



Voicing Innocence

Trauma, Memory, and Contemporary Opera
in the Work of Kaija Saariaho

7-8 April 2026

A Conference Presented by The Barry S. Brook Center for Music Research
and Documentation, The Graduate Center, City University of New York

In Conjunction with the Metropolitan Opera's 2026 Staging of *Innocence*

Conference Venue

The City University of New York
The Graduate Center
365 Fifth Avenue

The Barry S. Brook Center for Music Research and Documentation

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Printing: CUNY GC Graphic Arts Production Services
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The program of the conference closed on 1 April 2026.
Selected presentations and discussions are live streamed.
All presentations and discussions are recorded for archival purposes.
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Organized by the Barry S. Brook Center for Music Research and Documentation,
Graduate Center, City University of New York

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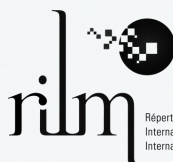
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About the Brook Center

The Barry S. Brook Center for Music Research and Documentation is a scholarly facility associated with the doctoral program in music at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York. Founded in 1989 by the renowned musicologist Barry S. Brook and renamed in his memory after he died in 1997, the Center's objectives are to provide a setting for wide-ranging research and documentation activities in music studies in all its breadth and across disciplines, from music theory to music iconography, with focus on a global approach as well as the local phenomena of New York, one of the most ethnodiverse cities in the world. The Brook Center aims to disseminate the results of its activities to the scholarly community and to the general public through conferences and events, publications, and exhibitions.

The Brook Center thus serves as a connecting point for The Graduate Center, CUNY, New York City, and all those who seek to visit it—local researchers and visiting scholars, writers and lecturers, as well as interested audiences. The Brook Center houses several valuable archives, including papers and sound recordings of Barry S. Brook, Gustave Reese, and Emanuel Winternitz.

Music—whether as oral tradition, performing art, social practice, or ritual—is a vital form of intangible cultural heritage. Through its research, archival work, and public programs, the Brook Center works to preserve, transmit, and expand access to this heritage for future generations.



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Tina Frühauf

Greetings

Dear colleagues and friends,

Welcome to the Brook Center. It is my great pleasure to extend this greeting to all participants of what promises to be two days of transformative dialogue, discovery, and exchange.

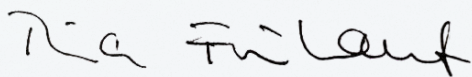
This conference takes as its point of departure a singular work. Kaija Saariaho's opera *Innocence*, her final masterpiece, *Innocence* has expanded our understanding of what opera can be and what it can hold. It gives voice to the unspeakable, rendering audible the complexities of trauma, memory, and human vulnerability. In gathering here at the CUNY Graduate Center, we join a global community of scholars, artists, and thinkers committed to exploring these profound questions.

We are honored that the conference coincides with the Metropolitan Opera's historic production of *Innocence*, and we thank our colleagues at the Met for their collaboration and support. This partnership between an opera house and a research university exemplifies the kind of transdisciplinary engagement that lies at the heart of our mission.

This gathering emerged from a conversation with my colleague G. Steven Everett, whose insight and impetus were instrumental in shaping the conference's earliest conception. I am deeply grateful for his foundational contribution, which has guided us to this moment. I am equally delighted to acknowledge our collaboration with Tobias Fandel and the overdrive festival (April 8-17), which extends our exploration of Saariaho's legacy into performance. Together, the conference and festival will co-host a special concert, "Saariaho with Electronics," featuring the renowned Finnish pianist Tuija Hakkila—a friend and longtime collaborator of the composer. Her presence brings us into direct contact with the living tradition of Saariaho's music, performed by one who knew her work from the inside. This conference would not have been possible without the generous support of The Graduate Center, which has provided both infrastructure and assistance. I am especially grateful to my colleagues Helen Koh and Julia Viegas for their support in bringing this event to life, and to the broader CUNY community whose transdisciplinary spirit infuses every session.

We are delighted to welcome participants from so many countries, representing a remarkable range of perspectives. In this way, we hope to honor the legacy of Barry S. Brook himself, whose vision for music studies transcended national, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries. Our aim is that this conference will serve as a platform for new ideas, sparking collaborations that will continue long after we leave these rooms.

With best wishes for an inspiring forum of learning, sharing, and exchange.



Director, The Barry S. Brook Center for Music Research and Documentation
The Graduate Center, City University of New York



Kaija Saariaho working in her studio, rue d'Amsterdam, Paris, 2019 © Maarit Kytöharju

Tuesday, 7 April 2026

William P. Kelly Skylight Room, Ninth Floor

8:30

Registration

9:00

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Tina Frühauf, Director of the Barry S. Brook Center for Music Research and Documentation

Joshua Bumberg, President of the CUNY Graduate Center

Jarmo Sareva, Consul General of Finland in New York

9:30

Session 1 | Chair: Jonathan Gilmore (Baruch College and CUNY Graduate Center)

Liisamaija Hautsalo (Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki), *Returning to the Past: Archaic Vocal Traditions and Musico-Dramatic Meaning in Kaija Saariaho's Innocence*

Olga Manulkina (Independent Scholar), *The Da Vinci Code: Saariaho's Operatic Fresco*

11:00

Coffee Break

11:30

Session 2 | Chair: Nickolas Pappas (CUNY City College and Graduate Center)

Yayoi Uno Everett (CUNY Hunter College and the Graduate Center), *Kaija Saariaho's Adriana Mater (2006): A Narrative of Trauma and Ambivalence*

Danielle Buonaiuto (CUNY Graduate Center), *Staging Collective Trauma: Compassionate and Care-full Approaches to the Depiction of Gun Violence in Simon Stone's Production of Innocence*

13:00

Lunch

Tuesday, 7 April 2026

William P. Kelly Skylight Room, Ninth Floor

14:00

Session 3 | Chair: Peter Eckersall (CUNY Graduate Center)

Olga Heikkilä (Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki), *Innocence and Its Performers: Significant Expansion of Operatic Vocality and Prosodic Possibility*

Naama Perel-Tzadok (University of Pittsburgh), *Resonant Tongues: Exploring the Sound of Language in Kaija Saariaho's Opera Innocence*

15:30

Coffee Break

16:00

Aleksi Barrière **in Conversation with** Frank Hentschker (Director of the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center, CUNY Graduate Center)

18:30

Reception (by invitation only)

Wednesday, 8 April 2026

William P. Kelly Skylight Room, Ninth Floor

9:00

Session 4 | Chair: Federico Favali (Conservatorio di Alessandria)

