

Venice Music Biennale announces award of Golden Lion to composer Kaija Saariaho and Silver Lion to Neue Vocalsolisten

Awards come ahead of Lucia Ronchetti's first Biennale as Artistic Director, 'Choruses', 17-26 September 2021



Kaija Saariaho (c) Priska Ketterer

This year's Venice Music Biennale is composer Lucia Ronchetti's first as Artistic Director and as part of the activities planned for the Biennale, Ronchetti has chosen composer Kaija Saariaho to be awarded its Golden Lion (Leone d'oro) and the Silver Lion (Leone d'argento) to vocal group Neue Vocalsolisten.

Ronchetti has programmed this year's Music Biennale, *Choruses*, to focus on the human voice and how composers throughout time have responded to it. One of the key reasons Ronchetti chose Saariaho to receive the Golden Lion was for the originality of her vocal compositions, as well as for her extraordinary technical and expressive levels achieved in her choral scores.

Saariaho will receive her Golden Lion award at on 17 September in the Sala delle Colonne at Ca' Giustinian. The award ceremony will be immediately followed by a public discussion with Saariaho and Ronchetti.

Ronchetti commented:

"I am honoured to award the Leone d'oro per la musica to Kaija Saariaho, a leading figure in contemporary musical creativity. An original artist with an unmistakable style, whose sound textures synthesise Debussy's timbral ideation with refined explorations of sound material, creating a personal musical language that engages and enlightens her global public."

The inaugural concert of the Music Biennale will be held at the Teatro la Fenice on 17 September and will feature the Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro La Fenice conducted by Ernest Martinez-Isquierdo. The programme will include the first Italian performance of Saariaho's 'Oltra Mar' for choir and orchestra from 1999 and the first Italian performance of an orchestral work by Hans Abrahamsen composed in 2011 based on the orchestration of Claude Debussy's 'Children's Corners'.

The vocal ensemble Neue Vocalsolisten of Stuttgart will receive the Silver Lion for their creative collaborations with many of the greatest contemporary composers and in particular for their work in developing the a cappella vocal repertoire in the field of contemporary writing.

The Silver Lion award ceremony will take place on 20 September in the Sala delle Colonne at Ca' Giustinian. The award ceremony will be followed by a public discussion with members of Neue Vocalsolisten and Ronchetti.

On Sunday 19th September in the Tesa III of the Arsenale, the Neue Vocalsolisten will present two world premieres: a work for voices and electronics by the American composer George Lewis, commissioned by the Biennale Musica, and 'Die Einfachen', a work of vocal theatre for six solo voices by the Russian composer Sergej Newski.

Ronchetti is a composer whose recent successes include her new chamber opera Pinocchio's Abenteuer at the Berlin Staatsoper which is available to view at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-YF61MUr00> and her Opera-Film Rivale from the FIFA Festival in Montreal which can be viewed at www.luciaronchetti.com/en/works-by-lucia-ronchetti/music-theatre/rivale/p5-25-1710.

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Notes for Editors

Kaija Saariaho

Kaija Saariaho is one of the greatest living composers and one of the most performed composers in the world, as confirmed by a survey conducted by BBC Music Magazine in 2019. Her music possesses the power of generating unprecedented acoustic frescoes and original sound narratives. Her first opera "L'amour de loin" was produced by the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 2000, and won the Grammy Award for Best Opera Recording in 2011. Since this first great success, Kaija Saariaho has been composing other operas, always for important institutions, achieving great success and presenting countless new productions all over the world.

Kaija Saariaho will be awarded the Leone d'oro in recognition of her vast production for voice, vocal ensemble and choir, and especially of her piece "Oltra mar", for choir and orchestra, composed in 1999, which is considered an absolute masterpiece in the field of contemporary music production. "Oltra mar", which in old French means "Across the sea", presents a complex yet transparent harmonic writing, through the synthesis of unprecedented and metamorphic orchestral colours of impressionist ascendancy.

Neue Vocalsolisten

The Neue Vocalsolisten is the most important and representative vocal ensemble specialized in contemporary music. It consists of seven exceptional soloists, whose interpretations distinguished themselves for their theatricality and dramaturgical effectiveness, allowing the uniqueness of each voice and the strong personality of each group member to emerge.

