

MEET THE COMPOSER

Žibuoklė Martinaitytė



Vocal appeal:
'I love the way the human voice sounds'

The Lithuanian composer made a name for herself at home before relocating to the US. There she has established a bright new musical path, though continues to enjoy a strong connection to her roots. A concert of her music forms part of the Vilnius Festival this month and her new album *Saudade* is out on the Ondine label.

Moving to New York was like a new beginning. It coincided with a stylistic shift in my music. I realised I didn't want to play mental games with my music any more; I had been writing for my own enjoyment but not so much for the audience's. I decided to simplify my means, so instead of having a bunch of extended techniques, where all the instruments are overworked and the listener is lost, I would concentrate on the essence and the emotion.

I love orchestral textures. Writing for large ensembles is my preferred medium because of the multitude of instruments and the possibility of layering the sounds. It creates a magical shimmering effect that you can't achieve with just one instrument. It's like layering a canvas; some things are more in the foreground, some in the background.

I love exploring the possibilities of timbre. Earlier in my career I was attracted to unusual instrument combinations such as trombone, saxophone and

accordion. They didn't have much of a loaded history behind them, so I felt you could hear them with new ears. I am currently working on a piece for lowest-range instruments – the tuba, bass clarinet and contrabass – so I still retain that fascination.

My composing process is old fashioned. I sketch in notebooks, but I like to live with the idea for a while first. I try and familiarise myself with the experience of the timeframe I want to write for, and see what I want to fill it with. Then part of the process is improvisation, so I sit at the piano and look for sounds – they sort of come by themselves. Some beautiful moments appear, but they don't always make it.

I haven't explored too much vocal music. I've written some choral pieces that don't sound like choral pieces, because I treat voices as instruments. I love the way the human voice sounds and the meaning it can carry, so I would like to work with voices more. My dream is to write an opera at some point.



Bear with me while I write a few notes...

Messiaen may have listened to birdsong for inspiration, but when Roxanna Panufnik was looking for material for a new quartet she had something bigger in mind. Much bigger: her *Heartfelt* is based on the heartbeat of a European Brown Bear. Though we are tempted to think of Panufnik spending days crawling through the undergrowth,

microphone in hand, the reality is a little more prosaic – she was in fact able to get a cardiac soundfile of a Bristol Zoo bear called Alfie when he went under general anaesthetic for an op. To thank her ursine assistant, Panufnik has now arranged for the Sacconi Quartet to perform *Heartbeat* to Alfie himself... at a safe distance.

DÉJÀ VU

History just keeps on repeating itself...



Musicologists, acousticians and other whizzes have teamed up to show how choral music would have sounded at a Scottish castle 500 years ago. An installation in the ruined chapel of Linlithgow Palace (left) uses laser technology to recreate what James IV might have heard during a visit in 1512, with the acoustic impact of floor tiles, the roof and even soft furnishings taken into account. It's not the first clever use

of technology to bring the music of the 16th century to life...

In 2017, **The Wyne**, a National Trust property in Hampshire, invited visitors to listen to music by composer Nicholas Ludford in a recreation of the soundscape of 1535, when Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn came to stay during a summer tour. The music – choral, organ and plainchant – was recorded in three different locations, then projected into the property's chapel via a number of carefully positioned speakers. Similarly ingenious was **Janet Cardiff's** 2001 sound installation *Forty-Part Motet*, which brought the exquisite sound of Tallis to various venues across the globe. For her work, Cardiff recorded each of the 40 voices of the composer's 1556 *Spem in alium* separately, then played the results through 40 speakers positioned in a circle, allowing the listener to stand right in the middle of this 'virtual choir'. The same work was recorded five years later by **The King's Singers**, despite there being just six of them – a combination of multi-tasking and multi-tracking turned this numerical shortfall into but a minor inconvenience.