and Charybdis. / She tamed
dragons for him.

Make strong. Make strong the—
Suture—
Weak—
This ransacked world.
She wanted to wreak havoc
on us.

What does she know
that we don't?
Who is she to know what's in me?
Underneath?
How can she heal this ransacked world?

I wanted to mend
this world
with what I know
of roots, pollen, sap...

Roots, pollen, sap, herbs.

Herbs growing at the mouths of caves,
the thrum of forgotten words intoned.

I wanted to know more.
To see the world.
I had no choice.
I escaped the ends of the earth,
I flew. Turned my back on Colchis,
morning light, latticed hills,
my home.

Morning light, latticed hills, days, nights,
a singing I'd known since—
The singing had stopped.
Blighted.
My brother, just a boy,
bludgeoned in the grey dawn,
by our father, the king.
The carnage of that place.

Venom. The venom of snakes,
the blood of sheep,
the piper's beak,
the mourning dove's retrices.
Flight feathers of its tail.
Herbs growing.
At the mouths of caves.

Had no choice.

The streams, the hills, the light.

Bludgeoned. Stoned, pulverized.
Throat slashed. Sunk, drowned.
Drowned, thrown away,

Racing, cutting across the waves,
sailing away from home
with Jason and his Argonauts—
shattered heart, heart full—
I released myself
from that place.
I thought I was free.

Where I come from
across the sea,
at the far ends of the earth,
we bury our dead in the air.
Not the ground.
The dead,
hanging in sacs from the trees.
Ancient olive limbs
festooned
with burlap-sacked pendants
shot through
with the cocooning scent of decay.

My boys—
Pendulums swaying across time,
through wind, rain, mist, sleet.

My boys,
pendulums

tossed into the deep,
limb by limb—
femur, sternum, scapula.
Buried at sea.

The flesh of the dead
suet for the birds
who racket the twilight
with their perfumed song,

swaying
across time.

If I could exhume
my murdered boys,
I would.

leaving only bones behind,
desiccated skin,
floating on the breeze
like blossoms.

Exhume murdered—
If she could exhume
murdered children.

She hails from a brutal place.
Brutal, strange.
She cannot face—
So far from home—
Backwards flow the rivers.
The moon's afraid
to look upon the stain,
the rage her exile stirs.
Reason's rained out.
She's gone, but she will not leave.
She will not leave me in peace.

3 III If I could exhume my murdered children,
I would.
I would carry their tender, broken bodies
home across the sea,
to the ends of the earth.
I would hang them each in a burlap sac
from the limbs of the olives
clinging to the side of the mountain
rising up from the blue-black deep.
The grove of the dead.

They say I killed—
They say I killed them.
My boys.

They say I killed my boys.
My boys.

If I could exhume my murdered children,
I would.
I would carry their broken bodies across the sea.
To the grove of the dead.
I would let the carrion crows
tear my boys' sweet flesh
from their bones,
eviscerate
body and soul.
But I left them behind
when I fled,
I flew towards the sun.
I flew—

I used to watch them play.
Running and laughing at the sun.
They say she killed them.
I cannot say.
I did not see.

They say she killed—
I cannot say.
I did not see.
I cannot say, I—

They say she killed them
so the last eyes they'd look into
would be hers.
So they would not be afraid.
Those boys were born to die.
Birthed in a foreign country,
progeny of a mother
marked as strange.

Is this what avenging is?

Jason.

Caught between a rock and the hardest place—

He must stay, he says.

For our children.

You are hammering me, I reply.

Battering.

The sky, raining down stones.

And they—

They are hurling rocks, pelting me—

as I stand between

you

and them

and my boys.

Our boys, he says.

Granddaughter of the sun,
tar-pitched nights, tattered days,
betrayed. Betraying—
This one thing we thought we knew.

A child is love.

But now— But you—

A child is love.

Shiny golden fleece. Jason—

Feather weak.

Jason—

Blindsided, blindsiding, worming his way—

Safe haven, favor, opportunity.

As she—

As we—

As we hammer,

as we batter,

raining down stones,

hammering,

battering.

I used to watch them play.

He says they must stay.

Holding sway—

They are my life.
His life?
I gave him his life.
He takes away.
The instant I step aside,
turn my back on this place,
exile myself,
we both know they are dead.
My boys.

Who would you have them look upon last
but their mother?
Whose eyes would you have them looking into?
Whose arms would you have
holding, kindling the heat,
the must, of their sweat-stained skin?

④ **IV** Whose arms, cradling pounding hearts
caged in brittle, birdlike ribs?
Whose hands would you have
smoothing calf-skin-soft foreheads?
Whose breath, caressing muddy,
game-splattered cheeks
as my whetted blade
slices open moon-white throats
so I can see inside
to the place where sound
comes from?

