

MÜNCHENER BIENNALE FESTIVAL FÜR NEUES MUSIKTHEATER

Münchener Biennale – Festival für neues Musiktheater
08.-20.05.2026

The Munich Biennale, the internationally unique festival for world premieres and a laboratory for new music theatre, enters a new chapter with a new artistic leadership duo as it celebrates its 20th anniversary. Founded in the 1980s by Hans Werner Henze, who would have turned 100 in 2026, the Munich Biennale has since been presented by the City of Munich.

The festival, dedicated to world premieres, has earned a global reputation as a platform for discovery. Among the best-known composers who wrote their first stage works for the Biennale are Olga Neuwirth, Unsuk Chin and Jörg Widmann.

Today, a new artistic duo has taken the helm: musicologist and cultural manager Katrin Beck, together with composer Manuela Kerer. True to the spirit of the festival's founder, their vision embraces adventurous new experiences of listening and seeing, openness and dialogue, participation, engagement with local communities and an international network of exchange.

With their diverse cultural backgrounds, the artists explore the complexity of our present times: What is the role of truth? What potential lies in illusion? And how do virtual worlds shape our perception of reality? From established performance formats to interactive games, installation-based presentations, and attempts to make music tangible beyond acoustic experience – anything is possible.

2026 Programm Features

- **12 productions and installations** with world premieres by Asia Ahmetjanova, Zara Ali, Eugene Birman, Margareta Ferek-Petrić, Julie Herndon, Piyawat Louilarpprasert, Monthati Masebe, Maximiliano Soto Mayorga, Ailís Ní Ríain, and Yuri Umemoto
- Two of these productions are for young audiences, with premieres by Margareta Ferek-Petrić and Piyawat Louilarpprasert
- **Co-productions** with Black Box Teater Oslo, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Klang Festival Copenhagen Experimental Music, Schauburg München, Staatstheater Stuttgart/JOiN, Styriarte Graz, Tempo Reale Firenze, Bayerische Theaterakademie August Everding, Tiroler Landestheater Innsbruck, Ultima Oslo, Staatstheater Wiesbaden, Ox & Öl
- **Collaborations** with Bayerische Staatsoper, Ars Electronica, Klangspuren Schwaz, Münchner Volkstheater, Hoch X, schwere reiter, Muffatwerk
- World **premiere** of the **documentary film Hans Werner Henze: Composer, Communist, Dandy** (by Holger Preuße and Philipp Quiring, commissioned by WDR for ARTE)
- **Campus** (in collaboration with Anton Bruckner Private University Linz and the Institute for Theatre Studies at LMU Munich)

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Process of opening up

The Munich Biennale invites reflection, dialogue, and participation. Under Beck and Kerer, the festival offers an open meeting space for artists and audiences, commissions for all ages, and participatory formats that bring fresh perspectives to contemporary music theatre - putting societal questions firmly in the spotlight.

Collaboration

In collaboration with renowned national and international institutions and festivals, new music theatre works, installations, and artistic interventions are created, which continue to be staged at various venues following their world premieres at the Munich Biennale.

Content

The invited artists engage with a complex contemporary reality, shaped by their diverse cultural backgrounds, individual creative processes, and approaches to generational challenges. They raise questions about the value of truth, the potential of illusions, and the influence of virtual worlds on our perception of reality. Through their research, the artistic teams explore different modes of perception, challenge our imagination, and even seek insights from those at the end of their lives, inviting reflections on how we view the world.

Range of formats

The festival embraces an extraordinary diversity of forms, from traditional performances to interactive games and immersive installations, as well as experiences that extend music beyond sound and playfully challenge the conventions of music theatre.

Open Call

To broaden access for artistic groups beyond the established curatorial focus, for the first time, the Munich Biennale issued an open call on the theme of "Martial Arts".

Out of 85 submissions, a seven-strong international jury selected the project by Chilean composer Maximiliano Soto Mayorga, together with artists David Camargo and Amauta García.

