

Project description

THE KANSI COMPLEX

CHAMBER OPERA IN THREE PARTS



CONSERVATO
CONSERVA RIUM
CONSER TORIUM
CON VATORIUM
SERVATORIUM

**HO
GENT**

howest

Introduction	2
Story	3
Synopsis	
Structure of the piece	
Music	4
Text	5
Staging	5
Team	6
Practical information	7
Location/venue	
Timeline	
Budget	
Promoting the show, attracting audiences and ticket sales	
Contact information	9
Appendix	10
Biographies of the creative team	1

What do we know about the people who clean our public spaces?

The East Complex is a three-act dramatic work consisting of an opera within a drama. The project was initially set up as a master project of Riles Walsh (USA), studying MA Composition at the Royal Conservatory Ghent, and Stefan Aleksić (CRO/SRB/BiH), studying MA Drama at KASK School of Arts Ghent. Over the course of a year they have been working closely with scenographer & theatremaker Yannick Verweij and are being joined by an international and diverse group of artists, both students from various conservatoires and art schools, as well as young professionals. All involved are either at the beginning- or early career and intend to present themselves to the industry through this work.

The artistic process started off originally with the questioning of immortality; what would the concept mean in a current-day context? This evolved into a more critical exploration of socio-economic hierarchy, on a collective- (external) and personal (internal) level. Here the notion of 'immortality' is transformed into a symbol for the perpetuity of systems we (in the West) have put- and keep in place to structure our everyday-life. What becomes of the people heavily utilized by the system, but often overlooked by a majority?

In making this work the team wanted both to create something new, as well as to reflect on a rich tradition of opera, what opera is and can be; as an artistic product and as a collaborative process. During the creation we involve multiple disciplines (text, music, sound, performance, visual arts and film) and attempt to establish a more horizontal way of working, where disciplines can alternate, during the performance, who takes the lead in telling the narrative. It is an aim to create not only a composition in music, but composition in different artforms working harmoniously together.

This has resulted in the writing of a drama, a score that is being composed for eight singers and six instrumentalists, electronics and film to create a hybrid of live theater and cinematic experience.

Synopsis

Having escaped destitution and war in her hometown in the East, Agnieszka Petrowska, referred to as AP00275S, now struggles in her work as a cleaning woman for a complex of buildings in her newly adoptive country. In moments between endless loops of cleaning, talking to her psychiatrist, taking medication, being overworked, she imagines herself as a powerful god-like being in search of a perfect physical manifestation of the Western ideal. The fantasy of her creation; where she controls the fate of her coworkers, becomes even more appealing one fateful day.

Part one

Act one takes place in the austere world of AP00275S, the cleaner. Unfair expectations, appalling work conditions and malignant situations, especially with a nemesis coworker O00101A, happen daily. The traumatic culmination of act one, when AP00275 gets assaulted in her workplace, serves as a catalyst for fantasy, creating a loop within the narration that is representative of the multiplicative nature of the abuse of power present in systemic racism, gender inequality, and nationalism.

Part two

O00101A is prodded awake in a river by a group of bird-like creatures who ferry her to a doctor. Experiencing memory loss and confusion, O00101A slowly realizes nothing is normal as the doctor tries to persuade her to give up her body so it can be occupied by a presence named Saint Agnes. O00101A rejects the offer, but finds herself trapped in the complex.

Part three

As O00101A keeps finding herself in the same space, another voice joins the chorus of persuasion, but this voice is without a body -- is it her own? O00101A is confronted by a riddle that can seemingly set her free. Determined to escape, O00101A tries to take control of the narrative she found herself in. Eventually she convinces herself - and others - that she really is Saint Agnes, which results in the phantasmagoria collapsing.

Epilogue

AP00275S, whose real name is Agnieszka Petrowska, steps back into the reality of a cleaner and goes about her day. We learn that she was named after a saint.

Structure of the piece

The opera part is encapsulated by a drama that presents the spectator with a more direct view on the world, without song or music. By a distinctive choice of artform the team aims to separate a more 'directly relatable' external world and a more 'abstract' internal space, existing within.