Philipp Lojak (Yale University), *Timeless Voices: Folk Vocality and the Politics of Time in Kaija Saariaho's Innocence*

Paola Livorsi (Centre for Music and Technology, University of the Arts Helsinki), *Relational Voices at the Threshold of Speech and Song*

Meeri Pulakka (Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki), *In the Transitional Spaces of Saariaho's Vocal Writing: Experience-based Artistic Research on Singing Émilie*

11:00

Coffee Break

11:30

Vilma Jää **in Conversation with** Lindsey Eckenroth (RILM and the New School's Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts)

12:15

Sofi Oksanen **in Conversation with** Yayoi Uno Everett (CUNY Hunter College and the Graduate Center)

13:00

Lunch

14:00

Session 5 | Chair: Ralph Whyte (RILM and Columbia University)

Federico Favali (Conservatorio di Alessandria), *The Concept of Hidden Theatricality in the String Quartets by Kaija Saariaho*

You-Kyung CHO (Tokyo University of the Arts), *Memory as Reconstruction: Temporal Entanglement and Musical Mediums in the Operas of Zimmermann, Saariaho, and Pagh-Paan*

Wednesday, 8 April 2026

William P. Kelly Skylight Room, Ninth Floor

16:00

Jean-Baptiste Barrière **in Conversation with** G. Steven Everett (CUNY Graduate Center)

Elebash Recital Hall

17:00

Coffee Break

18:00

Closing Concert | Saariaho with Electronics

Hosted in collaboration with the overdrive festival for experimental electronic music and multimedia art.

Fall (version for harpsichord, 1995)

Jardin secret I (1984)

Jardin secret II (1986)

Petals (1988)

Lonh (1996)

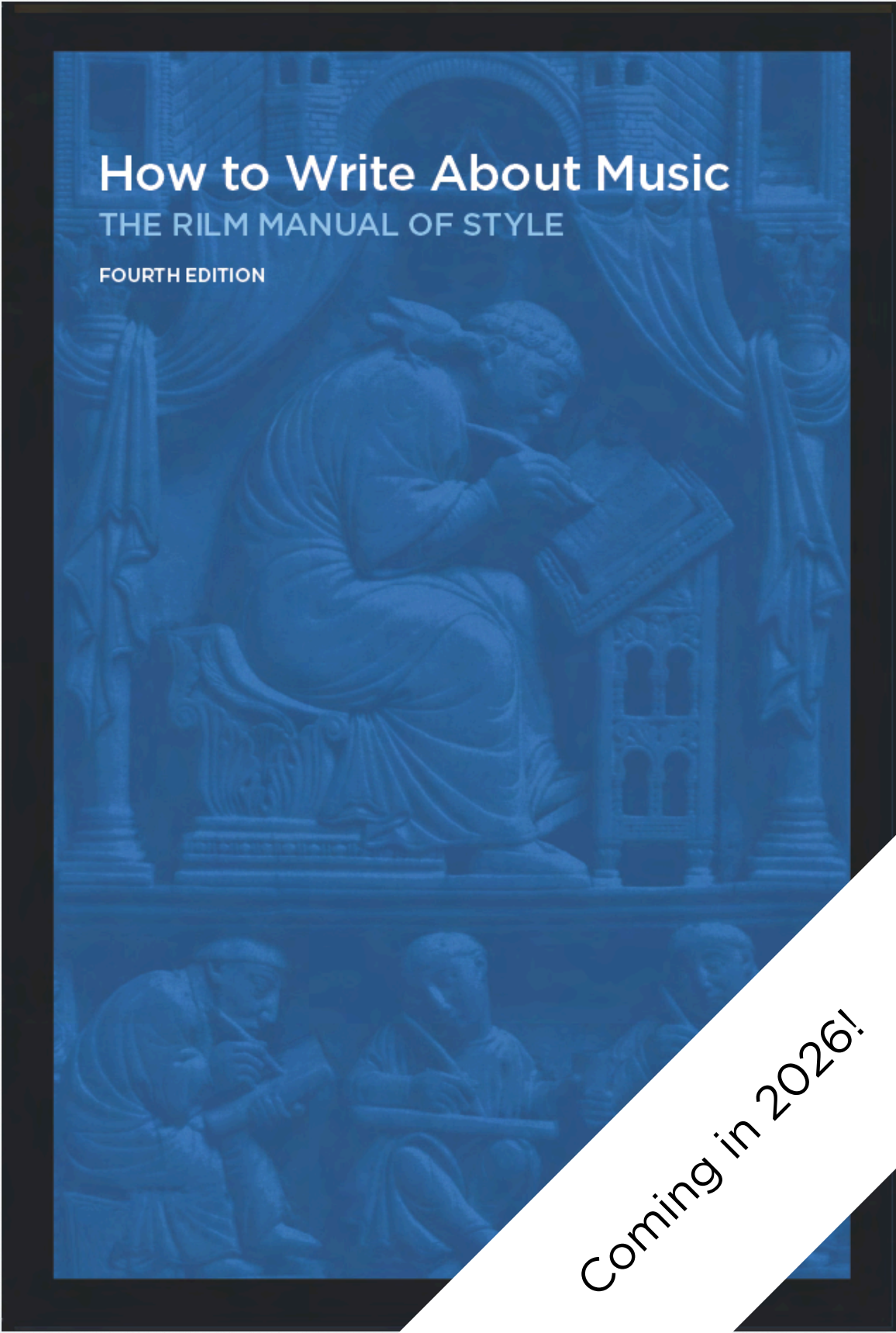
Im Traume (1980)

Tuija Hakkila | harpsichord, piano

Hannah Collins | violoncello

Joann Whang | violoncello

Olga Heikkilä | soprano



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Panelist Abstracts and Bios

Danielle Buonaiuto (CUNY Graduate Center), *Staging Collective Trauma: Compassionate and Care-full Approaches to the Depiction of Gun Violence in Simon Stone's Production of Innocence*