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The 2026 composers

- [Asia Ahmetjanova](#) (*1992), Latvia & Switzerland
- [Zara Ali](#) (*1995), USA & Germany
- [Eugene Birman](#) (*1987), Hong Kong, UNK, USA
- [Margareta Ferek-Petrić](#) (*1982), Austria & Croatia
- [Julie Herndon](#) (*1986), USA
- [Piyawat Louilarprasert](#) (*1993), Thailand & USA
- [Monthati Zenzile Masebe](#) (*1995), South Africa
- [Maximiliano Alejandro Soto Mayorga](#) (*1991), Chile
- [Ailís Ní Ríain](#) (*1974), Ireland
- [Yuri Umemoto](#) (*2002), Japan

Programme 2026

Codeborn

Zara Ali

Co-production by Münchener Biennale and Tiroler Landestheater Innsbruck, in cooperation with Bayerische Staatsoper, Ars Electronica Linz and Klangspuren Schwaz.

In “Codeborn” the world is subjected to an artificial intelligence. An unstoppable process of transformation begins that eludes any explanation whilst at the same time evoking fascination and uncertainty. Visions of power escalate into infinity, old hierarchies collapse, and impossible encounters become reality. Zara Ali's music theatre rejects both doomsday sentiment and cultural pessimism – it is neither utopia nor dystopia. Her music encompasses the entire spectrum of radical change and makes the unimaginable audible.

Venue: Muffathalle

Musical Direction: Hansjörg Sofka

Stage direction: Florentine Klepper, Deva Schubert

Concept: Hannah Dübgen

Set and costume design: Wolfgang Menardi

Cast: Ensemble PHACE (7), Sänger*innen (Lucy Altus, Paul Schweinester, Thomas Lichtenecker, Julien Horbatuk), Electronics

Duration: ca. 60 Min

World premiere: 08.05.2026

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Foosball[D]

Sound theatre for several table football players and live electronics

Co-production by Münchener Biennale and Tempo Reale Firenze.

Block, pass, shoot – goal! In “Foosball”, the audience and professional table football players alike are invited to demonstrate their skills on the foosball table. This interactive sound-theatre pushes the acoustic dimension of the popular game to the fore and transforms events on the table into a sonic experience that evokes stadium euphoria.

Venue: Einstein Kultur

Idea: Francesco Giomi

Concept, sound design: Agnese Banti, Simone Faraci, Francesco Giomi

Host: Patricia Gabor

Duration: 3 hours

Premiere: 09.05.2026

V01CES//B0D1EZ

Piyawat Louilarpprasert & Hans Werner Henze

Co-production by Münchener Biennale and Bayerische Theaterakademie August Everding in cooperation with Münchener Kammerorchester, Technische Hochschule Augsburg and Ludwigsburger Schlossfestspiele.

“V01CES//B0D1EZ” is the musical encounter between composer Piyawat Louilarpprasert and Hans Werner Henze, the founder of the Munich Biennale, who in 2026 would have celebrated his 100th birthday.

Based on excerpts from Hans Werner Henze's vocal cycle “Voices”, Piyawat Louilarpprasert examines the invisible workings of performance, production and repetition and reflects on them in his composition “R3SIST4NC3 B0D1EZ”.

What is the connection between artistic process and craftsmanship, resistance and exhaustion, breath and machine?

“V01CES//B0D1EZ” is an exciting music theatre portrayal of political and physical labor, ritualized activities and ongoing resistance.

Venue: Akademietheater / Theaterakademie August Everding

Musical direction: Bas Wiegers

Stage direction: Amy Stebbins

Set and costume design: Christian Wiehle

Cast: MKO / Münchener Kammerorchester, Singers of Bayerische Theaterakademie August Everding (Rusné Tušlaitė, Beatriz Maia, Madeleine Wulff, Henrique Lencastre, Mose Lee, Hoazhou Hu)

Duration: ca. 60 Min

World premiere: 09.05.2026

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ENDLICH

Asia Ahmetjanova

Co-production by Münchener Biennale and Deutsche Oper Berlin

Three Norns sit at the foot of the World Tree. There they spin, knot and cut the thread of life, deciding on who lives or dies. In a present where end-of-life has become the greatest social taboo, the battle to halt physical decline and the ageing process becomes a life's work. In their musical theatre piece "ENDLICH" (FINALLY), composer Asia Ahmetjanova and director Franziska Angerer dare to confront the inevitable. Working with a group of elderly people, they look at their own mortality and ageing with all its attributions. The result is a shared ritual that lies between mythology and performance and faces up to the final consequence of life.

