

flying carpet 2013

# Odyssey

## Three Short Operas

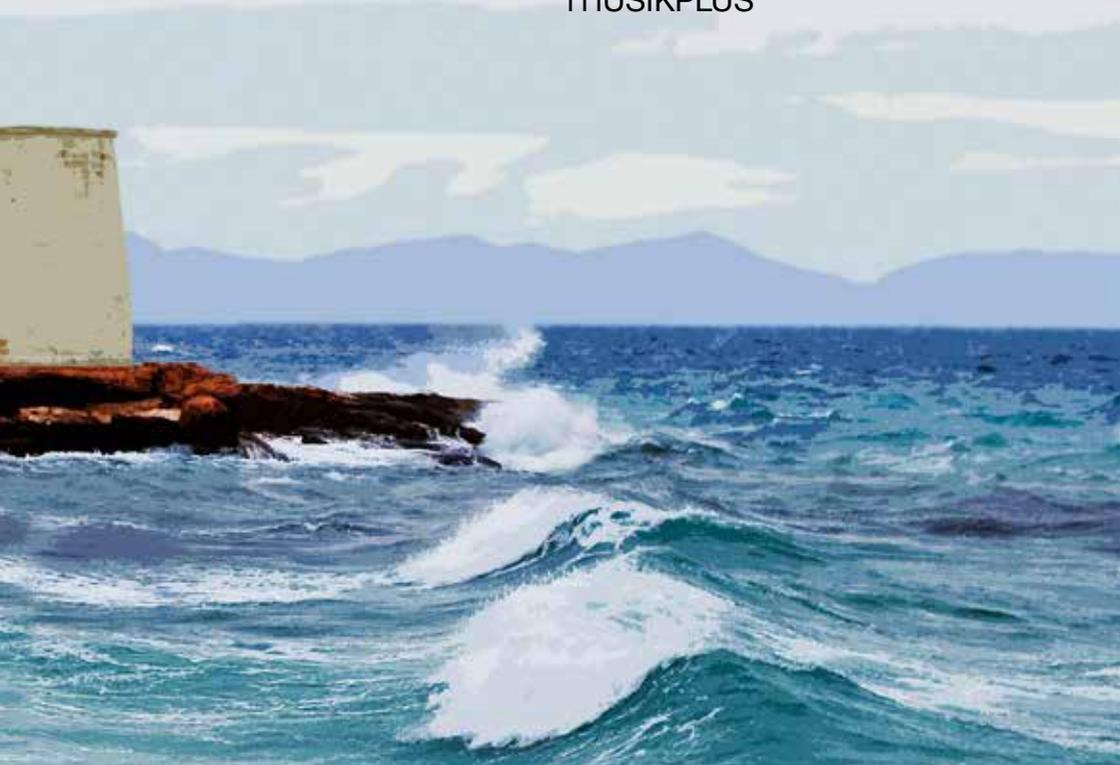
for children, youths  
and adults

by

Sinem Altan (Turkey),  
Amos Elkana (Israel) and  
Giorgos Koumendakis  
(Greece)

A performance of  
opus21musikplus  
based on an idea of  
Konstantia Gourzi

opus21  
MUSIKPLUS



## Three Short Operas

for children, youths and adults

### Sinem Altan

\*1985

### Turkey

#### Lotus-Insel

World Premiere

Short Opera in  
Turkish language

Libretto:

### Selmin Altan

#### Soloists

Nilüfer (soprano)  
Mutter von Su und Poyraz  
(mezzo-soprano)  
Su (girl's voice)  
Poyraz (tenor)  
Ak sakalli Dede –  
Der ältere Mann als  
Traumbild (bass)  
Inselbewohner,  
Lotosblumen  
(children's choir)

#### Instrumentation

Baglama, duduk / mey,  
flute, oboe, clarinet /  
saxophone, French horn,  
trombone, harp, piano,  
percussion, string quintet

### Amos Elkana

\*1967

### Israel

#### The Journey Home

World Premiere

Short Opera in Hebrew,  
Arabic, English language

Libretto:

### Edna Kedar-Arav

extracts of the poem  
*Ithaka* by K. Kavafis  
Arabic translation:  
Soha Kadry  
English translation:  
Amos Elkana  
Transliteration:  
Yehudit Elkana  
English translation *Ithaka*  
by Edmund Keeley /  
Philip Sherrard