Representations of traumatic events in opera are widely and productively discussed in industry and academic discourse, mostly in the context of sexual violence (Bloechl, 2021; Cormier, 2024). However, these perspectives have not adequately addressed other sensitive content present in new operas and deeply relevant to modern life, such as the mass shooting in *Innocence*. Since its 2021 Aix-en-Provence premiere, Kaija Saariaho's final opera has received four new productions in addition to the original by Simon Stone, appearing at eleven houses globally in just five years. Due to its musicodramatic power, its extreme social relevance, and Saariaho's stature as a composer, it is likely to receive many revivals, meaning an increase in the population of audiences and artists reckoning with the real possibility and past occurrences of the traumatic event they have witnessed or depicted onstage. My paper addresses the need for a trauma-informed approach to *Innocence* and other operas like it. Contemporary operas have tended toward hyperrealistic musical and visual depictions of traumatic situations. While this persists, it is imperative to tell these stories responsibly and compassionately to avoid exploiting the trauma of others or retraumatizing artists and audiences, and to use their telling to build empathy, raise awareness, and inspire civic engagement to call for change and progress. Drawing on ethnographic data from participant observation and interviews gathered during the production of *Innocence* at the Metropolitan Opera in April 2026, I analyze participants' approaches through the lens of critical trauma studies. I build on foundational work by Alexander (2012), Herman (1992), and others, to situate gun violence as a topic in company with the Holocaust, sexual violence, and other sources of collective and personal trauma. I follow analyses about witnessing, writing, and reading trauma by Allison (2016), Hartman (1997), and similar musicological studies by Cizmic (2024), Doran (2022), Rogers (2021), Wlodarski (2015), and others, to call for care-full approaches to operas like *Innocence* that resist monolithizing collective trauma. This research provides crucial insights and helps form best practices for opera practitioners as they approach work with highly sensitive content.

Danielle Buonaiuto is a PhD candidate in Musicology at CUNY Graduate Center and a professional opera singer. She maintains an active solo career and is particularly sought after for world premieres; her most recent were *Eat the Document* (Prototype Festival), *Pomegranate* (Canadian Opera Company), and *RUR: A Torrent of Light* (Tapestry Opera). She also sings in the Extra Chorus of the Metropolitan Opera and the Berwick Chorus of the Oregon Bach Festival. Danielle's scholarly work is deeply informed by her experiences in the field; she leverages queer theory, feminist frameworks, and field and archival research to critique systems on the stages and in the boardrooms of opera and vocal music.

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You-Kyung CHO (Tokyo University of the Arts), *Memory as Reconstruction: Temporal Entanglement and Musical Mediums in the Operas of Zimmermann, Saariaho, and Pagh-Paan*

Memory is neither a neutral record nor a mere document of the past; rather, it is an active process of deconstruction and reconstruction that shapes identity, questions actuality, and provides a framework for living in the present. This process is performed through a temporal entanglement with aesthesia (αἴσθησις or aisthēsis). While prior memory studies have often prioritized the representability of “negative memory”—such as the Holocaust or Nazism—by focusing on visual elements in fine arts and film, musical memory has been largely overlooked. This presentation explores how “negative memory” is inherited through the musical medium of sound by examining the contact points of temporality in the operatic works of Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Kaija Saariaho, and Younghi Pagh-Paan. Drawing upon the aesthetics of Zimmermann—a generation senior to the others—this analysis focuses on Saariaho’s *Innocence* and Pagh-Paan’s *Road on the Heaven*, both of which premiered in 2021. Their manipulation of time, language, and social messaging echoes Zimmermann’s *Soldaten* (1960–64), a work built upon the concept of “spherical structured time” and the rejection of linear progression. The study identifies two distinct layers of temporal manipulation: individual memories within the opera and the inheritance of collective memory outside the work, which now extends beyond national borders to a global scale. The first section argues that multiple senses cannot be integrated simultaneously, justifying a specific concentration on auditory elements. After establishing Zimmermann’s philosophy of time, the second section analyzes how temporal simultaneity in Saariaho and Pagh-Paan’s works disrupts causal links and weakens central character narratives, thereby inducing active engagement from the listener. Finally, the third section clarifies the historical commonalities between these works, illustrating how individual memory evolves into a collective consciousness centered on war, terrorism, and resistance to oppression. In this multilingual rebirth, modern opera reflects the specific cultural and political circumstances of Germany, Finland, and South Korea while exploring how humanity interacts across different times and spaces.

You-Kyung CHO is a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) postdoctoral research fellow in Musicology and Music Aesthetics at Tokyo University of the Arts. She also serves as a lecturer at the University of Tokyo and Tamagawa University. Cho earned her PhD in Aesthetics at the University of Tokyo with the dissertation titled “The Poetics and Politics of Musical Quotation and/or Collage in 20th-century Music.” Her doctoral studies were supported by the JSPS and Atsumi International Foundation. Her current research explores postmemory studies in music, contemporary music in global contexts, and the intersection of music and technology. She is a widely published scholar, with articles appearing in peer-reviewed journals such as *Bigaku/Aesthetics* and *Ongakugaku*. Among her most recent publications are chapters on Hatsune Miku (2024) and Zimmermann’s *Die Soldaten* (2025) to Japanese collections of essays.

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Yayoi Uno Everett (CUNY Hunter College and the Graduate Center), *Kaija Saariaho's Adriana Mater (2006): A Narrative of Trauma and Ambivalence*

In stark contrast to the spiritual and transcendent aura of Kaija Saariaho's first opera, *L'Amour de loin* (2000), *Adriana Mater* is dark and contemplative in dealing with the subject of war and rape. The story here centers on a "nameless" war, focusing on the ageless human conflict that revolves around themes of maternity and violence. And to this end, the opera blurs the boundaries between reality and dream and between past and present. Jacques Lacan views the unconscious and conscious thought as "unfolding" and developing chronologically along a timeline, yet interrupting or intervening in the other. In the case of trauma, the totality of the subject's experience may be contained in the Imaginary (protolinguistic) domain, while mediated by language in the Symbolic domain; the Real is that which is left unstated from the Imaginary, causing ruptures and residues in the subject's psyche. Drawing on Lacanian theory, I argue that Saariaho's music conveys traumatic residues and ruptures through repetition, stasis, and circularity in the unfolding of the opera. Actions that take place in the diegetic present represent reality, dreams and illusions non-reality, recurring musical motives and lighting the Imaginary, and the enunciated text the Symbolic. The sense of trauma and ambivalence accrues from moving back and forth between these opposite realms without resolution until a new order (or a promise of one) is established at the end.