Part I
Drama
± 20 minutes

Part II
Opera
±20 minutes

Part III
Opera
±40 minutes

Epilogue

Music

The East Complex is Riles Walsh's *alunissage*-- a fractal synecdoche of inhabitation. While planning to move across the world, he lost a family member, which made him search for meaning and expression in processing his grief, wishing to make a tribute while working on this story about identity and the struggles of existence.

The chamber ensemble consisting of Flute/Alto Flute, Clarinet/Bass Clarinet, Percussion, Accordion, Violin, and Double Bass contains a wide range and a varied palette for musical exploration. For each scene, a formal set of rules is constructed and a loose style guideline to enact the musical parameters that compliment and contrast the other scenes.

While employing many extended techniques for each instrument, Walsh takes a step further in exploring the opera's sound world by recording each instruments' part in order to use those recordings in the electronics which will be triggered from onstage by the conductor during the performance. Over 300 samples between 10ms and 5 minutes are triggered throughout the performance, oftentimes resulting in instrumentalists and singers "duetting" with themselves. However, a few advanced algorithmic variations of common sound editing techniques has rendered some of the sound files completely unidentifiable, adding to the unsettling feeling certain scenes of the opera evoke.

Text

Aleksić's text is an ode to female members of his family, many of whom migrated from Bosnia to Switzerland, spending their lives cleaning, ending up exhausted, ill and disfigured. In this text, Aleksić tries to merge his own position of an immigrant in Belgium with the experience of his mother, who illegally worked as a cleaner in the West.

These experiences are speculatively explored through a fictional psychological disorder called „the East complex”, reportedly common in adults who migrate from underdeveloped Eastern countries to the West. Throughout the text, characters are portrayed in a contrasting manner: in the drama part we focus on actions, sentences and functions of the bodies, unaware of their internal cosmoses, whilst in the libretto a desire is seen through the lens of a microscope; screams of the soul, imperatives, dilemmas and intrusive thoughts comprise most of the libretto. In this world, we are not to participate. Instead, we are voyeurs who catch glimpses of strangers' cruel worlds, but can not really do anything about it, except to relate.

In the creation of this text, Aleksić poses a number of questions: what is the position of these, mostly female and foreign, bodies, not only in society, but in the institution of opera? Who has the legitimacy to tell the story of cleaners and how to approach these stories? Why do all of us, no matter the position, relate to the idea of feeling trapped in the system? And when we dream, who actually dreams - our celestial or our id?

Staging

Yannick Verweij (stage director/scenographer) and Liv de Coninck (film director) are currently exploring the piece through the idea of a 'machine', where both humans and inanimate objects are involved: a space that is constantly in motion and in alteration of perspective. Moving platforms, screens and cameras. A space of surveillance, of monitoring, where you watch and are being watched. A space of dream and unconsciousness, where things and people appear and disappear.

In 'The East Complex' all prominent themes seem to be systems, complex things that are never standalone phenomena or single characteristics, but exist of multiple elements. In earlier correspondence Stefan Aleksić describes several examples: capitalism, workers' rights and workplace conditions, workplace inequalities, violence, migration, integration, mental health, monotony, loneliness, (mis)understandings, dreams. Most of them relate to power and control and can exist as multiple realities within one frame.

Power and control also lies in who tells what story; the tension between representation and appropriation has been an issue throughout the history of opera and came up again in discussions during the process. Yannick says *'Stefan obviously has the strongest personal connection with the cleaning lady as a character, whereas the rest of the team does not. But even he runs into dilemma's when it comes to the legitimacy of writing female bodies or of other ethnicities! So one of the questions remains: Who has the legitimacy to tell a story of and how to approach those stories? That is something the team does collectively relate to. Yannick relates to the notion of appropriating stories personally, citing: 'Most stories about Asian bodies (people of color in general) in the West have been portrayed by white men, when it is that much internalized you sort of get used to not controlling your own narrative. Portraying that struggle in controlling your own narrative in society around you and within is one of the major form factors that will shape the staging.'*

Team

The artists within the team are of various nationalities and are currently living (partly) in either Belgium, The Netherlands, Spain, Japan or Sweden. Involved are students or alumni from KASK, Royal Conservatory Ghent, Luca School of Arts and HKU University of the Arts Utrecht a.o.