#### Soloists

Yehudit / Aysha (soprano)  
Mutter von Ali /  
Mutter von Judith (alto)  
Ali / Avraham (tenor)  
Ali's Vater / Eliahu /  
Polizist / Sohn (bass)  
children's choir

#### Instrumentation

flute, oboe, clarinet /  
saxophone, French horn,  
trombone, harp, piano,  
accordion, percussion,  
string quintet

### Giorgos Koumendakis

\*1959

### Greece

#### Omiros-Orimos

World Premiere

Short Opera  
in Ancient Greek

Libretto:

Parts from Homer,  
*Odyssey* edited by

### Giorgos Koumendakis

#### Soloists

Pinelopi (soprano)  
Evrikli (mezzo-soprano)  
Tilemaxos (tenor)  
Odysseas (bass)  
children's choir

#### Instrumentation

flute, oboe, clarinet /  
saxophone, French horn,  
trombone, bayan,  
percussion, string quintet

Commissions from

**opus21musikplus**

sponsored by

**Ernst von Siemens  
Musikstiftung**

#### World Premiere

4 October 2013, 8pm

#### Further performances

5 and 6 October 2013, 8pm  
Introduction at 7pm

#### Location

Carl-Orff-Saal, Gasteig, Munich

#### Ticket prices

25 Euro, 20 Euro, 15 Euro  
reduced 10 Euro



**Konstantia Gourzi**

Conductor, Composer,  
Initiator and Artistic Director  
*opus21musikplus*



Dear audience,

Welcome to *flying carpet 2013 – Odyssey!*

I am delighted to fly with you over these three days, and across three different worlds; to experience three different cultures, and tradition and modernity together!

You will see and hear three half-hour operas by composers from Israel, Turkey and Greece, in Turkish, Hebrew, Arabic and Ancient Greek. They will be performed by four soloists, a children's choir and fifteen musicians from Ensemble *opus21musikplus*.

The operas are interpreted in such a way that an arc of dramatic tension connects all three. They will therefore be performed one after the other, without a break.

*flying carpet* uses traditional fairy tales and myths from throughout the world as a source of inspiration for composers, to write a contemporary opera for children, young people and adults. The idea is to translate the ancient into the language of today, and illuminate it anew. This concept should grow over the next few years, and, from its birthplace of Munich, fly to still more places.

For *flying carpet's* first production, I chose *The Odyssey*. It is an ancient source that is highly relevant to us all today, be we young or old. Who is Odysseus? Who reaches their goals? How does victory alter the character? How important is home? What is home?

It was important to me that the three composers came from the Eastern Mediterranean, for the social and political conflicts force those who live there to engage with The Odyssey's questions. I gave each of the three composers a theme, to couple in their opera with a story of their choice. Sinem Altan from Turkey composed **Lotus Insel**, on the theme of migration and integration. Amos Elkana (Israel) composed **The Journey Home** around the idea of victory, hubris and defeat. Giorgos Koumendakis (Greece) composed **Omiros-Orimos** around the theme of homecoming (*Omiros* is the Greek word for Homer, and *Orimos* means to be mature).

*flying carpet 2013 – Odyssey* is the high point of an education programme I initiated: *opus21musikplus live in primary schools*. The opera should also be the beginning of a new education project. It is about the realisation of a vision which began in 2008: through the creative collaboration of people from different backgrounds, classic themes are cast in a new light, and presented on stage for children, young people and adults.

From the very beginning, we gave the children in our education programme considerable challenges, which they handled with great ease, individuality and intensity. What is often almost impossible for adults was easy for them! The idea to offer children the highest quality very early on, and thereby to activate their "antennae" for freedom and self-awareness, was wonderfully realised by the education programme from the start.

At the start of the education programme I wanted to discover – using a coincidentally selected Munich primary school – how much children's personality and social behaviour developed, if we worked with them over an extended period and on the highest artistic level. We combined contemporary music with painting, dancing and writing, for creativity promotes listening! Working with the children confirmed again to me that new music is nothing other than an expression of the world today. Children should start collecting experiences, with all their hearts, and as early as possible, that they may later decide consciously for themselves what they consider beautiful and good.

