

Mike von der Nahmer

MIKE VON DER NAHMER

Composer, Sound Researcher, Music Psychotherapist &
Creator of Transformative Music Theater

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Mike von der Nahmer is a composer, sound researcher, music psychotherapist, music dramaturge and creator and artistic director of [MuTaDra](#) (Music – Theater – Drama) home of transformative music theater. His American/German/Cuban heritage influences the questions of identity, complexity, and transcendent connection that shape his music. He has written over 30 works for stage and over 100 works for concert and film; many have received national/international awards and been performed around the world. Mike worked for companies such as GRAMMY, Sony, music supervisor Gary Calamar and for the BMW research and innovation center where he created auditory notices for BMW.

Mike's barrier-breaking, eclectic background explains his passion for music both as artistic expression and as a means to connect disparate cultures. His desire to be an agent of radical connection – to literally create harmony out of apparent dissonance – is his defining motivation.

Mike holds a B.A. in composition from the University of Music and Performing Arts, Munich. In May 2015, he received an M.F.A. in Musical Theater Writing from New York University, where he held a 2-year Tisch School of the Arts Departmental Fellowship and studied with composers Mel Marvin, Fred Carl and Randall Eng. He also studied Film Scoring at UCLA with Lee Sanders and Craig Stuart Garfinkle, among others. He also holds an M.A. in Music Therapy from the University of Augsburg and a certificate in Music-Imaginative Pain Treatment (music therapy treatment for patients with chronic pain) from the Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences, Germany. He is currently doing his PhD at the German Aerospace Center, researching “Underscoring Aircraft Ballets – Sonifying Air Traffic Control Data to heighten Situational Awareness – A Composer’s Perspective.

Mike is Artist in Residence at the Orchard Project Greenhouse Lab in NYC as well as at the SETI Institute AIR Program where he continues his sonification and theatrical projects among other artistic and scientific endeavors. The center of his work is the search and creation of the sonification of the mind, his (utopian) idea and concept to create a sonification of the mind, that might help us in the future to understand the complexities of the brain through an audible representation.

His music been used in TV series such as NOVA and performed/commissioned by organizations and ensembles such as, Kenwood, White Snake Projects, West Edge Opera, Earplay, Green Space - New York Public Radio, New York Opera Alliance, LaGuardia Performing Arts Center (NYC), 54 Below, NYU, FJK DANCE, Jewish Community Center Manhattan, Fresh Squeezed Ounce of Opera, Hartford Opera Theater Festival, California International Theatre Festival, Neuköllner Oper (Berlin), University of Augsburg, Ensemble Modern, CARISMA (ABC Classics), Cage 100 – Party Pieces Project, Bar Harbor Music Festival

His awards include the McKnight Visiting Composer Residency, Jerome Foundation Grant and encore grant from the American Composers Forum; the SU-CASA residency in collaboration with the New York City Council, the Department of Cultural Affairs, the Department for the Aging and the Queens Council on the Arts; Berlin Opera Prize; New World Composition Challenge by the New York Philharmonic; Charles and Joan Gross Family Foundation Grant; Renée B. Fisher Composer Award; a 5-month composer residency at the Herrenhaus Edenkoben; 1st and special prize at the ISME-IVME 2nd international Composition Contest 2008, Belgium; Masterworks Prize and Dr. J. Howland Auchinclose Prize at the Society for New Music; numerous ASCAP Awards and many more. He has also received scholarships from the Aspen Music Festival in film scoring to study with Thomas Newman and Jeff Rona, the Eugen O'Neill Puppetry Conference and the ASCAP Film Scoring workshop in Los Angeles.

THE STORIES BEHIND HIS WORK FOR THE STAGE

Mike von der Nahmer is a composer whose entire career is about exploring existential questions and the theater of the mind. From his very first opera “**Between Delusion and Reality**” in 10th grade about a teenager lost in his own emotions and torn between the powers of love and hate, Mike always asks; ‘Who and why are we? How does one fit into society? What makes fitting in such an uncertain, mysterious journey?’