Soprano's Moa Karlsson and Katherine Koester are currently also part of the chorus at Malmö Opera, Sweden.

Team and cast are being supported by a group consisting of Teachers, mentors and fellow students for feedback, a set builder and several volunteers.

Composer & Sound Designer	Riles Walsh	(USA)
Librettist & Dramaturge	Stefan Aleksić	(CRO/SRB/BiH)
Conductor	Ronan Whittern	(IR)
Stage Director & Scenographer	Yannick Verweij	(NL)
Film Director	Liv de Coninck	(BE)
Costume Designer	Leonidas Kanavetsados	(GR)
Production/Stage Manager	Gijs de Jonge	(NL)

Cast

Agnieszka/AP0027500S (dramatic soprano)	Moa Karlsson	(SE)
OO1001A (coloratura Soprano)	Katherine Koester	(USA)
RW0010700M (soprano)	Noriko Yakushiji	(JP/BE)
Receptionist (mezzo soprano)	Maris Pajuste	(EE)
Doctor (baritone)	Thomas Vandenabeele	(BE)
Birds (soprano)	Anne-Laure Dollie	(FR)
(mezzo soprano)	Xiaomei Bi	(CN)
(tenor)	Vahe Harutyunyan	(AM)

Instrumentalists

Flute / Alto Flute	Yan Rui	(CN)
Clarinet in Bb / Bass Clarinet	Ostap Bachynskyy	(UA)
Violin	Jose Usma	(CO)
Double Bass	Daniel Aztatzi	(MX)
Accordion	Louis De Backere	(BE)
Percussion	Wouter Willems	(BE)

- Suspended Cymbal
- Hi-Hat pair
- Snare Drum (shallow)
- Bass Drum (orchestral)
- Waterphone
- 2 Buckets, approx. 50cm x 30cm, with approx. 10L of water
- Bicycle Wheel, mounted upside down, including a card to interact with the spokes
- Medium metal bell, such as a Temple Bell, with clapper removed
- Thick metal sheet, approx. 15cm x 20cm, hung with wire
- 6 Planks of wood mounted on foam
- 4 Sections of metal pipes, various thicknesses/lengths, mounted on foam
- 2 small metal discs or plates, capable of two different pitches each when struck
- 4 Metal bars, capable of producing sustained pitch, mounted on foam

Practical information

Amount of performances intended: 5

3 performances in May, 2023 (Première)

2 performances in June, 2023 (Graduation festival KASK & Conservatorium)

Location/venue

Ideally this would be in an opera house, theatre or concert hall and can be in a foyer or (indoor) courtyard of reasonable size.

To the team, topics addressed in the work, such as hierarchy, privilege and systemic customs, also occur in their respective art forms (opera, (classical) music, drama and film). During the creation process of this intermedial awareness they often referred to systems (for example an opera house or theatre) within those artforms as almost micro-societies, where certain aspects of society are being mirrored or even enhanced. Therefore the team is currently looking for a public space that carries such a rich history in both performances and visiting audiences. The team aims the space to become a transmedial part of the artwork itself; through performing this opera at the same time unlocking similar stories that (could) have happened in that very place, to eventually transcend the literal function of that physical space. Preferable minimal capacity of 50 people in the audience.

Timeline

2022

December

Deadline composition Act 2

2023

February

Deadline composition Act 3

Film pre-production

March

Start Music rehearsals

4th March: Non-staged concert of a selection from the opera at Miry Concert Hall, Ghent

Film shooting

April

Start Production rehearsals (staging)

Film post-production

May

Tech week & premiere

June

24th + 25th June Performances as part of Graduation KASK & Conservatorium at

Minardschouwburg, Ghent

Budget

This project is a non-profit project, since it consists of two master projects. Participation of the project is voluntary, although expenses made by the team will be covered. Costs for Venue, rehearsal space will be covered by KASK. To cover further made expenses, the team receives some project budget from KASK Drama and have set out a financial plan to apply for study- and graduation related funds and are looking into the possibility of a crowdfunding, as well as a financial contribution by the initiators of the project themselves.