They say that inside
the box of the voice
is the soul—

holding love—he sways—
hostage.

I can see inside— They say—
but they are wrong:
Pulsing red flesh,
coursing rivulets,
a runnel of blood.

If I could exhume my murdered children,
I would.

I would carry their broken bodies home.

Carry them home
across the sea,
their tender, broken bodies.

They say
inside the box of the voice
is the soul.
I cannot say.

But kill the child,
you cut out the soul
from the shape of the sky
I hold in my chest
like a small, shattered country,
the hollow at the base of my throat
where I draw in breath, spitting out these words.

If I could rid her
from my disremembered dreams—
The hammering stones—
If I could expel her
from my sandpaper skin,
from the touch,
the weight of my child
in my arms,
I would, I'd sleep again.

If I could expunge her—
My—
my complicity
from what I see
when I close my eyes—
Carry them home—

To the grove of the dead.

But I left them behind.
I fled—

I left them behind.
I flew towards the sun.
I flew—

Soulless, loveless, bloodied, broken
skies,
dreams,
song,
fields of children,
emptied eyes,
buried
underfoot—
dust of skin and bone,
of generations,
millennia
killed—
a wandering glance,
a dinnerplate heaped higher—
If she could carry them home—

The grove of the dead.
If she could exhume
her murdered children,
she would.

She would carry them home,
to the grove of the dead.

Towards the sun.

Biographies

Widely recognized as one of the foremost performers of contemporary music, **Sarah Maria Sun**'s repertoire currently spans music from the 16th through 21st centuries, including some 400 world premieres. She performs regularly around the world as soloist in concert halls and festivals such as the KKL Luzern, Suntory Hall Tokyo, the Muziekgebouw Amsterdam, the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, the Tonhalle Zurich, the Auditorio Nacional Madrid, the Berlin and Cologne Philharmonics, the Biennale Paris, Venice and Munich, the Arnold Schönberg Center Vienna; and major festivals in Witten, Donaueschingen, Herrenhausen, and Cervantino and Vertice in Mexico. She has appeared at the opera houses of Zurich, Basel, Berlin, Dresden, Frankfurt, Munich, Dusseldorf, Stuttgart, Mannheim, Leipzig, Strasbourg, Luxembourg, Zagreb, the Opéra Bastille, and the Opéra Comique in Paris.

Her theatrical and musical skills have led her to frequently inhabit complex female figures. For her performances as Elsa/Lohengrin (*Lohengrin* by Salvatore Sciarrino, Salzburg Easter Festival 2017) and as Gwen (*Psychoses 4.48* by Philip Venables, Semper Zwei Dresden 2019) she was nominated as Vocalist of the Year.

Sarah Maria Sun has performed with noted conductors such as François Xavier Roth, Sir Simon Rattle, Ingo Metzmacher, Kent Nagano, Alan Gilbert, Thomas Hengelbrock, Susanna Mälkki, Peter Rundel, Heinz Holliger, together with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic, the North, Bavarian, South-West and West German Radio Orchestras, the Dresden Philharmonic, the Antwerp and Tokyo Symphony Orchestras and ensembles such as

Ensemble Musikfabrik, Ensemble Modern, Ensemble Mosaik, and Ensemble Intercontemporain, as well as the string quartets Diotima, Arditti, Minguet and Signum.

From 2007-2014, she was the first soprano of the Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart, a chamber ensemble of seven singers that has been one of the world's leading pioneers of contemporary music for decades.

Sarah Maria Sun's discography includes more than 40 CDs, many of which have been awarded with and nominated for prizes. She is also an illustrator and author of children's books and releases songs with the band Titillating Tofu.

As an educator, she regularly gives masterclasses for vocal music from the 20th and 21st centuries; she has taught at universities and conservatoires in Oslo, Harvard, Chicago, Stockholm, Zurich, Bale, Rostock, Moscow, Dresden, Hannover, Graz or Berlin. In 2018 she was guest professor at the Musikhochschule Hannover. In 2019-2022 she worked as a guest professor, tutor and lecturer at the music universities of Hannover, Graz and Lucerne. In 2022 she was appointed Professor for Contemporary Music at the Musikhochschule Basel, Switzerland.

Bas Wiegers is one of the most exciting conductors working today. A regular guest of orchestras, soloist ensembles and opera houses across Europe, he commands a vast repertoire from the Baroque to the present.