During high school Mike worked as a young journalist for the local radio **M 94.5** in Munich, focusing on contemporary music theater/opera, particular radio reports about the Munich Biennale, an international Festival for New Music Theater, where he saw and critiqued numerous new operas from around the world.

While still completing his first BA in composition in Munich, he received a call from Broadway in NYC. His name had been mentioned by several people that knew that his music seamlessly mixed different styles and backgrounds and would he be interested in being part of a worldwide composer search for an upcoming Broadway Musical? Excited for a new challenge but anxious over his ability to work in English (his second language) he began communicating with several high-ranking producers from the US. After a long process of elimination for over 400 applicants, 25-year-old Mike was selected as one of the 3 finalists.

Arriving in Los Angeles in 2003, he wrote “**The Ultimate Musical**” (Libretto by Virginia Emrick, von der Nahmer) which dealt with stereotypes around us and in musical itself, the heroic hero, the beauty, the messenger and of course the bad guy, all hiding behind their own masks. In 2005 he was commissioned the large-scale Musical “**Von Zeyt Zu Zeit**” (Libretto by Johannes Ponader) about Otto Henry, Elector Palatine. While in Los Angeles he also worked on “**SPAM: a song cycle**”(libretto by Scott Guy) which was based on spam emails that Scott had received on a single day that then were formed into a libretto and set to music.

Other operatic works include the one-act opera “**20 Minuten**” (libretto by Andreas Bisowski), awarded the 2010 Berlin Opera prize, about a female bomb assassin in Berlin, uncertain and torn between her love for her unborn child and powers that force her to do the unthinkable. This opera was a psychogram of what happens within us when we have nowhere to go or hide until the point when all language has lost purpose and meaning and there is only the noise of distorted vowels.

In 2011 he was commissioned the very successful youth opera “**Klangwandler**” (Sound Shaper) (libretto by Kai Ivo Baulitz) by the Neuköllner Opera about a high school student, struggling with his fear of everything and the ability to hear the inner soul of everything around. By learning to trust another person he learns to trust himself. He also comes to realize that sometimes our character flaws can become our greatest strength if we learn to deal with them in a different way.

In 2011 his American opera “**El Canguro**” (libretto by Cynthia Lewis Ferrell), was chosen by the California International Theater Festival for a performance at the AT&T Center theater. EL CANGURO is about an impoverished young woman in the South American rainforest who bears babies that her father then sells to the lucrative adoption market. The newfound wealth is enough to create a new life, one that can lift them out of desperate circumstances, but at what cost? EL CANGURO is currently in preparation for a 2020 presentation in Berkeley and San Francisco with SNAPSHOT/West Edge Opera.

In New York he worked also on a series of short operas including “**Ho! Ho! Ho!**” (libretto by Kate Chadwick) performed at several opera short festival in the US which is a short, comic opera that explores the idea of escalation between two people. What happens when you take a teenager and his dad's girlfriend, and you put them in a crowded toy store in New York during the holiday season? Things get fun and a little messy. The one-act opera “**The Cookies Call – A Tragic Tragedy**” (Libretto by Emily Roller) which was premiered on March 22, 2019 as part of the 4th Annual Fresh Squeezed Ounce of Opera in Texas at the

Mike von der Nahmer

Museum of Human Achievement and the song **“Night After Night”** (lyrics by Kate Chadwick), commissioned by “Sing Away the Stigma”, a benefit gala against stigmatizing mental disorders. In the musical theater writing program at NYU he created two thesis projects. The musical drama **“A Hundred Thousand Places”** (libretto by Greg Moss) about an elderly lady with dementia as she and her daughter struggle with theme of escape and the meaning of support and the musical Drama **“Esther”** (libretto by Emily Roller), based on the book of Esther.

