

YOUNG ARTIST
AWARD
— 2015 —

DIANA SOH



Tête à tête Opera Festival, London, UK.
Performance by Size Zero Opera (2011).
Photo credit: Fly Davis



Conductor Baldur Brönnimann and student composer Diana Soh
at June in Buffalo Festival (2010).
Photo credit: Irene Haupt



OUT at S.E.A world premiere (2013).
Photo credit: Peter Eötvös Foundation

Diana Soh (b. 1984) is a composer whose works span from choral music, opera, orchestral and chamber works to interactive electronic music. She graduated from Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, National University of Singapore in 2007 and completed her doctoral studies in Music Theory and Composition at the University at Buffalo, New York, in 2013. She also spent two years at the highly selective IRCAM Cursus programme (2011-2013) honing her skills in computer music programming.

Known for integrating interactivity, theatre and electronics in her music, her chamber music works such as *Arboretum: of myths and trees* (2013) reflect her strong musical personality, impressive control of structural ideas and technical mastery. While Diana has notable choral compositions such as *Vak* (2014), opera remains one of her greatest passions. Her recent involvement includes participation at the Tête-à-tête Festival in London and Aix-en-Provence Opera Festival. She was also one of six composers for the *Out* at S.E.A chamber opera project in collaboration with the Peter Eötvös Contemporary Music Foundation. She has also collaborated with French film director Bertrand Bonello.

Diana had participated in highly acclaimed festivals like the Gaudeamus Music Week, Klang Festival Copenhagen, Donaueschinger Musiktage, Royaumont Voix Nouvelles, Acanthes, Manifeste and the Tongyeong International Music Festival where she had the opportunity to understudy and work with internationally acclaimed composers like Brian Ferneyhough, Wolfgang Rihm, Beat Furrer, and Isabel Mundry. She has worked with musical groups including the Arditti Quartet, Ensemble Court Circuit and Ensemble Phoenix Basel. In 2012, Diana was appointed Composer-in-Residence at the Conservatoire D'ivry sur Seine, France, in partnership with National Center for Musical Creation (La Muse en Circuit). Her works have also been broadcast on *Deutschlandfunk*, Danish Broadcasting Corporation, BBC Radio 3 and France Musique identifying her as “a composer to follow” (*une compositrice à suivre*).

Diana is an advocate of music education. She has taught at her alma maters, and institutions such as School of the Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, and New England Conservatory.

She developed a distinct voice as a composer in contemporary music and is highly sought after by international ensembles. Diana has recently won the Impuls International Composition Competition and is commissioned by Klangforum Wien. She is also in the final selection for the prestigious Fondation Prince Pierre de Monaco 2015 Music Composition Prize.



A CONVERSATION WITH DIANA SOH

When you set about creating a new work, what inspires you?

It is this mad desire to learn and explore that keeps me going. Creating is a form of constant and intimate discovery and because I am constantly thinking about my various projects, anything and everything around me can spark excitement and be related back to my work. Encounters and relationships with the right performers are often also inspiring. Instrumentalists are the experts of their particular instruments and they each have their own unique energy which can be harnessed to propel a new creation.

Do share what a typical day in your life as a composer is like?

It is quite a solitary life as during the writing process I am quite relentless: Most mornings and early afternoons are spent doing the bulk of my creative work at the piano or in front of my computer if I am programming. I try to schedule meetings in the late afternoons and I spend early evenings replying to emails, writing proposals, etc. and doing everything else that I do not like to, but must do.

On days where I am spared that drudgery, I get to read or listen to music or do research online for my next project. Nights are spent working again on music till late, or at concerts.

While I am at festivals or during rehearsal periods, I usually spend early mornings pre-breakfast thinking about music, or squeezing in time to compose because once the day begins there's no time left! For everything else unrelated to the creative work, I do it in between during any spare time in transit or during coffee breaks. God bless the iPhone!

Do you have any advice for other young local composers who are starting on their journey?

I still feel I am at the start of my journey as well and I hope to always feel this way. Nonetheless, here's my two cents:



In every situation, learn. In the worst case, learn what not to do.

Expose yourself to different works, different types of music. But always understand the context of which these works were created and why you are creating. It is more important to know few works deeply than to memorise a catalogue full (we now have google for that!).

Try different things, be uncomfortable, make mistakes. And it is crucial you don't just stick to what you are good at because if you rely only on your inherent musicianship and only on your instincts, then you will keep rewriting the same old thing and you will only keep reinventing the wheel.

If composing is something that you need to do, then brace yourself and think positively always.

What are your vision and hopes for Singapore's music scene?

Wagner once said, "Even if I know I shall never change the masses, never transform anything permanent, all I ask is that the good things also have their place, their refuge."

I hope there can be a place for contemporary music one day and more openness, instead of a protectionist culture, to the development of unfamiliar sounds. I believe very strongly in sharing and in talking about what it is that we do in composition and how very important it is to think about music, what it is and what it can be. I envision a future where other definitions of beauty and of music can enter the scene and that Singaporeans can distinguish between art and entertainment; and between listening and hearing.



WORDS OF APPRECIATION

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