

## **AWARDEE: PÉTER EÖTVÖS COMPOSER, CONDUCTOR AND PROFESSOR, HUNGARY**



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**For the composer and conductor Péter Eötvös, music is a form of intense communication between composer, performer and audience. Born in Transylvania – a place of longing that would shape his compositions – he sought early contact with contemporary European music cultures. In the 1960s, he forged connections with the Cologne musical avant-garde and in 1978, at the invitation of Pierre Boulez, conducted the opening concert of the *Institute de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM)* in Paris. Péter Eötvös is one of the most successful opera composers of our time – his extraordinary sound compositions incessantly pose existential questions for which the composer invents musically powerful, often overwhelming responses.**

Péter Eötvös was born in 1944 in Székelyudvarhely, Transylvania to a family of musicians. At the young age of 14, he was accepted into the composition class of Zoltán Kodály at the Budapest Academy of Music. A scholarship enabled him to move to West Germany in 1966. In Cologne, the mecca of 1950s and 1960s contemporary music, he worked in close contact with Karlheinz Stockhausen. This was followed by concert appearances with the Stockhausen Ensemble (1968 to 1976) and a job as a sound engineer at the Electronic Studio of the WDR in Cologne (1971 to 1979). At the invitation of the composer Pierre Boulez, Eötvös directed the opening concert of the IRCAM in Paris in 1978. He was then appointed musical director of the Ensemble Intercontemporain for which he was responsible for the premiere of many works. In 1980 he made his conducting debut at the London Proms, and a year later he conducted the world premiere of Karlheinz Stockhausen's opera *Donnerstag aus Licht* at La Scala in Milan. In 1991 he founded the International Péter Eötvös Institute for young conductors and composers as a platform to pass on knowledge and lived experience to the next generation. In addition, Péter Eötvös taught at the University of Music in Karlsruhe in 1992, took on a professorship at the Cologne Musikhochschule in 1998, to return to Karlsruhe in 2002 for another five years.

Since the 1990s Péter Eötvös has increasingly devoted himself to the composition of concert works and operas. He achieved his breakthrough in 1998 with the opera *Trois sœurs*, after Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, which premiered at the Opéra de Lyon as a sensational success. From then on, he divided his time between a life of conducting and composing. Among other works, he wrote *zeroPoints* in 1999 as a tribute to Pierre Boulez. The piece refers to the historical "zero hour," in which the integrated noise sounds are produced exclusively by the orchestral instruments themselves. In the concert *Speaking Drums* (2012/2013) written for the exceptional percussionist Martin Grubinger, Eötvös used the combination of spoken word and Indian drums with poems by fellow Hungarian Sandor Weöres and the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Indian poet Jayadeva.

His compositions are based on his own lyric ideas or historic world literature, but present-day political issues like globalisation or immigration policy are also incorporated in his pieces. For instance, his opera *Golden Dragon* (2014), based

on the contemporary German-language theatre of Roland Schimmelpfennig, “deals almost clairvoyantly with the current problems of refugee flows in Europe” (*Der Spiegel*, 2016). Eötvös’s extraordinary sound compositions also express tragic, personal themes. *Replica* comes from personal experience. “My young adult son decided that life was not worth living. For three years I tried to convince him of the opposite over and over again in conversations.” He set this battle, which he would eventually lose, to music: the viola represents the father, the orchestra the son. The father passionately attempts to persuade his son, whose responses are melancholic. It is an intense, deeply emotional listening experience.

Péter Eötvös has received numerous international awards and prizes, including the Hungarian Bartók Prize (1997), the Royal Philharmonic Society Music Award (2002), the Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale 2011 and the International Classical Music Award (2014). Since 1997 he has been a member of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, the Hungarian Academy of Literature and Art and the Royal Swedish Academy of Music.

### **Quotes by Péter Eötvös**

“[Conducting premieres] is my favourite thing. Because I’m also a composer. I have this creative gift, and I’m interested in what my colleagues are thinking and creating. I think exactly like a writer who reads books by his colleagues. Since I master the techniques of conducting, I am even able to implement it.”

“As a composer, I’m basically a translator or transformer. Existing formulas from cosmology, or distances or masses of stars or things like that are what I attempt to translate into music. I always need a stimulus from the outside, be it a picture or a text or just the idea of the expansion of the universe.”

“Each language has its own sound world, its own focus, a different tempo, and when I compose, I think very carefully in which language direction I will compose the notes.”

### **Quotes about Péter Eötvös**

“He is one of the very rare conductors who can conduct everything because they can use the conceptual spirit of the composer. He knows about the inner coherence of the works, the importance of the details and how he can convey this to the listener.” (Karlheinz Stockhausen, in an article by Dagmar Wacker/journal21.ch)

“So this is the unrestrained fellow from Transylvania, the man of all styles, who regularly confounds the experts. Six years ago, he achieved a breakthrough with his *Three Sisters* opera after Chekhov, which he has hardly ever been able to achieve with complex scores. He was already familiar with the avant-garde circles, the European radio orchestras (including the BBC), but now even larger audiences have discovered an artist who flees from a recognisable image. He is constantly changing his style, his language – the exact opposite of the lonely and subjective creator who translates his identity into the work.” (Volker Hagedorn, *Die Zeit*)

“The characters [in *Three Sisters*] are literally psychoanalysed, which painfully transmits their suffering to today’s observer. The fact that the three sisters were also presented in the premiere by tenors instead of female singers, that the production – far from any flat realism – retained a Kabuki or Nō theatrical distance, intensified the objectifying observational pressure of the events. This proximity to the people, their suffering, their bafflement, also occupied Eötvös in his other operas. And he always finds music full of dark beauty, full of mystery, often emotionally overpowering especially in its uncommon inner tranquillity.”  
(Gerhard Rohde, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*)