

# Venice Music Biennale Announces Award of Golden Lion to Composer Kaija Saariaho and Silver Lion to Neue Vocalsolisten

*By* [Chris Ruel](#)

Venice Music Biennale's new Artistic Director, Lucia Ronchetti, has selected composer [Kaija Saariaho](#) as the winner of the Golden Lion (Leone d'oro).

Ronchetti chose Saariaho for her breadth of work for voice, vocal ensemble, choir, and the originality of her vocal compositions. Her piece "Oltra mar" ("Across the sea"), composed in 1999 and written for choir and orchestra, is considered a masterpiece of contemporary music production and the work factored heavily in Ronchetti's decision. Saariaho will receive her Golden Lion on September 17 in the Sala Delle Colonne at Ca' Giustinian. A public discussion will follow.

Saariaho won a 2011 Grammy® Award in the Best Opera Recording category for "[L'amour de loin](#)," which was produced by the Metropolitan Opera in 2000.

"I am honored to award the Leone d'oro per la musica to Kaija Saariaho, a leading figure in contemporary musical creativity. An original artist with an unmistakable style, whose sound textures synthesise Debussy's timbral ideation with refined explorations of sound material, creating a personal musical language that engages and enlightens her global public," Ronchetti said in a statement released by Venice Music Biennale.

Ronchetti awarded the Silver Lion (Leone d'argento) to vocal ensemble Neue Vocalsolisten of Stuttgart, basing her selection on the ensemble's creative collaborations with many of the leading contemporary composers and for their work in developing the acappella vocal repertoire in contemporary writing. The Silver Lion award ceremony will take place on September 20 in the Sala Delle Colonne at Ca' Giustinian. A public discussion will follow the ceremony.

Neue Vocalsolisten comprises Johanna Zimmer, soprano, Susanne Leitz-Lorey, lyric soprano, Truike van der Poel, mezzo-soprano, Daniel Gloger, countertenor, Martin Nagy, tenor, Guillermo Anzorena, baritone and Andrea Fisher, bass.

The inaugural concert of the Music Biennale will be held at the Teatro la Fenice on September 17 and will feature the Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro La Fenice conducted by Ernest Martinez-Isquierdo. The program will include the first Italian performance of Saariaho's "Oltra Mar" and the first Italian performance of an orchestral work by Hans Abrahamsen composed in 2011 based on the orchestration of Claude Debussy's 'Children's Corners'.

On Sunday, September 19, in the Tesa III of the Arsenale, Neue Vocalsolisten will present two world premieres: a work for voices and electronics by the American composer George Lewis, commissioned by the Biennale Musica, and "Die Einfachen," a work of vocal theatre for six solo voices by the Russian composer Sergej Newski.

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Writer Christopher Ruel started with OperaWire in 2018 and has profiled artists such as Kathryn Lewek, Erin Morley, Stephen Costello, Christine Goerke, Susan Graham, and Zachary James. His work also includes stage reviews. He is the co-founder and Creative Director of Bel Canto Productions, an organization that brings together the beauty of opera with the culinary arts.