It is very important to express oneself as early as possible through music and movement, in order to develop oneself and also to find balance. And children need strong hearts in order to learn. To discover freedom through music and art, to learn to recognize traditional symbols, to feel strength, to love oneself and also to learn how to build things for oneself helps children, and indeed us all, very much.

We have tried out many ideas, using intuition and careful attention rather than textbooks or lesson plans. We have adapted to the needs of the children, allowed them to experiment, aroused their curiosity and let their imaginations grow. We saw how much the children developed, and how naturally they could perform world premieres of new music (for example, the concluding performances small *flying carpet I, II and III*). This is a very hopeful sign of a resuscitation of the commonly – until now – frigid concert presentation that does not only happen to contemporary music.

I am lucky enough to have had fantastic colleagues, who have been at my side throughout these experiments: they have assured the consistently high quality of the project. From this education programme, *flying carpet* has been born. It is not only about the children, but also about their parents, teachers and the other adults. At the end of the day, it concerns us all.

This June, alongside preparing the opera, we launched a Bavaria-wide art competition with the theme *flying carpet 2013 – Odyssey*. We received more than two hundred wonderful pictures. Many thanks to all the children and young people who took part! On October 4th, 2013, we will all experience the premiere of *flying carpet 2013 – Odyssey*! This opera also incites an idea that carries us further and helps us to find a new everything that we desire, and everything that we have lost along our way. Our magic carpet flies with us all and brings us to three countries, three cultures, which unfold themselves on stage with our cast of all ages; weave themselves around them, and touch our hearts.

My own heartfelt thanks to the wonderful composers, the soloists, the musicians, children's choir and the entire team, who have accompanied and realized *flying carpet 2013 – Odyssey*, as well as to all sponsors and supporters, without whom the opera also could not have happened!

*Konstantia Gourzi*





**Sinem Altan**  
Composer

Abstract of the story line  
by Sinem Altan

## Lotus-Insel

Three strangers enter the lotus island, in a fierce storm. They are a family: the mother, the elder son Poyraz, and the little daughter Su. They meet the islanders, who at first observe them cautiously, until the young islander Nilüfer steps forward. Poyraz explains the reason for their journey. They are searching for the healing lotus juice for their mother. Nilüfer tells them about the desolate state of the lotus blossom, and offers them a lotus fruit. As they draw closer, as if hypnotized, they are interrupted by an anxious Su. Despite Nilüfer's warning, first the mother, and then Poyraz go up to the flowers, and both fall into a deep sleep. Su does not dare go any further, until the grandfather she knows from her dreams appears. Following his words, she manages to bring the blossom to life again, with the help of her music. Su's joy in having helped to heal her mother, and also the great recognition afforded her by the islanders, leads her to an unexpected discovery. This appears to show her a new way, and forces the family to make a decision: stay, or go.



Two questions for Sinem Altan about dealing with the *Odyssey* and composing for kids, youths and adults.

**From your contemporary perspective, how do you see the connection between Konstantia Gourzi's motto of migration and integration, and the Odyssey?**

For me, migration is an eternal oscillation between what one has left, and those to whom you feel you belong (possibly, those to whom you constantly have to claim to belong). The Odyssey's experiences of staying and going precisely engage with this oscillation. There are certain goals, which one follows, and on the other hand something unexpected always happens, which influences your perspectives about past and present. So I see integration as a broad perspective in life experience.

**Has composing an opera in which children play important roles had a fundamental effect on your compositional approach? If so, how?**

I developed many physical, intuitive elements in the lines of the songs and the rhythmic motifs, which became formative parts of their, and other figures. In this way the children's involvement made my work much freer and less inhibited. The central song of the lotus island, *Love* (sung by Su and the lotus flowers), is the setting of a song, which I first wrote when I was ten after a poem by my mother. The opera therefore has an additional connection to my own childhood and my very first works.

Abstract of the story line by Amos Elkana

# The Journey Home

It is the early twentieth century. Ali, an eighteen-year-old Arab from Nablus, decides not to go into the family business, and to travel instead. The family denounces him, and Ali leaves Nablus for Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem Ali meets Eliahu, an elderly Jew, who invites him to spend time with him and his family. Ali finds out that Jews are actually nice, ordinary people. He decides to convert to Judaism. After a year his conversion is complete and he is given a new name: Avraham.

