

Alessandra Salvati talks about

Revisiting and updating sacred tradition in the work of three contemporary composers: Lucia Ronchetti, Helena Tulve, and Khadija Zeynalova.



Lucia Ronchetti (1963)



Helena Tulve (1972)



Khadija Zeynalova (1975)

Conservatorio G.Martucci di Salerno, December 6th 2025



Lucia Ronchetti

Prosopopeia (2010)

A study of personification

*Drammaturgia after the Musikalische Exequien by
Heinrich Schütz
for vocal ensemble and instrumental ensemble*



Helena Tulve

Visions (2022)

For vocal ensembles, cori spezzati, and instrumental ensembles



Khadija Zeynalova

Ave Maria-Meryem Ana (2020)

For soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, and instrumental ensemble.

KEY STAGES OF THIS RESEARCH

- REVIEW OF TEXTS AND ANY REFERENCE SOURCES
- ANALYSIS OF TEXTUAL CHOICES ➡ INSIGHT INTO DECISIONS RELATING TO INSTRUMENTATION AND COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES
- IDENTIFICATION OF COMMON AND DIVERGENT ELEMENTS
- BROADER OBSERVATIONS ABOUT DIFFERENT APPROACHES OF THE THREE COMPOSERS ON SACRED THEMES



Prosopopeia = Rethorical figure = Personification



‘[...] In its most familiar sense, prosopopoeia is the personification of the dead. Rhetorical personification of the deceased was frequently employed in baroque funerary oratory in the Lutheran Church.’

Gregory S. Johnston

Rhetorical Personification of the Dead in 17th-Century German Funeral Music: Heinrich Schütz's Musikalische Exequien (1636) and Three Works by Michael Wiedemann (1693)

Schütz used this rhetorical figure in his *Musikalische Exequien* (1636). Acting as a medium, the singer conveyed messages from the afterlife to the congregation, even imitating tone, gestures, and rhythm of voice of the deceased person.

THE 'ARS MORIENDI'

THE PRACTICE OF PREPARING FOR ONE'S OWN DEATH

VXII CENTURY - CONSTANT PRESENCE OF DEATH
(disease, epidemics and pillaging, high infant mortality rate)



SCHÜTZ USED THIS RHETORICAL FIGURE IN HIS *MUSIKALISCHE EXEQUIEN* (1636)





PRINCE HEINRICH POSTHUMUS REUSS



Prince Heinrich's Coffin

Lucia Ronchetti

Prosopopeia (2010)

A study of personification

*Drammaturgia after the Musikalische Exequien by Heinrich Schütz
for vocal ensemble and instrumental ensemble*

- **Revisitation and updating of Schütz's musical material through reharmonization, orchestration, displacement or even disembodiment and disassembly.**
- **Integration of original German texts from the Musikalische Exequien with excerpts from philosophical and poetic texts by coeval authors in different languages**
- **Adoption and elaboration of Schütz's communicative strategies (such as 'prosopopeia') and spatialization of sound sources, integrating them with original dramaturgical solutions.**

KEY TERMS → THEMES OF THE SPIRITUAL ITINERARY

Sin (Sünde)

Lost (Verloren) **Human fragility/disorientation**

Time (Zeit) **Time of human life/destiny**

Body (Leib) **Body as a prison for the soul**

To transfigure (Trasfigurare)

Fear of death (Todsurcht)

GERMAN TEXT FROM THE MUSIKALISCHE EXEQUIEN

KEY TERMS

Ex. 'sin', 'lost', 'time',
'body', 'transfigure', 'ruin',
'salvation', 'flesh',
'ascension'

Poetic links:
an invisible web of
meanings and resonances

TEXTS BY COEVAL AUTHORS

John Donne, Torquato
Tasso, Francisco de
Quevedo, Andrew Marvell,
and Richard Crashaw.

..das ist Gottes Lamm, das
der Welt **Sünde** trägt...'

('This is the Lamb of God
who takes away the sins of
the world.'

Schütz's musical material
reworked

Sünde/Sin

'Wilt Thou forgive that **sin**
where I begun,
Which was my **sin**, though
it were done before? [...]'

