

# Video conference on the genesis of "Innocence" by Aleksi Barrière - Spring 2021

I am delighted to talk to you a little about **Innocence** this evening. First and foremost, I would like to thank the Friends of the Aix-en-Provence Festival for this invitation, as well as Timothée Piccard from the Aix Festival who suggested it. So, what is Innocence? It is a new opera composed by **Kaija Saariaho**, which will premiere in July 2021 at the Festival.

To put it another way, it's 100 minutes of music that tell a story. But it's also a creative process that began in 2012, more than eight years ago, which I have been involved in, and it is that story that I would like to tell you about this evening. Not the plot of the opera, because we don't get to discover a new opera as often as we get to discover a new film, especially at the moment, and today we are celebrating a rather sombre anniversary, that of the first lockdown.

So I would like to be careful not to spoil the surprise too much. And the joy that we will soon have of experiencing live art together again. As the writer Philippe Delerm says, 'The first sip of beer is the only one that counts. The others, increasingly long and increasingly bland, only give a lukewarm aftertaste, a wasteful abundance.' " End of quote from Philippe Delerm. That being said, without any animosity, of course, towards the pleasure we get from rediscovering familiar works from the repertoire each season, I think Delerm overlooks the particular but real charm of lukewarm beer.

But to return to the charm of the first sip of beer that we are about to enjoy together, and to the discovery of a new work, in keeping with this spirit, rather than telling you about this work, Innocence, I will tell you how we ourselves discovered it by inventing it. In Latin, the same word is used to mean both inventing and discovering. It all began in 2012 with a commission from the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden.

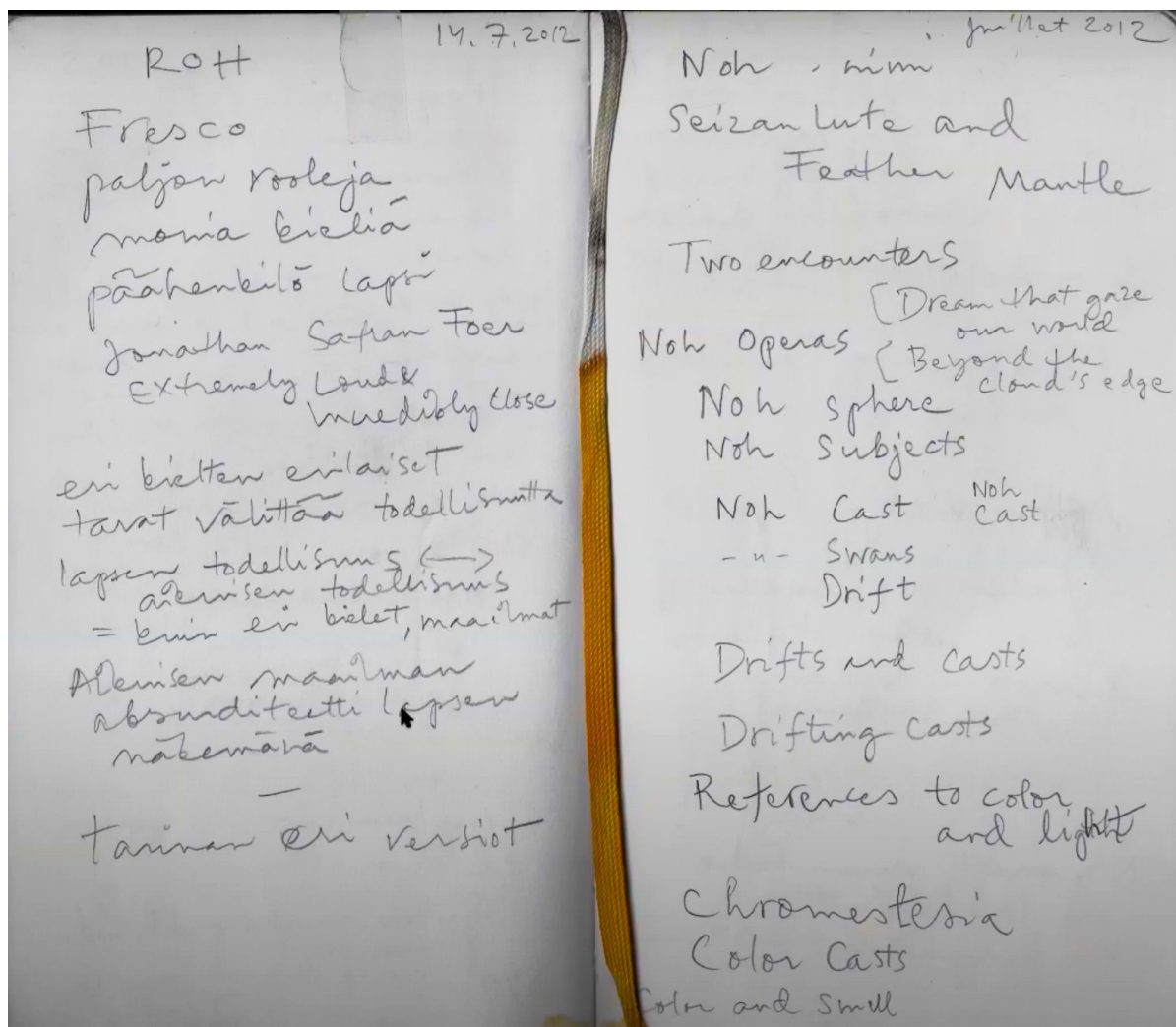
This company then launched a vast programme of commissions, inviting several composers to respond, through opera, to a series of very general questions: What concerns us today? How do we represent ourselves on stage? What are the collective myths of our present and our future? Three fairly general questions, then. Kaija Saariaho saw these questions as an opportunity to do something she was not accustomed to doing as an opera composer: to show a familiar and contemporary reality. The project became more radical in this direction because Kaya was preparing another opera that would become *Only the Sound Remains*, an opera created in 2016 that some of you may have seen at the Paris Opera a few years ago.

