

NICO AND THE NAVIGATORS – BIOGRAPHY - 2024

NICO AND THE NAVIGATORS was founded in 1998 by Nicola Hümpel and Oliver Proske at the **Bauhaus Dessau**. Starting in 1999, the ensemble began their "artists in residence" phase at the **Berliner Sophiensøle** and developed their cycle of "portraits of humanity," which included productions marked by distinctive and visually powerful storytelling: 1999 *Lucky Days*, *Stranger!*, 2000 *Eggs on Earth*, 2001 *Lilli in putgarden*, 2002 *The Family Council*, 2003 *Cain, Ifs & Buts!*, and 2004 *HEROes & smallCOURAGE*. The production *Eggs on Earth* (2000), which was nominated for the Berliner Theatertreffen, led to the ensemble's international breakthrough.

The 2006 piece *Where You Are Not*, featuring Franz Schubert's compositions, marked their entry into musical theater and opera. This was followed by projects centered around G.F. Handel, J.S. Bach, H. Purcell, and G.A. Rossini. In 2012, the premiere of *Mahlermania* opened the "Tischlerei" stage at the **Deutsche Oper Berlin**. Their next major music theater project, *The Limited* based on Elias Canetti, premiered in 2014 at the **Munich Biennale**, developed in collaboration with composer Detlev Glanert at the **Residenztheater**.

The production *The Hour We Knew Too Much of Each Other* brought the ensemble back to their roots, premiering in May 2015 at Hamburg's **Kampnagel** as an independent production. In April 2016, Nicola Hümpel directed *Reigen* by Philippe Boesmans with NICO AND THE NAVIGATORS at the **Stuttgart Opera**, contributing to the theater's highly acclaimed premiere series, which earned the title "Opera House of the Year" 2015/16.

In February 2017, the staged concert *SILENT SONGS into the wild*, based on Franz Schubert's music, premiered at the **Palais des Beaux-Arts** in Brussels and later thrilled audiences at **Berlin's Konzerthaus**, **Radialsystem**, and the **Elbphilharmonie Hamburg**. In June 2017, Navigator Ted Schmitz's original songs featured in *Unlike You*, an indie-folk concert staged at the **Heimathafen Neukölln**. For their 20th anniversary, the ensemble returned to the Sophiensøle with *The Future of Yesterday*, bridging past and present. In April 2019, *Nobody Dies in the Middle of Their Life* premiered at Berlin's Konzerthaus. The multimedia project *Betrayal of Images*, showcased at venues including the Meisterhäuser in Dessau and the Georg Kolbe Museum Berlin, merged augmented reality, theater, dance, sculpture, and digital visuals into an immersive experience. Under the musical direction of Kirill Petrenko, February 2020 saw the premiere of *FAITH TO FACE - Puccini's Suor Angelica* at the **Berlin Philharmonie**, featuring collaborations with the Karajan Academy of the Berlin Philharmonic, soloists, music students, and the Vokalhelden choir program.

Force & Freedom, a Beethoven project, saw the ensemble work with the Kuss Quartet. Despite pandemic-related delays, it was produced as a music film with **EuroArts** and **ZDF/ARTE** in December 2020. The stage premiere followed in November 2021 at the **Konzerthaus Dortmund**. During the pandemic, NICO AND THE NAVIGATORS launched the *Present* music video series, fulfilling musical wishes of those profoundly affected by the crisis and reaching over 115,000 viewers online.

In December 2021, *Empathy for the Devil*, a staged concert exploring the duality of evil, premiered at **Radialsystem**, captivating critics and audiences and returned in December 2022. Concurrently, the ensemble expanded their digital division, exploring new performance formats. The 2022 augmented reality dance performance *You Must Render Your Life!* exemplified their leadership in using AR in performing arts, inspiring workshops and the development of the AR-Loopmachine, nominated for the AureaAward.

Contrasting this, the analog project *Flesh & Spirit* premiered in fall 2022, marking the 350th anniversary of early Baroque composer Heinrich Schütz. It was performed at the **Heinrich Schütz Musikfest** in Altenburg/Gera, the **Kassel Music Days**, and **Berlin's St. Elisabeth Church**. The ensemble also celebrated T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* centenary with *Wasted Land*, a mixed-media performance that debuted as a spoken word piece in September 2022 at Literaturhaus Berlin and expanded to include dance and video in its April 2023 premiere at Radialsystem.

The company's 25th anniversary began with the February 2023 premiere of *Lost in Loops*, a staged concert featuring the Konzerthausorchester Berlin. Workshops with students from Pankow's Schule Eins accompanied the production, resulting in a video project. The ensemble has performed over 360 shows in more than 60 cities worldwide, including festivals and venues such as **Wiener Festwochen**, **Bregenzer Festspiele**, **Handel Festival Halle**, **UIMT Festival in Korea**, **Schwetzingen SWR Festival**, **Opéra-Comique Paris**, **Kunstfest Weimar**, **Opéra de Rouen**, and **Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg**. Since its inception, the ensemble has been closely associated with Berlin's Radialsystem.

Supported by structural funding from the state of Berlin since 2007, NICO AND THE NAVIGATORS commemorated their 15th anniversary with the photo book *Man Hangs on the Earth and the Sky Hangs on Him*, published by Theater der Zeit. In 2011, the ensemble was honored with the George Tabori Prize by the Performing Arts Fund, and in 2016, Nicola Hümpel received the Konrad Wolf Prize from the Academy of Arts. Beyond ensemble work, Nicola Hümpel teaches her method of "guided improvisation" at various drama and music institutions worldwide and serves as a jury member for the German Academic Scholarship Foundation in "Directing for Musical Theater." Oliver Proske is also active as a workshop leader and consultant, particularly in the field of digitalization for cultural and educational institutions.