

# DENİZ KÜSTÜ

## THE SEA-CROSSED FISHERMAN OPERA IN FOUR SCENES

Music by Michael Ellison

Libretto adapted from Yaşar Kemal's novel by Simon Jones

"The realization of Yaşar Kemal's magic permeated every second of the work's ninety minutes, with its elements achieving a spectacular unity."

— Vecdi Sayar, *Taraf*





### **"A Masterpiece"**

— *Ismail Hakkı Aksu, Reflections on Art, Istanbul*

**"...an arresting picture of Istanbul, from its glittering  
dawns to its seething underbelly."**

— *Ismail Hakkı Aksu, Reflections on Art, Istanbul*

**"The Sea-Crossed Fisherman reflects the creation of a  
kind of total work of art in which were interwoven music,  
singing, acting, and dance, together with the stunningly  
beautiful videos of NOHlab."**

— *Gianluigi Mattietti, Amadeus (Italy)*

**"Ellison's work has focused on the interaction between  
Western and Eastern music traditions, and it is striking  
how well he navigates the potentially disparate novel  
soundworlds here. Instruments break out of their  
traditional roles and mix to form novel sonorities, so that  
the sea music shimmers, a bed of strings below spangling  
out [kemençe, kanun,] and reedy ney."**

— *James Imam, Opera*

**"Ellison's music played well by alternating, through  
dramatically compelling means, fantastic episodes  
and the "noir", in a way that seamlessly integrated  
contemporary elements and the traditional Turkish  
instruments."**

— *Gianluigi Mattietti, Amadeus (Italy)*

**"Casting Dancers as the dolphins illustrated Fisher Selim's  
infatuation with the creatures, and NOHlab's projections  
worked wonders, transforming a dank Menekse coffee-  
house into a maritime expanse, or conveying Zeynel's  
panic with a winding chase over rooftops."**

— *James Imam, Opera*



## **Deniz Küstü** **The Sea-Crossed Fisherman**

Opera in four scenes by Michael Ellison

Based on the novel Deniz Küstü (1978) by Yaşar Kemal

Director/Librettist/Dramaturg: Simon Jones

Choreography: Zeynep Tanbay

Video Performance & Installation : NohLab -Candaş Şişman, Deniz Kader

Hezarfen Ensemble

Conductor: Michael Rafferty

### **CAST**

Gwion Thomas (SELIM, a fisherman)

Robyn Allegra Parton (MENEKŞE VILLAGER/NARRATOR/CHORUS)

Louise Innes (MENEKŞE VILLAGER/CHORUS)

Damian Thantrey (FISHERMAN/EAGLE'S OWNER/CHORUS)

Adam Green (FISHERMAN/BOATMAN/CHORUS)

From the Zeynep Tanbay Dance Project:

Evrin Akyay (ZEYNEL, a gangster on the run/VEZİROĞLU, a

Developer, DOLPHIN)

Gizem Bilgen (VILLAGER/SELIM'S DOLPHIN/MERMAID/POLICE OFFICER)

Can Gökdoğan (FISHERMAN/EAGLE/DOLPHIN)

Serhat Kural (FISHERMAN/ DOLPHIN/ POLICE OFFICER)

Co-commissioned by IKSŞ (Istanbul Culture and Arts Foundation) with support from European Research Council (ERC) and Istanbul Music Festival

**DENİZ KÜSTÜ** is a piece of total music-theatre, composed by Michael Ellison and adapted from Yaşar Kemal's 1978 novel by Simon Jones. This dynamic new opera brings this modern gem of Turkish literature to the stage for the first time. In his visionary novel, Kemal creates the tragic story of a village loner – Fisher Selim – and an orphaned street-child – Zeynel – to explore many of the crucial challenges the world faces today: destruction of the earth's resources, the devastating impact of global trade on traditional lifestyles and communities, and the ordinary person's sense of powerlessness in the face of corruption and injustice. To realize Kemal's penetrating analysis of these challenges, the opera moves through four scenes, which contrast the seascape of the Marmara Sea – with its swordfish and dolphins and mermaids in its changing moods – with the dizzying, teeming metropolis of Istanbul and one small fishing village, Menekşe. The work moves from social realism to magical realism to make its powerful critique.

Ellison's score articulates Kemal's concern for the powerless individual facing such global forces through an unprecedented integration of Western and traditional Turkish instruments. This unique musical sound for opera is realised through the imaginative, vibrant playing of Hezarfen Ensemble, together with five stellar singers from the UK under the direction of Michael Rafferty. The staging of Deniz Küstü extends and deepens the intercultural encounter at the heart of Ellison's recent music through a new collaboration between librettist and director Simon Jones (Bodies in Flight, UK), acclaimed choreographer Zeynep Tanbay (Turkey) and NohLAB – video-designers Deniz Kader and Candaş Şişman (Turkey). The result is a 70-minute total music-theatre piece integrating Turkish and Western instruments, contemporary choreography and cutting-edge video-animation, that takes its audience on a stunning emotional journey from the swell of a small fishing boat on the Marmara sea to a slapstick police chase through the streets and sounds of Istanbul, from personal compromise and agony, through comedy and touching friendship, to tragic misunderstanding and hard-won hope. A new opera that addresses our fears for the planet through the struggle of one lonely fisherman and his poor orphaned deck-hand.

## SYNOPSIS



### 1ST SCENE: THE MURDER OF IHSAN

A coffee-house in the fishing village of Menekşe on the Marmara Sea outside Istanbul. The villagers return from the funeral of the local gangster Ihsan. The village-loner Selim enters, prompting the others to relive Ihsan's traumatic death at the hands of the orphaned street-child Zeynel. Even though Selim tried to intervene, they end up blaming him for Zeynel's actions.



### 2ND SCENE: SELIM'S DOLPHIN

Selim is fishing for swordfish in his boat. As he struggles to catch a prize specimen, the villagers continue their gossiping, recounting a story of Selim's love for a dolphin. Suddenly, this tale turns into a nightmare as the dolphins are slaughtered and boiled for their oil. Selim is horrified at the violence, but can do nothing to stop it, so he gets drunk, as sea, boat and coffee-house merge into one stormy, drunken dreamscape. Full of self-loathing at his own impotence, Selim accepts a boat-load of dolphin carcasses. Recognizing his own beloved dolphin dead amongst them, he falls asleep in despair and mental exhaustion. As he sleeps, the villagers' gossip becomes malicious and fantastical, recounting how he went insane and fell in love with a mermaid. Finally, Selim wakes as a policeman appears to question him about Ihsan's murder.



### 3RD SCENE: ZEYNEL'S FLIGHT

The villagers read reports of Zeynel on the run in Istanbul, chased by police through the sights and sounds of the city. Zeynel finds a brief moment of sanctuary amongst the moored boats on the Golden Horn, before the chase starts up again even more frantically. The newspaper headlines become hysterical, building up Zeynel into an all-powerful gangster. In another moment of respite, Zeynel sees a fortune-teller with his eagle, handing out fortunes on slips of paper. The bird's motion whips the crowd into a panicked frenzy of fearful and accusatory speculation, confirming Zeynel's now mythic status. Meanwhile Zeynel himself becomes so desperate he decides to return to Menekşe, just as the crowd recognize him and point him out.



### 4TH SCENE: SELIM BUILDS A HOUSE

Whilst Selim is dreaming again of the mermaid on his boat, the swordfish reappears. As Selim reels him in, the fish turns out to be Zeynel at the end of the line. Selim promises to smuggle Zeynel abroad to safety. As they journey out to sea, their moods oscillate wildly between fear that the other will murder them, to joy they will survive and escape. Eventually Zeynel's paranoia overwhelms him and he pulls his gun on Selim, who overpowers and kills him. In another extreme mood-swing, Selim decides to use Zeynel's hoard of stolen cash to build his dream-home for the mermaid to live in. As he hands out wads of banknotes, the villagers enthusiastically help him. Soon the building-work turns into feasting to celebrate the new house, as Selim's mood shifts again and he attempts suicide. Meanwhile the villagers tell of the arrival of factory ships, run by the village hard-man, the developer Veziroğlu. They encourage Selim to give up his traditional fishing and go work on these ships. As Veziroğlu is feted by the villagers, Selim appears to come to a resolution: he approaches the developer and shoots him with Zeynel's gun. Everyone flees, leaving Selim for one last time on his boat out at sea. There he sees a family of dolphins. The world is suddenly clear and bright, the huge open sea blue, blooming like a flower of joy.





#### MICHAEL ELLISON

Singing melody, an at times propulsive, at times scintillatingly mercurial sense of rhythm, large-scale harmonic mastery, and above all a keen dramatic bent characterise Michael Ellison's work, which seamlessly integrates traditional (especially Turkish and Western) and contemporary sensibilities. Ellison's first opera, *Mevlana, Say I am You* (Rotterdam Operadagen and Istanbul Music Festivals, 2012) broke new ground in contemporary music, achieving an unprecedented level of integration of the Turkish traditional instruments and voices—a direction his second opera, *Deniz Küstü* (Istanbul Music Festival, 2016, Jones/Tanbay/NOHlab) extends. Ellison has been commissioned by BBC Symphony Orchestra, Radio France, Acht Brücken Festival (Köln), Grenoble Festival, New York Youth Symphony, and New Music Southwest (UK), amongst many others. He is Principal Investigator on the five-year, Bristol-based European Research Council project *Beyond East and West: Developing and Documenting an Evolving Transcultural Musical Practice*, and co-director of *Hezarfen Ensemble*.



#### SIMON JONES

(librettist, dramaturg and stage-director) is a writer and scholar, founder and co-director of *Bodies in Flight* (UK), which has to date produced 17 performance works and numerous documents of performance that have at their heart the encounter between flesh and text, where words move and flesh utters. He has been visiting scholar at Amsterdam University, a visiting artist at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Banff Arts Centre. He has published in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, *Liveartmagazine*, *Shattered Anatomies*, *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, *Performance Research: on Beckett*, co-edited *Practice as Research in Performance and Screen* and his work with *Bodies in Flight* features in *Josephine Machon's (Syn)aesthetics? Towards a Definition of Visceral Performance*. He recently led two major projects into the accessibility, preservation and creative re-use of live art archives – *Into the Future* and *Performing Documents*; and is currently collaborating with composer Michael Ellison on two new operas.

#### ZEYNEP TANBAY

Zeynep Tanbay started her ballet training in Ankara, Turkey where she was born. In 1981 she went to New York to study at Joffrey Ballet School and continued her training as a scholarship student in School of Cleveland Ballet, San Francisco Ballet School and Alvin Ailey Dance School. In 1983 she joined the Minnesota Dance Theatre as a soloist and a year later became the principal dancer, performing classical repertoire as well as works of Balanchine, Glen Tetley, Loyce Houlton and others. Having a serious surgery from her foot made an end to her classical ballet career and she continued her dancing in bare foot. Returning to New York, she studied on scholarship at the Paul Taylor and Martha Graham Dance Schools. Tanbay joined the Martha Graham Dance Company as a dancer and same time became a faculty member in Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance. In 1994 she choreographed her first solo and performed it as a guest artist, with the Elisa Monte Dance Company touring to İstanbul in 1995. In 1998, it was time to return back to her native country to continue to dance her own choreographies in her own company, which she initiated in 2000 under the name Zeynep Tanbay Dance Project.



#### NOHLAB

NOHlab is a studio founded and directed by two experienced creative partners: Deniz Kader & Candaş Şişman. Established in late 2011, NOHlab is focused in the areas of art direction, motion design, projection mapping, audio-visual performance and new media for art & culture and advertisement industry. They are motivated by pushing the boundaries in design and visual communication. NOHlab has received several awards, among which are an Honorary Mention from *Prix ARS Electronica Computer Animation/Film/VFX* and Best Prize in Sound Design from *Roma Viedram Video Festival*. They have participated in many exhibitions and festivals such as TED X, ARS Electronica, *Genius Loci Weimar* and *OFFF*. Among the clients and institutions who commissioned work from NOHlab are Chanel, Pink Floyd, Target Scriabin Museum, Audi, Istanbul 2010 Agency, Ankara State Polyphonic Choir, *OFFF Festival*, EA Theatre, Blackberry, Turkcell, Joyce Gallery, Lunchmeat Festival and Nike.







#### **MICHAEL RAFFERTY**

After a short career as a research physicist, Michael Rafferty switched to music initially as a violinist and later as a conductor. He is co-founder of Music Theatre Wales and conducted all its performances for more than 25 years. Other conducting has included performances with the BBC Concert Orchestra, Opera National du Rhin, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Scottish Opera, London Mozart Players, Norway's BIT 20 Ensemble, Musikfabrik of Cologne, The Composers' Ensemble and PM Music Ensemble. Altogether, he has conducted the works of more than 80 living composers and 50 opera productions. Many of his performances have been broadcast on radio and TV and he has made several CDs - most recently, Philip Glass' *The Trial*, soon to be released on Orange Mountain Music. In 2016 he conducted the world premiere of Stuart MacRae's *The Devil Inside* with Scottish Opera, and the world premiere of Michael Ellison's *Deniz Küstü* with Hezarfen Ensemble at the Istanbul Music Festival. In 2010 he received an Arts Council of Wales Creative Wales Award and in 2016 was awarded an MBE for services to music in Wales.

#### **ROBYN ALLEGRA PARTON [NARRATOR/CHORUS-SOPRANO]**

has received numerous prizes, including the prestigious Joaninha Trust award, appearing in roles ranging from the Vixen in Janacek's masterpiece, to Agnes in David Bruce's *Nothing at Glyndebourne*, to Peg in *The Virtues of Things* with the Royal Opera.

#### **LOUISE INNES [FISHERMAN'S WIFE/CHORUS-MEZZO-SOPRANO]**

has appeared as Sesto at the ENO, Festival Aix-en-Provence, Royal Opera House and countless other houses, performing such seminal mezzo roles as Carmen, Dido, Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*) and Javotte (*Manon*).

#### **DAMIAN THANTREY [EAGLE OWNER/CHORUS-BARITONE]**

has appeared in numerous contemporary operas, at Aldeburgh, Bregenz and Opéra Nationale de Lorraine, and appeared in Marc-Antony Turnage's *Anna Nicole* at the Royal Opera House.

#### **ADAM GREEN [BOATMAN/CHORUS-BARITONE]**

Adam Green has performed in roles ranging from the Police Lieutenant in Tippett's *The Ice Break* to Aeneas in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, as well as in James MacMillan's *Clemency* with ROH.

#### **GWION THOMAS [SELIM-BARITONE]**

Bartione Gwion Thomas' wide-ranging career has featured frequent contemporary opera appearances, including in Turnage's Greek with Music Theatre Wales, as Huld in Glass' *The Trial*, as well as Punch in Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy* and Pasternak in *The Electrification of the Soviet Union*.

#### **ZEYNEP TANBAY DANCE PROJECT**

Initiated by Zeynep Tanbay in 2000, the Zeynep Tanbay Dance Project (ZTDP) has proved to be the trailblazer in Turkey in the field of dance since its very first appearance. Maintaining its continuity independently of the state and gathering an enthusiastic audience through new projects every year, ZTDP successfully carried the mission of filling the gap in the field of dance in Turkey. In 2006 ZTDP entered a new stage as an independent, professional dance Company, gathering 10 dancers under one roof, supported by private sponsorships. Presenting modern dance outside of İstanbul, reaching a wide audience through national tours and building an authentic repertoire with new works by Zeynep Tanbay, lead to many innovative creations in the field.

#### **HEZARFEN ENSEMBLE**

Since its inception in January 2010, Hezarfen Ensemble has had an enormous impact on the contemporary music scene in İstanbul, presenting countless premieres of Turkish works to European audiences as well as in Turkey itself. Hezarfen has appeared on major European festivals including MärzMusik, (Berlin, 2013) Rotterdam Operadagen (2012), Klangzeit Festival Münster (2013), Istanbul Music Festival (2011-12), and many others. From 2015-2020, Hezarfen Ensemble will take part in Beyond East and West a European Research Council (ERC) grant, awarded to world-leading research projects based in Europe, to facilitate Hezarfen's long-term goal of integrating Turkish traditional instruments and voices into contemporary music.

"Gwion Thomas was perfectly cast in the role of Fisher Selim. Here we got the brooding reticence and inner intensity of Kemal's description... The other challenging roles were stylishly delivered by Robyn Allegra Parton, Louise Innes, Damian Thantrey and Adam Green, who doubled up to provide the illusion of a bigger cast."

— James Imam, *Opera*

"...brilliantly performed by Hezarfen Ensemble, Turkey's gold standard in contemporary music"

— Gianluigi Mattiotti,  
*Amadeus*



#### FOR BOOKINGS AND INQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT

#### HEZARFEN ENSEMBLE

##### Management

Şafak Üstündağ

+90 533 9274762

safak.ustundag@hezarfenensemble.com

www.hezarfenensemble.com

##### Directors

Michael Ellison

+90 538 065 3619 / +44 791 043 7747

michael.ellison@hezarfenensemble.com

Ulrich Mertin

+90 530 490 8364 / +49 177 280 5995

ulrich.mertin@hezarfenensemble.com

Ilyas Celebi Sokak N9 D8

Kilicalipasa Mahallesi

Cihangir/Beyoglu

34433 Istanbul/Turkey

+90 (0)212 243 5762

info@hezarfenensemble.com



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#### PRODUCTION REQUIREMENTS

The following production and technical details are a basic indication of what is required to stage the opera.

#### COMPANY [33 IN TOTAL]

Singers (5)

Dancers (4)

Musicians/ Hezarfen Ensemble (13)

Composer

Conductor/ musical director

Stage director

Choreographer

Video designers (2)

Lighting Designers (2)

Stage-managers (2)

Company Manager

(23 company members are based in Turkey; 10 in the UK.)

#### STAGING

Playing area: minimum 10M wide by 10M deep.

Orchestra pit area: minimum 9M wide by 3.5M deep.

Rear LED video screen: circa 12M wide by 5M high.

Side mirrored panels: circa 5M wide by 5M high on each side.

Stage floor: black, preferably slightly reflective & sprung.

Furniture: 5 wooden tables (4 small; 1 large) & 9 wooden chairs.

Costumes & props: supplied by the company.

