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VIVIER REENACTED: SINGING BEYOND MASCULINE

Abstract: Vivier: A Night Report is a kind of poetical archive of musical details, protocols, experiences, concepts, memories, fears, desires and sorrows connected to Canadian composer Claude Vivier's (1948-1983) unusual destiny. All characters from Marko Nikodijević's opera originate from Vivier's life and works but they are re-indexed, or reenacted differently. The countertenor voice of Vivier is what primarily makes him different from all the rest of the characters. Even it could be claimed that the rest of the voices are dominated by Vivier's vocal presence on stage. Vivier stands as symbol for minority, queer, vulnerable. During his short life he was trying to get his own voice, voice as the personification of freedom and possibility to be heard. Finally he gets vivid, imaginative opera in which both his physical and personified voices are shining by creativity that his art emanate. He gets his singing voice, and he finally gets heard.

Keywords: Claude Vivier, opera/postopera, voice-gender relation

We lived two streets away from him. I remember we heard him singing very loudly when he passed by on the pavement in front of our house. (...) He already had effeminate manners, laughed loudly and behaved strangely. (...) You would notice him. He wasn't the type to pass by unnoticed.¹

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¹ An anonymous neighbour of the Vivier family in Pont-Viau, quoted in Bob Gilmore,

Concluding my earlier text “A Queer Protocol of Homage” about Marko Nikodijević’s composition *Chambres de ténèbres/tombeau de Claude Vivier* (2005) for this Journal I wrote:

Nikodijević “announced” his homage to Vivier with the following words: “Strange, beautiful, excessive. Those are the words that come to my mind when thinking about Vivier. (...) Stopped and inverted decays, frozen resonances, delays and echoes, processes recalling granular synthesis, all there to simulate an ever-changing room-size and spatial form, inter-cut with dance-club episodes.” And indeed, through Vivier’s music language and its deconstruction, Nikodijević masterfully and yet unobtrusively demonstrated what the terms strange, beautiful and excessive mean to him in music. Thus, he himself joined one of the possible lines of marginal histories of the contemporary music scene. And not entirely unexpectedly, it is possible that this work has given Vivier a strong and insightful follower who will continue to reexamine queer identity in the world of music.²

After Nikodijević’s first opera emerged as a substantial continuation of his interest in Vivier’s music and life I continue with the present text exactly where I stopped the last time. “Vivier: A Night Report” (“VIVIER. Ein Nachtprotokoll” (2013/14)), chamber opera in six scenes was commissioned by the Munich Biennale and it was first performed in Munich on May 7, 2014.³ The author of the libretto in German is the writer Gunther Geltinger. As Nikodijević noted, the libretto was composed from ‘real’ references that had been rewritten: poetry by Friedrich Hölderlin, fragments of Tchaikovsky’s diaries, texts by Claude Vivier himself, the travel writings of Marco Polo, the Bible etc.⁴ The opera lasts about seventy minutes and all the voices and characters that appear in it are male:

Claude Vivier: A Composer’s Life, Rochester, New York, University of Rochester Press, 2014, p. 21.

² Jelena Novak, “A QUEER PROTOCOL OF HOMAGE, *Chambres de Ténèbres/Tombeau De Claude Vivier* by Marko Nikodijević”, *International Journal for Music New Sound* n 29, p. 63, Available online: <http://www.newsound.org.rs/en/pdfs/ns29/8.%20Jelena%20Novak.pdf>, Accessed April 12, 2015.

³ The cast in this performance was: Tim Severloh: Countertenor, Musa Nkuna: Tenor, Malte Roesner: Baritone, Daniel Holzhauser: Bass, Orchester des Staatstheaters Braunschweig, Conductor: Sebastian Beckedorf. Stage director: Lotte de Beer.

⁴ From an e-mail conversation with Marko Nikodijević on April 14, 2015. Here I also underline that my position here as a listening spectator was specific: I don’t speak German, and even after I got the libretto translated, it was impossible for me to understand the words while they are being sung on stage. Also, I have not seen this performance live. I used the video from one of the dress rehearsals. I listened and analyzed the music, using the score published by Sikorski.

Character	Voice
Vivier	countertenor
Harry (Typ 1) Liebhaber 1 (Lover 1) Heiliger Sebastian (Saint Sebastian) Rusticello Singer 1 Harry (als Stricher, as a prostitute)	Tenor
Typ2 Liebhaber 2 (Lover 2) Priester 1 (Priest 1) Marco Polo Singer 2 Stricher (prostitute) (Typ2)	hoher Bariton
Typ 3 Tschaikowsky Priester 2 (Priest 2) Herrscher von Cipangu (Ruler of Japan) Singer 3 Zeremonienmaister Typ 3 (als Stricher, as a prostitute)	Bass

The main character is Vivier himself, and he is surrounded by a number of various existing and fictional characters that are related to his life. The fact that the same voice interprets several characters is, according to the composer, the consequence of the economy of the chamber opera in general, but also part of the poetical structure of the libretto”.⁵ This ‘promiscuity’ of engaged voices might also be seen to represent chaotic destiny and the insecure persona of Claude Vivier. His life was marked by a series of rejections and discontinuities. Some of the ‘characters’ in his real life only temporarily found a place there. He seemed to be on a constant quest for lost or never realised emotional comfort. And those discontinuities are pictured by voices that constantly convey different characters, many of them anonymous (lovers, priests, prostitutes). The ever-changing origin of the voice in the opera makes the importance of the characters relative, ephemeral. And that was a strong generator of the emotional drama in

⁵ From the e-mail conversation with the composer on April 13, 2014.

Vivier's real life, and in this opera too. The ensemble furthermore includes a choir, extras, and dancers.

It is possible to enter into the world of *VIVIER. Ein Nachtprotokoll* without knowing much, or not knowing anything about the Canadian composer Claude Vivier (1948-1983) and his music. However, *Vivier: A Night Report* is a kind of poetical archive of musical details, protocols, experiences, concepts, memories, fears, desires and sorrows connected to Vivier's unusual destiny. As this composer is still not widely known, and his music is in a way still being discovered in the classical music world, it is highly advisable to become better acquainted with his life and work before experiencing Nikodijević's opera, which is based on various details from Vivier's life and music.

Vivier's biography is somewhat unusual for the stereotypical image of the Western classical music composer. There are several 'leitmotifs' concerning his background, sexuality and death that appear in his biographical notes and biographies, in addition to information about his education, the awards he won and the names of the mentors during his graduate and advanced studies. The identity of Vivier's biological parents is unknown: he was born in Montreal and abandoned at birth. His biographer Bob Gilmore speculates that his mother was very young when she gave birth, and probably suffered a great deal due to her ignorance about what the reaction would be to her entering into pre-marital sexual relations, which was severely condemned in Quebec catholic society at the time. That ignorance and humiliation she experienced caused her to abandon her 'bastard child', Gilmore supposes.⁶ Vivier agonised over the fact that he never knew who his biological parents were. He yearned for maternal love all through his life; it was his obsession. "Lonely Child"(1980) for soprano and orchestra, one of his most widely known pieces, questions this longing, and his identification with the feelings of loneliness and isolation.

He was adopted at the age of three by a Canadian family that was not well-off. His adopted siblings were much older than him, they left home few years after he had arrived, and his adopted mother never accepted him warmly. This was another maternal rejection he had to cope with. Another tragic event according to Gilmore is that he was raped at a young age by his adoptive uncle: yet another burden for his vulnerable personality. He attended a catholic secondary school (Juvénat) "directed by priests, offering a foundation for pupils who want to become Christian brothers".⁷ Among other things, there he developed a love for Gregorian chant. However, after a few years, he was asked to leave

⁶ Bob Gilmore, *Claude Vivier: A Composer's Life*, Rochester, New York, University of Rochester Press, 2014, p. 2.