Time goes by and Avraham becomes a respected member of the Jewish community in Jerusalem. He is good-looking, his Hebrew is fluent, he has work, and money. With Eliahu's encouragement, Avraham meets a Jewish woman, Yehudit; they fall in love and marry.

Yehudit's mother lives together with them. She does not like Avraham. She criticises his drinking, his job, and his treatment of her daughter and grandchildren. Their battles become more and more frequent and bitter. One day, a terrible fight breaks out between Avraham and his mother-in-law. He leaves his home in a rage and roams the streets of Jerusalem. He is in agony, upset and confused.

A British policeman arrests him for looking suspicious and not carrying ID. The British authorities don't believe his story and are convinced he is a spy. They do not believe his story of conversion and love, and he remains in jail. After a while Avraham's parents learn of his situation and come to visit him.

Avraham's parents try to convince him to go back with them to Nablus, and return to Islam. Avraham refuses. He cannot bear the thought of leaving his wife and children. A year later, his parents come again. This time they succeed in convincing him, they release him from prison and he goes back to Nablus with them.

Meanwhile, war breaks out and the borders are closed. Avraham, now known as Ali again, cannot go back to Jerusalem. After a while in Nablus Ali meets an old friend, Aysha, a Muslim woman, and they fall in love. Very quickly a wedding is arranged. There is a big celebration and they get married.

Everybody is very happy about Ali's marriage and his return to Islam - except Ali. He misses his Jewish family. Many years later, Ali becomes very ill and writes a letter to his Jewish wife and children. He asks to see them one last time before he dies. Shortly afterwards, Ali dies and is buried in Nablus. The two families meet at his grave.

*Based on a true story*



**Amos Elkana**  
Composer

Two questions for Amos Elkana about dealing with the *Odyssey* and composing for kids, youths and adults.

**From your contemporary perspective, how do you see the connection between Konstantia Gourzi's victory / hubris / defeat, and the *Odyssey*?**

Ali's personal story is filled with many little victories and defeats. He is *victorious* over his father and leaves his home (the father is defeated). He is welcomed in Jerusalem and is *adopted* by the Jewish community and thus victorious again. He succeeds in getting married and having a family. But, he also is constantly fighting with his mother in law and he runs away from his home thus defeated. In our story there are many more instances of this. All these little, personal victories and defeats are strongly linked to *hubris*. Pride and self confidence accompany Ali in every step of the way. But one must realize that this pride and self confidence, this *hubris*, are also an essential element in the local culture and tradition which largely account to the situation in the middle east over the past centuries including the time of Ali's life and still today. And thus we return again to victories and defeats on a much larger scale. Religions, cultures and traditions of this part of the world are very much nourished by victories and defeats in wars, both military and others. In the end in spite of small and large victories the people of the middle east are essentially defeated due to hubris.

**Has composing an opera in which children play important roles had a fundamental effect on your compositional approach? If so, how?**

The fact that children are involved in this project had a tremendous effect on the way I composed this opera. I decided to give the children choir a special role, they sing the famous poem *Ithaca* by Cavafy throughout the entire opera. The juxtaposition of this poem with the libretto of my opera makes it seem that the poem constantly and allegorically comments on the events happening in the libretto.

I composed the poem in such a way that it would be relatively easy for children to sing but also act as transition between various scenes of the opera. So in fact it is the children who act as the wise man and who *comment* on the story of the sometimes foolish adults.

Abstract of the story line by Giorgos Koumendakis

# Omiros-Orimos

*Omiros-Orimos* consists of four recognitions of Odysseus, and one game at the end. Odysseus's son, wife, and trusted friend all find it difficult to recognize him, because of how he has physically and psychologically changed. Only his dog recognizes him immediately. Odysseus accepts these initial difficulties, patiently waiting for the approval and love of his people.

First scene: Telemachus recognizes his father Odysseus. Together, they plot to kill the suitors. Second scene: Odysseus is recognized by his dog. Third scene: Odysseus's nurse, Evriklia, washes his feet. She sees his old wound, made by a boar's teeth, and she recognizes him. Fourth scene: Odysseus is recognized by Penelope, his wife.

