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REWORK: EMBEDDING
CREATIVE PROCESSES
OF REMIX IN THE
CHAMBER OPERA *LA LUNA*

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The submission consists of two equally-weighted components:

- the creation of an original, purpose-written chamber opera La Luna to be assessed via live performance thereof by the Hamburg State Opera (directed by Ron Zimmering, conducted by Rupert Burleigh, dramaturgy by Johannes Blum) and the submitted score;
- a written supplement for the dissertation.



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**Staatsoper
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The opera *La Luna* and this dissertation are dedicated to the memory of my father, who, through his constant support and affection, made me arrive where I am now.

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1.Introduction

- 1.1.Context for the Dissertation
- 1.2.Line of Questioning
- 1.3.Avenues for research results
- 1.4.Methodological remark on the footnotes

1.1 Context for the Dissertation

My dissertation, which consists of this written supplement and the score of my opera *La Luna*, is the outcome of a partnership between the Claussen Simon Stiftung, the University for Music and Theatre Hamburg, and the Hamburg State Opera. In 2018 these three institutions launched The *Opernstipendium*, a call for applications for a new doctoral program (Doctor Scientiae Musicae), consisting of the composition of a new opera and a written thesis.

I had the honour to be chosen for this project and to compose the chamber opera *La Luna* with a libretto by Giuliano Bracci and Johannes Blum, and a book in which I explain the aesthetic thoughts and the compositional processes behind it.

The Claussen-Simon Foundation provided me with a monthly stipend for 4 years, which covered my living expenses and allowed me to give the project my full attention.

The opera had its world premiere on June 24, 2022 at the Opera Stabile of the Hamburg state opera, and the thesis was finished in the month of November 2022.

I owe a sincere debt of gratitude to everyone who contributed to making this exceptional opportunity possible. The *Opernstipendium* is an innovative initiative that provides a top-notch pathway for young composer-researchers.

1.2 Line of Questioning

The aim of this thesis is the development of personal aesthetic reflections and analytic tools that make cognitive my creative process. Therefore, the main research question for this thesis is quite straightforward: how did I compose my chamber opera *La Luna*?

To answer this question, as a first move, I started to take notes on my composition progress in a research diary. Every day of work I described in English language the music I composed that day, together with free reflections on my inspiration sources, on technical tools and on philosophical ideas. In this diary, therefore, there were the first hints of the cognitive aspects of my work as composer, and, eventually, it became the document upon which I built the theoretic discourses contained in this written supplement.

At the beginning of this project, indeed, I had already developed a palette of technical skills, which had as a main feature the appropriation of pre-existing sonic material. This aspect has always been dominant in my creative output: my first composition, as a teenager, was a hip-hop beat, which sampled one bar from an Italian song by Fabrizio de André, mixed together with a pre-recorded funky drum part. Parallely, my composition studies taught me the techniques to vary, enrich and transform pre-existing

music, as it happened in my counterpoint trainings where I learnt how to compose polyphonic textures upon a given *cants firmus*, or in my harmony courses where I studied how to harmonize a given melody. Ever since I was young I have found sampling and elaboration of pre-existing music two aspects of the same creative idea, which manifested itself through the practices of appropriation, transformation and combination.

In order to translate into cognitive discourse my artistic interests, in the first months of my scholarship I began to explore the field of artistic research as methodological framework for my project. In chapter 2, indeed, I report my personal reflections on the debate around this discipline, and I illustrate the autoethnographic method that helped me to bring my personal thoughts – sketched in my diary – into a wider context. This cognitive method for artistic research foresees three areas: a research *on* art (which includes aesthetic, hermeneutic, philosophical and historical reflections), a research *for* art (that includes creating, defining and demonstrating ‘tools’ for understanding and composing new music according to my reworking approach for composition) and *in* art (meaning research through the very act of composing my opera *La Luna*). The research *on* art is developed in chapter 3 and 4, where I study the Remix Theory, Postmodernism and the concept of authorship in order to find a cultural frame to my reworking approach, but also in chapter 5 where I explore the main concepts of musical borrowing as defined by musicologist J. Peter Burkholder in order to compare them with the one of Remix Theory and to form a personal set of terms that define my own compositional style. I perform the research *for* art both in chapter 4, where I develop my analytical approach of reworking of material, and in chapter 6 where I apply my analytic perspective to the

analysis of my opera *La Luna*. Eventually, the score of *La Luna* contains the research *in art*.

My compositional work has been continuously influenced by my cognitive reflections. The writing of my research diary made explicit some artistic instances that in the score were not yet put into focus, and it allowed me to find new artistic solutions. The description in words of my compositional process also functioned as a motor for new music production. I like to compare it to the writing down of one's dreams in a journal: this action brings people to remember their dreams and to a deeper dreaming activity. My diary worked in the same way: the more I described my music, the more I was able to focus my compositional techniques and goals, receiving more inspiration. Nonetheless, In the last part of my composition process, when the structure of the opera started to be clear in my mind, I began to be more involved in writing down the music than to describe it through words. It was as if the diary had already accomplished its task of making me conscious of my intuitive processes: at that time my reflections were always revolving around the same topics, and they were not bringing me new knowledge or inspiration. The decline of the use of my diary coincided also with a major involvement with Remix Theory. My encounter with this theory materialized into a systematic method of many concepts that I had already sketched in my diary and it changed relevantly my compositional output: the discovery of the theory brought me to conceive my music as an editing of samples. This conception is evident in the last two chapters of the opera, which were entirely composed after my first encounter with the theory.

In order to reflect on my own music, I adapt the thoughts of scholars that cover different artistic and academic fields. I appropriate the concepts of

Eduardo Navas, media theorist and founder of Remix studies, and I mashed them up with the thoughts of Peter J. Burkholder who is a musicologist. I quote words from contemporary classical music composers such as Salvatore Sciarrino and Karlheinz Stockhausen, but also by pop music producers such as Brian Eno. I relate to postmodern musicologist Johnathan Kramer, and I find insights in the semiologic analysis of Jean-Jacques Nattiez. I often refer to concepts of poststructuralist philosophers such as J. Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze, Baudrillard, Foucault and Barthes but also to ideas of Metamodernists thinkers such as Jason Storm, Timotheus Vermeulen & Robin van den Akker. Finally, this thesis was deeply influenced by the dissertation project of Samuel Penderbayne, the former recipient of the *Opernstipendium*. Doctor Penderbayne, indeed, with his dissertation and his reflection opened new paths in artistic research and provided me with a model for my dissertation.

1.3 Avenues for research results

The thesis has five main areas of results: my original ideas on the debate that surround artistic research (chapter 2), the definition of a framework of my compositional method through the exploration of themes such as postmodernism, remix and authorship (chapter 3 and 4). The development of an analytic approach on reworking of pre-existing sonic material (chapter 5), and an analysis that is a concrete example in which my analytic approach is applied (chapter 6). Finally, the score of my new opera *La Luna*.

I suggest that my thesis could be beneficial for scholars from different fields of knowledge. I think that artistic researchers could profit from the