⁷ Gilmore, *Vivier*, p. 12.

the school, presumably because he was a “misfit”. That rejection also left an emotional scar. Although he had already discovered his passion for music in the religious school, it was only after, that he started his serious musical education and it was a success. Vivier pursued his music education first in his hometown of Montreal, then at the Institute of Sonology in Utrecht, and finally with Karlheinz Stockhausen. He lived as a freelance artist from his music and grants he received for new pieces and research. One of these grants was intended to help him write an opera about Tschaikowsky’s death, an idea he later abandoned.

One of the most obscure details of his life (among them, that he was afraid of the dark, that he used to smell unpleasantly, that he invented and used strange languages and that he had irritating “machine gun laughter”) was his violent and premature death under strange circumstances. He was stabbed to death by a young male prostitute in Paris, whom he met and brought home the same night. His last composition, *Glaubst du an die Unsterblichkeit der Seele?* (Do You Believe in the Immortality of the Soul?, 1982-3), a dramatised monologue in which Vivier describes a metro ride during which he becomes attracted to a young man, predicts his own end (the music ends when the young man stabs his victim). The piece was left unfinished and was found on his desk at the time of his death.

Vivier was survived by his forty nine compositions, among which are two operas *Kopernikus* and *Rêves d’un Marco Polo* (left unfinished), and a later one about the explorer whose visions and travels he admired. The circumstances of the author’s tragic end, as well as his obsession with death and decay, create a specific atmosphere for interpreting his art.

All the characters in Nikodijević’s opera originate from Vivier’s life and works. Harry is the name of the killer from Vivier’s last composition. He also appears as a prostitute (Stricher). Saint Sebastian is the Christian saint, the protector from the bubonic plague. This is an important icon in gay culture (AIDS in our present times is often treated as a plague). Rusticello is Marco Polo’s biographer. He co-authored Polo’s writings from his travels and copied them into the book. Vivier admired the world of Polo’s voyages and discoveries. Priest characters are supposedly a homage to Vivier’s interrupted path to becoming a priest himself, and also to his devotion to religion. Male prostitute characters are a clear association to Vivier’s sexual life and promiscuous behavior. The Tschaikowsky character is there because Vivier had the intention to write the opera about his death, and probably because of insinuations that this composer was also gay. Nikodijević comments that it was a kind of peculiar challenge to write an opera about the composer’s death, and the fact that the chosen composer also had the idea of writing an opera about another composer’s death (Tschaikowsky) is intriguing. As Nikodijević explained *Zeremonienmaister* is “a cabaret figure

in the last scene in the dark room, he presents himself as the fairy Karabosa, who is the character from Vivier's opera *Kopernikus*".⁸ The same voice is the ruler of Cipangu.⁹ "That is the connection", says Nikodijević, "the figure that always tells Vivier about impending death".¹⁰ All of the characters are from Vivier's life and works, but they are re-indexed, or reenacted differently.

The scenes of the opera are:

Scene 1 Wo bist du, Licht

Scene 2 Valse triste et sentimentale

Scene 3 Gott (ist Liebe)

Scene 4 Cipangu

Scene 5 Wiegenlied

Scene 6 Totentanz

There is no linear narrative in this plot. The scenes are specific images from Vivier's life. There is no unity of time and place between them, they happen in a Paris metro station (1), in Vivier's Paris room (2), in a church (3), in an imaginary Japan (4). The last two scenes do not have a specific location. It appears to be a kind of composed non-linear, post dramatic documentary about Vivier.¹¹ This non-linearity is strikingly underlined by the staging in Scene 5 to the point where the figures of two young boys of different ages, dressed like Vivier, appear: suddenly we see several Viviers present on stage at the same time and the adult one runs after the small ones. The character of Vivier is striking. Dressed in a leather jacket that had often been seen on him (with a lambskin lining), and with this specific countertenor voice, he immediately appears much different from the rest of the characters, even eccentric.

The opera opens with the words "Wo bist du Licht!" (Where are you light!), which is the title of Vivier's composition (1981) about which he writes as a "meditation on human suffering".¹² Vivier is at the metro station in Paris, at night: the situation from his last piece, *Glaubst du an die Unsterblichkeit der Seele?* is reenacted on stage. A few guys appear and Vivier asks them where

⁸ From an e-mail conversation with Marko Nikodijević on April 15, 2015.