(John Donne (1572-1631)
from *A Hymne to God the
Father.*)

Original music

Lucia Ronchetti served as the Artistic Director of the Biennale Musica for the 2021-2024 editions.



The theme for her first festival in 2021 was titled *Choruses – Drammaturgie vocali* (Choral Dramaturgies)



As part of the program, a new piece was commissioned from Estonian composer Helena Tulve.

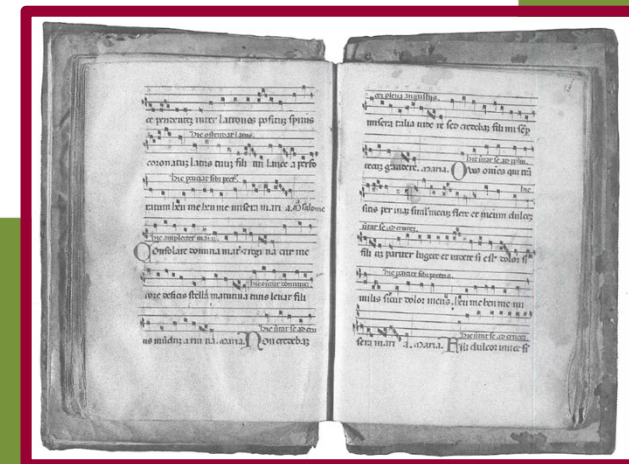


la Biennale di Venezia

Helena Tulve

Visions (2022)

- Texts in Latin language from fragments of the Sacred Representations found in the S. Maria della Fava Library by Giulio Cattin in 1993, dating from between the XIII and XV centuries (FAV).
- Texts from the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, in Coptic language, from the Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, dating IV-V century.
- The polyphonic texture is the result of the overlapping of linear structures clearly inspired by the Gregorian chant tradition, resulting in a 'texture that is heterophonic rather than contrapuntal'.
- Use of traditional instruments (nyckelharpas, kannel) and baroque lute, theorbo and double bass.



Handwritten musical score for measures 14 and 15. The score includes parts for Soprano 2 (S2), Soprano (Nh sopr), Alto (Nh alto), and Keyboard (K). The lyrics are: "do-ler te-net ni-mi-us".

Measure 14: S2 has a whole note "e-o". The vocal parts (Nh sopr and Nh alto) have whole notes. The keyboard part has a half note. The lyrics "do-ler te-net ni-mi-us" are written below the vocal lines.

Measure 15: S2 has a whole note. The vocal parts (Nh sopr and Nh alto) have whole notes. The keyboard part has a half note. The lyrics "do-ler te-net ni-mi-us" are written below the vocal lines.

Handwritten musical score for measures 16 and 17. The score includes parts for Tenor (T.), Soprano (Nh sopr), Alto (Nh alto), and Keyboard (K). The lyrics are: "Post se-cun-dam di-cat ter-ti-a", "sed e-a-mus", and "et ad e-ius".

Measure 16: T. has a whole note. The vocal parts (Nh sopr and Nh alto) have whole notes. The keyboard part has a half note. The lyrics "Post se-cun-dam di-cat ter-ti-a" are written below the vocal lines.

Measure 17: T. has a whole note. The vocal parts (Nh sopr and Nh alto) have whole notes. The keyboard part has a half note. The lyrics "sed e-a-mus" and "et ad e-ius" are written below the vocal lines.

Nickelharp

Kannel



Visions has a six-part structure

I	Lamentum (Passion Passion of Christ) from FAV
II	Planctus Mariae
III	Dialogue 1 (in Coptic) from PB
IV	Dialogue 2 (in Coptic) from PB Mary's vision and her dialogue with the Saviour, a key moment in the work.
V	Visitatio Sepulcri in Pascha from FAV
VI	Dialogue 3 (in Coptic) from PB

Gospel of Maria → IV-V cent.

Fragments from Papyrus
Berolinensis

→ XIII-XV cent.

A HUGE TIME SPAN

Visions → XXI cent.