Promoting the show, attracting audiences and ticket sales

As this is a graduation project we will not (be able) to sell tickets, they can be reserved for free.

Since the performance will have a limited capacity for audiences to attend, it will most-likely not be necessary to set up a big marketing campaign to promote the show. Internally in the school, the study courses in Drama (KASK) and Composition will promote the project, mostly online (facebook posts-, event and on their website) but also by hanging some posters. We intend to expand this campaign by using our own social media accounts to gain attraction (through photos and videos of the creation process and final product). The team is able to attract further audiences through their contacts; inviting colleagues, friends and family. We hope to reach (new) audiences outside of school and our network by hanging some posters in [theatres, cafés and..] and by having an 'open door/window' policy during our last rehearsals. That means making sure people on the street can hear the music being rehearsed when walking by and having a poster that states the performance information clearly outside the venue at the same time.

Contact information

Overall contact Artistic

Artistic Team - Stage Director & Scenographer

Yannick Verweij

+31 (0) 615 60 00 31

E: njyverweij@gmail.com

W: <https://yannickverweij.com>

Contact Royal Conservatory Ghent

Artistic Team - Composer

Riles Walsh

+46 (0) 793 55 71 18

E: rileswww@gmail.com

W: <https://www.rileswalsh.com>

Contact KASK Drama

Artistic Team - Librettist & Dramaturge

Stefan Aleksić

+32 (0) 479 12 33 74

E: alexic.stefan@outlook.com

Contact Production

Production Team - Production & stage manager

Gijs de Jonge

+31 (0) 6 34 25 19 40

E: gijs.dejonge@outlook.com

Appendix

Biographies of the creative team

Riles Walsh (USA, Composer & Sound Designer) writes, performs, records, and teaches music. Walsh received a BFA with honors in Music Composition and Technology from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where he studied with Jon Welstead. His recent work focuses on the combination of solo instrument and fixed media. His 2021 video piece for instruments and singers, *Dialogue Between the Soul and the Body*, was assembled from performances in isolation. Previously Walsh has written music for DIY Chamber Music, The Duetto Project, the pianist Lorna Krier, and other chamber music ensembles. He has worked with Present Music, The New Orleans Jazz Orchestra, East Bay Regional Parks District, New Century Chamber Orchestra, Little Opera, and Music From Almost Yesterday. He played buk and jang-gu for several years in the traditional Korean drumming group Ga-Ram. He teaches piano and composition, coaches chamber music, and runs music production workshops in a music studio in Wauwatosa, WI. He is currently working on a master's degree at the conservatory in Ghent, Belgium.

Stefan Aleksić (CRO/SRB/BiH, Librettist & Dramaturge) is a playwright, dramaturge and librettist based in Antwerp, Belgium. His artistic practice consists of writing theatre texts, screenplays, short stories, librettos and dramaturgical work. Aleksić has studied dramaturgy at the Academy of Performing Arts in Sarajevo and at the Academy of Arts Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, where he acquired his bachelor's degree. In 2019, he enrolled into the Drama Master's programme at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent, Belgium. Aleksić frequently collaborates with Dutch-Filipino artist Yannick Verweij, with whom he created an opera "amidst dust and fractured voices" (re-titled as "PLAT HOME" for Japanese market) set on music by the composer Koji Takahashi. Aleksić's first theatre texts, "Pork Rind" and "Patrimony", premiered in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2015 and 2016, respectively. His play "The Swimming Pool" was among the finalists of Heartefact Fund's Contest for Best Contemporary Drama Text in 2020.

Yannick Verweij (1994, Cabadbaran, The Philippines / (NL) Stage Director & Designer) is scenographer and theatremaker. He trained at HKU University for the Arts Utrecht, The Netherlands (BA Theatre Design, grad. 2017) and at the Royal Academy for Fine Arts (KASK) in Ghent, Belgium (MA Drama, grad. 2021). He gained experience by working for designers such as Clement & Sanôu (La Traviata Theater an der Wien, Vienna), Michael Levine (Die Toten Stadt, Komische Oper Berlin) and as associate video designer for Finn Ross (Les Pêcheurs de Perles, Grand Théâtre de Genève). In the last couple of years Yannick has been developing new opera works, focusing on the process of multidisciplinary collaboration. Yannick practice includes multiple disciplines within the performing arts, from directing and writing to designing (sets, costumes, lighting, video). Since 2018, Yannick also works as a lecturer at the BA Theatre Design course at HKU. Engagements this season are with puppetry company 'Studio Figur', Theater Oostpool and Dutch National Opera a.o.