⁹ Cipangu or Zipangu is the name of Vivier's composition; it was the name given to Japan at the time of Marco Polo.

¹⁰ From an e-mail conversation with Marko Nikodijević on April 15, 2015.

¹¹ See: Lehmann, Hans-Thies, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby, New York, Routledge, 2006.

¹² Vivier suggests that "the piece is intended as one long continuous melody". See: <http://www.boosey.com/cr/music/Claude-Vivier-Wo-bist-du-Licht/47773>, Accessed: April 11, 2015.

he can go for a drink and a dance at that hour. They insult him. One of them is Harry, the killer from Vivier's last piece. After a short conversation, in which the figure of Vivier is presented in a rather poetical way, as a melancholic looking for love and warmth in his life, the metro disappears. Harry stabs Vivier with a knife, and he is lying on the floor as the scene finishes.

The Second Scene "Valse Triste et Sentimentale" opens with Vivier alone in his Paris room, busy with a score. He tries to write an opera about the death of Tchaikowsky, and an imaginary dialogue between the two composers develops. Tchaikowsky is accompanied by two lovers, and Vivier complains to him about the difficulties he has writing this piece. They find similarities in how they both will end their lives and how they were rejected by society. Finally, Tchaikowsky drinks contaminated water, about which many of us learned while studying the history of classical music. The choir ends the scene singing about the eternal values of immaterial things.

In the third scene "Gott (ist Liebe)" homage is paid to Vivier's religious life, and the fact that he might have become a priest. Vivier, the priests and Saint Sebastian together with the Choir are the protagonists of this scene. A mass is held in the church. Vivier passes through the rows of believers. The choir sings "Sanctus, Sanctus Deus, Sanctus Deus, Miserere Nobis. Sanctus Deus, Sanctus Fortis, Sanctus Immortalis, Miserere Nobis, Miserere Nobis etc". Then Vivier sings about how he had chosen to be a composer and not a priest. Two priests bring in the statue of Saint Sebastian. At one point, this saint sings to Vivier about how he cannot love him, but also how he cannot let him die. At the end, the Choir sings a kind of prediction of how unjust life will be for Vivier, and how he will suffer in loneliness.

Scene 4 bears the name of Cipangu. The scene symbolizes Vivier's love of travel and discovering new worlds. The character of the ruler of Japan is there, together with Marco Polo and Rusticello, Polo's biographer. The Choir sings in an invented language (symbolically, a language one does not understand; it might be perceived as a simulacrum of Japanese in this case, although the composer reveals that it is a transliteration of the Tamil language).¹³

Scene 5 – *Wiegenlied* – is a tender lullaby song, sung by three singers in succession, walking around the stage in a kind of procession, with a baby in their arms, and the Choir. This scene is the reference to Vivier's composition *Lonely Child*. It is also a symbolical fulfillment of Vivier's longing for the never experienced, yet so much desired care and love of his biological mother. In a way, he finally receives it here with this song, so that his emotional horizon, at least symbolically, can be relieved.

¹³ From an e-mail conversation with Nikodijević on April 22, 2015.

The last scene, Scene 6, Totentanz, is an episode with a groove rhythm, creating an atmosphere of urgency, and a kind of nightmare. The Choir takes the leading role, performing over the groove. As Nikodijević notes, the Choir assumes the role it has in Greek tragedy, “the one that knows what will happen next”. Vivier’s character is on the stage. Zeremonienmaister, the cabaret character is also there, and Harry appears again, too. The loud, violent, repetitive dance music is interrupted by a music-box, a subtle episode that sheds light, for the last time here, on Vivier’s childhood. At the end, we see Vivier stabbed by the lover, while making love in the bed. The circular structure of the piece links this scene to the opening of the opera, where we also saw Vivier being stabbed. However, I understand that in the first scene we saw the stabbing as staged in his last composition, and in the last scene we see it reenacted from the real-life situation.

