A New Opera Concept:
An Identity Quest Mediated by Digital Media and Microtones
in Manfred Stahnke's *Orpheus Kristall*

Navid Bargrizan (University of Florida)

In his 2001 opera *Orpheus Kristall*, Manfred Stahnke presents an autistic Orpheus bewildered within the complexity of a multimedia environment. The hallucinating Orpheus, struggling with his thoughts, seeks his lost self-identity amid his immediate world and its extension through the Internet. While reacting to the incoming sounds originating from the network, he attempts to express his memories of the traumatic loss of his Eurydice. In this pioneer work, Stahnke extends the borders of live music on stage with the integration of the vast external world through the Internet as part of the performance medium, to comment on the foundation of our existence. Most important, Stahnke uses concepts of *Differenztonharmonic* (Difference tone harmony) as well as *micro-glissando*, which characterize opera's tone system, to establish the Orpheus' inner-battle within his extended technological world. As I argue in this paper, the intricate structure of this opera, with its allegorical meanings, was only possible through Stanhke's innovative approaches to microtonality.

On the basis of interviews I conducted with Manfred Stahnke in 2011, as well as his own article "Anmerkungen zur Orpheus", where he explains much of his compositional procedures, I explore the allegorical representation of key contemporary existential issues within *Orpheus Kristall,* especially the correlation between Orpheus' inner-battle and the non-fixed, fluid horizon of the endless tones in Stanhke's microtonal system. Orpheus' attempt to overcome the cold "kristall" (crystal) in his corrupted, non-functioning surroundings, I argue, is analogous to the composer's desire to break through the limited scope of equal temperament. Through analysis of the musical, philosophical, and mythological dimensions, I demonstrate that *Orpheus Kristall* is a successful example of a multimedia art piece that draws upon mythology in order to address complex questions related to cultural and personal identity, while shedding light on the subtle amalgamation of the mythology, technology, and microtonality.