

## mar'eh for Violin and Orchestra

### Matthias Pintscher

**M**atthias Pintscher is among the most widely applauded German composers of his generation. He studied violin, piano, and percussion while growing up in the industrial heart of North Rhine-Westphalia and already as a youngster gained his first experiences as a conductor. From his earliest years he evinced a fascination with the sonic capacities of orchestras. "The orchestra," he has said, "is still my instrument; the possibilities of the colors are so seductive, because you can do everything with them."

Having established himself as a conductor, he currently serves as music director of the Ensemble Intercontemporain, which he leads at its home in Paris and on frequent tours throughout Europe, Asia, and America. This season he also occupies the creative chair for Zurich's Tonhalle Orchestra; is artist-in-residence at the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra; and completes a nine-year tenure as artist-in-association of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. He worked with the Karajan Academy of the Berlin Philharmonic during the 2017–18 season; in 2016–17 he was the inaugural composer-in-residence for the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg; and from 2016 through 2018 he was principal conductor of the Lucerne Festival Academy Orchestra. In 2020 he will serve as music director of the Ojai Festival in California.

Pintscher previously served as composer-in-residence for an international array of leading orchestras and musical establishments, including The Cleveland Orchestra (2000–02), Lucerne Festival (2006), Radio Saarbrücken Orchestra (2006–07), Cologne Philharmonic (2007–08), Stuttgart Radio Symphony (2008–09), and Zermatt Festival in Switzerland (2009). His achievements have been recognized through numerous awards, including the Salzburg Easter Festival

Prize and Hindemith Prize of the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival (both in 2000); the Grand Prix de l'Académie Charles Cros and the Belgian Prix Cecilia (both in 2001); the Hans Werner Henze Prize (2002); and, in 2004, membership in the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts.

He is a familiar presence on the podiums of celebrated orchestras of Europe and the United States, and last month he led the world premiere of the opera *Violetter Schnee*, by the Swiss composer Beat Furrer, at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden in Berlin. He has been professor of composition at The Juilliard School since 2014, having previously taught at the University of Music and Performing Arts Munich (2007–09) and New York University (2010–11).

Pintscher's substantial catalogue includes numerous chamber compositions, a ballet, and two full operas: *Thomas Chatterton* (premiered in 1998 at the Saxon State Opera in Dresden), and *L'Espace dernier*, a four-part musical theater piece (introduced in 2004

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## IN SHORT

**Born:** January 29, 1971, in Marl, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany

**Resides:** in New York City, and Paris, France

**Work composed:** 2011, on commission from the Lucerne Festival, Alte Oper Frankfurt, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra; dedicated "In memory of Luigi Nono; for Julia Fischer"

**World premiere:** September 11, 2011, in Lucerne, Switzerland, by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Vladimir Jurowski, conductor, Julia Fischer, soloist

**New York Philharmonic premiere:** these performances

**Estimated duration:** ca. 23 minutes

at the Opéra Bastille in Paris). He has proved susceptible to inspiration from literature and from the visual arts. The prodigy-poet Arthur Rimbaud resurfaces in a number of his pieces, while work by the visual artist Joseph Beuys spurred the conception of *towards Osiris*, sculptures by Alberto Giacometti led to his chamber work *Figura-Zyklus: Frammento* of 1997, and Cy Twombly paintings inspired a group of chamber pieces.

*mar'eh* is his second concerto-like work to feature the violin as the solo instrument, having been preceded by his *En sourdine* in 2002. It joins a succession of pieces spotlighting other instruments: *La metamorfosi*

*di Narciso* (1992), *Reflections on Narcissus* (2004–05), and *un despertar* (2016–17), all with cello; *Tenebrae* (2000–01), with viola; *Transir* (2005–06), with flute; and *Chute d'étoiles: Hommage à Anselm Kiefer* (2012), with two trumpets. *mar'eh* is cast in a single movement, though a relatively long one at 23 minutes; and notwithstanding the very full-sized orchestra, it adheres to mostly soft dynamics. Pintscher's writing for both the violin and the orchestra displays punctilious attention to sonic detail, including many effects that require extended techniques. The large percussion complement plays an important role in forming the sound world, be-

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## In the Composer's Words

Matthias Pintscher provided this comment about *mar'eh* when it was premiered, making particular reference to the violinist Julia Fischer, the dedicatee of this work, who introduced it:



*mar'eh* is a Hebrew word that means “face, sign.” [It] can also mean the aura of a face, a beautiful vision, something wonderful which suddenly appears before you. I came across this word when I thought of the fine lines which Julia can spin with her instrument — this very intensive, but light play. The “wonderful appearance” is a metaphor for the sound-aura of the entire concerto.

*mar'eh* continually materializes new sounds out of nothing, with the violin acting as protagonist. I have tried to shape the whole [work] in a very song-like fashion, so that the violin starts at the beginning and draws a line — or its vision — through to the end in the most varied registers, often quite high where it can only be continued in harmonics .... [It is a] continual pacing-out of a line. As part of the transparent sonority, the orchestra answers in gesture what the violin evokes and then realizes its own tone-color melody.

gining with the opening measures, in which the violin's initial chord is answered by an unusual grouping of tam-tams and gongs, plus a hushed utterance from the alto flute.

**Instrumentation:** three flutes (one doubling piccolo and one doubling alto flute), two oboes (one doubling English horn), two clarinets (one doubling bass clarinet), two bassoons (one doubling contrabassoon), two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, tuba,

timpani, two vibraphones, three gongs, four tam-tams, three pairs of suspended cymbals, sandpaper blocks, two triangles, five temple blocks, chimes, crotales, bass drum, two guiros, two metal blocks, cymbals, five bongos, metal chimes, flexatone, marimba, two tom-toms, spring coil, harp, piano, and strings (the composer specifies 14 first violins, 12 second violins, 10 violas, 8 cellos, and 6 double basses), in addition to the solo violin.

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## The New York Philharmonic Connection

Matthias Pintscher has been a presence at the New York Philharmonic as a conductor as well as composer. He first led the Orchestra as one of three conductors coordinating separate groupings of musicians in *Philharmonic 360*, a 2012 program of spatial compositions, including Stockhausen's *Gruppen*, at Park Avenue Armory. Later that year he led Musicians from the Philharmonic in Schoenberg's arrangement of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* (*The Song of the Earth*). He was also on hand for the NY PHIL Biennial in 2014, conducting an ambitious performance of new music by nine different composers at The Museum of Modern Art, and another program featuring his own *Reflections on Narcissus*.



*Pintscher conducts a Philharmonic program at MoMA*