As one could have expected, the music of this opera owes a great deal to the music of Claude Vivier. As mentioned in my previous text, the music of Vivier draws on different musical idioms, albeit not through collage and the eclectic confrontation of contrasting music materials. His music presents subtle transitions from microtonality to tonality, from La Monte Youngian “drones” to the booming of Tibetan trumpets, from microtonal sounds of rituals of hidden origin to obsessive-repetitive incantations of forgotten rites, from unison sounds to organum fourth-fifth archaic chords, from sounds of harmonic tones on string instruments to the whistling of the performers. He was interested in non-European music, particularly in the music of Bali.

Another characteristic of Vivier’s music is its specific non-development, the existence of ‘musical statements’ that “lead nowhere”. And those “statements” would be the “grains”, the “particles” of sound which generate the sound event whose microstructure depends on the interaction of the parameters that determine the particles, while its macrostructure depends on changes of the particle characteristics. It is close to definitions of granular sound synthesis. The form of the compositions created in such a way is often asymmetrical and the endings of the compositions are unexpected and even potentially “open”. Finally, the way of composing the melodic lines is such that the melodies are developed from a single nucleus, or unison, often based on a kind of ‘hoqueting’, where the material is divided among several voices.¹⁴ The homage to these techniques exists

¹⁴ “While in Bali, Vivier became interested in the technique of *kotekan* or interlocking melodies. In Balinese music, two or more melodies, each consisting of a pattern of rests and attacks, occur simultaneously to create the effect of constant interlocking attacks. Although this is primarily a rhythmic device, Vivier was interested in its melodic applications.” According to: Janette Tilley, “Eternal Recurrence: Aspects of Melody in the Orchestral Music of Claude Vivier”, *Discourses in Music: Volume 2 Number 1* (Fall 2000), Available online:

in this opera. For example, Vivier's character, alone on stage at the opening of Scene 2, starts to sing a 'circling' melody, built from one melodic nucleus, written in canon with violoncello solo.¹⁵ And Scene 5 and the way how the instrumentation is arranged there bears a reference to Vivier's music too, The horn, trumpet and trombone play on "an empty, large bottle, like a very distant fog horn", the percussion players play on tuned glasses, the violas and violoncellos bring only the fifth (G-D), and the piano, a "calmo, gently rocking, senza misura". The ocarina with the fifth motive occasionally 'interrupts' like some little bird singing.¹⁶ The use of a water gong in Scene 4 Cipangu immediately brings to mind a reference to Vivier's music, too.¹⁷

The countertenor voice of Vivier is what primarily makes him different from all the rest of the characters. One could even claim that the rest of the voices are dominated by Vivier's vocal presence on the stage. Like Vivier's anonymous neighbour remarked: "You would notice him". The specific color of the countertenor voice makes it easily recognizable. Moreover, it sounds like what is usually perceived as a female voice. And here, an interesting game takes place. As Joke Dame suggests: "Gender confusion tends to make one nervous".¹⁸ That generator of 'nervousness' is actually a ventriloquist dimension that exists between what we hear and what we see at the same time on stage. The figure of Vivier, dressed in his typical outfit with the famous leather jacket, typical glasses and hairstyle, does not clearly fit in with the voice we hear him produce. Or the other way round: the produced voice seems not fit in with the body we see on stage producing it. That gap, or mismatch is consistently present (the only scene where Vivier does not sing is in Scene 5, in which we listen to a lullaby song for him). Reading that mismatch seems to tell us more about the author's poetical vision of Vivier than, for example, the text of the libretto, or the staging. Vivier's voice, on the one hand, makes it impossible not to notice him. On the other hand, with such a voice, he is symbolically isolated from the rest of the community (and the other members of the cast in this opera). This decision about how to represent Vivier vocally truthfully transposes his eccentric figure from the 'real world' to the singing world of opera.

<http://library.music.utoronto.ca/discourses-in-music/v2n1a3.html>, Accessed: April 10, 2015.

¹⁵ Marko Nikodijević, *Vivier. Ein Nachtprotokoll*. Partitur, 2014, Sikorski Musikverlage Hamburg, p. 33.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 174.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 112.