Because of his interest in nonverbal communication and body language he is frequently asked to write music for choreographers and dancers. Among those pieces are **“Home”** and **“Reflections”** commissioned by the New York contemporary dance company FJK DANCE with Iraqi born artistic director Fadi J. Khoury that supports cross-cultural dialogue, presenting a unique fusion of dance genres from classical ballet to ballroom and Middle Eastern to Jazz. Other works include ballet chanté **“Talking City”** (2015) (libretto by John Dietrich, commissioned by Jonathan Haas) about the unique life in New York City and all its wonderful and weird daily stories as well a series of works with New York choreographer and dancer Hala Shah including **“Psychogramm”**, **“Red Tide”** for the Voices transposed: Refugee Crisis Benefit Concert in partnership USA for UNHCR the UN Refugee Agency, and Refugee Immigrant Funds (RIF) which illuminates the social incongruities, cultural complexities, and generational variations that beg to not be stripped away through assimilation and deculturalization, the award winning solo **“Oscillate”**, **“Mashrabiya”** commissioned by LaGuardia Performing Arts Center as part of its 2014-2015 “Beyond Sacred: Unthinking Muslim Identity” programming, and other dance pieces presented through Periapsis Music and Dance and the JCC Manhattan.

In 2016 he received the prestigious **McKnight Visiting Composer Residency** where he created a 4-hour musical theater festival in 3 months with writers and composers in 2017 from New Ulm, MN based on stories and questions about German American heritage. Among those projects was **“Growing Young”** a program for older adults where Mike gathers stories of the elderly, and translates them into short musical theater pieces. Stories focus on the teenage years of seniors and the finished pieces are performed by young actors, showing that we are one people, creating an inclusive circle valuing life at any age and making connection through deep knowledge of the other and a collective sense of America. In 2018 he was chosen for the SU-CASA program continuing his GROWING YOUNG project with seniors in Queens/NYC, supported by funding from the department for the aging, the department for cultural affairs and Queens Council on the Arts. Additionally, he received a “Small Arts Project Grant” (2018 and 2019) by the Prairie Lake regional Arts Council, Minnesota for his **MuTaCo Festival**, sponsorship from the New Ulm Chapter of Optimist Club International “Bringing out the best in children” for his **“Growing Wise”** project (2018) which is a program for kids and teenagers connecting the world and study of science with musical theater writing. Their first “Growing Wise” weeklong camp focused on studying and learning about ecosystems in Minnesota.

He created several Sacred Dramas including **“Tightrope – An Electopera”** (Libretto by Tatiana Wechsler) based on the book of Ecclesiastes and, **“Multitudes”** (Text by Gloria Zimmermann) based on the Book of Job. Both developed at the Artist Beit Midrash of Town and Village Synagogue in New York City. In 2017 he was commissioned an evening’s Sacred Drama **“Gottesschwüngen”** (God’s Vibrations) based on the old Testament with a libretto by psychoanalyst and religious scholar Dr. Alfred Walter.

His 2018 work of musical theatre, **“Welcome to Hell”** (libretto by Peter Lund), about the horrific G20 protests in Hamburg in 2017, commissioned by the Neuköllner Oper, premiered in Berlin in March 2018 to critical acclaim and sold out performances and was nominated for most popular new musical of 2018 in Germany. In the same year he was commissioned to create the song cycle **“Blue Hum”** as part of the Art Song Collaborative Project – A Music Drama through Art Song about the refugees crises with writers Marianna Mott Newirth and Anita Prestidge based on interviews with refugees and premiered on July 14, 2018 in Toronto, Canada.

In 2019 he was chosen as dramaturge and music supervisor for the 10-minute opera **“Transportation Transformation”** (libretto by Marianna Mott Newirth). Conceived, developed and performed in just 24 hours for the marathon 10th anniversary celebration of the Green Space – New York Public Radio’s venue for live broadcasts & tapings – and produced under the auspices of New York Opera Alliance.

March 2020 marked the beginning of a difficult time for artists around the world. Every project in development had to rapidly adapt as the pandemic caused worldwide cancellations.

“When Falling...Dive”, a VideOpera about connectivity with libretto by Marianna Mott Newirth, was brought into the recording studio just ahead of social-distance guidelines. The producer is currently revising her concept to create an illustrated opera that will work in concert with Mike’s completed score.