Yayoi Uno Everett is currently Professor of Music at Hunter College and the CUNY Graduate Center. Her research focuses on the analysis of postwar art music, film, and opera from the perspectives of semiotics, narratology, multimedia theories, cultural studies, and East Asian aesthetics. Her publications include the monographs *Reconfiguring Myth and Narrative in Contemporary Operas* (2015) and *The Music of Louis Andriessen* (2006), an edited volume *Contemporary Opera in Flux* (2024), a co-edited volume *Locating East Asia in Western Music* (2004), and various peer-reviewed articles on music by Kaija Saariaho, John Adams, Thomas Adès, Charles Wuorinen, Louis Andriessen, György Ligeti, Elliott Carter, Toru Takemitsu, Toshi Ichijanagi, Chou-Wen Chung, Lei Liang, and Unsuk Chin. She is the recipient of fellowships and awards from UIC's Creativity Activity Award, Dean's Research Award, NEAC Research Fellowship from the Association of Asian Studies, Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry at Emory University, the Japan Foundation, Bogliasco Foundation, Asian Council, and the National Endowment for Humanities.

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Federico Favali (Conservatorio di Alessandria), *The Concept of Hidden Theatricality in the String Quartets by Kaija Saariaho*

This paper analyzes the musical figures and the musical gestures that create a hidden theatricality in the string quartets by Kaija Saariaho, specifically *Nymphéa* (1987) and *Terra Memoria* (2007). It offers a perspective on how the musical material can be interpreted as characters on a stage and how they interact throughout the piece. To achieve this, a geometrical approach to the harmonies will be employed; in other words, a graphic representation of the chords will be presented. While this aspect has been explored in previous decades, the approach proposed here differs significantly from earlier studies. This study builds on previous work and aims to show how specific geometric figures can be derived from the analysis of the chords. The harmonic chain of the chords of each piece will be described geometrically, using triangles, squares, pentagons, and hexagons. These will be represented graphically on different cylinders symbolizing the musical space. The subsequent analysis will be a graphic exploration of how these figures evolve. Comparison among the harmonies will be made comparing the figures themselves, with their characteristics reflecting those of the chords. This type of study represents a first step toward a detailed and precise theory of harmony articulated geometrically. Importantly, the analysis is not an end in itself. It will also explore how these figures can be perceived as characters within an inner theatrical space. This approach may serve as a starting point for investigating the relationships between Saariaho's operas and her instrumental music.

Federico Favali is an Italian composer whose music has received international acclaim and has been performed worldwide by ensembles such as Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and Lontano Ensemble. In 2014, he received a commission from Teatro del Giglio of Lucca for the chamber opera *The Fall of the House of Usher*. He was invited to the Daegu International Contemporary Music Festival in 2015, and to the Crosscurrents Festival (Birmingham, U.K.) in 2016. Favali is also active as a musicologist. His research primarily focuses on the analysis of contemporary music, with particular attention to the works of Ligeti and Adès, as well as the relationships between narrative techniques in Jorge Luis Borges and structures in contemporary music. He graduated in piano from the Conservatorio di Musica Luigi Boccherini in Lucca and studied musicology at the University of Bologna. He studied composition in Italy, the U.K., the U.S., and Argentina. He currently teaches harmony and music analysis at the Conservatorio di Alessandria.

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Liisamaija Hautsalo (Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki), *Returning to the Past: Archaic Vocal Traditions and Musico-Dramatic Meaning in Kaija Saariaho's Innocence*

Kaija Saariaho's compositional background, shaped by her studies at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s with teachers advocating serialism and by her own description of a "post-serial education," places her work broadly within a modernist tradition, as reflected in contemporary opera scholarship on her output (Calico, 2016). From this perspective, her final opera, *Innocence*, premiered at the Aix-en-Provence Festival in 2021, may be understood as introducing an unusual point of reference through its rare allusion to traditional Scandinavian cattle calls, a vocal practice historically associated with rural contexts prior to the industrialization of agriculture (Jääskeläinen, 2025). *Innocence* is a five-act opera that addresses a school shooting and its aftermath. Musically, it continues many characteristics familiar from Saariaho's earlier works, including finely differentiated timbral textures, extreme dynamic contrasts, and a wide range of vocal writing, ranging from speech-like articulation to fully operatic singing. The opera is scored for seven operatic voices, one folk singer, and five spoken roles. Its dramaturgy unfolds on two temporal dimensions: a present-day summer evening in 21st-century Helsinki, framed by a multicultural wedding, and a retrospective dimension in which students and a teacher reconstruct the events of the shooting ten years earlier. Within this otherwise familiar framework, the folk singer occupies a marked position. Unlike the operatic voices, this part draws on a vocal practice whose cultural origins lie outside the Western art-music tradition, placing it in a different relation to Saariaho's usual vocal writing and to the opera's broader musico-dramatic texture. Against this background, how might the allusion to an archaic vocal tradition be understood within the musico-dramatic context of *Innocence*? This paper proposes that the allusion to an archaic vocal tradition may be approached as a musico-dramatic element whose placement and vocal character invite interpretation in relation to the ethical implications of violence within the opera. The analysis is based on a close reading of the score and libretto, with particular attention to vocal writing, the use of the voice, and the dramaturgical deployment of the folk singer's vocal textures. By focusing on this material, the paper contributes to emerging scholarship on *Innocence* through a focused musico-dramatic analysis of that vocal texture.

Liisamaija Hautsalo is a Finnish musicologist and Associate Professor at the Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki. She led the five-year research project *The Politics of Equality in Finnish Opera* (2017–23), funded by the Finnish Research Council, which examined opera as a political and societal phenomenon in the context of the Finnish welfare state. She received her PhD from the University of Helsinki in 2008 with a dissertation on Kaija Saariaho's first opera, *L'Amour de loin*, analyzed from the perspective of musical semantics. Since then, her research has continued to engage closely with Saariaho's operatic and vocal works alongside broader questions in opera studies, contemporary opera, and opera theory, with particular emphasis on institutional structures and singer–composer relations.