Tulve concludes the preface to the score with the following words:

'These representations and texts are not historic artefacts separate from us, they are a part of us – if we dare to open our imaginal and give space to our own visions.'

THE TEXT OF *VISIONS*

- The solemn dignity of its archaic sources
- A “bird's eye view” perspective of human events and the destiny of the soul.
- An explicit reference to the theories of the French orientalist and philosopher **Henri Corbin** on “imaginative consciousness” and the “**mundus imaginalis**”

‘In this world of violence and aggression, more than ever I feel the need to honour and give space to the imaginal, not the imaginary “utopian”, but the true area of the soul.

Sacred representations are a layer in the topography of these interworlds.

The space of the church – full of symbols and images – is a model of our own inner sacred space we cannot really understand, but rather perceive like Jesus being in the womb of the Virgin Mary.’ (From the preface of the score)

Khadija Zeynalova
Ave Maria-Meryem Ana
TEXTS

PART I	PART II	PART III
Anonymous lyrical extension of the Ave Maria prayer in German From Ave Maria! Lieder und Gedichte zu Ehren der Himmelskönigin (1893)	Sura 19 of the Koran, dedicated to Mary, verses 16-21	Traditional Jewish folk songs: 'Hevenu Shalom' and 'Hava Nagila', and the song 'Veyashev', based on verses from the Old Testament (Micah 4:3)

SOME DRAMATURGICAL ASPECTS in PROSOPOPEIA

- **Spatialization of vocal and instrumental groups**
- **Instruments are also characters (Tuba/Prince)**
- **Welding between material from Schütz's score and original music by Ronchetti**
- **Adoption of freely reinterpreted madrigal techniques**
- **In some passages, Schütz's original vocal score is “assaulted” by contemporary gestures and sonorities**

