

SONO FIGURES SOCIETY x DAMKAPELLET: Sound-Puppetry with chamber music

How are puppets brought to life and musicalized in the hands of classically trained musicians? In a collaboration between two female/non-binary-trans groups within the scene for music and performing arts in Copenhagen, a new original work for chamber quintet and massive fabric puppet marionettes will be created in the fall of 2024 and premiered on the 15th of February 2025. The 45-minute piece is a new commission that will be developed, built and composed by Sono Figures Society in collaboration with five musicians from the renowned chamber music collective Damkapellet.

Who?

Sono Figures Society is a Copenhagen based group out of the Norwegian composer, musician and puppeteer Marte Røyeng, German vocalist, puppeteer and puppet maker Sarah Buchner (based in Denmark) and Danish-American textile and costume designer Nat Johns. They met over their shared fascination for contemporary puppet theater and experimental sound, aiming to contribute through cross-disciplinary artistic innovation within the Nordic scene for experimental music and theater.

Damkapellet is a music collective formed in 2016 to bring diversity to the Danish music scene by highlighting and performing music by artists who define themselves as women, non-binary or transgender. The collective debuted on 8 March the same year at KoncertKirken, Copenhagen, celebrating International Women's Day. As an ensemble, Damkapellet embraces large parts of art music, from newly composed music and improvisation to opera, Baroque, children's performances, and performance art. Today, Damkapellet consists of 15 members from Copenhagen, Malmö, and Oslo.

Details on execution of the project

The project will consist of five phases – Creation, Rehearsal, Installation, Performance and Post-Production. The composition and puppet building work begins in October 2024 with Sono Figures Society, including one day together with Damkapellet where drafts of sound and movement material will be workshopped together with the musicians, in an open collaborative process. The musical composition and puppet construction are finalized in the weeks leading up to rehearsals on 15th of February 2025. In March 2025 the project will be completed by administering the project accounting, reports, and production of sound and video documentation. We will begin looking for new performance opportunities outside of Copenhagen, including internationally. The venue is KoncertKirken, which offers enough room for the puppet, as well as the ideal acoustics for the extended chamber music ensemble. It will be part of Koncertkirkens Vinterjazz festival program. The creation phase happens in Sono Figures' puppet building studio at PB43 and at Musikhuset, where Damkapellet currently holds a residency (for more details see the project timeline at end of document).

Artistic description

The piece is exploring new forms of cross-aesthetic work within experimental music and figure theater. It turns the concert venue into an installation of an oversized puppet and a chamber ensemble. The huge fabric creature hangs over a walkway above, its oversized limbs and inflatable parts contorting in grotesque ways. Meanwhile, the floor below becomes a stage for the ensemble, each musician entangled in their own puppet-like contraption, entwined in strings that is slowly revealed to be connected to the creature above. Sounds emerge from the five musicians' voices, string instruments and percussion. As the composition progresses the ensemble reveals more and more connections with the big puppet. Every sound causes a movement and every movement causes a sound.

The music is an experimental approach to chamber music aesthetically inspired by noise and electronic music, utilizing extended playing techniques turning the quintet into a net of sounds morphing slowly over time, rather than individual melodies. Squeaky string swarms, scratchy clusters, and wobbling drones intermingle with the eerie movements of the puppets, creating a tornado of sound that resonates inside the venue. On the walls, more strings and small mechanisms are attached that allow the ensemble to activate the whole space through spatially distributed sounds. The music is dense yet occasionally creates space for visual impulses, like the huge puppet spitting out a kite-figure made out of thin plastic, kept in the air with a leaf blower.

The puppet, with its ambiguous and unpredictable intentions, becomes both puppeteer and puppet, seamlessly shifting between controlling and being controlled by the ensemble. The quintet is attempting to pull together, while being pulled in separate directions by forces wavering between violent and endearing. And within this echo chamber, this hegemonial gravity, something both beautiful and grim is being weaved. A cluster of movements; everything happening in waves of contraction and release.

The piece will be an unfolding journey filled with weirdness, unpredictability, and music in motion. It challenges perceptions of causality and aliveness and invites the audience to embrace moments of chaos. From the audience's perspective a sense of beauty emerges, shaped by the forces pulling at the performers from all directions, each individual action resonating in the collective sisterhood of musicians and puppets.

Audience targeting

The collaboration's power lies in its ability to engage diverse audiences. Sono Figures members are active players in Copenhagen's theater and experimental music scenes, while Damkapellet over has developed an audience in contemporary classical music over many years. This event aims to blend these different spheres, creating a unique intersection of audiences - introducing both groups to new fans. For the Koncertproduktion to be part of KoncertKirkens Vinterjazz Festival program, holds big potential to draw Copenhagen's jazz audience into experiencing a chamber music based interdisciplinary production and reaches people outside of the circles of both ensembles with the festival's big program campaigns (print/online/newspapers).

How does the project provide high quality and innovative work to the Danish music scene?

The collaboration between Sono Figures Society and Damkapellet promises an innovative and exceptional contribution to the intersection of contemporary music and performing arts in Denmark. The diverse artistic perspectives of the different actors are encouraged especially in the creation phase, by an inclusive process where composers, musicians, puppet-makers and puppeteers work in close contact and exchange, to use the different educational backgrounds, skill sets and experience of the participants to the fullest potential. The result is not only a multi-dimensional artistic piece of work but also creative cross-pollination: Members of both groups can learn from each other's techniques, styles, and approaches, leading to fresh ideas and creative experimentation. Overall this production is also intended to enrich the performing groups long-term, as collaborative projects often lead to new connections, partnerships, and future opportunities for both groups, fostering a supportive artistic community.