¹⁸ Joke Dame, "Unveiled Voices: Sexual Difference and the Castrato," in *Queering the Pitch, The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2nd edition, ed. Philip Brett, Elisabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, 139–54. New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 139.

The large spectrum of masculine vocality is present. The countertenor voice of Vivier, the priests singing Gregorian chant, ‘rap’ reciting in Totentanz, a kind of hocketing, singing in canon to an instrument (for example Vivier’s character with the violoncello in Scene 2), a male choir singing in an invented language, the typical ‘operatic’ vibrato bass voice of the character of Tschaikowsky. In Scene 2, the speaking dialogue between Vivier and Tschaikowsky is heard over ‘the noise’ of the percussion. The role of the male Choir is prominent: it acts like a reference to the choirs in Greek tragedy, it comments the ‘drama’. And it bears different musical ‘masks’: they sing Gregorian chant, the Choir at the end of Scene 2 brings music that resembles the choirs of the Orthodox Church tradition, although in this case accompanied by electric organ and strings, and in the Cipangu Scene the Choir sings in an invented language.

The dramaturgy of the music events is dominated by numerous ‘statements’, to use Vivier’s terminology. Nikodijević easily and masterfully arranges different atmospheres, and although they follow each other quickly, those changes are made in such a way that the transitions are very smooth and the listening spectator is ‘swallowed’ by the flux of events. In his first opera, Nikodijević demonstrates an unusual sensitivity in his ability to build many different moods and contexts on stage. Especially intriguing is the situation in Scene 3, where the Choir of the priests sings “Sanctus Deus, Sanctus Fortis...” in a Gregorian chant manner. This religious ‘mantra’ is repeated as ostinato. The figures of the priests on stage recite the same words that the choir members sing, at the same time. At some later point, Vivier’s character starts to sing above the Choir and it becomes obvious that the disciplined world of religion, embedded in the priests’ chanting, will not be the sphere in which Vivier will fit. Another intriguing situation is the valse episode in Scene 2 with Tschaikowsky, where the reference to this composer’s music is loaded with emotions similar to those that are connected to Vivier’s early childhood. Tschaikowsky’s character sings above the ‘valse music’ performed by the celesta and the piano, and his low, vibrato, ‘operatic’ sounding voice clearly belongs to a world that is different from Vivier’s. Another picturesque situation is the moment in Zipangu when Rusticello appears for the first time. Suddenly, we hear a vivid medieval melody, symbolizing Rusticello’s world. The subtlety of its introduction does not make it awkward in the contemporary context. A memorable moment is also where the ‘music box episode’ appears in Scene 6, as a dream-like reference to Vivier’s yearning for love in his early childhood. Finally, the last scene is the dark room, the night club episode, in which the text of the libretto is written in a form that could be recited in a rhythmic manner. This episode, growing in vocal tension and in the volume of the sound towards the end, appears as a kind of final rejection of Vivier. What could have been perceived as the sound of heart beats, at some point, resembles

the sound of the final countdown ahead of the guillotine, or a funeral march. The reference to Nikodijević's composition "'cvetić, kućica.../la lugubre gondola: funeral music after franz liszt – in memoriam" (2009)" is open here, too.¹⁹ It becomes obvious that death is approaching. And indeed, at that point, on stage we see Vivier in bed with Harry and the fatal stabbing occurs next, ending the opera.

The staging by Lotte Beer closely follows the musical dramaturgy, and in a poetical manner pictures the moments and atmospheres from Vivier's life. Especially touching is Scene 5, with the lullaby song. The procession in white circles the stage, carrying the baby. At the same time, a silent Vivier is on the stage too, and observes the situation. The huge ball (possibly representing this world in which we all live) is on the stage, and Vivier sometimes pushes it. The dream-like atmosphere is supported by waving with transparent white sheets on stage, towards the end of the scene. Two boy-Viviers are on stage with the adult Vivier. Finally, the adult Vivier remains alone. The same two silent boys reappear on stage again in Scene 6, when the music introduces the 'music-box episode'. Tender and soft, the melody of the music box, simulating a music-box sound (*l'istesso tempo, come meccanismo* dominated by vibrafone, celesta and harp)²⁰ or the sound of soft baby toys that play comforting melodies, obviously is an association with the early childhood of Vivier. That is the period which, in a way, was forever lost for this person, and that loss haunted him throughout his life. Lotte Beer affectionately pictured that aspect of Vivier's personality.