*Only the Sound Remains* is a work inspired by two translations of Noh plays, which, due to the form of Noh theatre, presuppose a very tight structure, with two characters, a chamber orchestra and a chamber choir. It is a

a kind of opera that was being written at the time. So what happened was that when Kaija was asked in 2012 to come up with another opera, alongside the one she had already started working on, she imagined a kind of complementary project.

Complementary means opposition. Only the Sound Remains has ancient and distant origins, namely 15th-century Japanese theatre. It was therefore necessary to move towards the contemporary and the local.

Like all of Kaija Saariaho's previous operas, Only the Sound Remains focuses the action on a handful of characters. We must therefore explore a multiplication of the number of characters, their musical characteristics and even their language of expression, as we will soon see, and this is the point that concerns me most as a translator. I am going to show you a document that illustrates very well how these two projects developed in parallel with each other.



It is a double page from Kaya Saariaho's notebook at the time these two projects were conceived. On the right, you can see some ideas for the title. You can see my cursor.

On the title to give to a non-opera opera, which will be *Only The Sound Remains*. She's a bit lost. She hasn't found that title yet.

And on the left, you can see ideas for the project marked ROH, which stands for Royal Opera House. There are several ideas that the composer will move away from, but also the main ideas that she wants to explore and will continue to explore, in particular the idea of a fresco, and the idea of a work in several languages in which several versions of the same story are diffracted. I'm pointing this out because most of you here tonight probably don't read Finnish!

These are fairly clear ideas, but they do not resolve the question of the story to be told. Because an opera, normally, at least in theory, begins with a story, a story that we want to share, that we want to tell, and that we will find a way to tell. So it was because she didn't know what that story was, she hadn't yet discovered or invented it, that Kaija had the idea of asking the novelist **Sofi Oksanen** to write a text.

I don't know if you are familiar with Sofi Oksanen's work, but I highly recommend her novels, most of which are available in English, beautifully translated by Sébastien Cagnoli. Much like Amin Maalouf, also a novelist who has written opera librettos for Kaija Saariaho, Sofi Oksanen has a certain knack for recounting collective situations through individual characters. She is particularly interested in the recent history of Finland and the recent history of her mother's country, Estonia.

So you can see why Sofi Oksanen was the ideal person in Kaija's eyes to tell a story that is both familiar and contemporary. What's more, both artists shared the Finnish language, and working in one's mother tongue is pretty much the opposite of working on English translations of 15th-century Japanese plays. So here we see the parallel growth of these two ideas.

But that still doesn't say much about what will be told, and the discussion between Kaija and Sofi remained open on the question of how to formally introduce this idea of a fresco, and above all this idea of multilingualism, since by her own admission, Sofi, on the one hand, was going to write in Finnish, since that is her writing language, and on the other hand, she had never written an opera libretto and therefore did not know the formal possibilities of a work of this type. And that is where I modestly enter the scene. I had previously written texts as a librettist for Kaija Saariaho's choral pieces.

As a director, I was working on forms of contemporary musical theatre, which are still the focus of my work today as a director. I was also a translator of several languages, including Finnish. Kaija

therefore suggested to Sofi from the outset that I be included in the creative process as a dramaturg and translator.

And so, with this trio in place, the work began. That was in early 2013. The commission was for the opera to be premiered in 2020.

At the time, I might as well tell you that it seemed like a very futuristic date. So we had time, and each of us also had other projects to work on at the same time. But the three of us started meeting regularly. I'm going to apply the majority agreement to the feminine form, there's no reason not to.

So, the three of us got together to develop this project, whose working title was still *Fresco*. The first word Kaija Saariaho wrote down in her notebook as a formal idea of what it should look like.

And I'll go over it again.



*Fresco*. So why *Fresco*? There was this idea, which you probably know from afar, this painting, well, it's not a painting, it's a fresco.