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Olga Heikkilä (Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki), *Innocence and Its Performers: Significant Expansion of Operatic Vocality and Prosodic Possibility*

Innocence has roles for operatic singing, folk singing, Sprechgesang, actor speech, contemporary music theater singing, and notated speech. This paper examines how Saariaho employs this spectrum of vocal styles to articulate character, memory, and trauma, arguing that the work represents a significant expansion of operatic vocality and prosodic possibility. The deliberate pairing of specific vocal techniques with particular characters enables Saariaho to differentiate between figures situated in distinct temporal and emotional planes, such as those inhabiting the present and emerging from fragmented memory. The interaction of language choice and vocal technique intensifies musical characterization and invites analysis through voice studies and recent scholarship on the phenomenology of operatic vocality. The paper argues that *Innocence* exemplifies an emerging paradigm in operatic casting and collaboration, one that requires performers with diverse vocal backgrounds and training traditions. Through analysis of selected vocal passages and their dramatic functions, it demonstrates how Saariaho's compositional strategies challenge conventional distinctions between singer and actor, Western classical technique, and vernacular practices. The work thus opens new territories for vocal expression and characterization in 21st-century music theater. To examine how a fixed composition is transformed through individual performers, the study adopts a threefold analytical framework. The first perspective focuses on vocal sound and technique as material phenomena. The second considers the role of vocal tradition and training in shaping expressive realization. The third analyzes how musical notation regulates, constrains, or contradicts both technical execution and traditional practice. These perspectives allow for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between composition, notation, and embodied vocal performance. Drawing on performance experience with multiple casts and stagings of *Innocence*, the paper shows that Saariaho's use of diverse vocal techniques does not aim at effect-driven contrast but at holistic vocal presence. As in orchestral writing, each voice is treated as a complete instrument rather than as a collection of isolated effects. The analytical framework thus serves not only as a tool for scholarly analysis but also as a practical method for performers preparing a role, highlighting how individual vocality contributes to the realization of the work beyond what is specified in the score.

Olga Heikkilä is a doctoral student at the Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki. Her doctoral degree comprises five concerts and a thesis titled "Sprechgesang and the Expressivity of the Voice in Western Art Music," supervised by Professor Mieko Kanno. She holds a Master of Music (University of the Arts Helsinki, 2015), an Advanced Postgraduate Diploma in Music (The Royal Danish Opera Academy, 2013), and a Master of Theology (The University of Eastern Finland, 2007). Heikkilä has presented her research at conferences in Finland and delivered lecture-concerts at international Doctors in Performance festivals and the Royal Academy of Music in London. As a performer, she has appeared in Kaija Saariaho's *Innocence* at the Finnish National Opera, Royal Opera House, Dutch National Opera, San Francisco Opera, and Semperoper Dresden. Heikkilä is involved in the Metropolitan Opera's performances. Her engagement with *Innocence* forms a central part of her doctoral research, connecting performance practice with scholarly inquiry.

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Paola Livorsi (Centre for Music and Technology, University of the Arts Helsinki),
Relational Voices at the Threshold of Speech and Song

Exploring one's voice(s) can guide a person to deepen and develop their embodied identities. Broadly taken, every sound can be considered a voice making itself present to the living (Ihde, 1976). Voice is always plural, and identity is a work-in-progress that consists of multiple inner voices (of role models and meaningful ones). The voices we hear invite us to attention, relationality, and care. Saariaho's work *Innocence* is a powerful example in this regard; the voices she takes care of are intrinsically multiple and interdependent. We hear every character through a shared language (English), but also through their native language. Multilingualism allows the composer to explore varying expressive plans and to deepen her psychological understanding of each character. This presentation focuses on the musicality of language, seen through the vocal styles of Tereza and Markéta, Cecilia and Iris. I will explore how different languages can subtly reveal hidden aspects of the stories or sides the characters are not aware of; how a character makes themselves heard, and which aspects are heard or unheard by the other characters and by the surrounding society. I reconsider the dichotomy of music and language typical of modern Western culture. Following Jin Hyun Kim, I consider music and speech as meaningful interactions that foster interpersonal and affiliative communication, including degrees of non-representational semantics (Kim, 2023 and 2025). *Innocence* presents a subtly varied vocal palette at the threshold of song and speech. Non-linear narratives and gender perspectives are pertinent. In the opera, multiple temporal plans coexist and communicate – a feature of multiplicity. Personal and collective narratives emerge from non-linear events unfolding over time. It is only at the end of a life or a story that meanings come to light (Blixen in Cavarero, 1997). *Innocence* challenges established traditions in opera and theater, showing a broad array of female characters – mothers, daughters, teachers, and students. The work shows an unflattering portrait of a Western society where problematic issues are often silenced.

Paola Livorsi studied composition and electroacoustic music in Italy, Finland, and France, with Kaija Saariaho and Jean-Baptiste Barrière, among others. She holds a PhD from the University of the Arts Helsinki, with a dissertation on “Human Voice and Instrumental Voice: An Investigation of Voicelikeness” (2023). She is the author of multidisciplinary works such as *Imaginary Spaces* (2016), *The End of No Ending* (2017), *Between Words and Life* (2019), *Sounding Bodies* (2020), *Medusa* (Helsinki Contemporary Opera Festival 2022), and *Songs of Winter and War* (2025). Livorsi was commissioned by singers Tuuli Lindeberg, Piia Komsa, and Pia Freund, and by Klangforum Wien, Biennale di Venezia, Helsinki Chamber Choir, Tampere Biennale, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Vicentino Singers, and the Finnish Baroque Orchestra. She was invited to Japan in 2004–05 and 2013. Livorsi was awarded grants from Finnish foundations and institutions, and in 2020 received the Pro Musica Prize. She is also active as a teacher and regularly performs in the experimental music ensemble Naarmu.

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Philipp Lojak (Yale University), *Timeless Voices: Folk Vocality and the Politics of Time in Kaija Saariaho's Innocence*

Kaija Saariaho's *Innocence* is an opera about the remembered past that haunts the present. The memory of a school shooting painfully remains with the survivors, who live in a double reality of the past and the lived present. This paper examines how Saariaho renders this simultaneity audible by mapping distinct vocal techniques onto the competing temporalities of the living and the dead, and the liminal state between them. While bel canto signifies the chronological time of the living, and speech or Sprechgesang marks the psychological stasis of the traumatized survivors, the murdered student Markéta is sung by Vilma Jää, who takes inspiration from the singing of the Finno-Ugric population in Finland. But this "figure of sound," the vocal tropes that associate her piercing timbre with otherworldly timelessness, rests on a fraught history (and present) of othering. In this paper, I argue that *Innocence* is an expression of the Western collective memory that has made Indigenous and folk cultures its "Other" by associating them with timelessness. Johannes Fabian has defined the tendency of the anthropological discourse to place its object in a time other than the present, the "denial of coevalness." This translates into the opposition of bel canto and Vilma Jää's particular style of folkloristic singing, an interpretation of the joik from White Karelia, which are herding calls of piercing and intense timbre. The "denial of coevalness" is evident in Jää's timbre becoming a sign for the past that cannot be overcome, and thus, cannot progress, although joik and the more common kulning are still practiced all over Northern Scandinavia. I contend that timbre is perceived as monolithic, since it cannot be classified or abstracted like other means of expression. Therefore, the voice of dead Markéta is perceived solely by virtue of its alterity and thus without progression and temporal development. Consequently, Jää/Markéta's voice functions as a disruptor of the linear time of the living, resting on a history of othering.