As this project was underway, **“Nia Wa Ja Shu – Make the World New”**, a dramatic choral cantata over 260-member youth choir and orchestra of the renowned Camerloher High School in Germany only received a filmed performance without audience as well. The piece is about the Fridays for Future movement, demanding action to prevent further global warming and climate change.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WkwT-s4YuU>

MUSIC PSYCHOTHERAPY/MuTaDra

Interested equally in music and medicine from an early age, he has developed several projects over the past years that used musical theater writing and composition as a tool of diagnosis and therapeutic intervention. He calls his method **MuTaDra** (Music – Theater – Drama), in which the creation of music theater is used as a way of artistic expression and therapeutic intervention, and for which he has received several grants in Minnesota, NYC and Germany. He also teaches his method to other music therapist and works closely with psychoanalysts, neuroscientists and psychologists. He has written about his therapeutic in several articles and book chapters, most recently an article about depression for the Music and Medicine Journal entitled **“Musikalisierung: How a Despondent Mind Shapes Thought into Music: A young boy’s journey & music therapy from an insider’s point of view”**. Programs are **“Growing Young”** for seniors and **“Growing wise for kids”**.

Additionally, he received a conference-funding grant by New York University to take part in a round table **“Play it again! Symposium on Musical Composition process in Music therapy”** where he talked about *“Things might or might not change if you play them again... How patients find and develop form, context and logic in their compositions”*



A Dramatic Choral Cantata for Change
NIA WA JA SHU – MAKE THE WORLD NEW
Youth choir and choir of the Camerloher-Gymnasium High School, Germany 2020
Performed without audience due to COVID-19 Pandemic



Musical
WELCOME TO HELL
Neuköllner Opera in collaboration with the University of Arts (UDK), Berlin, 2018



Set design sketch for the
Opera
**BETWEEN
DELUSION AND
REALITY**



Sacred Drama
GOTTESSCHWINGUNGEN
St. Severin Church,
Germany 2017



Opera
EL CANGURO
California International Theater
Festival, 2011



Opera
20 MINUTEN
Berlin 2010



Youth Opera
KLANGWANDLER
Neuköllner Opera Berlin, 2011



Dance

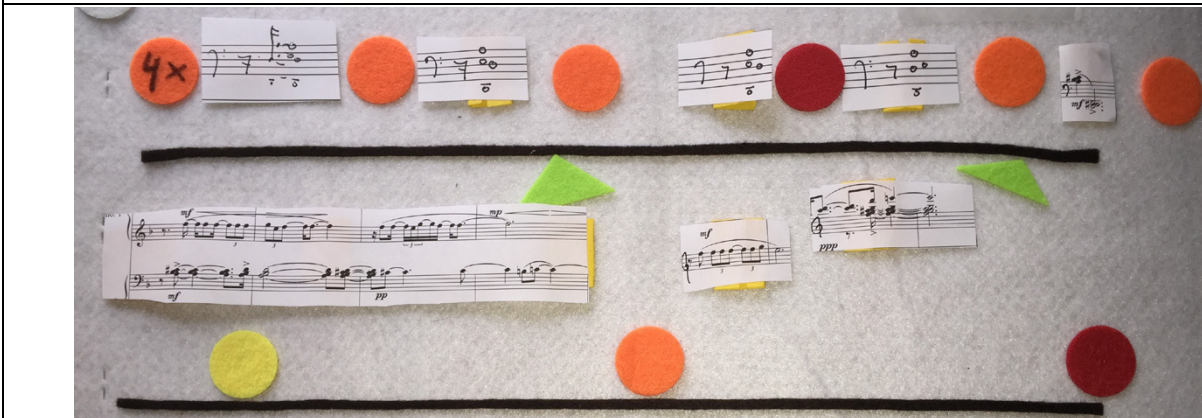
MASHRABIYA

LaGuardia Performing Arts Center, New York City, 2014



REFLECTIONS

FJK DANCE, NYC, 2016



PSYCHOGRAM (for dancers and musicians)

Tisch Dance Alumni Concert, Jack Crystal Theater NYC, 2016