And so, our reflection, since we had to start somewhere, our starting point was Leonardo da Vinci's fresco, *The Last Supper*. Obviously, not because of its subject matter, because I speak certain languages, but I don't speak Aramaic. But because of this idea of several characters gathered in the same place, each of whom seems to be living their own life.

It's a bit chaotic, but we know that they are brought together by a story, which is embodied by the fresco. To be more precise, they are brought together by a drama. A drama that is about to happen, or to be even more precise, a drama that is about to be revealed.

Because it has already begun, in reality. Judas' betrayal has already taken place. Its consequences will unfold relentlessly and imminently.

Everything I'm telling you now may give the vague impression that we had no idea what we were doing. Well, that's not far from the truth, and that was kind of the point, actually.

Kaija Saariaho wanted to experiment with choral dramaturgy, which she had never used before. And Sofi Oksanen was interested in the idea of having several characters present at the same time. Because, she said, that's something that's impossible to achieve in a novel.

For technical reasons, because of how the dialogues and descriptions are organised. Of course, there are novels by Dostoevsky where, on top of that, you get lost in the characters' names. In any case, it's something that's very difficult to achieve in a novel.

Another thing that is very difficult to achieve in a novel, of course, is multilingualism. Generally, we are addressing monolingual readers. For my part, I was put in the position of the expert, the one who gives advice on the possibilities of musical theatre, but I was, of course, just as lost as everyone else.

I was 23 years old, and in my corner, I was working with conductor Clément Mahoutakach on a production that linked Gustav Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*, the Saint-Diouf primary school shooting and the work of mourning in Noh theatre. And all of this, of course, came together on some level. However, in our defence, it must be said that we were looking for the right story to tell, but in fact, it would be an exaggeration to say that we didn't have a subject.

The form we chose reflected a desire to show something specific, namely how a group of people overcome a collective tragedy. And the different languages would allow us to show both their communication difficulties and the way in which each person is isolated, each survivor of a tragedy isolated in their individual experience. So we had the subject, but we didn't have the story.

This is where the three-way conversations were invaluable during those early years of the opera's creation. Sofi asked me for story ideas that had never before been told in the form of an opera. Fortunately, there are still quite a few.

But she also asked herself aesthetic questions relating to her profession as a writer and a certain ethic of the writing profession. Firstly, for her, the subject had to be linked to contemporary Finnish society because Sofi believed, and still believes, that you should write about what you know, that you are justified in writing about what you know, that our contribution as authors is to talk about and bring to the public's attention the things we know. She does indeed ask herself questions, if not other questions, then questions of writerly ethics, since we ask the reader to

suspend their judgement and that writers have a responsibility towards the reality they portray.

Otherwise, they risk being taken a little too seriously on things they don't know very well, but that's a whole other subject. At the same time as there was a fairly significant constraint, to talk about contemporary Finnish society, the plot also had to allow the different languages to be introduced in a way that wasn't artificial.

The question of the plausibility of this multilingualism was also very important to Sofi.

Furthermore, it was necessary to find a pretext for bringing together so many characters who speak different languages in the same place, at the same time, caught up in a shared situation. Since there would be many characters, their roles in relation to each other had to be fairly easy to understand, given that, due to their number, there would not be much time to introduce each of them in detail and explain them, provide information about their activities, their professions, their profiles, etc. This is something we generally have plenty of time to do in a novel, for example, but it's also easier to do in a play or film that focuses on one character.

When there is a gallery of characters, it is inevitably more complicated. One of the first ideas, in trying to bring all these constraints together, was to create a courtroom scene. A trial is clear, we immediately understand who does what, and it unfolds in a very ritualised order that we are all familiar with.

But the fresco of the scene gave Sofi another idea, even more interesting than the previous one, because looking at this fresco that you now have in your mind, it reminded me of wedding photos. A wedding is much less predictable than a trial. In a trial, you understand everything right away... In a trial, as in a wedding, you immediately understand everyone's role in relation to the event; there are archetypes, you can relate to them.

But old family photos, with their stiff smiles, always hint at tensions and secrets that are ready to resurface. And then it allows for much more dramatic things. In a trial, we know right away that something terrible has happened.

That's the principle of a trial. But a wedding, I would say more dramatic, I could say more perverse, from the writer's point of view, a wedding, something beautiful must happen. But it is the past that catches up with the protagonists and the future is called into question by the past.

I'm quoting something Sofi Oksanen said during our discussions about this work. This idea of a future that is coming and is called into question by the past. So, based on these different ideas, Sofi wrote, after two years of discussions between the three of us, which brings us to 2015, the synopsis, then the complete text of a finished work that she called **Cua Caballeras**.

A Finnish title that I translated into English as **The Uninvited Guest**. That was the first draft, so to speak, of the **Innocence** booklet. I have a rather personal reason for being rather

happy that we didn't keep this new provisional title, because, as you'll realise if you try it right now, it's a title that's untranslatable into French.

