

SUNVILLE

Afrofuturist Music Theatre by Sofia Jernberg, Fiston Mwanza Mujila & Stephanie Thiersch

A production of Deutsche Oper Berlin, Tischlerei
World Premiere: 25 September 2026
Co-production: Wiener Festwochen and VOICES BERLIN FESTIVAL

"Love is truly contagious and eternally creative." (The Urantia Book)



"Das Meer ist ein wildes Tier / Das Meer ist niemals satt" (Fiston Mwanza Mujila, Sunville – Act I)

"Wir werden hier stehenbleiben / Und zwei, drei Worte mit der Sonne wechseln" (Fiston Mwanza Mujila, Sunville – Act III)

CONCEPT

Survivors of the sea, refugees, exiles gather on an island. From nothing, they build a new society — without the old rules of origin and power. Can it exist: a community founded on love?

Two intergalactic collaborators host the evening: Sun Ra, pioneer of Afrofuturism as a response to omnipresent racism, and Karlheinz Stockhausen, who sought to escape the confines of the art world through interplanetary vibrations. Both were captivated by interplanetary frequencies; in the 1970s they read the same spiritual book about love and spun freely through the cosmos.

“The truth about the planet Earth is a bad truth” – Sun Ra, 1972. His chosen escape: music — and, with a touch of irony, outer space. Afrofuturism, as Adyem Tesfamariam puts it, is about “resistance through imagination.” This is the path the evening follows.

Congolese-Austrian author Fiston Mwanza Mujila takes us into the “Second World”: a zone where African cosmologies, Black science fiction and sharp satire collide. Sometimes the only way forward is to break into laughter before we can keep dreaming.

Sofia Jernberg’s music is both resonance chamber and counter-voice: contemporary composition meets spiritual jazz, improvisation meets griot tradition. Jernberg and Mujila appear on stage themselves — as singer and storyteller. In Stephanie Thiersch’s choreography the space becomes a fluid body; language, sound and movement vibrate in permanent tension.

What is true, what fiction? What past, what future? Sunville immerses itself in an uncertain world of fantasy and asks a seemingly simple question: how do we want to live?

PERFORMANCE DETAILS

Deutsche Oper Berlin — World Premiere Tischlerei, Berlin

Fri 25 Sept — World Premiere, 20:00

Sat 26 Sept, 20:00

Sun 27 Sept, 18:00

Wed 30 Sept, 20:00

Thu 1 Oct, 20:00

Fri 2 Oct, 20:00

Running time 1 hour 20 minutes / No interval

Languages German, English, French, Swahili

Age recommendation From 15 years

Wiener Festwochen 2027 Vienna

Thu 15 May / Fri 16 May / Sat 17 May / Sun 18 May

Co-production Wiener Festwochen and VOICES BERLIN FESTIVAL

Support Deutsche Bank Stiftung, Förderkreis der Deutschen Oper Berlin

CREATIVE TEAM

Composition & Musical Direction Sofia Jernberg

Libretto Fiston Mwanza Mujila

Direction, Choreography & Stage Concept Stephanie Thiersch

Curation, Concept & Dramaturgy Elisa Erkelenz

Dramaturgy Flavia Wolfgramm

Set Design Sonja Füsti

Costumes Lauren Steel

Sound Design Thomas Wegner

English Translations Roland Glasser

German Translations Lena Müller

CAST

Soprano Sofia Jernberg

Alto Noa Frenkel

Countertenor Serge Kakudji

Storytelling & Performance Fiston Mwanza Mujila

Performance Emeka Ene

Double Bass & Musical Preparation Ole Morten Vågan

Saxophone Espen Reinertsen

Piano Kit Downes

Violin & Performance Yukari Aotani-Riehl

Violin Esther Feustel

Viola Yi-Te Yang

Cello Maria Pstrokonska-Mödig

BIOGRAPHIES

Sofia Jernberg

Sofia Jernberg — born in Ethiopia, raised in Ethiopia, Vietnam and Sweden — is a singer and composer. Her work centres on unconventional vocal techniques and the acoustic potential of the human voice, and engages persistently with questions of identity, origin, belonging, and the conditions of collective practice.

Music theatre and contemporary opera have played a central role in her work. She performed in productions of Schönberg's *Pierrot lunaire* (2010) and Sciarrino's *Lohengrin* (2014) with Norrbotten NEO; a production of *Pierrot lunaire* directed by Marlene Monteiro Freitas and conducted by Ingo Metzmacher brought her to the Wiener Festwochen 2021, the KunstFestSpiele Herrenhausen, and the Festival d'Automne à Paris 2022 with Klangforum Wien.

As a composer, her work *Dreams of our future* (children's choir, soprano and chamber ensemble) premiered at Ultima Oslo 2022; a new work for Ensemble Contrechamps followed at Borealis Bergen 2023. In the 2024/25 season she presented *Noise Uprising: A Polystilistic Atlas* with ZWERM Ensemble, gave the world premiere of Chaya Czernowin's *NO!* with the LA Phil New Music Group at Walt Disney Concert Hall, and made debuts at Armory Hall New York and Concertgebouw Bruges.

Fiston Mwanza Mujila

Fiston Mwanza Mujila is widely considered the most translated writer from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Poet, playwright and novelist, he writes in a language that systematically subverts Western temporalities and the violence of colonial history. Numbers lose their reliability; time swings and sways — as musical metaphor, as political gesture.

His writing — primarily in French, increasingly in German — combines Dada energy with tender loudness, diasporic genealogies with the concrete history of the Congo Basin. The German translation of his debut novel *Tram 83* won the 2017 Internationaler Literaturpreis; in French it received the Etisalat Prize for Literature and the Grand Prix SGDL du Premier Roman. His novel *La Danse du villain* won the 2021 Prix Les Afriques. The play *Der Garten der Lüste* appeared in 2023; the libretto for Hèctor Parra's opera *Justice* followed in 2024. He holds the Peter-Rosegger-Literaturpreis and serves as literary coordinator at Forum Stadtpark Graz.

Stephanie Thiersch

Stephanie Thiersch is a choreographer and director. Since 2000 she has developed international productions with her company MOUVOIR at the intersection of contemporary dance, music, visual arts and digital formats — more than 50 stage works, films and installations across more than 50 countries.

Landmark projects include *City Dance Köln* (2016), a politically motivated art manifestation involving over 600 performers and 10,000 citizens across the city; *Chombotrope* (2017, Goethe Institut / Akademie der Künste der Welt), invited to Theatertreffen Berlin; *Until the Beginnings* (2024, Sommerblut Festival / Schauspiel Köln), a collaboration with the École des Sables in Senegal; and *Hello To Emptiness*, toured through Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Bangalore in 2025. She has collaborated closely with, among others, Brigitta Muntendorf, the Asasello Quartet, Ensemble Garage, Orchestre Les Siècles, and DJ Elephant Power.

CONTACT

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