

S.E.M. Ensemble
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S.E.M. ENSEMBLE
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ROULETTE INTERMEDIUM

509 Atlantic Avenue / at 3rd Ave, Brooklyn Downtown (one block from BAM)

SPECIAL EVENT!
Thursday, September 29th
6pm - 12am

The complete performance of
Many Many Women

by

Petr Kotik

text

Gertrude Stein

Staging and Projection

Jo Fabian



S.E.M. Ensemble performing *Many Many Women* at New Opera Festival NODO
(Ostrava, Czech Republic), June 2022.

S.E.M. Ensemble, Petr Kotik, director

Sopranos: Zen Wu, Ana Caseiro
Countertenor, Tenor: Padraic Costello, Nathan Fletcher
Bass baritone, Bass: James Gregory, Nicholas Hay
Flutes: Petr Kotik; Roberta Michel
Trumpets: Sam Jones; Patrick Smithers
Trombones: Will Lang, Jen Baker
Percussionists: Chris Nappi, Juan Herrera, Sam Lazzara,
Russell Greenberg
Lights, Projections: Jo Fabian, Marian Joel Küster

How do you listen to extended duration music?

*You can stay for the entire duration
(it will give you one-of-a-kind experience)
or come later, leave earlier,
or take a break in the middle.*

Many Many Women opens the 33rd Season of Interpretations Concert Series produced by Mutable Music. This year's Interpretations series also includes major works by: Wadada Leo Smith, Tyshawn Sorey, Michael Byron, and Alexandra Gardner, among others.

Tickets Available Here: <https://roulette.org/event/interpretations-peter-kotik-80th-birthday-celebration/>

Many Many Women will be performed as opera. It is an opera as spectacle without a plot or a story. Staged by the Berlin director and designer Jo Fabian, *Many Many Women* (1975-78) is Petr Kotik's magnum opus composed on the entire text of Gertrude Stein's novella of the same title. The Roulette concert follows the production of MMW at the New Opera Festival NODO in Ostrava, Czech Republic this past June. For this staged version, Kotik also added a simultaneous performance of *Drums* (1977-80) for percussion.

It was the invitation to perform the piece at NODO, that inspired the creation of the staged opera version. NODO festival explores new approaches to opera and this year, it included eight productions, five of them by young emerging composers. Besides *Many Many Women*, there were other operas that turned away from the romantic notion of an opera as drama. These new operas could be described as "variable situation spectacles," among them pieces, such as *Nulanus* by the young Slovak composer Miroslav Tóth (performed on a mountain close to Ostrava), and the monumental *Prometeo* by Luigi Nono (two conductors, four orchestras, choir, vocal and instrumental soloists, percussion, narrators and extended electronics). *For images of opera productions at NODO [click here](#)*

About *Many Many Women*

In *Many Many Women*, the audience follows a flow of musical events that have no clear beginning or ending. It is a "situation" instead of "dramatic story." This notion was eloquently described by Morton Feldman in his comments on Samuel Beckett's libretto to the opera *Neither*:

"...there's something peculiar about the text. I can't catch it. Finally, I see that every line is really the same thought said in another way. And yet the continuity acts as if something else is happening. Nothing else is happening. What you're doing, in an almost Proustian way, is getting deeper and deeper saturated into the thought."

Kotik began composing for voice in 1971, as a result of his close collaboration with the composer and singer Julius Eastman. From the first piece he composed for Eastman, Kotik was using the writings of Gertrude Stein. *Many Many Women* is the culmination of the series of Stein-related works. The twelve musicians – six singers and six instruments – perform continuously for six hours. The duration of the complete piece is determined by the text – every word of the of Stein's novella has been used.

Many Many Women is based on a concept of a "variable situation." The form is not narrative and does not have a dramatic character. The idea of a continuous, non-dramatic "situation" emerged in the early 1950. Instead of a narrative progression – known in music as the Sonata form - there is a continuous, almost Beckettian situation that, although changing, remains constant.

The score of *Many Many Women* consists of 173 sections across 378 pages. The sections are distributed among all the performers, who shape the piece during the performance, improvising their entrances, creating a musical flow of unpredictable configurations. The poetic nature of Stein's text suggests images that could lead to a musical theater. Despite its open form, *Many Many Women* is traditionally and exactly notated. The performance at the NODO festival was the first staged performance.

About the Composer

Although as a composer, **Petr Kotik** is regarded as self-taught, he undertook rigorous musical training, studying the flute at the Prague Conservatory and taking private composition lessons with Jan Rychlík, followed by composition studies at the Akademie für Musik in Vienna. Rychlík has been a source of inspiration and admiration for Kotik throughout his life (similar to Philip Glass's admiration for Nadia Boulanger). Rychlík's work and ideas were far ahead of his time. In the late 1950s, he began to work with phase music based on African drumming, similar to Steve Reich's compositions more than a decade later. Rychlík's early beginnings as a jazz player as well as his scholarly research into music practice led him to understand and appreciate the significance of improvisation, almost half a century before it became part of the avant-garde. It is possible that the unconventional openness of Rychlík, together with the writings of Cage, which Kotik discovered at the age of eighteen, may have influenced the composer's way of thinking at this very early stage.

About the Stage Director:

Born in Berlin (East) in 1960, **Jo Fabian** is an author, director, stage designer, and choreographer. He is the founder and artistic director of the theatre group known today as DEPARTMENT/fabian.dept. Since 1987, Jo Fabian has created more than 40 stage productions for theaters throughout Germany. In 1989 he worked closely with the Bauhaus in Dessau and founded the independent project group ›example dept.‹ that worked under his direction for six years. His unusual theater of images suspends the borderlines between theater, dance, performance, concerts and installation and typically combines polished artificial aesthetics with precision and subtle irony.

About the S.E.M. Ensemble

SEM is dedicated to the performance and advancement of new music, with a focus on current compositions. Since its inception in 1970, SEM has collaborated with composers who have also often performed with the group. They have included Earle Brown, John Cage, Alvin Lucier, Morton Feldman, Alvin Singleton, Leroy Jenkins, Pauline Oliveros, Elliott Sharp, Jackson Mac Low, Roscoe Mitchell, Phill Niblock, David Tudor and Christian Wolff, among others.

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Can't make it on September 29?

You can attend the preview performance on Friday, September 23rd Willow Place Auditorium, 26 Willow Place, Brooklyn
5pm to 11pm

A monument from the 1970s - a durable classic, vast in scale, rich in polyphony...
- Kyle Gann, 1999

Kotik's hands, the iron-clad rhythms that drive words and music have weight but are not heavy – they are deliberate and move horizontally with a regularity.
- George Grella, 2021

...consistently strong and distinctive, Many Many Women is a 20th century masterpiece.
- Christian Wolff, 2022

Many Many Women is an enormously demanding composition... dedication, stamina and concentration of the performers is astounding. The music has an ingenuous effect on the listener.. Like watching a river, a sea surf, a fire or the swaying of treetops...
- Jan Borek, Harmonie magazine, Prague, July, 2022

S.E.M. Ensemble's 2022-23 season has been made possible with the generous support of the New York State Council on the Arts in partnership with Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature, with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, The Amphion Foundation, The Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University, The Foundation for Contemporary Art, The Fritz Reiner Center for Contemporary Music, The Low Road Foundation, Stephen J. Deutsch, and Martina Forman. Special thanks to The Czech Center New York, Consulate General of the Czech Republic in New York, and Brooklyn District 33 Councilman Lincoln Restler.