And as a translator, that didn't suit me. You see, the guest, uninvited, it's not very happy. *L'intruse* is a play by Maurice Néterlin, which would make a very nice opera, by the way, if anyone is interested.

And then *L'incruste*, which would be another possible translation, is more of a title for Francis Weber than for Sofi Oksanen. But so, in 2015, in our exchanges, while writing *The Uninvited Guest*, we tried to develop a form that took into account the constraints we had set ourselves. Sofi imagined this wedding scene unfolding like a classic drama, with a unity of time and place, but interrupted by other voices from the past.

The voices of people involved in a tragedy that occurred some ten years earlier and whose memory would haunt the wedding. The famous tensions that crack the polite veneer and gloves of wedding photos. So you must be wondering, what was this tragedy? I'm obviously not going to tell you now.

We'll have to wait and see in the show. But the important thing is that Sofi has found a dramatic way to connect these two levels of the story and make them both multilingual. The wedding, level number 1, brings together characters of several nationalities.

And level number 2, the tragedy. I continue to call it that because that's what the characters call it in the text, both as a euphemism and to avoid giving it its real name, which suits us here, since we don't want to give it that name. And this tragedy, then, took place in an international school in Helsinki, where, of course, every student is foreign or dual national, which allows for multilingualism.

So our first question in approaching this two-level structure was a formal one. How could we clearly distinguish between these two levels and how could we give the students and their teacher enough text to be interesting, knowing that a text composed to be sung takes a long time to unfold, much longer than a spoken text in theatre, for example. And we wanted a short work, a work that could be performed without an interval, in a single flow, like the thriller we imagined it would be.

So we couldn't take all the time we wanted for each of these characters to tell their stories individually. And that's when I proposed an unusual solution for an opera to Kaija Saariaho and Sofi Oksanen, a solution that was to decide that the wedding would be a kind of opera in the classical sense, performed by opera singers, and that the scenes with the high school students the other level, would call for other solutions, that they would bring together performers who use their voices differently. So some would speak like actors, others would use a mixture of speech and song, and still others would use singing techniques that are not traditionally those of opera.



This also opens up other possible solutions when it comes to staging, which is a later stage in the creative process. But for example, and this is what **Simon Stone**, who will be directing the premiere of this opera, will do, he will use extras and dancers and introduce other characters into this level of narration of the past, which is haunted by all kinds of figures, each with their own unique mode of expression. This solution allowed us to invent a different aesthetic for the two levels of the story, and it allowed Sofi to write more text than she could have in a traditional libretto, since we did not have to worry about lyrical singing for certain parts of the text.

And it allowed Kaija to invent very different musical characters for each of the characters. So watch out, I'm switching back to screen sharing to show you this. It's starting to get busy.

So what we have here is a sketch of the different characters by Kaija Saariaho at the moment when she was asking herself how to characterise them, how to give each character a different vocal style, a different style of musical expression. I'm not going to comment in great detail, except to show you that there are many avenues, many elements that are being explored. For example, the question of tempo.

Each character has a different rhythm, each character is associated with different instruments in the orchestra. For example, this character is associated with the



timpani or this other one who is associated with the harp. And another element, of course, is languages.

Some characters do not even have names yet. In fact, almost none of the characters have names. There is the mother, the father.

We are still in the early stages, in a fairly schematic dramaturgy where the characters have not yet come to life, where they are still in the process of being born. And they are being born both as musical ideas and as dramatic ideas about the role they will play in the drama, in the musical drama. What makes this possible is that the text, the text that Sofi Oksanen wrote, *Uninvited Guest*, was written entirely in Finnish, of course, by Sofi Oksanen.

That was our working basis, our basis for discussion. And so that gave us complete freedom to decide later which language we wanted to introduce from that textual basis. But in addition, it turns out that Finnish is a language that is not gendered.

In Finnish, there is no he or she, there is only one pronoun. And adjectives do not agree in gender. So many of the characters were still of indeterminate sex, if I may say so.

And as we can see, there are attempts here to define things, male, female, to decide. It was a process where we decided, by discussing together on a case-by-case basis, where to assign them a language and all the other elements we might want to define about a character. So obviously, we started with their gender.

And that's where the question of translation comes in. Since it was up to me to do the translations, I naturally suggested languages that I could say, without lying too much, that I spoke well enough or that I knew someone who could translate the text with me. The idea was to avoid additional intermediaries as much as possible, so to make the best use of the languages I knew best myself.

In this respect, one could say that the translated booklet is more autobiographical than the original. I myself was born to a French father and a Finnish mother, so in terms of my ability as a translator to convey the character of the different characters, it seemed quite logical that the character of the groom, who is one of the main characters in the opera along with his parents, should be bilingual with a French mother and a Finnish father. So, in a way, symmetrical to my own situation, someone whose use of both Finnish and French I could easily imagine.

Another anecdotal detail is that I did part of my studies in the Czech Republic, so if a main foreign language was needed for certain characters, it was Czech. Even so, I still needed help to produce Czech that would be spoken, for example, by one of the characters who was born in the Czech Republic. And for that, I also had some help, but I'll come back to that a little later.

And so, of course, the language of communication is English, as in my real life today. And for the languages of the other characters, we chose Swedish, German, Spanish, Greek and Romanian. So that makes a total of nine different languages used in this opera.

And it was through numerous discussions with Sofi and Kaija that we decided which language would shed interesting light on which character and whether it seemed more natural for that character to be male or female. And what's interesting, of course, is that compared to the idea we might have of how an opera is written, there is a text and then, based on that text, there is music. And then the music is given to singers and those singers sing the music and the text.

What's interesting is that the process was, at times, much more organic and circular than that. That is to say, when I showed Sofi bits of the translation, it inspired her and she rewrote and refined the text and characters a lot, based on the identity we had defined together in the language and on the various homological suggestions that it inspired. Because, obviously, texts sound very different in different languages and allow for very different things.

In short, all this brings us to the summer of 2016, when I am translating the libretto and, at the same time, the libretto continues to be written based on this translation.

The point of this work was not to give someone who did not speak the language access to a text in another language. In this case, the original would disappear. It disappears forever, to be replaced by a multilingual libretto that would, in a way, be the new original.

The one that we would have to retranslate in order to provide surtitles for the performance, for example. In reality, Sofi Oksanen's Finnish text would remain in the score, accounting for only 4% of the Finnish text. The text that Kaija would set to music would be the translated text.

It was in this text, above all, that it was necessary to capture the full musical potential of the words and the choices that would bring the characters to life, their characterisation, as they say. The work of a librettist, you might say. Not to mention that these nuances are very different in each language.

English is the easiest, as it is the mother tongue of only one character. The English used is the international idiom, which is not exactly the English spoken by people whose mother tongue is English. It was necessary to calibrate the fact that each character speaks a more or less sophisticated form of English, depending on their supposed level of education.

But for the other languages, we had to be more precise. So I contacted collaborators who were native speakers, unlike me. Very importantly, given the nature of this work, these were people for whom it was the language of their childhood.

But that's not enough, of course. As we know, bilingual people don't necessarily make good translators. We needed people who were in a good position to understand what we were trying to achieve with these translations.

These are people who are themselves translators, playwrights, actors, composers. It really depends on the case. That is to say, above all, more importantly, they understood the difficulty of saying or singing a sentence on stage.

That's another issue, but there are also very competent translators who don't really have experience working for the theatre or working with musicians, for example. These are very specific challenges. Additional constraints, because, you see, in this project, we like constraints.

I chose people from my own generation. So people who were the same age as the student characters, to find the right level of language and vocabulary. Because, once again, you can be an excellent translator, but your language may not really reflect the way our young people speak.

In fact, this work continued until rehearsals last summer. We had a whole series of rehearsals to prepare for the show last summer, when the festival was cancelled. So I continued to edit the text with the performers, who were obviously also recruited for their language skills, to play characters whose mother tongue it is in a credible way.

So they all have an intimate relationship with each language. And so they are also people of the same generation, also due to the requirements of the casting.

So one of the interesting effects of this multilingual form is the relationships that are created, the shadows of people who are called upon to bring this form into being, necessarily. And that's something that's exciting and also quite rare in opera. When you translate a play, it's normal to keep correcting the text, to correct the translation by seeing how it works on stage, together with the performers, discussing with them how it sounds when they say it.

But we rarely have that luxury in opera, where we always print the score and learn it, and then we rehearse. So here, for once, we were able to proceed in this way, which is more typical of theatre, especially with texts that are not singing in the classical sense, and so it was much easier, even for Kaija Saariaho, to make changes in those parts. And so we were able to retain that collective dimension that creation and translation share, which is quite incredible, breathing life into a work and making it exist beyond its author, which is very important for the work we are concerned with this evening.

And so it was at this point in the work that the title came about. The title, *They Are Uninvited Guests*, focused the opera on a single character, which is quite normal, since she was the most developed character in the first draft of the text. She is the character of this intruder who causes the wedding party to degenerate.

But through the different languages, all the other characters began to come to life, and there was no longer a main character. There was really what was the original goal, which is a choral form. So, because each of these characters is trapped in their own relationship, in this event from the past, in the tragedy, and because they remain locked in their guilt, I suggested the title **Innocence**.

And look, this time I managed to find something that was the same in English and French, so I didn't have to worry about it later. In fact, innocence comes from the subject of Leonardo's scene, which shows us the moment when Christ says, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." It's quite interesting. I don't think I'm straying from the subject by asking you to look at Leonardo da Vinci's fresco again.



So it's a scene. The Last Supper is a trial scene. We see Christ, and most commentators believed that this scene takes place just after Christ uttered these words: "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." And all the apostles, then, we see them confused, gesturing in denial, protesting their innocence, literally surprised, shocked, in denial, argumentative, angry.

And indeed, one of Leonardo's original touches in his depiction of this subject is that he does not isolate Judas, unlike many versions from the same period, where Judas is shown at the end of the table or with his back to us, on the other side of the table from the others, the good apostles. Leonardo shows Judas among the apostles, which means that, for the viewer, it could be anyone. The viewer is therefore invited to play detective, so to speak, and try to spot the culprit when they see this fresco for the first time.

One can search for quite a long time before seeing, spotting what a subtle position reveals, such as these two hands that converge. Or this right hand here, nervously clutching the purse containing the famous 30 pieces of silver. And so here, as at the

the end of any detective film or series, exclaim, "That's it, I've found it, I've figured out who it is."

And so, this was a thought that greatly interested us in the creation of Opera, since if Leonardo da Vinci was able to create a thriller on the wall of a Dominican refectory, why couldn't we create a thriller in an opera? I'll stop there on the question of Leonardo da Vinci, since I think the discussion of art history could be the subject of another talk. But this question of the title is really interesting, because it reflects the creative process that I have just summarised for you very clearly. What we might call the antogenesis of the work, if we were to use the vocabulary of a biologist, on its formation in utero.

First, there is Fresco, the composer's formal idea, which could also be the title of a musical work. Then there is The Uninvited Guest, the writer's narrative idea, which could also be the title of a play. And finally, Innocence, the dramaturgical synthesis, I would say, in all modesty.

The moment when it becomes musical theatre, when the tension between the two moves towards a resolution, or at least towards a convergence. And so, it was under the title Innocence that Kaija Saariaho began composing the music in 2016, a work that was completed in 2019. I will skip over the details of those three years, since we don't have three years ahead of us to discuss them together, but of course the dialogue between the three of us continued throughout that period.

Kaija made suggestions for changes to the text, based on her musical requirements or on how the music made her feel about her characters. Because it must also be said that she spent three years with her characters, living with them, trying to bring them to life, trying to understand them, in order to be able to give them music.

So she would ask Sofi or me questions, depending on whether it concerned the plot or the text in its sung form, for which I was responsible as translator.

But what is interesting to observe is how Kaija developed the universe of her opera from her original idea of a multilingual text, now that this text existed. We have seen that the decision to use different types of singers and actors allowed her to characterise each character in a very strong way, and so this work continued in the language, based on the language. What Kaija was looking for from the outset, as we saw when discussing her very first ideas, was the fact that each language has a different musicality and therefore suggests a different kind of music.

While working on the translation, I had my fellow translators read aloud and record the result, so that Kaija would have an audio basis for approaching the new text. She then proceeded in various ways, doing what are known as dictations of her recordings, noting down the melodies she heard in the speech on music paper, and analysing them with computer tools. So that what I'm telling you doesn't seem completely abstruse, I'm going to show you some valuable documents.



| ACT II                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | ACT II                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>SCENE V</b><br><b>THE WEDDING</b>                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>SCENE V</b><br><b>THE WEDDING</b>                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| (The Waitress lays the table for the wedding meal.)                                                                                                                                                                      | (The Waitress lays the table for the wedding meal.)                                                                                                                                                                      |
| The Waitress (to the audience)<br>This morning I was told<br>that one of the waitresses was ill<br>and that I would replace her at a wedding.                                                                            | The Waitress (to the audience)<br>This morning I was told<br>that one of the waitresses was ill<br>and that I would replace her at a wedding.                                                                            |
| Only when I arrived did I realize<br>whose wedding I would attend,<br>to whose mother I would serve wine,<br>to whose father,<br>whose name this bride would take upon herself<br>and with what pride she would take it. | Only when I arrived did I realize<br>whose wedding I would attend,<br>to whose mother I would serve wine,<br>to whose father,<br>whose name this bride would take upon herself<br>and with what pride she would take it. |
| To jméno utnulo māj život<br>je to deset let.                                                                                                                                                                            | My life was ended by that name<br>ten years ago.                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>SCENE VI</b><br><b>THE AFTERMATH</b>                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>SCENE VI</b><br><b>THE AFTERMATH</b>                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Student 5<br>Algunos siempre llevamos<br>los planos de la escuela de nuestros hijos.                                                                                                                                     | Student 5<br>Some of us always carry along<br>the blueprints of their children's school.                                                                                                                                 |
| Student 6<br>Κάποιοι απο εμάς στέκονται έξω απ'το σχολείο κάθε<br>πρωί<br>και περιμένουμε μέχρι τη λήξη των μαθημάτων.                                                                                                   | Student 6<br>Some of us stay every morning close to the school<br>and wait until the classes are over.                                                                                                                   |
| Student 5<br>No podemos dejarlos fuera de vista.                                                                                                                                                                         | Student 5<br>We can't leave them out of our sight.                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Student 6<br>Μόνο λίγοι απο εμάς έχουν δουλειές.                                                                                                                                                                         | Student 6<br>Only a few of us have a job.                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Student 4<br>Oder gehen in Einkaufszentren,<br>zu Sportveranstaltungen oder Konzerten.<br>Nur einige von uns schaffen es                                                                                                 | Student 4<br>Or go to shopping malls,<br>to sports events or concerts.<br>Only a few of us are able to go                                                                                                                |

Here, to show the evolution, we see the text of a scene, with the text as written by Sofi Oksanen. It's in Finnish, which doesn't help you much. Then, in the next step, as if by magic, I worked like this. When we wanted to create the multilingual libretto, I used different colours, which brightened up my days. We can see the transition from this state of the text to this state, with the multilingual text on one side and the English text on the other, which I also produced, because to work on the project, even though we like constraints, we hadn't looked for people who speak nine languages fluently, so we produced an English version of the text, which served as a basis for collective work.

Here is an example, where we see the text in Czech, which is this text, shown here in orange. Kaija listened to the recording I provided her, which was created with my co-translator Linda Duskova, who is a Czech playwright and director. Kaija Saariaho doesn't speak a word of Czech, and she wrote down what she heard in the recording, noting the stressed syllables, and she studied what each word corresponded to, throughout the entire libretto, in order to draw out a music that was truly the music of the Czech language, and which would also be the

music of the character, the character being what is contained in the meaning of the words.

The image shows handwritten musical notation on a page from a notebook. The notation is written on five staves. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are in Hindi: "To jmeno utmulo mij zivot je to deset let." The second staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are in Hindi: "tselehi" and "to jmeno utmulo mij zivot". The third staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are in Hindi: "enplanti" and "nages rasam". The fourth staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are in Hindi: "allen, hidas" and "vun sare". The fifth staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are in Hindi: "I wasthe that one of the" and "Na's". The page is numbered 15 / 19 in the top right corner. The text "STAP - Notenhell, 6 Systeme, WZ, ges. gesch." is visible on the left margin.

And so you will see that this same method has been applied to each character. There are 13 characters in the opera, which is noteworthy, as it is the only formal detail we have retained from Leonardo da Vinci's famous fresco: the number of characters, which is 13.

To go to the end of the life cycle, this was a computer analysis of the speech recordings. We can see that it is the computer that analyses, according to its different parameters, the pitches, the rhythms, what happens when someone speaks, because it is already music, which can be formalised as music.

The screenshot displays a music notation software interface with multiple staves. The top bar includes settings for 'read', 'quantize', 'zoom', and 'select all, legato, cross-staff'. A note 'pour éviter les silences' is visible. The interface shows several staves with musical notation, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. On the right side, there are settings for 'minimaleurle' (1/20, 1/12, 1/10, 1/8, 1/4, 1/2, 1/16, 1/32, 1/64, 1/128, 1/256, 1/512, 1/1024, 1/2048, 1/4096, 1/8192, 1/16384, 1/32768, 1/65536, 1/131072, 1/262144, 1/524288, 1/1048576, 1/2097152, 1/4194304, 1/8388608, 1/16777216, 1/33554432, 1/67108864, 1/134217728, 1/268435456, 1/536870912, 1/1073741824, 1/2147483648, 1/4294967296, 1/8589934592, 1/17179869184, 1/34359738368, 1/68719476736, 1/137438953472, 1/274877906944, 1/549755813888, 1/1099511627776, 1/2199023255552, 1/4398046511104, 1/8796093022208, 1/17592186044416, 1/35184372088832, 1/70368744177664, 1/140737488355328, 1/281474976710656, 1/562949953421312, 1/1125899906842624, 1/2251799813685248, 1/4503599627370496, 1/9007199254740992, 1/18014398509481984, 1/36028797018963968, 1/72057594037927936, 1/144115188075855872, 1/288230376151711744, 1/576460752303423488, 1/1152921504606846976, 1/2305843009213693952, 1/4611686018427387904, 1/9223372036854775808, 1/18446744073709551616, 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Some composers compose on the piano and then orchestrate for the full orchestra. Kaija Saariaho, on the other hand, writes directly for the orchestra, which means that she first imagines the vocal line and then imagines what instrumentation is needed. This is obviously an extremely complex and tedious task, and on average, in a full day's work, she writes about fifteen seconds of music. It's easy to see why it took three years.

So, that gives you an idea of the different layers that are added to the original translated text, transformed into music. And it is this material that is created in the way I have shown you, with characters characterised by the music of their language, characterised by tempi, characterised by the instruments that accompany them.

This forms the basic grammar of this opera, *Innocence*. And you will hear during the performances that each character is very recognisable thanks to this work, and that sometimes their presence is felt in the orchestra's music even when the character themselves is absent. As if to announce them, for example, to evoke their memory.

One could even say that the entire process of composing *Innocence* consisted of inventing a musical universe in which these different languages coexist. How they collaborate and make music. It forms a colourful, extremely subtle fabric, the subtlety of the orchestration of this writing.

