



A Theatrical Performance of
György Ligeti's
Aventures & Nouvelles Aventures

with

Samuel Beckett: **Play**,
György Ligeti: **Artikulation**,
and the potential for
newly-commissioned works

Proposed schedule:

08/29 - 09/15 2016

EXVOCO

Stuttgart, Germany

EXVOCO

Expanded Voice Company Stuttgart
Stuttgart, Germany
www.exvoco.de

Founded in 1972, EXVOCO is a collective of singers based in Stuttgart, Germany interested in blurring the boundaries between music, speech and theater.

[Link to view full live performance from June 2014](#)
www.vimeo.com/116483264

Performers from June 2014
EXVOCO with instrumentalists from the Hochschule für Musik Saar Saarbrücken, Germany
EXVOCO members involved:
Christie Finn [soprano & EXVOCO christie@christiefinn.com](mailto:christie@christiefinn.com)
Matias Bocchio [baritone](#)
Simone Eisele [mezzo soprano](#)
Frank Wörner [artistic/stage direction frank-woerner@gmx.de](mailto:frank-woerner@gmx.de)
Annette Wolf [stage design costumes, and technical direction](#)

A unique Performance, with both historic and contemporary elements

This evening could not be more varied in its theatrical and expressive material: Ligeti's *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures*, both revolutionary works for voice and instrumental ensemble, intersect with Beckett's theater piece *Play*. Ligeti's short electronic music work *Artikulation* gives the audience brief respite between the intense stretches of vocal and staged theatrics.

The 20th century brought new ways to explore the drama of the human condition, as new discoveries in psychology and science lead to an increased understanding of the human animal. Artists sought to explore these discoveries through new and different theatrical expressions. As the century wore on, artists sought to integrate themes like the social objectification of the individual in a world dominated by technology, the loss of autonomy, and the absurdity of existence into their works.

Both György Ligeti and Samuel Beckett address these themes but through very different (although complementary) mediums of theater and theatrical expression.

Alongside with these well-known pieces will come three world premieres written by composers working in the United States and Germany especially for these two ensembles and this theatrical performance.

György Ligeti (1923-2006)
Born in Romania





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György Ligeti (1923-2006): Born in Romania, Ligeti lived in Hungary until 1956, when he immigrated to Germany. In Germany, he became acquainted with the contemporary music of the Western world, music that he did not have contact with while living in Soviet-controlled Hungary. He quickly became an important figure in contemporary music with works like his orchestral piece *Atmosphères* (1961), which was premiered in Donaueschingen, and *Artikulation*, a work that was created in the WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk, or West German Radio) Studio in Cologne.

In 1961, Ligeti received a commission from the NDR (Norddeutscher Rundfunk, or North German Radio) for his work *Aventures*, which was completed and premiered in 1962, and quickly followed by *Nouvelles Aventures* in 1965. It was immediately clear to Ligeti that he wanted to compose these vocal pieces without text: theater without plot and

without understandable language. He did this while imposing countless gestural and emotional expressive directives to the performers, which take on their own level of meaning because of this artificial language.

Aventures: Setting the Stage for Contemporary Vocal Music

All vocal sounds and noises that are possible with the human voice are employed as sound material in *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures* — sounds which would, in subsequent years, become the basis for extended vocal technique in contemporary music. This includes the complete vocal register of a trained singer, as well as air noises, sighs, wheezing, screaming, laughing, and much more. In short: the entire palette of vocal and articulated possibilities.

The two works seem to be envisioned as the opening and ending of a performance, with *Aventures* beginning with breathing sounds and *Nouvelles Aventures* ending with the same. And between this first and last breath, the lives of three people play out before our eyes and ears, with all aspects of life present: speaking, dreaming, fear and hope, screams and laughs, misunderstood communication and great loneliness.

