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Composer Profile: Panayiotis Kokoras



Panayiotis Kokoras (Alyssa Hedenstrom)

Website

Kokoras is an internationally award-winning composer and computer music innovator. Since fall 2012 he has been appointed Assistant Professor at the University of North Texas. Born in Greece, he studied classical guitar and composition in Athens, Greece and York, England; he taught for many years at Aristotle University in Thessaloniki (among others). Kokoras's sound compositions use timbre as the main element of form. His concept of "holophony" describes his goal that each independent sound (phonos), contributes equally into the synthesis of the total (holos). In both instrumental and electroacoustic writing, his music calls upon a "virtuosity of sound," emphasizing the precise production of variable sound possibilities and the correct distinction between one timbre and another to convey the musical ideas and structure of the piece. His compositional output is also informed by musical research in Music Information Retrieval compositional strategies, Extended techniques, Tactile sound, Augmented reality, Robotics, Spatial Sound, Synesthesia.

His works have been commissioned by institutes and festivals such as the Fromm Music Foundation (Harvard), IRCAM (France), MATA (New York), Gaudeamus (Netherlands), ZKM (Germany), IMEB (France), Siemens Musikstiftung (Germany) and have been performed in over 500 concerts around the world. His compositions have received 56 distinctions and prizes in international competitions, and have been selected by juries in more than 130 international calls for scores. He is founding member of the Hellenic Electroacoustic Music Composers Association (HELMCA) and from 2004 to 2012 he was a board member and president.

THE QUESTIONS

What is your earliest musical memory that, in looking back, has proved to be significant regarding your career as a composer?

During my elementary school years I was fascinated with the classical guitar. Although I didn't play by that time, I found the sound of it awesome so I started taking guitar lessons at the age of thirteen. Soon after I got my first Casio synthesizer and an Atari computer with build in MIDI interface. That was the beginning of my interest in music technology. I have always had an interest in making sounds not playing notes.



Are there composers who have been influential or relevant regarding your own work? Has this changed over time?

It changes all the time, as I find more and more composers relevant to my own interests. At the beginning, my first influences were the classical composers like Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, and Palestrina alongside pop rock groups and new age artists like Jean Michel Jarre. Then, I became interested in the Second Viennese School with Webern to be my favorite. Soon after, I moved to Xenakis, Ligeti and the Spectral composers. A bit later I went back to the impressionism, but also to the world of electroacoustic music. I am mostly influenced by composers working with the sound as their main form bearing element. Lately, I do not listen very much "old" music as I mostly enjoy discovering new pieces and composers online.

Would you mind speaking a little concerning your working process, i.e., do you have a regular schedule for writing; do you use a computer for composing (either for creating pre composition materials or notation), if so, do you find that it inhibits your process? What other technology, if any, do you use?

I try to compose every day as much as I can sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. The first word for my compositional process is "creative freedom." Other words I like are imagination, detail, interesting, fusion, beautiful, depth, coherence, unity, and clarity. Usually, I start a piece with no systems, no constraints, other than my own brain's capabilities. The first phase is the "Synthetic" process. I would characterize as creative, chaotic, and brainstorming. This phase includes improvisation, recordings (indoors and outdoors), drawings, sketches, etc. It is a rather intuitive, trial and error, process where all the senses are involved at the maximum. The other phase is the "Analytic" process where sound analysis, classification, development, transformation, notation, and reasoning, is taking place. The two phases are alternating each other several times during the composition of the piece, every time in a more refined way.



