

CREATE

WITH UNCOMPROMISING CONVICTION,
LOVE AND COMPLETE DEVOTION



INTERVIEW WITH JAMIE MAN, COMPOSER AND CONDUCTOR



How did you develop your interest in music?

My ancestral village in Hong Kong is well known for its outdoor Chinese opera festival and, as a child, I was a dancer in a touring Chinese folk dance group based in London. Despite growing up in this environment I never felt much affinity towards its sound with both Eritrean and late romantic Russian piano music; particularly music by Scriabin which I played daily in search of spiritual clarity. In 2012 I was offered a doorway into the inner workings of carnatic music.

This, alongside Olivier Messiaen, Claude Vivier and Anton Bruckner -with whom I have developed profound relationships through my work as a conductor- has been my greatest teacher.

Why did you decide to start composing for voice?

I fell in love with a boy but was too scared to tell him directly. I wrote a song about it instead and discovered that the human voice on stage is a great envoy for secret messages. I feel that many of the best operas are complex labyrinths of secret messages.

You participated in 10 different enoa projects, including workshops with the composer Magnus Lindberg, the soprano Barbara Hannigan and the director Peter Sellars. What was your strongest enoa experience?

Meeting artists who are successful in their chosen field is always an interesting learning opportunity, especially when it is an artist whose work you particularly admire. The most poignant encounter for me was with the late French director Patrice Chéreau during a workshop in Aix-en-Provence in

summer 2013. As a person very much in the embryonic stage of their artistic life, this meeting felt to me like an overwhelming confrontation with life in its entirety. His ferocity and fragility were extraordinary. Every piece of advice he gave us was direct, urgent and deeply heart-felt. I still keep the notes I scribbled during the session pinned to the wall next to my composing desk. I think of his production of *Elektra* very often.

What is the most important thing you learned during these workshops?

The most important thing I have learnt is to create with uncompromising conviction, love and complete devotion to the needs of the others in the room, even if these people are imaginary.

How can opera institutions support young composers? What should they implement to help them to develop their careers?

I cannot speak for all young composers but I imagine offering commissions and placing faith in the composer's artistic ambition is a fairly good place to start. It can seem risky to put faith in a work, which does not immediately resemble a shape we recognise as 'opera' but entering unfamiliar territory is the only way to grow. Opera should help us question what we think we know, not just validate us.

As a composer, what is your opinion on artists' residencies in opera institutions? What are you expecting from this kind of collaboration?

To create new operas which interrogate what opera can be and are not simply regurgitations of nineteenth century forms dressed in contemporary clothing we need access to time, space and the right people. Opera institutions that offer residencies rich in these resources are Edens on earth.

How could you describe the place of creation in the opera sector today?

Opera is an extraordinary thing. It can be big and it can be small but, most importantly through opera, we must hear the voices of artists alive today; those with wisdom gained through the experience of living as well as those of the young people who will inherit the planet when the former are gone. New work needs to be at the heart of the opera sector's activities and crafted by the hands of artists with ambition beyond self-promotion as well as the capability to survey the world and ask difficult questions. Choosing to exist without creation and artistic innovation at its core is to choose a path towards becoming irrelevant, financially unsustainable and ultimately self-destructive. Thankfully that is not entirely where we are today.

Would you like to compose an enoa?

In 2014, following participation in the enoa workshop *Composition for voice and orchestra*, I was incredibly fortunate to be commissioned to write *Play*, a 30 minute fantasy drama for soprano, *beyton Martin* and orchestra. *Play* was my first large-scale work and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, supported by enoa, took a huge leap of faith, one for which I will forever be grateful. The process of creating *Play* was both an invaluable learning experience and solid affirmation that staged musical work is the medium through which I can best converse with the world. The thrill of bringing an imagined world to life on stage and connecting with people through music – a language which speaks even to the deaf – is intoxicating and dangerously addictive but what is life without a little indulgence? I am burning to write my first full-length opera.

How do you imagine the future of opera in 20 years?

The future of opera began yesterday, crippled by every decision that traded art for people-pleasing and every box we failed to think outside of. Fortunately, the course of change is transfigured by the dreams and work we make today and with the continuation of cross cultural creative collaboration at its core, the future of opera need not be imagined- it will be made.

Interviewed by Louis Geisler



Jamie Man and fellow composers attend a rehearsal of their pieces by the Gulbenkian Orchestra

Jamie Man, composer and conductor born in 1987 (UK)

7 enoa workshops

Aix-en-Provence – Ghent – Lisbon

1 enoa lab

1 week work on a opera project called Anna

2 mobility grants

Assistant to the conductor in Vivier's *Kopernikus at the Dutch National Opera* and in Tolant's *Perséphone at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence*