

Taja Astar – Artist Statement

As a composer, I write, first of all and most eagerly, on things that pierce me, that bite me in the heart – or irritate my mind. By this, I strive to pierce the listener's heart and mind also, which guides and shapes my personal musical language: I write in what can be called a “modern tonal paradigm,” calling for both advanced harmonies and traditional techniques to serve my purpose.

I often collaborate with my poet wife Anna, who is both my source of inspiration, co-author and most demanding judge. Art is for us a way to process the world and a tool of empathy. We write on what moves us deeply: war, the fragility of life and the nature, humanity's absurdity, the longing for the transcendental and beauty, suffering and fight... In this sense, my own and our shared works are both very personal and universally human, where the shreds of emotions and contemplation get sewn into a breathing patchwork, together with a manifold of musical and extramusical references.

The piece “All the Power and Glory” for soprano and orchestra is an example of such a patchwork that reaches beyond the borders between nations, languages, cultures, and even beyond the human race. To create the musical texture of the work, I composed numerous original motives in different folk traditions that talk to each other, complement each other, and intricately intertwine, to create an organic flow, where the shoots of creativity from various times, continents and peoples coexist in perfect harmony. Some other material in the piece is built around the “songs” of humpback whales. The musical texture where the melodies, made via transformation and “translation” of these songs, are juxtaposed with the folk tunes puts people into the general context of “natural creativity” and reminds us that nature also speaks and needs to be heard. The title of the piece refers to the New Testament (Luke 4:6) and metaphorically blames people for claiming authority over the world that existed long before them, for blindly pursuing dominance over their peers through war and violence. Merging all these components together, the work is a pungent reflection on the things that are common and potentially uniting for all of us, such as longing for creativity, and on why people use these very things to justify the aggression against each other.

This description pretty much summarizes my approach to composition in general and writing for orchestra in particular, both in regard to the techniques used and topics explored. I consider myself a versatile composer, who is open for various genres and settings, and my artistic aim is to wake thoughts, feelings, and have a dialogue with the listener.