Philipp Lojak is a composer and musicologist specializing in opera studies and global history. He is currently a PhD student in Music History at Yale University. His core interests include contemporary music, global opera history, and the entanglements of aesthetics and capitalism. In 2025, he received the Folkwang Prize in Musicology for his master's thesis on medievalism in contemporary opera and the Scholarly Paper Award of the National Opera Association. Philipp Lojak holds an M.A. in musicology and dramaturgy from the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen, a B.A. in musicology and media culture studies from the University of Cologne, and a B.mus. in composition from Robert Schumann University in Düsseldorf. Additionally, he worked as a concert manager for the Duisburg Philharmonic Orchestra and composed orchestral works and chamber music, published as scores and on CD.

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Olga Manulkina (Independent Scholar), *The Da Vinci Code: Saariaho's Operatic Fresco*

In the conversations about *Innocence*, Kaija Saariaho, Sofi Oksanen, and Aleksis Barrière tell the story of the initial concept of the opera. Saariaho, we learn, was interested in “how the group of people live one event so differently.” Having “imagined a group of tourists coming to see Leonardo da Vinci’s Last Supper,” she wanted to express their transformative experience through her music. Seemingly very distant from the final result, that initial idea of a multilingual group contemplating da Vinci’s fresco has nevertheless made an impact on the final work. Describing their process, the opera creators named the main elements of the future piece: “I wanted a group of people living through something extraordinary and the consequences” (Saariaho); “Kaija had this idea that there would be thirteen characters who are united by an event” (Barrière); “Kaija wanted to be multilingual and that all the performers to be on stage throughout the piece” (Oksanen). Even the wedding table came up in association with da Vinci’s fresco. The ideas of catharsis, multilinguality, and overcoming trauma remained in the composer’s mind. Saariaho wanted to name the entire project “Fresco” and defined her opera as follows: “Under its disguise of a thriller, *Innocence* is a story about recovery and healing: a large fresco of the human mind.” In my paper, I argue that the da Vinci fresco provides a key to the interpretation of the opera that may otherwise remain hidden by the topical subject matter. Its foundational Gospel story gives a new dimension to the plot of sacrifice and mourning – in particular, of Pieta. *Innocence* explores the tragedy that has already happened. We essentially learn about it at the moment the opera begins, but we revisit the traumatic event again and again as the narrative progresses. In terms of musical genre, it brings us to the Passion, thus evoking parallels with Saariaho’s *La Passion de Simone*. Linked both to da Vinci and the Passion is a key dramaturgical feature of the opera: the logic of tableaux unfolding in three parallel time-streams. This resonates with Saariaho’s musical style, which is marked by a sense of stasis and pictoriality – the capturing and inhabiting of a moment. As I will demonstrate, even the most intense dramatic episodes in *Innocence* are paradoxically marked by orchestral suspension, a dwelling in time.

Olga Manulkina was an Associate Professor at St Petersburg State University (2012–22), a founding director of the M.A. program in Music Criticism, and taught at St Petersburg State Conservatory (1992–2021). In 2002 she was a Fulbright scholar at the CUNY Graduate Center. She specializes in the cultural and social history of music, opera, music criticism, and reception. She was the founding editor-in-chief of the *Opera Musicologica* journal (2009–18). In the 1990s and 2000s, she was a music critic for the Russian federal newspaper *Kommersant* and *Afisha* magazine. She is the author of *Ot Ajvza do Adamsa: Amerikanskaâ muzyka XX veka* (From Ives to Adams: The 20th-century American music, 2010), numerous articles, and over 500 reviews. She has been co-editor of the volumes *Novaâ russkaâ muzykal'naâ kritika: 1993–2003* (The new Russian music criticism: 1993–2003, 2013, and 2015).

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Naama Perel-Tzadok (University of Pittsburgh), *Resonant Tongues: Exploring the Sound of Language in Kaija Saariaho's Opera Innocence*

While music theory has traditionally drawn inspiration from the structural aspects of language, this paper expands the conversation by developing a method that examines how the sound of particular languages influences vocal and instrumental writing. This approach considers interactions between linguistic sounds, prosody, musical characteristics, and musical structure. The paper addresses central questions: how do specific languages shape musical characteristics such as fluidity, timbre, dynamics, and pitch, and how can linguistic features and musical elements be integrated to build a cohesive artistic narrative? Kaija Saariaho's opera, *Innocence*, incorporates nine languages and presents a school shooting from the perspectives of thirteen characters. While existing scholarship on Saariaho's music has focused on her engagement with spectralism, computer-assisted composition, and the synesthetic relationships between sound and perception, this paper offers a new interpretive direction: her use of multilingualism as a musical device, a practice she has explored since early works such as *Stilleben* (1988) and *Lonh* (1996). In *Émilie* (2010), multilingual writing becomes a means of articulating the self's fragmentation. *Innocence* represents the apex of this trajectory, fully integrating text, music, and multilingualism into a complex, dramatic, and sonic architecture. In *Innocence*, Saariaho worked with spectral and rhythmic analysis for each language. Since she did not speak all the languages in the opera, she relied on recordings by native speakers to analyze prosody, pitch, and speech rhythm using computer-assisted tools. Each character is differentiated through vocal style, tempo, instrumental associations, and electronic treatment, requiring a detailed sound design that balances acoustic and electronic elements. The methodological framework builds on linguistic and music-analytic models proposed by Peter Stacey and Inna Ivanova, focusing on phonological, morphological, lexical-semantic, and syntactic dimensions of text in music. Using the Praat software, the study analyzes the phonetic and acoustic characteristics of the multilingual libretto and compares these findings with the musical score. By examining how the sonic traits of language directly inform musical decisions, the paper proposes a new framework for understanding the interplay between language and music, contributing to scholarship on multilingual composition, vocal writing, and contemporary music theater.

Naama Perel-Tzadok is a versatile composer-performer, conductor, and scholar whose works have been performed in Europe and the US. As a doctoral candidate in music composition and theory at the University of Pittsburgh, she investigates the acoustic relationship between music and language in the compositional process. As a third-generation Yemeni and Tunisian immigrant, she grew up surrounded by Yemeni, Arabic, and Jewish music. Drawing inspiration from nature, current events, visual art, and the diverse musical traditions of her heritage, her work often explores and blurs the lines between ancient and modern musical worlds, incorporating various musical styles and genres.

