

“EMERGING VOICES” INTERVIEW WITH AKIM ZVARYCH ON MUSIC AND ARTISTIC RELEVANCE

BY ILONA TAMILINA

In the context of the ULYSSES Platform, co-funded by the European Union, Gaudeamus, the Internationale Ensemble Modern Akademie (IEMA) and the Ukrainian Institute in the Netherlands have launched a special project called “Emerging Voices”. Akim Zvarych, a 22-year-old Ukrainian composer, won the open call of this project and is currently composing a new piece for IEMA. Akim is also supported by the ULYSSES Platform for the commission of a work by Lviv National Philharmonic in the context of the concert series Pro et Contra. New Music Stage. The world premiere of this work, *Transcription*, was performed on August 29, 2026.

The premiere of Akim's piece at Gaudeamus will take place on 11 September at this year's festival in Utrecht. I spoke to the composer in July about what matters to him at the moment and whether this will be reflected in his new work.

What is it like to be a young Ukrainian composer and musician today?

It's a complex question... There are pros and cons. Of course, I see plenty of opportunities and I feel more support with every passing year. But, unfortunately, there are still certain things that can make it difficult for young artists in Ukraine...

You came to composition via performance. Does your experience as a violinist and violist influence your approach to composition?

Absolutely. Particularly in terms of making music that is practical to perform, which is crucial for the piece to work in performance. Also, when I perform music, I analyse it. This analysis gives me a deeper understanding of the material, which is essential for me as a composer.

As a composer, performer and listener, what exactly interests you in music at the moment: new technologies, ways of engaging with the audience, working with sound, etc?

I'm interested in working with time and texture. For me, music is very similar to architecture: the more complex and polyphonic the structure, the more context and logic it creates, and the more interesting it becomes.



Do you like Iannis Xenakis?

I can't say I'm a fan of his right now, though perhaps I was in the past. But he has certainly had a huge influence on my understanding and my vision of structure and form.

You work at the intersection of contemporary academic music and electroacoustics. What matters most to you as a composer/performer/musician today? Will this become the concept behind this piece?

What concerns me most is the question of relevance. That's why I write about things that interest me at the moment. In this particular piece, I'm working with memory and history. The result is, in fact, a very expansive, multi-layered structure. I've now finally finished the preparatory work. I'm currently notating the piece and looking for a notation style that suits me. The title of the piece came about as “Das Glasperlenspiel”.

What does it mean to you that your piece is being performed by IEMA?

For me, it's a very important and valuable experience: making new acquaintances and collaborating with these musicians. I have a unique opportunity to work alongside specialists of the very highest calibre. Also, as these people are so professional and experienced, I can learn as a performer a great deal from them simply by working with them to prepare the piece for the premiere.

Do you feel that your experience of living and working in Ukraine during Russia's war against Ukraine has influenced your worldview and your music? In which way exactly?

I don't think it directly influences my music, but it certainly influences me. I'm not sure I can say exactly how. I think it will take a long time before I can answer that question for myself. In fact, I started writing music actively after the full-scale invasion in 2022, and for me it's more of a form of therapy than a means of expression. In my view, there are far more effective ways of talking about war than through music.

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Read more about Akim Zvarych's activities in the ULYSSES Platform [at Gaudeamus](#) and [with the Lviv National Philharmonic](#).

Ilona Tاملينا is a Ukrainian musicologist currently living in the Netherlands. She has a PhD in music history and has worked as a press secretary, scientific researcher, journalist and teacher.

Artist biography

Akim Zvarych is a composer and violinist from Kyiv, working at the intersection of contemporary classical music, electroacoustics, and music for theatre.

As a violinist, he has taken part in numerous international festivals, masterclasses and academies in Ukraine, Poland, Belgium, Switzerland and Germany, including the Morawa Music Academy (2019), the International Chamber Music Festival Koblenz (2024), the Kyiv Baroque Fest (2025) and others.

He honed his performing skills under the guidance of musicians such as Amandine Bayer, Mark Bushkov, Raphaël Merlin, Jörg Zwicker, Dima Smirnov, Anna Gebert, Pablo Shatsman, Eva Rabchevska, Serhii Ostrovskyi and others, as well as his compositional skills under Sven-Ingo Koch, Étienne Gahan and Oleksii Shmurak.

As a composer and instrumentalist, he took part in the "Music Student Exchange" Ukraine–Canada (2023). In 2023, he took part in the performance "Hide and Seek with Mr Lyatoshynsky"; in 2024, he composed the music for the performance "Mr Schoenberg's Whimsical Tales". Since 2025, he has been an artist with the Opera Aperta contemporary opera laboratory. As part of the ensemble, he took part in performances of the opera "GAIA-24. Opera del mondo" at the Schall und Rausch festival (Berlin, 2025), "The Actor's House. Breath" (Zaporizhzhia, 2025) and "Mōdraniht. Songs of Winter War" at the Kř Fest (Kyiv, 2026), Rotterdam Operadagen (Rotterdam, 2026) and Wiener Festwochen (Vienna, 2026) festivals.

The composer's works have been performed in Ukraine, Germany, Switzerland, Finland, the Netherlands and Canada. He receives grant support from the VERE MUSIC FUND (Ukraine). He is a winner of the Emerging Voices Competition (2026).