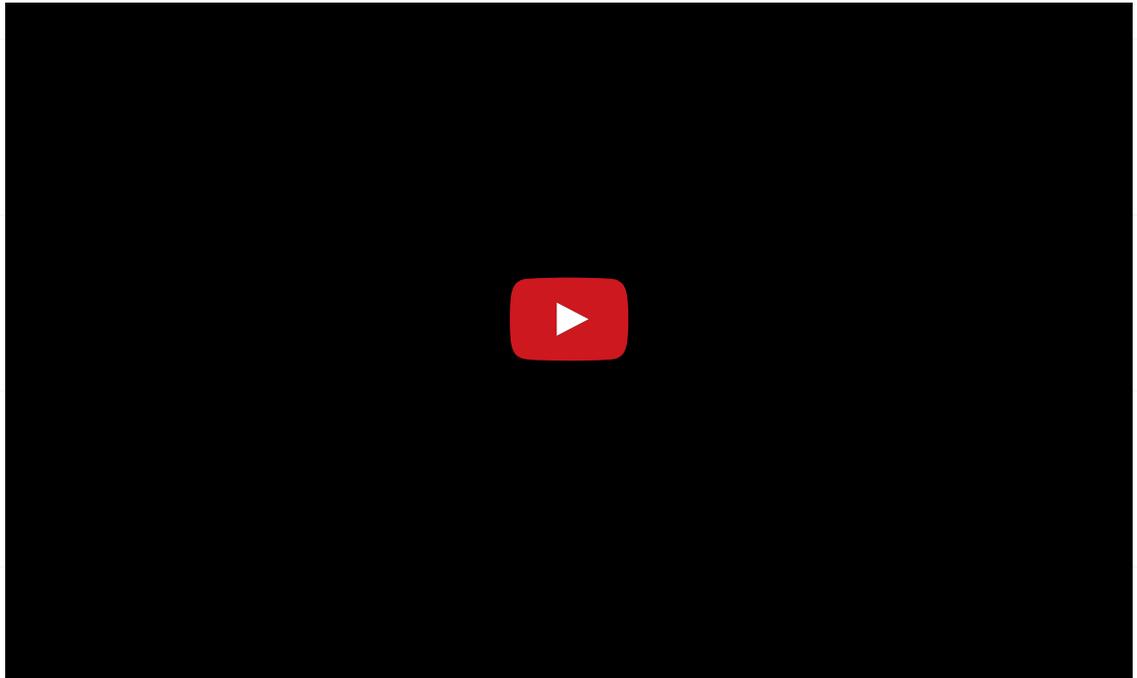
Please describe one of your recent compositions and provide a link to an audio clip.

Susurrus (2011) for amplified piano, violin and cello. Duration 8' 30 minute.

Susurrus was completed in spring 2011 as a commission for the Pharos Arts Foundation 3rd Contemporary Music Festival in Cyprus to be premiered by the Belgian ensemble Musiques Nouvelles. The musical texture of the trio in a large part of the piece is written in Holophonic musical texture, creating a complex network of sounds where the functions as a whole are superior to any other subtotals. The combination of the instruments as a single meta-instrument reveals, creates and processes in great detail and precision, most of the sound palette of the instruments. Before and during the composition of the project more than 600 audio units from violin, cello and piano, recorded in studio and analysed on a computer in order to systematize them on a sound to sound logic.

In my sound composition Susurrus, the relationship between performer and instrument is deliberated upon from the limitations of the traditional classical constraints of "idiomatic" playing or writing. When performing sound, one explores sound possibilities of the instrument beyond its classic sound. It establishes a musical culture where traditional instrumental training in the west has been forgotten or ignored. The classical instrument is challenged out of its long historical context, its repertoire and its traditional training methods. In order for a performer to touch the essence of Susurrus, one should totally deliberate oneself from the past and completely redefine the relationship between performer/instrument, present/past, right/wrong, beautiful/ugly, stable/unstable, predictable/unpredictable.

Susurrus was awarded the second-place prize at the Kazimierz Serocki 13th International Composers' in Warsaw, Poland (no first-place prize was awarded), was the winner of the University of Utah New Music Ensemble Composition Competition 2012 in Salt Lake City, Utah / USA and finalist at the 2011 International Composition Competition at Kunstuniversität Graz in Graz / Austria.



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