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Meeri Pulakka (Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki), *In the Transitional Spaces of Saariaho's Vocal Writing: Experience-based Artistic Research on Singing Émilie*

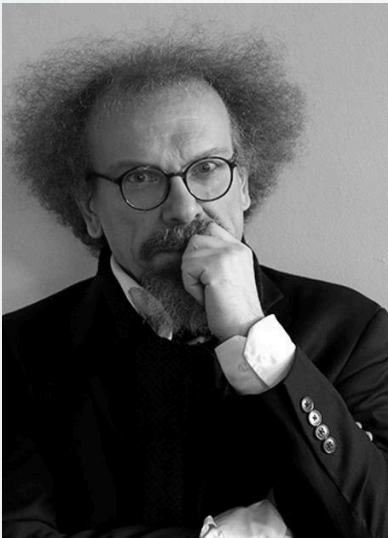
Among the many works Kaija Saariaho composed for the soprano voice is the monodrama *Émilie* (2009), which is focused on a woman's experience. As with other works of Saariaho, *Émilie* operates with contrasting dichotomies and especially with what lies in between, the transitions and the transitional spaces created through constantly moving between opposing stages. In *Émilie*, even the situation in the opera can be considered as a transitional space between life and death: *Émilie* (Marquise du Châtelet, 1706–49) is determined to finish her translation of Newton's *Principia*, while near her time of giving birth and experiencing premonitions of death. Based on my doctoral artistic research project on singing contemporary vocal music, this presentation examines Saariaho's vocal writing in *Émilie* from the singer's perspective. The first artistic component of my research was a performance of Kaija Saariaho's *Émilie*, and through that I explored the instrumentality of the voice in the context of contemporary opera. In this presentation, I discuss what Saariaho's vocal writing in *Émilie* requires from a soprano, and what it is like to learn, practice, and perform Saariaho's music. By comparing singing *Émilie* with Saariaho's other two works, *Lonh* (1996) for soprano and live electronics, and *Innocence* (2021), I ask what kind of elements (such as trills, glissandos, whispers, etc.) in her vocal writing reappear and how they reshape themselves in her works from different decades. Besides Saariaho's vocal writing, the subject of this presentation touches on multilingualism, non-linear narrative structure, and extended vocal techniques in contemporary opera. By shedding light on my practice process and describing my performance experience, I aim to understand Saariaho's vocal writing, more specifically, how the voice is used as an instrument in *Émilie* to convey emotions and meaning. Through my practice, I explore the transitional spaces in *Émilie*'s vocal writing, essential in forming the emotional language and meaning-making in the opera: gliding between speaking and singing, glissandos between intervals, combination of the previous two, shifting between languages, the execution of specific phonemes such as the uvular French *r*, and in our version (directed by Aleksí Barrière) the division between multiple *Émilies* (two sopranos, dancer, and harpsichordist). In this research-framed performance presentation, I will also give examples by singing a few sections from *Émilie* as part of my argument.

Meeri Pulakka is a Finnish soprano known for her elegant, expressive, and musically sensitive interpretations across opera, chamber music, and solo repertoire. Performing contemporary music and working in collaboration with composers of our time is especially close to her heart. Pulakka holds a Master of Music from both the Sibelius Academy at the University of the Arts Helsinki and the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. She is currently pursuing doctoral studies at the Sibelius Academy, where her artistic research focuses on singing contemporary vocal music. In the summer of 2025, Pulakka performed Kaija Saariaho's monodrama *Émilie* with the Avanti! Chamber Orchestra, conductor Aliisa Neige Barrière, and soprano Pia Freund in a new production directed by Aleksí Barrière.

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Featured Speakers and Performers

Aleksi Barrière is a librettist, dramaturg, and stage director working at the intersection of opera, theater, and contemporary performance. His work is marked by a strong interest in political themes, collective memory, and multilingual dramaturgy. Barrière has collaborated closely with composer Kaija Saariaho, most notably as librettist of the opera *Innocence*, and has since been staged internationally to critical acclaim. His writing is characterized by psychological depth and structural complexity, often weaving together multiple perspectives and temporalities. In addition to his work in opera, Barrière has directed and developed interdisciplinary projects across Europe, exploring the relationship between text, music, and staging. With a background spanning literature, philosophy, and performance, he represents a new generation of European music-theater makers committed to innovative forms and urgent contemporary subjects.



Jean-Baptiste Barrière is a French composer and multimedia artist known for his pioneering work in electroacoustic music, interactive technologies, and digital arts. Associated with the research environment of IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique) in Paris, Barrière has been at the forefront of combining composition with technological innovation since the 1980s. His work integrates live electronics, video, virtual reality, and immersive sound environments, often exploring the relationship between body, gesture, and digital space. In collaboration with visual artist and choreographer Shiro Takatani and others, he has developed multimedia operas and large-scale installations presented internationally. Barrière has also held academic and research positions in Europe and the United States, contributing significantly to the development of computer-assisted composition and interactive performance systems. His artistic practice bridges music, science, and visual culture, positioning him as a central figure in contemporary experimental composition.



Vilma Jää is a Finnish singer, composer, and performer known for her innovative fusion of Nordic folk traditions with electronic music and contemporary art-pop. Drawing on archival materials, runo-song, and Karelian vocal techniques, she reimagines traditional sound worlds through modern production, looping, and experimental textures. Her work often explores themes of gender, desire, myth, and embodied voice, bringing feminist and queer perspectives into dialogue with folk heritage. Vilma Jää gained international attention with her debut solo album *Kosto* (2023), which was widely praised for its bold reinterpretation of folk material and its striking sonic landscapes. In addition to her solo career, she collaborates across disciplines in theater and performance contexts, contributing to projects that bridge ritual, storytelling, and contemporary stage practice. Her artistry combines raw vocal expression with conceptual clarity, positioning her as one of the most distinctive voices in the current Nordic experimental folk scene.

Sofi Oksanen is a Finnish novelist, playwright, and public intellectual whose work explores memory, power, gender, and the political traumas of the 20th century. Born in Finland to a Finnish father and an Estonian mother, she has consistently addressed the entangled histories of Finland, Estonia, and the Soviet past. Oksanen achieved international recognition with her novel *Purge* (2008), which won numerous awards and was translated into dozens of languages. Her writing is known for its psychological intensity, sharp social critique, and focus on the experiences of women under regimes of violence and control. In addition to fiction, she has published essays and commentary on contemporary politics, freedom of expression, and Russian imperialism. Beyond literature, Oksanen has worked as a librettist in contemporary opera, bringing her dramaturgical sensibility and ethical concerns into musical theatre contexts. She is widely regarded as one of the most significant Nordic authors of her generation.