ORIGINAL
SCORE
'ASSAULTED'
EXAMPLE

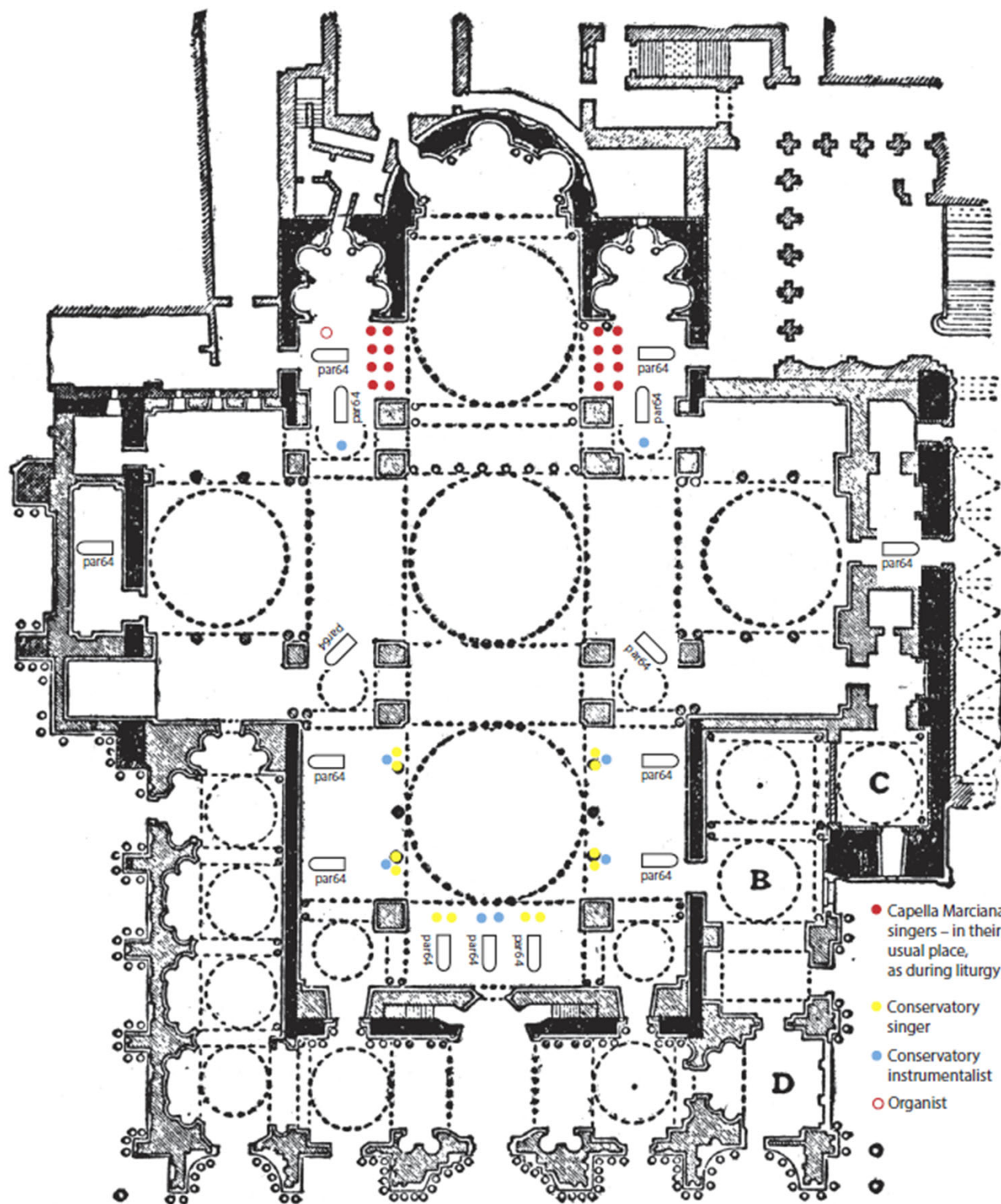


Handwritten musical score for a vocal ensemble and orchestra. The score is written on multiple staves, including vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in German, and the music is marked with dynamic instructions such as *f* (forte) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The score includes various musical notations, including notes, rests, and articulation marks. The bottom right corner of the page is marked with the number 120.

SOME DRAMATURGICAL ASPECTS in *VISIONS*

- Spatialization of vocal and instrumental groups
- A choreography of subtle movements and gestures by the performers
- Multiple voices for the same character to create effects of intensification and reverberation
- Hidden performers and gradual dematerialisation of sound







AVE MARIA – MERYEM ANA

A Musical Bridge Between Religions and Cultures

- **A more traditional writing style**
- **A quest of simplicity through the use of block chords, arpeggiated chords and melodies given to the soloists frequently at the distance of unison or octave**
- **The writing incorporates musical features from Middle Eastern and Jewish traditions (harmonies, melodic gestures) however each section is distinct in style and language, yet they are bound together by recurring melodic and harmonic threads**

41

S.

Mzs.

T.

Akk.

Org.

VI.

Vc.

Und ge - den - ke im Buch der Ma - ri - a: Da sie vor

The musical score is written for a vocal and instrumental ensemble. It begins at measure 41. The vocal parts (Soprano, Mezzo-soprano, and Tenor) are in the upper staves, and the instrumental parts (Accordion, Organ, Violin, and Violoncello) are in the lower staves. The lyrics are: 'Und ge - den - ke im Buch der Ma - ri - a: Da sie vor'. The Tenor part has a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3'. The instrumental parts provide accompaniment, with the Organ part featuring sustained chords and the Violin and Violoncello parts playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.



INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVES ON SACRED THEMES

- **RONCHETTI** Ronchetti's work is close to earthly suffering, the fear of death, the body experienced as a prison, in short, an entirely human vision of these themes, also due to the orchestration choices, the techniques adopted, and the expressive range that goes from whispers to the cries of the performers.
- **TULVE** A mystical perspective, which literally brings angels to earth through refined and evocative vocal reverberation techniques, spatialisation and a preference for more consonant harmonic structures, characterizes Tulse's work.
- **ZEYNALOVA** Zeynalova's vision is linked to the popular aspects of the sacred, to the different traditions and stories that pass from the Bible to the Koran, and is offered as narration and prayer, with a clear ecumenical intent.

Thank you for your attention

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