Recently appointed the Associated Conductor of the Munich Chamber Orchestra, he has led performances of music ranging from

Haydn, Weill, and Dutilleux, to the premieres of new concertos by Márton Illés and Chaya Czernowin. The ensemble is not only performing regularly in Munich, but can also be heard at the Now! Festival Essen and the Mozartfest Würzburg.

During the 2024/25 season, he was reengaged with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of the city of Amsterdam, along with invitations from the SWR Sinfonieorchester, the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, and the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra. On the rostrum of the Klangforum Wien, of which he was principal guest conductor until 2022, he gave his Salzburg Festival debut in 2024 for a concert performance of Georg Friedrich Haas' *KOMA*. With Ensemble Modern he appears at the Venice Biennale for the first time. On the occasion of Pierre Boulez' anniversary in 2025, Bas Wiegers conducted *Répons* on a tour with the Asko Schönberg Ensemble.

In his homeland of the Netherlands, he has worked with all major orchestras. In addition, he has been a guest with the Belgian National Orchestra, Trondheim Symphony Orchestra, Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, and Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Ensemble Resonanz, Britten Sinfonia and SWR Vokalensemble. He has conducted at the Cologne Opera, Opéra national de Lorraine (Britten, Mozart), Theatre Bern, the Klagenfurt Theater (Haas, Sciarrino), Festspielhaus Erl, and appeared at festivals including Musikfest Berlin, Wiener Festwochen, Tongyeong International Music Festival, Aldeburgh Music Festival, Avanti! Summer Sounds, Prague Spring and Ruhrtriennale.

Bas Wiegers has established meaningful relationships and collaborated with many of today's leading composers, including Georges Aperghis, Georg Friedrich Haas, Helmut Lachenmann, Salvatore Sciarrino, and Rebecca Saunders.

With his podcast *The Treasure Hunt*, Bas Wiegers regularly dives deep into the realm of scores and gives his listeners a very personal insight into his working process as a conductor. He is also involved in promoting young talent as a board member of the Kersjes Foundation and guest professor of conducting at the Amsterdam Conservatory.

Virtuosity coupled with versatility. Both individually and collectively, the vocal soloists of the **Schola Heidelberg** are equally at home with widely differing styles and vocal techniques, from the works of the distant past to music of the present day which employs microtonal intonation and vocal and respiratory noise. Under the artistic directorship of their founder Walter Nußbaum, works from the 16th/17th and the 20th/21st centuries meet head-on, often with extraordinary results. A new interpretive culture materializes from an intensive concern with historically informed performance and contemporary music. The ensemble's extensive repertoire bears the fruit of close collaboration with leading present-day composers. Much noted are the commissions for new works deriving from projects like *Heimathen* and *Prinzhorn*.

Schola Heidelberg performs in its home city, all over Germany and at international festivals like the Salzburg Festival, Milano Musica, the Lucerne Festival, the Venice Biennale, Salzburg Biennale, and the *Festival d'automne* in Paris. The Schola has successful cooperative partnerships with leading groups such as Ensemble Modern, the WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne, the SWR Symphony Orchestra, the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra, the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie, and the Gürzenich Orchestra.

Schola Heidelberg's recordings of vocal compositions from the 20th/21st centuries have received acclaim resulting in multiple international awards.

Since its foundation in 1990, **Ensemble Musikfabrik** (Landesensemble NRW) has had the reputation of being one of the leading ensembles for contemporary music. In keeping with the literal meaning of its name, Ensemble Musikfabrik is particularly concerned with commissioning and producing new works, often in close collaboration with composers. The results of their extensive endeavors, are performed by the international Cologne-based soloist ensemble in numerous concerts in Germany and abroad, at festivals, in the self-organized concert series “Musikfabrik im WDR” and “Montagskonzerte” (often with live broadcasts), and in audio and video productions. WERGO released the CD series “Edition Musikfabrik” with cover art by Gerhard Richter, who chose the paintings for the CDs himself. In 2014, the in-house Label Musikfabrik was founded.

Exploring forms of modern communication and new possibilities for expression in music and theatre are a focal point. Interdisciplinary projects that include live electronics, dance, theatre, live video, and visual art expand the conventional form of the conducted ensemble concert. Thanks to its extraordinary profile and its superb artistic quality, the Ensemble Musikfabrik is sought after world wide and is a trusted partner of renowned composers and conductors.

Since 2013, the ensemble owns a completely reconstructed set of Harry Partch’s instruments. Under the title PITCH 43_TUNING THE COSMOS, many compositions have been written especially for or with these instruments. In addition, the brass players’ instruments, equipped with double bells, are another outstanding feature of the ensemble’s eagerness to experiment.

