

Essentials for composers and musicians participating in the Atlas Lab

For all who are new to the Atlas Lab we ask your attention for some important issues that you will surely encounter. The better you are prepared for this adventure the more fruitful the experience will be.

We recommend composers to **study the information about the instruments** – text, video, audio – we have prepared on the website: see ‘info instruments’. For detailed instructions and descriptions click on ‘for composers’.

An obvious but essential matter which all of us have to realize is this:
musical practises differ from culture to culture.

Music practises in the **Middle East** and **India** are mostly based on **oral traditions**. Musicians learn by rote, memorize by ear. If notation is used at all it serves mainly as a memory aid, providing the performer with a basis (a melody, a skeleton) which may be interpreted freely according to the artist’s taste and qualities. By no means should the music be performed exactly as written. Improvisation plays a very important role.

The common practice for **Western** classical musicians is to play music by **reading notes and working with a conductor**. They exactly follow the composers’ instructions as written in the score and perform the music under the guidance and control of a conductor. In the Western tradition there is little room for freedom, improvisation is rare. Most musicians from the **Far East** – China, Japan, Korea – are used to the Western practice alongside their own tradition.

Whereas in Middle Eastern musical practice the dominant element is the **auditive** (playing by ear), in Western music the **visual** element is dominant (notation, conductor). This difference in working methods confronts composers who write for the Atlas Ensemble with unusual problems: **what is the best way to transmit ones ideas?** And: how can we combine culturally different concepts, aesthetics, techniques and ways of conceiving and making music?

One of the central objectives of the Atlas Lab is to explore new and fruitful ways of collaboration between composers and the musicians (and instruments) of the Atlas Ensemble. We all may have to leave our comfort zones and find creative solutions to be able to work together and break into new territory.

Musicians are advised to think of ways how to explain their instrument and music to composers. In what ways could the culture and ideas behind the instrument as well as playing techniques and idioms be transmitted? There will be room in the academy not only to work with composers but also with fellow musicians.

Composers may have to transmit their ideas orally, face to face, or via sound bites or audio samples. Sessions are scheduled where composers and musicians can work together intensely on an individual basis to make new music and solve all kinds of practical problems. Composers: bring your ideas, your inventions, the music you have in mind, and try it out in reality, live with the musicians. This is what the Atlas Lab is for.