Venue: Freiheitshalle

Musical direction: Leonard Weiss

Stage direction: Franziska Angerer

Stage design: Mirjam Stängl

Costume design: Sabrina Bosshard

Cast: ensemble mosaik (7), Solist:innen of DOB Berlin (Lana Maletić, Constanze Jader, Jens Ginge), Performers (7)

Dauer: ca. 70 Min

World premiere: 10.05.2026

Isithunzi

Monthati Zenzile Masebe

Co-production by Münchener Biennale and Staatstheater Wiesbaden

"Isithunzi" means 'dignity' in Zulu – but can also be translated as 'spirit of death and renewal'. The idea: within each of us lies a connection to our ancestors and to a universal energy that gives rise to all life. Based on a text by Afrofuturist author Shanice Ndlovu, composer Monthati Masebe tells the story of three protagonists searching for connections in the past and their own identities. For her first music theatre piece, she invites audiences to a cultural encounter, combining Western instruments with South African playing techniques, and takes to the stage herself as a performer of electronic soundscapes.

Venue: Einstein Kultur

Musical direction: Adam Rogala, Tim Hawken

Text: Shanice Ndlovu

Stage direction/costume design: Theresa Maria Schlichtherle

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Choreography/Performance: Tumi Sharon Mkhondo
Stage and costume design: Mariella Maier
Cast: Staatsorchester Wiesbaden (2), Live Electronics (Monthati Masebe), Singers (Carmen Mičić, Carla Nahadi Babelegoto, Michael Sattler), Tänzerin (Tumi Sharon Mkhondo)

Duration: ca. 60 Min
World premiere: 12.05.2026

Xochiyaoyotl

Maximiliano Soto Mayorga (*1991), Chile

Co-production by Münchener Biennale and Styriarte Graz, in cooperation with schwere reiter/scope München.

In a world where gods were fed by humans, a child is trained to fight in war and preserve the sun god with his life.

“Xochiyaoyotl“, translated as ‘flower wars’, recalls rituals of Aztec martial arts that was wiped out by the Spanish conquest. We can only imagine what this combat – that challenged the belief in tomorrow every night anew - looked like.

David Camargo, Amauta García and Maximiliano Soto Mayorga develop a music theatre piece that lies between myth and memory, in which music, space and performance emerge from the physicality of the combatants.

“Xochiyaoyotl” is the winner of the OPEN CALL of the Münchener Biennale on the theme of “martial arts”. Chosen from among 85 submissions, the production was selected by an international jury consisting of Carola Bauckholt, Kenny Savelson, Vigdís Jakobsdóttir, Martin Minarik, Sarah Maria Sun, Óscar Escudero and Toshiki Okada.

Venue: schwere reiter
Set, costume and instrument design: David Camargo
Libretto, video, dramaturgy: Amauta García
Cast: Sänger*innen (Laure-Catherine Beyers, Johannes Wieners),
Instrumentalist*innen (5)

Duration: ca. 40 Min
World premiere: 13.05.2026

Der Miesepups

Margareta Ferek-Petric

Co-production by Münchener Biennale and JOiN/Staatstheater Stuttgart.

Miesepups, a grumpy creature, lives in a tree hollow in the Mooswald. He never gets up before noon nor does he want to see any of the other animals in the neighborhood. He is so grumpy that he even slams the door in the cuckoo's face. But a cuckoo is not so easily shaken off. Can it lure Miesepups out of his shell?

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“Der Miesepups” is based on the same-named book by Kirsten Fuchs and Cindy Schmid (illustrations). Margareta Ferek-Petrić Musiktheater tells of the sounds of the Mooswald forest, leads into the dreams of Miesepups, and shows us how wonderful it is to finally find a friend.