The positive effects of this project on the collaborating partners are possible new performances of the piece at concerts and festivals in Denmark and abroad, utilizing the combined networks of all the participants to target the music and theater scenes in Norway, Sweden, Germany, and more. The project will hopefully prove itself as a successful example of collaborative artistic work that is slightly off the beaten path, inspiring the partners as well as the field to continue to pursue the exploration of new and off-beat expressions and collective creation.

Concert promotion

The concert promotion will be put in place through following mediums:

- Posters, flyers
- Campaign with pictures and videos on both Damkapellet and Sono Figures Society's channels including social media channels, newsletters and homepages
- Culture journalists in Swedish, Danish and Norwegian media
- Advertising in online event calendars and online magazines through being part of Vinterjazz program
- Advertising through Koncerkirkens promotions on print and homepage

Participants

Marte Røyeng: composer, puppeteer, producer

Sarah Buchner: composer, puppeteer, producer

Nat Johns: costume and puppet design

Johanne Daucke von Barner: tailor, puppet maker

Josefine Weber Hansen: soprano, fans

Nadia Okrasko: mini piano, objects

Irene Bianco: percussion

Mika Persdotter: viola

Nicole Hogstrand: cello

Jari Matsi: Light Design

Pape Acre: Sound Design

Video and Photo: George Chiper-Lillemark

PHASE	DATE	DESCRIPTION	PARTICIPANTS
Phase 1 - CREATION	2.-6. October 2024	Composition work phase, beginning of puppet construction (Sono Figures Society) at PB43, CPH	Marte Røyeng (<i>composer/performer</i>) Sarah Buchner (<i>composer/performer</i>) Nat Johns (<i>puppet and costume design</i>) Johanne Daucke von Barner (<i>tailor, puppet maker</i>)
	7. October 2024	Composition workshopping with the composers and the ensemble, of both physical movement materials and musical sketches. Testing the first parts of the puppet. (Damkappellet + Sono Figures Society at Musikhuset, CPH)	Marte Røyeng (<i>composer/performer</i>) Sarah Buchner (<i>composer/performer</i>) Nat Johns (<i>puppet and costume design</i>) Johanne Daucke von Barner (<i>tailor, puppet maker</i>) Josefine Weber Hansen (<i>soprano</i>) Irene Bianco (<i>percussion</i>) Nadia Okrusko (<i>piano</i>) Mika Persdotter (<i>viola</i>) Nicole Hogstrand (<i>cello</i>)
	December 2024	Finalizing of Composition, Finishing the puppet construction (Sono Figures Society)	Marte Røyeng (<i>composer/performer</i>) Sarah Buchner (<i>composer/performer</i>) Nat Johns (<i>puppet and costume design</i>) Johanne Daucke von Barner (<i>tailor, puppet maker</i>)
Phase 2 - REHEARSAL	09.-12. February 2025	Rehearsal with the Ensemble and fully constructed puppet (Damkappellet + Sono Figures Society at rehearsal space PB43 in CPH)	Marte Røyeng (<i>composer/performer</i>) Sarah Buchner (<i>composer/performer</i>) Nat Johns (<i>puppet and costume design</i>) Johanne Daucke von Barner (<i>tailor, puppet maker</i>) Josefine Weber Hansen (<i>soprano</i>) Irene Bianco (<i>percussion</i>) Nadia Okrusko (<i>piano</i>) Mika Persdotter (<i>viola</i>) Nicole Hogstrand (<i>cello</i>) George Chiper-Lillemark (<i>video documentation</i>)
Phase 3 - INSTALLATION	13.-14. February 2025	Installing of the puppet at venue, lights and sound tech set-up, dress rehearsal (Damkappellet + Sono Figures Society at Koncertkirken, CPH)	Marte Røyeng (<i>composer/performer</i>) Sarah Buchner (<i>composer/performer</i>) Nat Johns (<i>puppet and costume design</i>) Johanne Daucke von Barner (<i>tailor, puppet maker</i>) Josefine Weber Hansen (<i>soprano</i>)

			Irene Bianco (<i>percussion</i>) Nadia Okrusko (<i>piano</i>) Mika Persdotter (<i>viola</i>) Nicole Hogstrand (<i>cello</i>) Jari Matsi (<i>light design</i>) Pape Acre (sound technician)
Phase 4 - PERFORMANCE	15. February 2025	Performance of Piece at Basement CPH (Damkappellet + Sono Figures Society at Koncertkirken CPH)	Marte Røyeng Sarah Buchner Nat Johns Josefine Weber Hansen (<i>soprano</i>) Irene Bianco (<i>percussion</i>) Nadia Okrusko (<i>piano</i>) Mika Persdotter (<i>viola</i>) Nicole Hogstrand (<i>cello</i>) George Chiper-Lillemark (<i>video documentation</i>)
Phase 5 - POST PRODUCTION	March 2025	Postproduction of video and sound material, project accounting and administration (Sono Figures Society)	Marte Røyeng Sarah Buchner Nat Johns