Prešeren Fund Prizes 2019: Who Won, & Why

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A painting of the poet France Prešeren, by Franz Kurz zum Thurn und Goldenstein

STÁ (https://english.sta.si/2601457/preseren-fund-prizes-diversity-of-finest-

artistic-creativity), 7 February 2019 - Choir conductor Martina Batič, composer Tomaz Sveti, poet Jure Jakob, actor Maruša Majer, animated film maker Dušan Kastelic and architects Aljoša Dekleva and Tina Gregorič Dekleva will be honoured with the Prešeren Fund Prizes tonight for their accomplishments over the past three years.

**Martina Batič** is one of Europe’s foremost choir conductors, collaborating regularly with celebrated choral ensembles such as the Swedish, Danish, Dutch and French national radios, the Eric Ericson Chamber Choir, and RIAS Kammerchor in Berlin.

Her “exceptional talent for shaping the choral sound earned her the appointment in 2018 as the artistic director and the Choeur de Radio France in one of the biggest breakthroughs for Slovenian musicians abroad,” runs the praise that Batič will hear at the award ceremony tonight.

Her repertoire includes choral and oratorial music of most styles and historic periods, spanning from the Renaissance to the latest trends, and comprising most demanding compositions.

The prize jurors will also credit her for making it possible that Slovenian compositions are featured in concerts by foreign ensembles, and that new music by Slovenian composers is commissioned from abroad. “Her affinity for domestic composers is worthy of attention and praise.”

A highly emotional moment for her was her inaugural concert with the Radio France Choir in November 2018 when she picked a Slovenian folk song, Pa Se Sliš, for the encore. "The French radio choir sung the song by heart with the students of the Veno Pilon secondary School in Ajdovščina", her home town.

Before her Paris engagement, Batič, 40, served for almost a decade as the artistic director of the Slovenian Philharmonic choir. She told the STA in an interview that a conductor needs to possess comprehensive expertise in various fields, including history, psychology and didactics, to be able to get the composer’s message through to the audience.

**Tomaz Sveti**, a 63-year-old composer, the author of ten operas, who is often praised for his uncompromising creativity is being honoured for his **Concerto for Two Violins and Strings** and his operas *Ada* and *Antigone*.

In the Concerto Sveti “demonstrates his mastery of counterpoint, in rendering neoclassicist and neobaroque associations into subtle personal, expressionist reflections”.

The piece was commissioned by the Kyiv Camerata, as an initiative in response to developments in Ukraine. The tragedy of the developments in Ukraine has moved him, without him trying to take sides.
"I won't say I'm politically engaged, but because like every other artist I am deeply religious, generally and in the humanist sense, I'm never indifferent to contemporary developments," Svete has told the STA in an interview.

In the chamber opera Ada, Svete returns to his reflection on the economics of means of sound, while Antigone is a continuation of a series of reflexive opera creations based on antique motifs.

The idea of Ada is that art, when honest, is immortal. It was written for the play by Ivo Svetina which deals with the life of Ada Škerl (1924-2009), the unrecognised poet, a pioneer of Slovenian intimist lyric poetry.

Antigone, written for Dominik Smole's interpretation of Sophocles' play, explores the heroine's being torn between whether to obey social norms or higher moral principles, a rift that Svete says extends to the Slovenian nation, which has still not buried its dead.

Jure Jakob, a 42-year-old poet has won the prize for his fifth collection of poetry Lakota (Hunger). He takes his motifs mostly from nature and from rural or suburban life.

"The tone of his voice has the quality of simplicity, clarity, precision and reliability of expression," the Prešeren Fund jurors will say.

"More often than not, Jakob's subject is a 'cough', dry, persistent and exhausting, painfully disturbing the quiet of an evening, a cough that cannot stop, that makes the effort but fails to achieve anything. The solution Lakota offers is to sustain, endure ... 'both hell and the sky'."

Jakob's motifs are to an extent related to his life-style, to his growing up in the countryside: "Rather than rich cities I visit humble, deserted villages, I walk in the woods more often than in the galleries. That's why a blackbird or an ant will find its way into my poem sooner than a car or a cyclist."

He says that a poem is meant to shed new light onto its subject matter, so that, regardless of its explicit theme, the poem should have a liberating effect, should “free us from the routine, automated, object-shaping imagining”.

Considering that it is impossible to earn a living as a poet, Jakob says he is forced to compromise between his mission and his life. "I'm trying to be a surreal realist in my writing and a down-to-earth idealist in my life."

Jakob also writes essays and poetry for children. These have come out in three picture books, illustrated and initiated by his wife Anja Jerčič Jakob.

Maruša Majer has won the accolade for her internationally acclaimed portrayal of Mara, a young mother facing an impossible choice, in Ivan, Janez Burger's 2017 psychological drama, and several other theatre and film roles.

"The queen of the independent theatre scene, Maruša Majer broke through into the mainstream like a tsunami," the prize jurors say about the 34-year-old actor, a member of the SNG Drama theatre ensemble since 2018.

Perhaps her best known role is that of Veronika, an unemployed young woman from Maribor sharing her uncompromising views on current topics in weekly phone calls with a receptionist on TV Slovenija news magazine show Studio City.

Other prominent roles include the Borštnik award-winning role in The Bug, a play...
Majer, one of the European Shooting Stars at the 67th Berlin International Film Festival, takes an in-depth approach to each role, trying to adopt a new method each time; for Mara she internalised her biography, writing down her internal monologue during the shooting.

"I'm trying to give each role a new method, to avoid being in a straightjacket ... I find developing a method for each role one of the most exiting parts of my job. I believe that every person I want to portray demands to have its own."

The Box TRAILER

Dušan Kastelic, an illustrator, comics artist and a pioneer of 3D computer animation, has earned the acknowledgement for his 2017 short animated film Celica (The Box), which has won him more than 50 awards at home and abroad.

The Box "is living proof that great works of art are not necessarily 'large', in this short, poetic but highly accessible film, the author speaks in his own unique and direct way about the individual's confinement in society's narrow confines".

His comic strip about the JBTZ military show trial, which first came out in instalments in the weekly magazine Mladina, in 1991 was one of the first globally to be made using a computer.

His first foray in the 3D animated film was the 2002 video clip for Perkmandeljc, a song by folk punk polka rock band Orlek, which went viral and caught the attention of Sundance producers, making it to the competition programme of the 2003 festival.

The Box was inspired by Kastelic's own nightmare, the product of his involvement with the group of environmental activists fighting against the waste incineration plant planned by the cement maker Lafarge in Zagorje.

"Half asleep I often dreamt up a similar scene that you can see in The Box. A dark place, an oppressive atmosphere with people rooted into the ground dozing off while I'm trying to tell them something but fail to wake them up."

Kastelic, 55, says that he has ideas enough for a lifetime, but it takes years to do the rendering, get the money and sort out the paperwork to make one short. His big desire is to make a feature-length film, but does not see any realistic chance at the moment, financially or organisation-wise.
Aljoša Dekleva and Tina Gregorič Dekleva of the Dekleva Gregorič architect studio are hailed for designing some of the finest examples of Slovenian contemporary architecture.

"They are distinguished by ingenious conceptual, technological and design innovation, refined restraint in their approach and sensitivity to cultural dimensions of living, to broader urban or natural landscape space, to the past and heritage."

Among their projects over the past three years, the Prešeren Fund jurors highlighted the Livada university campus building in the coastal town of Izola, Slovenia’s pavilion for the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale and the design of the 2017 exhibition on architect Stanko Kristl at the Ljubljana Museum of Architecture and Design.

"We do not consciously do architecture through which we would develop our own architectural signature or style, but all that we do depends on the environment we make it in and on the user we make it for," Aljoša Dekleva said in an interview with TV Slovenija.

The materials used in architecture are an important part of the story and message that the architecture makes, he said.

In designing houses, Tina Gregorič Dekleva says it is important how they are placed into the landscape and environment, with a sensibility for nature, colours, position, materials, and history.

It is also important how the architecture will affect those walking or driving by or how the view from a nearby hill.
REAL ESTATE IN SLOVENIA

Two-Bedroom Home, Mountain Views, Bovec (/real-estate/5484-two-bedroom-home-mountain-views-bovec)
Location: Bovec
Price: €90,000
Bedrooms: Two

Buy or Rent Villa Belica, Bohinj (/real-estate/5439-buy-or-rent-villa-belica-bohinj)
Location: Bohinj
Price: From €140 a night or €330,000 to buy
Bedrooms: Three

Three-Bedroom Home, Kobarid (/real-estate/5371-three-bedroom-home-kobarid)
Location: Kobarid
Price: €85,000
Bedrooms: Three

House on Castle Hill, Ljubljana (/real-estate/5280-house-on-castle-hill-ljubljana)
Location: Castle Hill, Ljubljana
Price: €988,000
Bedrooms: Four