The opera concludes with a test: a game of offers. Children, playing, are forced unwillingly to offer what they are playing with to Odysseus. It is an allegorical process by which Odysseus accumulates knowledge and wisdom, but through the suffering of the innocent children, also a sense of the dark side of our era. Odysseus stands as a preserver of knowledge and life experience for future generations. This wisdom both exists and does not exist; it manifests itself very diversely, and each individual must explore it alone. In the final bars of the opera, Odysseus plays darts with the children. As he aims his darts, the children stamp their feet rhythmically, and the lights dim, obscuring the target. In any case, it is unimportant who wins. Odysseus's journey is an adventurous game. It is a psychological journey, by which he comes to know himself. The world he explores is that of his spirit. He stands still in the centre of the earth, letting it turn around him.

Returning to his family from a journey he never made, he tells his child, and the children of his friend, that now it is their turn: their time to play and know themselves. It is time to stand still, to journey to the centre of the self, in the company of others.



**Giorgos Koumendakis**  
Composer

Two questions for Giorgos Koumendakis about dealing with the *Odyssey* and composing for kids, youths and adults.

**What do you consider to be the connection between Konstantia Gourzi's theme of *homecoming*, and *The Odyssey*?**

The *Odyssey* is the adventure of one person, who through his various experiences either develops a new personality, or finds himself again. My Odysseus comes home wiser and more mature. His migration is internal, in order to discover his new I. He returns home after he has come to know a part of himself, which before his wanderings had been obscured.

He comes home after many years, to live there. It is an open, friendly place, an outward-looking, Mediterranean landscape. It is an area with open borders and a gentle language, without guttural tones. There is space inside it for different concepts of reality. Children play in the fresh air and collect their toys from the beach, everything that the waves throw up, worked on by nature. These objects are exactly like Odysseus himself, as time goes on: buffeted by the sea salt, wind and experience of life and death, he discovers his character anew out of the depths of himself. Odysseus is the first to recognize himself, and then he is recognized by others. The superhero returns as a demystified antihero. His tools are symbolic and illustrative, a shocking antithesis for a well-organised, highly productive, rational community. Odysseus's home is

not nationally fenced-off. Half its people are migrants, refugees and those in exile, who all share the experiences they bring with them. Odysseus does not return home as a despairing middle-aged man, but rather as a mature human being, who is not afraid to challenge the rotten and failed structures which have taken hold in his absence. His weapon is wisdom, humble, and his companion is time, which lacks all panic or hurry. The children are Odysseus's alter ego. They are the part he left behind him, and that he discovers anew and learns to take heed of.

**Has composing an opera in which children play important roles had a fundamental effect on your compositional approach? If so, how?**

The children's presence dictates the basis and the content of the opera more dramaturgically than musically. The children are the dramatic solution. They bring a new ethical order, which characterizes itself more and more as the opposite of a comfortable, superficial and spiritually impoverished existence. In this way the children are the ones who receive the story and cause life to continue.



Questions for the director Martina Veh about the interpretation of the *Odyssey* and the work with, and for children.

**What do you think is special or unusual about an opera production created with, and for children? About an evening where the children's roles are as important as the adult ones?**

There is not anything particular about it. Children are people like everyone else. They live in the same world as adults. As a director, I have no patience with the term "children's opera". I would only remark that our so-called education system has not yet eradicated honest curiosity and the ability to question from every child. One could therefore perhaps say to an extent, that children are a more objective, and therefore more rigorous audience. As artists, they are as hard-working and interested as any other singers. What is particular in all three operas is that the chorus plays a very large part.

In terms of content, the product asks a much more essential question: what world are we leaving behind us for our children. This is no question for a playroom, and nor is it a first-world problem of an affluent society in which even children are like special status symbols. Rather, it is a global question, which all human beings must ask themselves.

For me, it is exactly this that is the special aspect of this very international production. It is not relevant that we all come from very different lands and cultures, this is the case in many music theatre productions. What I do find unbelievably moving is that we all engage with the question of our differences in an artistic sense.