Hannah Collins is a multifaceted artist, educator, and arts-in-health advocate. Winner of De Linkprijs for contemporary interpretation, she is committed to championing compelling new works for violoncello. *Resonance Lines*, her solo debut album on the Sono Luminus label, is an “adventurous, impressive collection of contemporary solo cello music” negotiated “with panache” (*The Strad*). Collins is a member of New Morse Code, Decoda, and the A Far Cry chamber orchestra. She also serves as the executive director of the Longwood Symphony, the orchestra of Boston’s healthcare community.

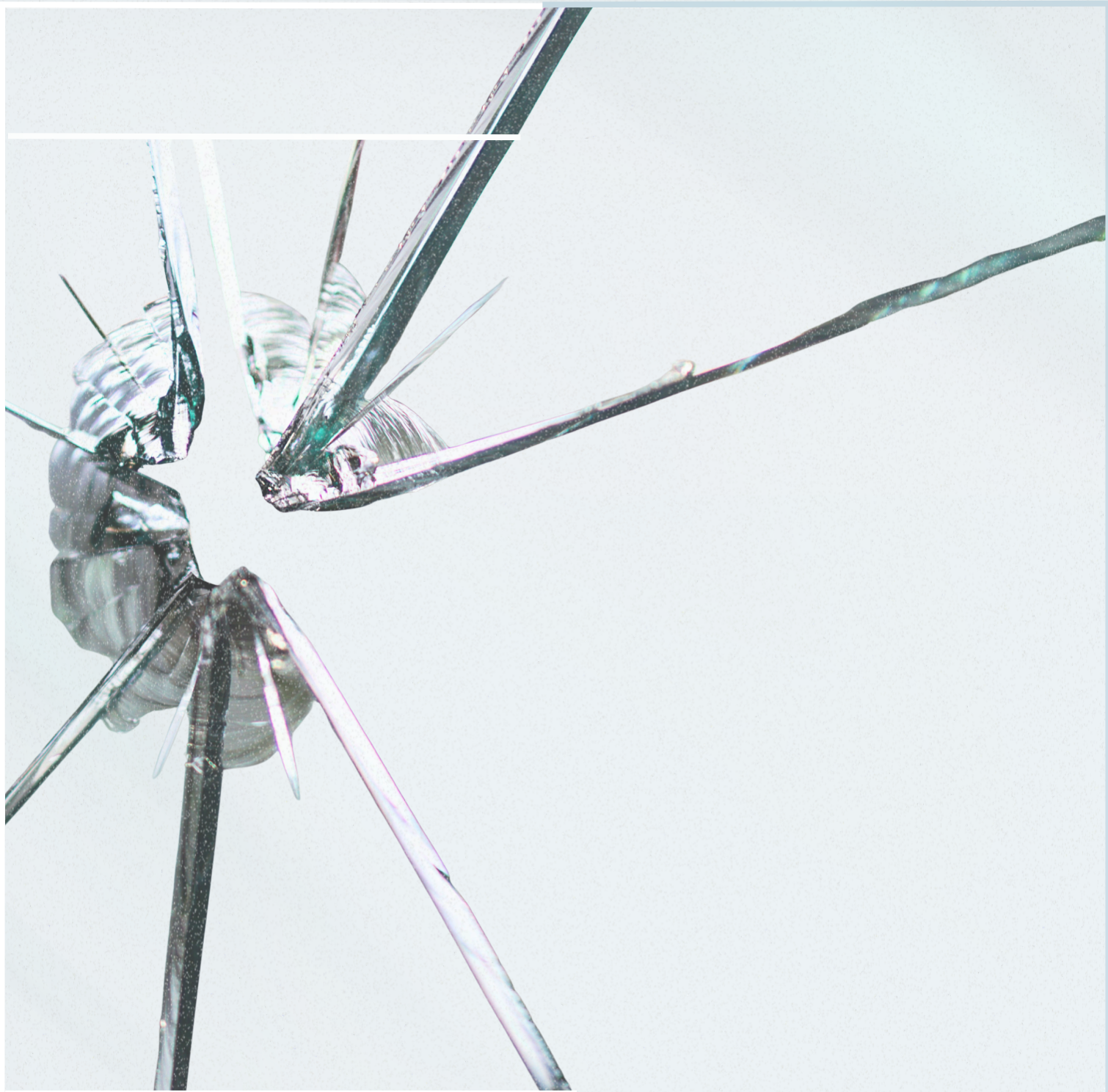


Olga Heikkilä is a Finnish soprano known for her versatility across opera, chamber music, and contemporary repertoire. A prizewinner in several international vocal competitions, she has appeared on major European stages including the Berlin State Opera, Stuttgart Opera, and La Monnaie in Brussels. An active interpreter of both classical and new music, she has collaborated with numerous composers and premiered contemporary works. Heikkilä studied at the Helsinki Conservatory, the Sibelius Academy, and the Royal Danish Opera Academy, and regularly performs as a soloist in concerts and recitals across Europe and the United States. Alongside her performing career, she is also engaged in artistic research at the Sibelius Academy, exploring vocal expression and contemporary performance practices.

Tuija Hakkila-Helasvuo is a Finnish pianist recognized for her wide-ranging repertoire and her commitment to both contemporary music and historically informed performance. A versatile chamber musician and soloist, she has premiered numerous works by Finnish composers while also performing extensively on period instruments, including fortepiano and harpsichord. Her artistry bridges modern concert practice and historical keyboard traditions, reflecting a deep engagement with questions of style, interpretation, and musical context. Hakkila-Helasvuo has appeared at major European festivals and collaborated with leading Nordic composers and ensembles. In addition to her performing career, she has been active as a pedagogue and cultural advocate in Finland, contributing to the country's vibrant contemporary music scene. Her recordings span repertoire from the Classical era to new music, and she is particularly noted for championing Finnish composers both past and present.



Joann Whang is a First Prize and Audience Prize winner at the Cello Biennale Amsterdam and has appeared as a soloist with the Amsterdam Sinfonietta. A founding member of the Argus Quartet, she held residencies at the Juilliard School and Yale School of Music and won First Prize at the M-Prize Chamber Arts and Concert Artists Guild Competitions. Deeply engaged with contemporary music, she has collaborated with composers including Kaija Saariaho, Augusta Read Thomas, Magnus Lindberg, and Christopher Theofanidis, and received a Fulbright grant to study in France.



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