Ensemble Musikfabrik has set itself the task of promoting the younger generation of performers and composers. Central initiatives are “Studio Musikfabrik” (Youth Ensemble for New Music of the Landesmusikrat NRW) and “Adventure”, which since 2019 has been

developing projects by composition students of the Cologne University of Music and Dance and presenting them in four annual concert phases. The ensemble bundles these and other educational activities under the title “Akademie Musikfabrik”.

Ensemble Musikfabrik is supported by the state of North Rhine-Westphalia and the City of Cologne. Ensemble Musikfabrik is registered as a not-for-profit organization under German law (“eingetragener Verein”), all major artistic and business decisions are made by the members.

A composer of “uncompromising brilliance” (*The Washington Post*) whose work has been described by *The New York Times* as “viscerally gripping and emotionally transformative music ... claustrophobic and exhilarating at once, with moments of sublime beauty nestled inside thickets of dark virtuosity,” **Michael Hersch** is widely considered among the most gifted composers of his generation. Composer Georg Friedrich Haas has written that Hersch “is the explorer of an unconditional, radical expressivity that reveals the human abyss without any palliation.” Recent events and premieres include his *Violin Concerto* at the Lucerne Forward Festival in Switzerland and the Avanti Festival in Helsinki; new productions of his monodrama, *On the Threshold of Winter*, in Chicago, Salt Lake City, and Washington D.C., and his elegy *I hope we get a chance to visit soon* at the Ojai and Aldeburgh Festivals. Other premieres include his 10-hour chamber cycle, *sew me into a shroud of leaves*, a work which occupied the composer for fifteen years, at the 2019 Wien Modern Festival. During the 2019/20 season, Mr. Hersch was the Composer-in-Residence with the Camerata Bern, and in early 2020, his work *Agatha* had its premiere performances in both Bern and Geneva. Hersch’s *the script of storms* premiered that year with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and

soprano Ah Young Hong. *Opera News* noted that Hersch is a composer whose ability “to probe the substructures of human suffering is unmatched.” His music, “sometimes desolate, sometimes terrifying,” and his “singular vision, coupled with astonishing compositional skill, makes it difficult to turn away.” In 2021, his opera *Poppaea* premiered at the ZeitRäume Basel Festival. In 2022/23, major projects included new works for Ensemble Phoenix Basel and Ensemble Musikfabrik. In 2024, Hersch’s opera, *and we, each*, premiered in Baltimore, Washington D.C., and New York City. During the past decade Hersch has worked closely with Patricia Kopatchinskaja, who commissioned both his *Violin Concerto* and his chamber work *das Rückgrat berstend*. She recorded the concerto with the International Contemporary Ensemble, and the duo with cellist Jay Campbell. More recently, Kopatchinskaja performed one of the solo roles in the premiere presentations of *Agatha* with the Camerata Bern. Notable past performances include *Night Pieces*, commissioned by the Cleveland Orchestra, and a song cycle, *Domicilium*, commissioned and premiered by Thomas Hampson and Wolfgang Rieger. Hersch’s second piano concerto, *along the ravines*, commissioned by pianist Shai Wosner, was heard with the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie and as part of the Enescu International Festival. His work *end stages* was commissioned and premiered by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and his *Zwischen Leben und Tod* received its U.K. premiere at the St John’s, Smith Square. *A Forest of Attics*, commissioned for the Network for New Music’s 25th anniversary season, was selected as among that year’s most important classical music events by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the paper noting, “A *Forest of Attics* threw a Molotov cocktail into the concert: Everything before it paled in comparison ... Hersch has written some towering works in recent years; this is yet another.” Also a pianist, noted for his “astounding facility at the keyboard” (*International*

Piano), Mr. Hersch has appeared around the world with appearances at the Ojai Festival, Aldeburgh Festival, the Festival Dag in de Branding in the Netherlands, the Warhol Museum, the Romaeuropa Festival, the Phillips Collection in Washington D.C., Cleveland’s Reinberger Chamber Hall, the Festival of Contemporary Music Nuova Consonanza, the Network for New Music Concert Series, Festa Europea della Musica, and in New York City’s Merkin Concert Hall, the 92nd St. Y - Tisch Center for the Performing Arts, and Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall, among others. Michael Hersch came to international attention at age 25, when he was awarded First Prize in the Concordia American Composers Awards, resulting in a performance of his *Elegy*, conducted by Marin Alsop in New York’s Alice Tully Hall. Later that year he became one of the youngest recipients ever of a Guggenheim Fellowship in Composition. Mr. Hersch has also been the recipient of the Rome Prize, the Berlin Prize, the Goddard Lieberon Fellowship and Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts & Letters, and the first artist to receive the Johns Hopkins University’s President’s Frontier Award.