The three singers, each of whom play a unique character, is somehow on the same clock and stuck in his or her own personal prison. There is no free will to speak of, although each individual tries, and tries again, to throw himself or

herself into a pose and to establish his or her importance in this artificially created world. The marionette-like qualities imposed on the singers in this production stand in the foreground, as if some external machine or puppeteer were pulling the strings.

The religious aspect of the vocal music tradition also did not escape Ligeti's concept: it is not coincidental that a prayer and a "choral" appear shortly before each of the characters breath their last breath.

Aventures On Stage: The Production

The production concept and staging magnifies the individual personal prisons of each of the three protagonists and attempts to understand life and the physical and emotional workings of human beings through science and art.

More and more, man is the subject of research — analyzed and studied, with the chemical processes of the emotions becoming more visible. It is now possible to identify which sections of the brain are active while experiencing certain emotions, suggesting that emotions, and perhaps even thoughts, can be somehow read through scientific tests. The video that accompanies both *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures* attempts to explore this theme further, first zeroing in on the movements and manipulations of the face itself, and then attempting to enter the brain to look at the chemical processes there.

However, in the end, isn't there more to understand than just the physical processes? For the artist at least, this question must remain open. Ligeti bounces between portraying a life that seemingly has a healthy concept of free will to a life with all of the "freedom" of a hamster in a hamster wheel — a theme that was not only relevant in the 1960s, but remains relevant in our contemporary world as well.



Beckett's Play as Complement

In between the overflowing theatrics of *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures* — theatrics which are also part of each instrumentalist's part — comes Samuel Beckett's *Play*, like a meditation in language. Beckett's interpretation of individuality and life is no less pessimistic than that of Ligeti, and is the perfect counterpart to Ligeti's compositions.



In 1963, Samuel Beckett published his theater piece *Play* (In German *Spiel*), one of his many short dramas. Here, the people are already dead and are looking back on their life — specifically on a failed love triangle (2 women, 1 man). They tell the story as if they have already told it a thousand times and therefore it doesn't necessarily need to be understood by the listener. In any case, it is a familiar story to any audience member: a man has an affair, the woman who is cheated on confronts the "other woman," and, in the end, all of the relationships are broken — with each of the three characters left alone.

The individuals are asked to speak the text very quickly, with no emotion or expression, and sometimes as a group. The understandability of the text fades not only in these "choral" sections but also in the second half of the piece, when the concrete story has already been told and the text becomes more abstract.

This inability for the audience to understand all of the text transforms *Play* into a language composition, with the sound of the language in the foreground. (One could even go so far as to notate it musically as a piece of minimal music.)

These three individuals, who are again lost in their own worlds, also give the appearance of being controlled by an outside force. Here, the unknown person directing the spotlight, a light which is controlled and regulated from the outside, seemingly "wakes" each individual periodically and gives permission for him or her to continue with their monologue. This function in Beckett is often interpreted as some god or higher being. In any case, there are three nameless people (Woman 1, Woman 2, and Man) who have no chance of escaping.

An Exploration of Language

Not only is this theater evening a confrontation of the theater concepts from the 1960s, but also an evening about language: about the language of language and the language of music. Next to Ligeti's meaningless building blocks of text, notated in the score in International Phonetic Alphabet, is Beckett's theater piece, completely based on language, in which theatrics is no longer necessary. In between is an important final piece of the puzzle: *Artikulation*, Ligeti's composition representing the language of music, a pure and absolute musical language as can only be present in electronic music. With the title, the composer already demonstrates that there is something to be understood in this composition. And, indeed, the music speaks in an abstract, but understandable, "language" that we have now learned to name and identify.

21st Century Musical Elements

This performance also allows for the possibility of a prologue and epilogue (a short piece to precede *Aventures* and a short piece to follow *Nouvelles Aventures*), which could make the production more attractive to theaters or funding sources looking for something that includes a world premiere. One composer could potentially be chosen from New York and another from Stuttgart, enhancing the collaborative aspect of the performance.