Johanna Zimmer, soprano, Susanne Leitz-Lorey, lyric soprano, Truike van der Poel, mezzo-soprano, Daniel Gloger, countertenor, Martin Nagy, tenor, Guillermo Anzorena, baritone and Andrea Fisher, bass, form an ensemble that offers a laboratory in which the voice and vocal dramaturgy can be experimented, as well as an open group discussion on contemporary vocal techniques and the significance of ensemble singing in its historical perspective and future potential.

For great composers such as Salvatore Sciarrino and Georges Aperghis, the Neue Vocalsolisten represents a forge for new voices and the broadest and most articulate vocal techniques, an extraordinary training ground preparing to opera writing.

Lucia Ronchetti

Born in Rome in 1963, Lucia Ronchetti studied Composition and Computer Music at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia and Philosophy at the University of Rome. Further studies were undertaken in Paris with Gérard Grisey, IRCAM (1997), the Sorbonne, Columbia University and with Hans Werner Henze among many other leading composers.

Lucia Ronchetti has frequently been composer in residence: Villa Concordia, Bamberg; in Berlin: Akademie der Künste & Künstlerprogramm des DAAD; in New York: Yaddo & Fulbright Scholar Program; in Stuttgart: Akademie Schloss Solitude & Staatsoper; Experimentalstudio des SWR, Freiburg; MacDowell Colony, Boston; in Paris: Cité internationale des arts, Fondation Nadia Boulanger & Fondation des Treilles; Schlossmediale Werdenberg, Zürich.

In 2021 the Oper Frankfurt will premiere Ronchetti's opera *Inferno*. The Staatsoper Unter den Linden in Berlin will produce the chamber opera *Pinocchio's Abenteuer*, which also receives a new production at Oper Frankfurt. A new opera project will be created at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Düsseldorf.

In 2020, the Neue Vocalsolisten performed *Never Bet The Devil Your Head* at the Wittener Tage für Neue Kammermusik. The Ensemble Vocal Sequenza 9.3, conducted by Catherine Simonpietri, premiered *Sangu di Rosa*, as part of the Defilé Dior. The Ensemble Modern presented a retrospective of Ronchetti's work in the Happy New Ears concert series. Throughout 2020 Oper Frankfurt presented three works by Ronchetti: *Cartilago auris, magna et irregulariter formata*; *Le Palais du silence* and *Rosso pompeiano*.

2019 saw the Kölner Philharmonie perform *Cartilago auris, magna et irregulariter formata* and *Speranze fuggite, sparite da me*; Biennale Musica, Venezia presented *The Pirate Who Does Not Know the Value of Pi*; Angers Nantes Opéra *Les Aventures de Pinocchio* and the Nouvelle Philharmonie, Paris, *Inedia prodigiosa*, having previously performed *Les Aventures de Pinocchio*.

Other notable performances include: Opera di Roma, *Le Avventure di Pinocchio*; Romaeuropa Festival *Rivale-Film, Le Avventure di Pinocchio, Inedia prodigiosa & Anatra al sal*; Staatsoper Unter der Linden, Berlin *Rivale, Lezioni di tenebra & Last Desire*; Teatro Massimo, Palermo *Inedia prodigiosa*; Berliner Ensemble *Abschlussball*; Nationaltheater Mannheim *Aria da baule; Esame di mezzanotte & Neumond* and Semperoper Dresden *Mise en Abyme, Sub-Plot & Contrascena*.

Numerous recordings of Ronchetti's work are available including *Action Concert Pieces* (Kairos) featuring the Ensemble Intercontemporain, Christian Dierstein, Michele Marco Rossi and the Orchestra Regionale Toscana; *Drammaturgie* (Kairos) with the Neue Vocalsolisten and the Arditti Quartet); *Portrait* (Stradivarius) with Neue Vocalsolisten, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin and Roland Kluttig; *Xylocopa violacea* with Barbara Maurer, Reinhold Braig and Experimentalstudio Freiburg; *Lezioni di tenebra* (Parco della Musica Records) with Katia Guedes, Daniel Gloger, Vocal Consort Berlin and PMCE.

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