**In your production, what connection do you make between the three operas? How do you and Alexander Polzin see the content and the characters?**

A glamorous, mysterious player – it could be Odysseus, hero of western civilization, legendary charlatan – leads us in all kinds of roles through the three short operas.

**First Short Opera: LOTUS ISLAND by Sinem Altan**

*Poyraz* (Turkish for "squall") and his little sister Su (Turkish for "water") are stranded with their mother on a strange lotus island, a watery world full of lilies and creepers. It is a heady world of forgetfulness, without solid ground, but it is also a world of hope. They are looking for a cure for their sick mother. She is suffering from her identity. Just as the world of water reflects everything – light, the sparkling surface of glamour and fame and also a person themselves, so is every self a half-full or half-empty glass of water, that can always be called into question.

A loss of the self begins. There is a longing for purity, a cleansing of the stagnant water, the tiny blossoms and the fruits from which lifeblood no longer flows. There are visions of redemption, and a dreamt-of world of perfect love, embodied by the wise old man Ak Sakalii Dede, who carries the innocent little girl Su into the world in order to change it, that beauty may be reborn.

We portray the characters of each tale like those in comics. What world do they come from? Into what world will the healed mother go back to, at the end? Whatever this world may be – if she calls it home, and it feels like home, this is what she is longing for. Perhaps longing is the mother's illness. At home she suffers from wanderlust, and the wish to be someone else. Far away, she is homesick, wishes to be at one again with her home.



On the other hand, what happiness do Nilufer (a type of water lily) and her world of plants hope for – a world that is not healthy either? Or is this world of plants, devouring as it is of people and their hopes, simply a principle of nature? Is there a type of automatic instinct to seek whatever balance that will heal each world?

#### **Second Short Opera: THE JOURNEY HOME by Amos Elkana**

I would personally describe this short opera as the nucleus of a full-length work. In glaringly sharp, almost documentary-like highlights this composition is on the tail of the protagonists' human situation. Their lives are marked by courage, failure and the struggle between two equally powerful identities: on the one hand, the chosen identity, and on the other the one you are given in the structures that surround you from birth. The latter can also surface anew in the course of one's life, and perhaps become a question of choice.

Hardly any other story – and the libretto is based on a true story – makes it so clear what the choice or acquisition of personal identity can mean, especially in times of war, violence and persecution.

#### **Third Short Opera: OMIROS-ORIMOS by Giorgos Koumendakis**

Space. Time. Becoming an adult. The homecoming of the 'grown-up' Odysseus is a story that can also be found in every family, also families today, which makes its mythical validity all the more noticeable. Perhaps Odysseus, as he tries to find himself, never really left home. What happens after the longed-for homecoming? What happens regarding the world Odysseus left behind? A hero's world? Or the one of a charlatan? The world of his permanent absence? What picture do people paint of a permanently absent family member, and how do they cope when he tries to come home?



Thoughts on the characters:

*Odysseus*, hero of western culture! But if one examines Homer's text more exactly, one finds above all a good storyteller. Does Odysseus tell the truth? If so, then which truth? How does this Odysseus want to explain himself? As a warrior, with a lion in his blood, roaring in battle, whose wisdom and clever negotiation show the way? He is the one who allegedly, tirelessly powers through the world and thereby avoids going home.

*Telemachos*, the son, encounters the process of becoming grown-up by actively seeking and finding his father, who challenges him. *Telemachos* is the first who tries to draw Odysseus's bow, in the last scene of the opera, while the children quarrel over who may prove themselves in the bow contest. *At the moment when Odysseus meets his dying dog*, Odysseus realizes that he has missed his dog's growth and prime, and also that he has missed his son growing up. *Amme Euryklia*, a blind woman in our opera, preserves herself by hoping for the return of the master of the household, and the restoration of her imagined order – coupled with the thirst for bloody revenge. Above all, *Penelope* has the main role in waiting, and all its associated anxieties and torpor of spirit and soul. She is full of contradictions: patience and impatience, loving memory and rage, pride and shame. *Penelope and Odysseus* have almost nothing to say to one another. Odysseus even has to be forced to face his wife. This is entirely ossified and cold. Fear and scepticism govern the situation. Only after the couple have lain together can they begin to tell each other about their real lives.

*A world is played out. Another, new world arises, with all its loss and gain.*