Ronan Whittern (IR, Conductor) is a bassoon player specializing in the performance of new music. Originally from Ireland, he now lives and works freelance in Ghent, Belgium.

Ronan studied from 2010-2012 at Chetham's School of Music, Manchester, with Anthea Wood and Steve Magee. In 2018, he completed his Masters studies at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow with David Hubbard and Peter Whelan.

He graduated in 2019 from the International Ensemble Modern Academy (IEMA) in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, where he spent a year studying intensely the literature and performance practice of contemporary music under the tutelage of members of the Ensemble Modern. As a member of IEMA, he performed at festivals throughout Europe, including Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik (Germany), Gaudeamus Muziekweek (Netherlands), and 180 Degrees Festival and Laboratory for innovative Art Sofia (Bulgaria).

Ronan has performed at festivals such as Impuls Festival, and Klangspuren Schwaz, and has taken part in masterclasses with Pascal Gallois, Sarah Watts, Andrea de Flammeneis, and Amy Harman. Ronan has performed with the Ensemble Modern, Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, and worked under such conductors as Lucas Vis, Ilan Volkov, Vimbayi Kaziboni, Donald Runnicles, and Thomas Dausgaard. He has worked with composers such as Sir George Benjamin, Sir James MacMillan, and Heiner Goebbels among others.

He recently took part in the premiere of a new work for solo bassoon commissioned by the Nevis Ensemble, which was broadcast on BBC Radio Scotland in 2020.

Liv de Coninck (BE, Film Director) studied film and directing at Warsaw Film School and is currently a film student at Luca School of Arts in Brussels. The intensive workshops and experience on set has led to work with other film departments designing sets. Her work at the moment focuses on childhood memories and nostalgia, which is currently in development with FOMU in Antwerp. In addition to her work in film art, she also makes behind-the-scenes productions, most recently with The Subs. Last year she worked on a video and the subsequent live visuals for a project with the Belgian singer, Lunace. Besides film, she loves fashion and has been involved backstage at several shows for both the fashion Academy of Antwerp and for Ann De Meulemeester at Paris Fashion Week.

Leonidas Kanavetsados (GR, Costume designer) is a multi-disciplinary artist, a mixed media Costume- and Fashion designer and treasure hunter. He has trained at Artez University of the Arts, Arnhem NL (Experimental fashion & installation art), Accademia Costume e di Moda, Rome IT (Theatrical costume & fashion design), Central Saint Martins, London UK (Fashion construction) and Leeds College of Arts (Fashion development).

"I share my interpretation of the world with the audience in the hope of inspiring a deeper connection between the viewer and their own life ride. The aim is always to encourage people to live deeply and appreciate this heavenly dimension called Earth, but also all the other possible dimensions of the universe. Existent or not! All artwork is created with a particular concept and a philosophy everytime in order to provoke a small part inside the existence of every person in the audience, to try to reinvent themselves by understanding and accepting better the "different", the unknown ...Therefore themselves. Open your eyes, breath like an eternal"

Gijs de Jonge (NL, Production manager / Stage manager)

From an early age Gijs started as a percussionist with a percussion group in Culemborg. After his first acquaintance in the culture industry, he grew to be a drummer in several bands and as a percussionist with a large number of student orchestras in the Netherlands. His studies, Art and Economics at the HKU, University of the Arts Utrecht, sparked his love for theatre production management. His internship at Stage Entertainment Netherlands confirmed his desire to become a production manager. Gijs has been involved as production manager for the production of Witregels' (Wervelwind Muziektheater), where he collaborated closely with Yannick Verweij, who subsequently involved him in several other productions as stage manager and production manager.