So it's a musical universe that is defined by this movement. Everything is translated in every direction, all the time. It's an opera born out of translation as a movement.

An infinite transposition, the search for a voice in the text, which is the very movement of translation. The search for a voice in the text is a definition that I offer you. A movement from me to the other, to me, word for word, and in the case of opera, note for note.

To complete this description of the process, I could perhaps give you a little preview, because I'm keeping quite a few things from you, and let you listen to this same page that I've just shown you the different stages of, as sung by Magdalena Kožená at the last piano rehearsal last summer. It's not quite the finished opera, with everything that the orchestra and choir will bring to it, but you can already hear a little of the music that emanates from the translated text. It's a sound sequence that begins in English and culminates in Czech.

When Kaija composed these measures, another interesting fact about the obligatory stages of the opera, she knew that Magdalena Kožená would be singing the role, so she was able to both design this music in relation to Magdalena Kožená's vocal range and rely on the fact that she would do justice to every inflection of the Czech language, since that is Ms Kožená's mother tongue, of course as her name suggests. New screen sharing. I'm going to... But I remain, of course, very... How can I put it? Frustrated, since I'm not going to show you any images of this rehearsal, but you'll hear from the quality of the video that it is a rehearsal, that we're taking you into this rehearsal room, you'll hear the sound of footsteps, the sound of the set being moved, the sound of props.

So you really have to imagine yourself there, in a rehearsal room. There, we continue to be in the place where music is happening, where it is being created, not in a show. ...

<https://pigyki.fr/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Innocence-extrait-conference.mp3>

So that was Magdalena Kožená, and at the end, just a little bit, the next scene where we'll see how it all fits together, how these two voices come in, in this case, it was the tenor Camino Delgado Diaz, who, the character, is Spanish-speaking.

And then you also heard some Greek from Marina Dumont. All of this was accompanied by Alain Miller on the piano, pianist, vocal coach and répétiteur. And under the musical direction of Susan Amalki and Clément Malota-Grach.

I have deliberately chosen not to reveal what will happen on stage, because it is still at an advanced stage of development. This is what director Simon Stone will bring to the issues I have raised, offering a unique interpretation in his staging. And so, I will leave you the pleasure of discovering it for yourselves this summer.

If you have already seen a Simon Stone production, you know that he has a keen sense of rhythm, whatever else one may think of him, and a particular sense of changes in rhythm. So you can be sure that he will make very interesting use of the extreme rhythmic variations in Kaija Saariaho's music. All those individual pulsations we were talking about, which overlap in the 100 minutes of this non-stop musical thriller.

Together, these pulses make music, and it is music that pulses, different pulses intertwined, just like life itself. It is music that is very organic in character. We are now approaching the inevitable conclusion, since at the stage of development I have reached, all that remains is to come on stage.

What is interesting is that, while rereading my exchanges with Kaia and Sophie in preparation for this talk, I realised that our first meeting in Troyes was in March 2013, exactly eight years ago. It seems like a long time ago, of course, firstly because time has flown by, and secondly because the violent events we have all collectively experienced have reminded us that this opera is sadly contemporary. The way in which we as a society experience grief and guilt, and how we deal with healing trauma, is a burning issue and, unfortunately, a very topical one.

Innocence is an opera that rejects the complacency with which most artistic and cultural forms cultivate a morbid fascination with monsters and violence. It is an opera with 13 guilty parties, but these guilty parties are above all 13 victims.

It is an opera that deals with what normally happens after the final act of the opera. Post-traumatic shock, the grieving process, the status of victims, survivors who blame themselves and tear each other apart, the difficulty of saying that life goes on,



but also, we might say, the courage to assert that there will be no world afterwards. There will be no return to normal after the disaster.

Firstly because there were consequences, but also because there was nothing normal to return to in the world that could have produced the disaster. We mourn the loss of an innocence that was a dream. The experience of this concerns us all intimately, but above all it is a collective experience.

Shakespeare says this beautiful thing in *Romeo and Juliet*. He mocks scars, he who has never felt an open wound within himself. In the dialogue that began with the creation of this work, first between three people, then between several translators across Europe, and now with a vast international team of artists, craftspeople and technicians who are formidable, I have been able to see this work come into being, buzzing with the languages that can be heard mixing today in our cities and regions, and see it become a collective project that transcends its creators, that is to say, a living work.

This is obviously its original and ultimate destination. From the beginning, as you have seen from the elements I have shown you, it is its form itself, and its subject, and its subject is its form. I am delighted that, finally, I will be able to share it with you this summer and that we will be able to discuss it together, because I think we will all agree that we have had enough of watching television at home and that it is now time to fill the theatres together.

So long live live performance, its artists, and above all its audiences. That's all from me, and thank you for your attention.

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To round off this brilliant lecture, I would like to point out that Aleksis Barrière is a playwright, translator, librettist and director. He is also the son of... Kaija Saariaho! Finally, here is the link to watch the opera "*Innocence*", beautifully filmed and subtitled in French:

