

# Kempff : Kulturstiftung

## Activity Report 2025

With the help of its sponsors, the Kempff Cultural Foundation succeeded in realising a sophisticated and diverse cultural programme in the 2025 event year. This was made possible by the generous support of the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation, the municipality of Positano and private donations. At Casa Orfeo in Positano, southern Italy, a sophisticated programme consisting of a high-calibre Beethoven master class, artist residencies and a music festival was realised.

In addition, in cooperation with the municipality of Positano, a music festival took place for the second time in September at various locations in Positano.

The following projects were implemented by the Kempff Cultural Foundation in 2025:

### **Progetto Positano: Scholarship with double portrait concert**

The Progetto Positano was launched in 2017 by the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation as a pilot project with a scholarship for young composers in cooperation with the Kempff Cultural Foundation and the ensemble mosaik under the direction of Enno Poppe. Each year, two scholarship holders are invited to spend a month at the Kempff Cultural Foundation in Positano working on their compositions. Following the residency, the works of the respective scholarship holders are presented at a double portrait concert in Berlin.

In spring and summer 2025, the premises in Positano were made available to the selected composers, and their entry and stay were facilitated.

Composer Arash Yazdani resided at Casa Orfeo in Positano in February. At the end of May, composer Zara Ali travelled to the Kempff estate in Positano for a four-week artist residency.

## Arash Yazdani



**Arash Yazdani** is a composer and conductor living in Estonia whose musical career has taken him to renowned institutions around the world. He studied at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, the University of Music in Basel, the University of Huddersfield and the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. There he earned degrees in piano, double bass, orchestral conducting and composition.

A former research fellow at the Institute for Electronic Music and Acoustics (IEM) in Graz, he was awarded the Jonathan Harvey Scholarship in 2020. From 2020 to 2023, he also served as a lecturer at the University of Huddersfield in England.

Yazdani's music is characterised by the innovative application of acoustic and psychoacoustic phenomena, which he uses to create unique listening experiences. His works have been performed at numerous international festivals, including the Schwetzingen SWR Festival, Musikprotokoll Graz, Warsaw Autumn, Ostrava Music Days, MIXTUR Barcelona, MATA Festival New York, IGMN Basel, CrossRoads Festival Salzburg, Darmstadt Summer Courses, World Saxophone Congress, L'Archipel Festival, Voix Nouvelles Royaumont, ReMusik Festival St. Petersburg, Vertixe Vigo and the ISCM World Music Days.

As artistic director of the Sound Plasma music festival, which focuses on alternative intonations in Berlin and Tallinn, and as artistic director and conductor of the Ensemble for New Music Tallinn, he has a significant influence on the contemporary music scene. In addition, he has worked as a guest conductor with several renowned ensembles and orchestras, including the Moravian Philharmonic, the NeuverBand Ensemble, the defunensemble, the Sonemus Ensemble and the Ensemble U.

Arash Yazdani has been honoured with numerous prizes and awards. He won first prize at the "Welcoming Maqam" composition competition in Berlin in 2016 and first prize at the "Speech, Text, Silence" composition competition organised by the Lemniscate ensemble in Basel in 2015. In 2023, a double CD album of his music entitled "Propagation of Uncertainty" was released by Kairos. His 2022 work "Hurreh" for 12 voices was selected by Estonian Radio to represent Estonia at the International Rostrum of Composers 2022. His orchestral piece "NAKBA", composed in 2018, was also nominated for the International Rostrum of Composers 2019.

His other awards include an honorary diploma at the Sergei Slonimsky Composition Competition in 2015 and the Gold Coin National Award for the best art school diploma, awarded by the Iranian Ministry of Culture.

Arash Yazdani combines musical innovation and cultural diversity in his work, making him a unique artistic voice in the contemporary music landscape.

## Zara Ali



**Zara Ali** (born 1995) is an American composer and multimedia artist living in Germany. Her versatile musical style encompasses lively programmes, rich microtonal harmonies, great attention to electroacoustic timbres, and the translation of structural concepts (e.g. geometry, kinetics, temporality) into sound. Her music has been programmed in Europe, North America and Asia, including at the Berlin Konzerthaus, Gaudeamus Muziekweek (Utrecht), impuls Festival for Contemporary Music (Graz), cresc. Biennale for Contemporary Music Frankfurt Rhine Main, Royaumont Festival, Archipel Festival, Tanglewood Festival and Seoul International Computer Music Festival.

In 2023, she won the prestigious Gaudeamus Award and was selected for the Deutsche Oper's Neue Szenen VII with a new work for chamber opera. In 2022, she won first prize at the Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy Competition for Composition, the oldest competition for classical music in Germany. She also received the special prize from the Friends of Young Musicians Germany. In 2021, she received a competitive studio scholarship from the renowned JACK Quartet for the composition of a new work to be premiered in the 2023 season. In 2017, she received the Robert H. Burns Prize for Chamber Music Composition. Zara received her B.A. from Columbia University in 2018 and her M.M. in music composition from the Detmold University of Music in 2022. Zara was composer-in-residence at the International Ensemble Modern Academy for the 2022-23 season.

The portrait concert with the two scholarship holders took place on 29 October 2025 at the Kesselhaus in the Kulturbrauerei in Berlin.

The Progetto Positano is supported by the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation.

For more information, visit: <https://progettopositano.org>.

## Kempff Festival Positano

Following a successful first edition in 2024, the second Kempff Festival took place from 13 to 20 September 2025 in cooperation with the municipality of Positano.

As part of the festival, four public concerts were held at various locations in Positano, promising the audience a diverse listening experience.

The second Kempff Festival kicked off with a piano concert by Louis Lortie on 13 September in front of the Church of Santa Maria Assunta in Positano. The programme featured romantic piano works by Frédéric Chopin.

This was followed on 17 September by a piano recital with the participants of the Beethoven master class at Casa Orfeo. The young pianists Elia Cecino, Anna Han, Shion Ota and Kris Sossoulo played sonatas by Ludwig van Beethoven for the audience. A lecture by musicologist Anita Pesce rounded off the evening.



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The third concert took place on 19 September in front of the Church of Santa Maria Assunta. The duo Lorenzo de Cunzio (baritone) and Tarek El Barbari (piano) delighted the audience with a song programme entitled *La dolce via? Meets Wilhelm Kempff*.

The festival came to a successful close with a chamber music concert on 20 September in front of the Church of Santa Maria Assunta with William Youn (piano) and Nils Mönkemeyer (viola). They presented a programme spanning different styles and eras with chamber music works by Johann Sebastian Bach, Claude Debussy, Johannes Brahms and Rebecca Clark.

The concept and concert planning for the Kempff Festival Positano were developed under the artistic direction of William Youn, internationally renowned pianist and member of the Foundation Board. The preparations and communication work, including on site, were supported by Foundation Board Chair Evelyn Meining.



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The event was organised in cooperation with the [Comune di Positano](#).

## **Beethoven Master Class**

The first Beethoven master class was led in 1957 by Wilhelm Kempff together with his colleague, the French pianist Alfred Cortot. The course began with two piano concertos by Mozart and Bach in the courtyard of the Hotel Palazzo Murat. The orchestra "Alessandro Scarlatti" from Naples played under the baton of the late Maestro Franco Caracciolo.

From 14 to 22 September, the traditional, prestigious piano course on Ludwig van Beethoven took place at the Kempff Cultural Foundation estate in Positano, southern Italy. Louis Lortie, a renowned musician with an international career spanning more than thirty years, was engaged for the course. He is one of the most successful pianists of our time, whose core repertoire repeatedly features Beethoven's piano works, and who performs with renowned orchestras in the world's major concert halls.

The last-minute cancellation by András Schiff also led to the cancellation of three participants, so that the course took place with five instead of eight participants.

Group lessons took place in the afternoons at Casa Orfeo. In the mornings, participants practised on the Steinway grand piano and Yamaha upright piano at Casa Orfeo according to a practice schedule. Two Kawai electric pianos were also available for students to practise on at the house near the Pension La Fenice, where the participants were staying.

During the course week, the young pianists were able to deepen their knowledge, gain musical experience and exchange ideas through intensive study of Ludwig van Beethoven's piano sonatas and piano concertos.

Musicologist Dr Wolf-Dieter Seiffert was invited as a guest speaker and gave a lecture on the topic: "The young Beethoven visits Mozart (1787). A philological-biographical examination, a more or less fictional account by Johann Nepomuk Hummel and a closer look at Beethoven's variations WoO 40." In addition, Dr Seiffert accompanied the rehearsals and was in constant contact with the young musicians on technical questions relating to Beethoven's piano works.

On the penultimate evening of the course, the students gave an exclusive concert in the atmospheric setting of Casa Orfeo. This was followed by a reception with enthusiastic guests, around 45 people from Naples and Salerno, including the mayor of Positano and the town's cultural mayor.

The event concluded with a dinner at Casa Orfeo together with the chair of the foundation's board, Evelyn Meining, the course director Louis Lortie and the course participants.

This year, four outstanding young pianists were selected to participate in the master class:

Anna Han (USA)

Shion Ota (Japan)

Kris Sossoulo (Canada)

Elia Cecino (Italy)



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Elia Cecino, Anna Han, Louis Lortie, Shion Ota, Kris Sossoulo

### **Comments on the masterclass**

*“This masterclass revealed to me many intricacies in Beethoven’s music that I never thought of before and made me respect this composer even more.”*

***Kris Sossoulo***

*“This masterclass has profoundly influenced my vision of Beethoven. It has shown me that his music is not only a matter of technical mastery, but above all of integrity, truth and dialogue with humanity. I am deeply grateful to the Foundation for carrying on W. Kempff’s spirit after his passing and for creating a place where young pianists like me can continue to explore his legacy and deepen their understanding.”*

***Shion Ota***

The first Beethoven masterclass took place in Positano in 1957 under the direction of Wilhelm Kempff. With the help of funding from the Federal Foreign Office, the 67th masterclass was held this year. The unique, inspiring atmosphere of the Foundation's own facility in Positano in southern Italy – the place where the German piano virtuoso, organist and composer once started the tradition of masterclasses – plays a significant role in the success of the Kempff masterclasses.

Living together, daily lessons – in groups and individually – and discussions about Beethoven allowed the international course participants to discover common ground, gain new ideas for interpretation, exchange ideas and gain a deep insight into Beethoven's life and work. , the

historic location of the Kempff estate with its unique atmosphere, and the southern Italian landscape and culture served as a source of inspiration for the participants during the course. They had the opportunity to present their own interpretations of Beethoven's music in joint lessons, receive feedback and discuss their ideas. This gave them the chance to deepen their awareness of different piano traditions and styles of interpretation, such as the German and Viennese piano schools, and then put this into practice at the course's final concert.



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## Artist residencies

Thanks to private supporters, two outstanding personalities from Italy and Germany were able to take part in residencies in 2025.

The two one-month artist residencies related to Beethoven were aimed at internationally renowned artists from various disciplines who were nominated by a two-member jury. The jury members were the renowned pianist William Hong-Chun Youn, member of the foundation board, and Evelyn Meining, artistic director of the Mozartfest Würzburg and chair of the foundation board. The Artist Residencies enabled the scholarship holders to pursue artistic and scientific work in a concentrated form.

The scholarship holders had exclusive use of Casa Orfeo and Casa Virgilio, respectively, with living and working areas and access to the foundation's own instruments and sheet music (including works by Beethoven). They also had access to the spacious gardens of the Kempff estate. The scholarship holders were thus offered sufficient space for individual artistic and academic development, leisure and inspiration.

The following scholarship holders resided in Positano in 2025:

- Lucia Ronchetti, composer  
Casa Orfeo, August/October 2025
- Prof. Dr. Ulrich Mahlert, musicologist and music educator  
Casa Virgilio, October/November 2025

## Biographies of the artists

### Lucia Ronchetti



Born in Rome in 1963, she studied composition at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia and philosophy at the university in her hometown. In Paris, she attended composition seminars with Gérard Grisey, took part in the IRCAM annual course (1997) and obtained a doctorate in musicology in 1999 at the École Pratique des Hautes Études at the Sorbonne under the supervision of

François Lesure. In 2005, she accepted an invitation from Tristan Murail to be a visiting professor (Fulbright fellow) at the Music Department of Columbia University in New York.

Lucia Ronchetti has been composer in residence at the Künstlerhaus Villa Concordia (Bamberg), the Yaddo artists' colony (Saratoga Springs, NY), the Staatstheater Stuttgart, the MacDowell Colony (Peterborough, New Hampshire, USA), the Akademie Schloss Solitude (Stuttgart) and Schloss Werdenberg (Werdenberg, Switzerland), and has also received funding from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). A particular focus of her work is in the field of music theatre: her work ranges from operas and chamber operas for professional singers and musicians to choral operas for ensembles with amateur choirs to musical theatre experiments without a stage ("Drammaturgia"). From 2012 to 2015, she realised a three-season musical theatre project as part of a co-production between the Semperoper Dresden and the Halle Opera: *Contrascena*, *Sub-Plot* and *Mise en abyme*. Her opera *Esame di mezzanotte* premiered at the National Theatre Mannheim in 2015 and was named "Premiere of the Year 2015" by the trade journal *Opernwelt*. In 2017, she presented her chamber opera *Rivale*, commissioned by the Staatsoper Unter den Linden Berlin. At the Biennale di Venezia in October 2019, the chamber opera *The Pirate Who Does Not Know the Value of Pi*, based on a libretto by Eugene Ostashevsky, was performed. In 2021, the Frankfurt Opera will present her new opera *Inferno*, conducted by Tito Ceccherini, as well as a new production of the chamber opera *Pinocchio's Adventures*, which will have its German-language premiere at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden.

In 2021, Lucia Ronchetti is a visiting professor at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts. From 1991 to 1995, she was artistic director of the multidisciplinary festival *Animato* in Rome at the Sala1 art space, in collaboration with its curator-director Mary Angela Schroth. She has recently been appointed artistic director of the Venice Music Biennale from 2021 to 2024.

<http://www.luciaronchetti.com>

## Prof. Dr. Ulrich Mahlert

Ulrich Mahlert studied piano, musicology and German language and literature in Freiburg im Breisgau. After graduating, he worked as a piano lecturer at the Freiburg University of Music, as an editor at Südwestfunk Baden-Baden and as a research assistant for music theory at the University of Hanover, among other positions.

Since 1984, Ulrich Mahlert has been teaching as a professor of music education at the Berlin University of the Arts and, until the end of his official term of office in 2016, he headed the artistic-pedagogical training programme. He continues to supervise doctoral students. Since the 2017/18 winter semester, he has been teaching at the Central Institute for Continuing



Education (ZIW) of the Berlin Career College at the Berlin University of the Arts in the series "Music for Amateurs and Enthusiasts". In 2008, he was appointed honorary professor at Qiongzhou University in Sanya (Hainan/China). Ulrich Mahlert is a guest lecturer at various music academies, a trainer at music schools and in music education associations.

His areas of expertise include music and music education from the 18th to the 21st century, instrumental didactics, aspects of musical education, Robert Schumann, and research into musical happiness.

Ulrich Mahlert is co-founder and co-editor of the magazine *Üben & Musizieren* (Schott) and has published numerous writings and editions. Most recent publications: *Wege zum Musizieren. Methoden im Instrumental- und Vokalunterricht* (Ways to Making Music: Methods in Instrumental and Vocal Teaching) (2011), two volumes within the complete edition of Leo Kestenberg's writings (*Texte aus der Berliner Zeit* (Texts from the Berlin Period), 2012, and *Texte aus der Prager und Tel Aviver Zeit* (Texts from the Prague and Tel Aviv Period), 2013).

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Municipality of Positano