Stephanie Fleischmann is a librettist and playwright whose texts serve as blueprints for intricate three-dimensional sonic and visual worlds. Her “lyrical monologues” (*The New York Times*), “finely tuned” opera libretti (*Opera News*), plays and music-theater works have been performed internationally and across the U.S.

Opera libretti include: *Poppaea* (music by Michael Hersch, commissioned by Wien Modern/Zeiträume Basel Biennial for New Music and Architecture, 2021; nominated for the Austrian Music-Theater Prize, 2023; New Focus Recordings); *In a Grove* (music by Christopher Cerrone; commissioned by LA Opera; Prototype, NYC, 2025—*NY Times*’ “Best Classical Music of 2025, So Far”; Pittsburgh Opera, 2022;

In a Circle Records, 2023—*NY Times*’ “Best Classical Music Albums of 2023”); *The Silver Cypress* (Niloufar Nourbakhsh, commissioned by Beth Morrison Projects, 2028); *Dido* (Melinda Wagner, for Dawn Upshaw and the Brentano Quartet; commissioned by 92nd Street Y, Rockport, Wake Forest, Hopkins Center for the Arts and others, 2022; Juilliard, 2026); 2 operas with David Hanlon: *The Pigeon Keeper* (commissioned by Santa Fe Opera; Opera Parallèle, 2025) and *After the Storm* (Houston Grand Opera, 2016); 2 operas with Jeremy Howard Beck: *Another City* (Houston Grand Opera, 2023) and *The Long Walk* (American Lyric Theater, Opera Saratoga, 2015; Utah Opera and Pittsburgh Opera), *Remedios Varios* (Carlos Carrillo, Chicago Opera Theater, 2025); *Tevye’s Daughters* (Alex Weiser, American Lyric Theater, 2026); *Claude & Marcel* (Alyssa Weinberg, West Edge Opera, with Elkhanah Pulitzer, 2028); *Paradiso* (Yevgeniy Sharlat, for Hub New Music and Estelí Gomez, 2023); *Arkipov* (Peter Knell, Jacaranda/Seattle Opera).

Fleischmann’s texts and songs have been set by Anna Clyne (*The Years*, Scottish National Chamber Orchestra and Choir; BBC Proms), Christopher Cerrone (*Last Message Received*, Northwestern; and *Wind Phone*, Goleta, CA, Conspirare), Olga Neuwirth (*ecstaloop & The Cartographer* Song, Aldeburgh, Basel, Berlin, Vienna), and others. Her “Carnival of the Animals” has been seen at the Ojai Festival and the Hollywood Bowl.

Music-theater works include *The Visitation*, a sound walk (Christina Campanella, HERE); *Niagara* (with Bobby Previte and Daniel Fish, Hudson Hall); *Red Fly/Blue Bottle* (HERE, NYC; EMPAC, Troy, NY; Noorderzon, NL), *The Secret Lives of Coats* (Red Eye, Minneapolis); *The Sweetest Life* (with Saskia Lane, New Victory LabWorks, NY). Plays include: *Sound House*, *Eloise & Ray*, *Tally Ho*, *The Street of Useful Things*, *What the Moon Saw*, *The World Speed Carnival*. Developed or presented at venues including Exit Festival (France), Roundhouse Studio

(London), Synchronicity (Atlanta), Son of Semele (LA), Roadworks (Chicago), Empty Space, Act II, Asolo Rep; and in NYC at New Georges, Soho Rep, Mabou Mines/Suite, Theater for One, the Knitting Factory, Prelude, the Public.

Fleischmann is a recipient of: the Opera America Campbell Librettist Prize; grants from Café Royal Cultural Foundation, New York Foundation for the Arts, Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, Venturous Capital Fund, New York State Council on the Arts, Arts Council England, National Endowment for the Arts; fellowships from the Howard Foundation (Brown) and University of the South; the Frederick Loewe and Whitfield Cook Awards; and residencies at Macdowell, Hedgebrook, HARP, BricLab, PS21, Mass MoCA and others. Her work has been supported by funders including the MAP Fund, Opera America, New Music USA, the Greenwall Foundation, Mid-Atlantic Arts Fund, the Tobin Foundation, Pew Charitable Trust, the NY State Music Fund. She is an alumnus of the Composer Librettist Development Program at American Lyric Theater and former Playwrights Center Core Writer, New Georges Audrey Resident, and resident playwright at New Dramatists. She has taught playwriting and theater at Skidmore, Bard, and Sewanee and mentors librettists for Arts Ireland and Capetown Opera.

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P. 7: Michael Hersch, sketch from MEDEA manuscript, 2022

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