The history of opera has seen many examples based on the lives and deeds of famous individuals. In earlier times, they could be emperors, kings, etc. (for example *Giulio Cesare* by G. F. Handel, *Idomeneo* by Mozart). Even in our own times, this trend has persisted (for example, with *Akhmaten* by Philip Glass, and *Nixon in China* by John Adams). However, nowadays, composers more frequently write operas about scientists, researchers or artists (for example *Writing to Vermeer* by Louis Andriessen, and *The Perfect American* about Walt Disney, by Philip Glass). Nikodijević questions this trend further and has created an opera about the composer.²¹ Moreover, he chooses a very specific composer: the

¹⁹ See more about this piece in my text "Politics of Sadness: Little Flower, Refrigerator Lorry, Death and Symphonic Tradition", *New Sound – International magazine for music* *New Sound*, No. 38, II/2011, pp. 65-75. Available online: http://www.newsound.org.rs/en/pdfs/ns38/New_Sound_38.65-75.pdf

²⁰ Marko Nikodijević, *Vivier. Ein Nachtprotokoll. Partitur*, 2014, Sikorski Musikverlage Hamburg, p. 202.

²¹ Writing an opera about a composer has become an intriguing subject for composers lately. For example, in 1994, Louis Andriessen and Peter Greenaway wrote the opera *Rosa, the*

Canadian Claude Vivier, an eccentric, important figure, but at the same time, a composer ‘from the margin’. Vivier’s queer aura makes him especially intriguing. Nikodijević is inspired with the ‘myths’ that surround Vivier, and they are not ‘the myths’ of power and grandeur. They are ‘the myths’ of sorrow, of being insecure, ‘myths’ of the search for identity, struggling with emotional pain and rejection. They are the subjects that Vivier as the queer figure symbolizes and questions.

Vivier stands as a symbol of the minority, the queer, the vulnerable. During his short life, he strived to acquire his own voice, a voice as the personification of freedom and the chance to be heard. He finally attains it with this opera, in the manner that he deserved. The countertenor voice associated to the character of Vivier, in addition, questions the voice-gender relations in opera and beyond. This voice sings beyond gender. It shows that the voice-gender relation is not a fixed category. Vivier is fulfilled in a vivid, imaginative opera, in which both his physical and personified voices radiate with the creativity that his art emanates. He obtains his singing voice, and he finally gets a hearing.

After this opera, Vivier is not the same composer anymore. He becomes the composer about whom one of the most creative young composer’s voices wrote an opera. And that opera strongly captured both his strengths and weaknesses in a manner that elevates him to a secure place in the contemporary history of music. Finally, Marko Nikodijević after this postopera is not the same composer anymore, either.²² He has virtuosically ‘upgraded’ his oeuvre and left the world waiting for his next music theatre piece with curiosity.

Translated by the author

Death of a Composer in which the title character is the imaginary composer Huan Manuel de Rosa, a composer of music for Western films. The death of Anton Webern was also elaborated in this piece. The figure of Carlo Gesualdo seems to be especially inspiring for contemporary composers, since there are already three or four operas written about him: Alfred Schnittke’s *Gesualdo* (1995), Marc-André Dalbavie’s *Gesualdo* (2010), and more recently, Bo Holten’s *Gesualdo – Shadows* premiered in 2014 at The Royal Danish Opera. Salvatore Sciarrino’s opera “*Luci mie traditrici*” (1998) was originally also inspired by Gesualdo’s life but later that reference was not given importance.

²² For more about the notion of ‘postopera’ see: Jelena Novak, *Postopera: Reinventing the Voice-Body*, Burlington, VT and Farnham, Ashgate, 2015.