Venue: Volkstheater München

Musical direction: Michael Pandya

Original book: Kirsten Fuchs

Libretto: Silvan Rechsteiner

Stage direction: Maria Kwaschik

Stage design: Isabelle Kaiser

Costume design: Franziska Müller

Cast: Staatsorchester Stuttgart (10), Soloists of Staatsoper Stuttgart (Jacobo Ochoa, Robin Neck, Olivia Johnson, Carmen Larios Caparrós)

Duration: ca. 55 Min

World premiere: 14.05.2026

Hidden Heartache

Ailís Ní Ríain & Julie Herndon

Co-production by Münchener Biennale and ox&öl in cooperation with HochX Theater and Live Art.

In “Hidden Heartache”, two Deaf and two hearing performers look for a common physical language on stage, striving to understand each other and create a utopia beyond linguistic borders that lies somewhere between languages and cultures.

This piece by the Swiss collective ox&öl becomes physically accessible and experiential for all: by using body-sound transducers, the compositions by Ailís Ní Ríain and Julie Herndon, from the perspectives of a Deaf and a hearing composer, are transformed in the room.

** ‘Deaf’ (written with a capital letter) is the positive self-designation commonly used in English by people who cannot hear – regardless of whether they are deaf, have residual hearing or are hard of hearing.*

Venue: HochX

Stage direction: Philip Bartels (ox&öl)

Choreography/Co-creation/Costumes: Lee Méir (ox&öl)

Stage and costume design: ox&öl

Cast: Performers (Eli Cohen, Lua Leirner, Simone Keller, Kassandra Wedel)

Duration: ca. 70 Min

World premiere: 15.05.2026

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crypt_

Yuri Umemoto

Co-production by Münchener Biennale and Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival, Oslo Sinfonietta, Black Box teater Oslo and KLANG Festival Copenhagen Experimental Music.

More money, more fame, more art, more life.

In search of “more” – of excess, of abundance – a Japanese composer encounters three ghostly nobles. They put his supposed longings to the test and confront him with what truly matters to him: his faith, his music, his culture, his father. Between European opera, Japanese ghost story, anime, and artificial intelligence, „crypt_“ weaves together the tale of „Hoichi the Earless“ into a music theatre piece about ambition, identity, and the act of creation.

Venue: Muffathalle

Musical direction: Christian Eggen

Stage direction: Ivar Furre Aam

Libretto: Gareth Matthey

Costume design: Ingrid Torvund

Anime design, direction: Kanji Okai

Anime design:

Cast: Oslo Sinfonietta (9), Singers (Peyee Chen, Sean Bell, Mathias Monrad Møller, Halvor Festervoll Melien)

Duration: ca. 70 Min

World premiere: 16.05.2026

Radio broadcast on Bavarian Radio BR-KLASSIK: 30.06.2026, 20:03

Wie das flunkert

Music theatre about trickery and sonic detours

Piyawat Louilarpprasert

Co-production by Münchener Biennale and Schauburg München — Theater für junges Publikum.

Half a lie is almost true. Yes, no, not quite — well, almost. That’s almost the whole truth. The whole almost-truth. The twisted truth.

Sometimes it’s just easier to tell the truth by taking a few detours. Based on Emily Dickinson’s poem “Tell all the truth but tell it slant,” Daniella Strasfogel and Piyawat Louilarpprasert develop a music theatre piece that explores how difficult — and at the same time necessary — it is to tell the truth. Together with the audience, they improvise and experiment — and in the end, entirely new, fantastic sound-truths emerge.

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Venue: Schauburg Labor München
Stage direction, text, concept: Daniella Strasfogel
Stage and costume design: Lisa Fütterer
Cast: TETRA BRASS (Aljoscha Zierow, Luca Chiché, Christian Traute, Jakob Grimm),
Performance (Anh Kiet Le)

Duration: ca. 50 Min
World premiere: 16.05.2026

ARCHE

Where to put the mind?

Eugene Birman

immersive installation

Kampfkunst schreibt sich in Körper, Kunst, Dokumente und Objekte ein. Sie werden zum Archiv einer Praxis, geprägt von Rhythmen, Bewegung, Atem und Konzentration. Komponist Eugene Birman und Librettistin und Regisseurin Katharina Schmitt lenken in ihren Recherchen den Fokus auf die Ursprünge und die zeitgenössische Ausführung von Kung-Fu und suchen nach Verbindungen zum Gesang. In „ARCHE“ wird dieses Wissen in einen musikdramatischen Kontext gesetzt und als Installation für das Publikum frei begehbar.

Venue: Muffatwerk
Text/stage direction: Katharina Schmitt
Media dramaturgy: Christoph Wirth
Creative advisor: Jeffrey Shaw
Besetzung: Darsteller (Albert Law, Kelvin Mak, Pan Lingjuan), Soprano (Olga Siemieniczuk)

World premiere: 08.05.2026

Mineral Amnesia

Ioana Vreme Moser

Immersive installation "Mineral Amnesia" explores the evolution and decay of early erasable programmable memory through sound. Encapsulated under quartz windows, EPROMs, now obsolete microchips, lose data when exposed to light. The installation salvages various generations and plays them under UV light until their sounds are eroded and disappear. The work traverses the Digital Dark Age through the lens of an obsolete device.

Venue: Muffatwerk
World premiere: 14.05.2026

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Film Premiere (in German)

HANS WERNER HENZE
Composer, Communist, Dandy

Documentary film by Holger Preuße and Philipp Quiring, commissioned by WDR for ARTE

The life of the composer, born on 1 July 1926 in Gütersloh, reflects European contemporary history under a magnifying glass: the Nazi era and the war, conflicts arising from his homosexuality, and public attacks surrounding the 1968 movement made Henze Germany's most political composer. With his cosmopolitan demeanour and villa in Italy, he defied all expectations of a composer of so-called 'serious music', embodying the very essence of a dandy.

The film uncovers previously unknown personal archival material and, alongside public scandals, reveals Henze's more intimate side: as an individual, but also as a composer of fragile songs – presented here in first recordings with Sarah Maria Sun and Jan Philip Schulze.

Directors / Writers: Holger Preuße, Philipp Quiring

Cinematography: Dieter Stürmer

Editing: Jan Stefan Kolbe

Producer: Claus Wischmann

Production Company: sounding images GmbH

With: Barrie Kosky, Jörg Widmann, Riccardo Panfili, Gretchen Dutschke-Klotz, Camilla Nylund, Ian Bostridge, Michael Kerstan, Helen Grob, Torben Hardenberg, among others

Duration: approx. 88 minutes

Venue: Theatiner Filmkunst

World premiere: 09.05.2026

The cinema screening will be followed by a panel discussion with the film team and Dr Michael Kerstan (Henze Foundation).

CAMPUS (in German)

A Space for Listening, Discussion, and Networking – Between Stage, University, and Society

A collaboration between the Munich Biennale, the Anton Bruckner Private University (Linz), and the Institute for Theatre Studies, LMU Munich

At the campus, scientists and artists come together. Lecturers from various disciplines give students the opportunity to look beyond their own fields and gain new perspectives. The 2026 Campus edition will focus on artistic mediation in music theatre, both in theory and practice. The campus thus provides a space for critical reflection and intensive

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dialogue, forming the foundation for vibrant, socially relevant, and forward-looking artistic and cultural work.

Concept and Realisation: Laura Nerbl, Christiane Plank-Baldauf, Irena Müller-Brozovic
Dates: 13 - 15 May 2026

Podcast „Noch nicht Premiere“ (in German)

In Kooperation mit MUCBOOK und POSITIONEN

Bastian Zimmermann, editor of the music magazine POSITIONEN, hosts entertaining episodes that provide insights into productions and feature conversations with personalities from the festival.

To the podcast: <https://www.muenchener-biennale.de/en/programm/podcast>

Young Critics

In co-operation with Hochschule für Musik und Theater München and Bayerischen Theaterakademie August Everding

Under the title 'Young Critics', seven young critics from the Cultural Journalism programme at the Munich University of Music and Performing Arts are accompanying the productions of young international artists at this year's Munich Biennale.

Under the direction of Süddeutsche Zeitung music editor Egbert Tholl, the students are reviewing and reporting on selected productions from the festival. You can read the results of their analyses and experiences [here](#).

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Organiser

Organised by Spielmotor München Festival gGmbH – the festival platform of the City of Munich with the kind support of the BMW Group



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