

Mikael Karlsson

Composer | Stockholm, Sweden | mikaelk.com

Curriculum vitae | 27 September 2026

Forthcoming works

Prey | 2027 | Jess and Morgs | Dutch National Ballet / Finnish National Ballet | Amsterdam, February 13-March 2

The Grand Dance | 2027 | Mari Carrasco | Skånes Dansteater | Malmö Opera, March 20-April 17

Barcelona, Map of Shadows | Opera with Mallory Catlett | Planned for NYU Skirball, fall 2027

EDUCATION

B.A / M.A. in classical composition

Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College, City University of New York

2000-2005, Summa Cum Laude graduate. Departmental honors. GPA 3.95

DANCE

Arena* | Morgann Runacre-Temple & Jessica Wright | Paris Opera Ballet | 2026 | 40 min

Mary, Queen of Scots* | Sophie Laplane & James Bonas (direction) | Scottish Ballet | 2025 | 130 min | Music co-composed with Michael P. Atkinson.

Little Concert* | Mari Carrasco | Gothenburg Opera Dance Company | 2025 | 35 min

Forever* | Mari Carrasco | Royal Swedish Ballet | 2024 | 45 min

Burn Baby Burn* | Mari Carrasco | Swedish tour | 2024 | 50 min

Hammer | Alexander Ekman | Gothenburg Opera Dance Company | 2022 | 90 min

Coppelia* | Morgann Runacre-Temple & Jessica Wright | Scottish Ballet | 2022 | 100 min | Music co-composed with Michael P. Atkinson.

Remind Me I'm Not Dead* | Mari Carrasco | Skåne Dance Theatre | 2021 | 60 min

Rasa* | Daniel Proietto | Vlaanderen Ballet | 2020 | 120 min

Midsummer Night's Dream | Alexander Ekman | Dortmund | Ballet | 2020 | 90 min

The Heart* | Mari Carrasco | Stadsteatern, Regionteater Väst | 2020 | 40 min

Crypto | Guillaume Côté | Canadian Stage | 2020 | 40 min

Escapist* | Alexander Ekman | Royal Swedish Ballet | 2019 | 90 min

Internally Black* | Mari Carrasco | Norrdans | 2018 | 40 min

Midsummer Night's Dream | Alexander Ekman | The Joffrey Ballet | 2018 | 90 min

Play* | Alexander Ekman | Paris Opera Ballet | 2017 | 90 min

Rooms* | Alexander Ekman | Norwegian National Ballet | 2017 | 60 min

Paper Plane* | Mari Carrasco | Riksteatern | 2017 | 40 min

Cow* | Alexander Ekman | Dresden Semperoper | 2016 | 90 min

Blanc* | Daniel Proietto | Vienna State Opera | 2016 | 40 min

Player* | Daniel Proietto | Norwegian National Ballet | 2016 | 16 min

Black Forest* | Mari Carrasco | Norrdans | 2016, 2017, 2018 | 40 min
Midsummer Night's Dream* | Alexander Ekman | Royal Swedish Ballet | 2015 | 90 min
A Swan Lake* | Alexander Ekman | Norwegian National Ballet | 2014, 2016 | 90 min
Tulle* | Alexander Ekman | Royal Swedish Ballet | 2012, 2014 | 25 min
Rusty* | Benoit-Swan Pouffer | Alvin Ailey Dance Theater | 2012 | 25 min
Installation* | Benoit-Swan Pouffer | Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet | 2012 | 60 min
On This Planet* | Benoit-Swan Pouffer | Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet | 2011 | 30 min
Installation* | Benoit-Swan Pouffer | Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet | 2011 | 60 min
* indicates world premiere production

OPERA

Fanny and Alexander | Ivo van Hove | Opera La Monnaie, Brussels | 2024 | 160 min
Melancholia | Sláva Daubnerova | Royal Swedish Opera | 2023 | 140 min
The Echo Drift | Mallory Catlett | PROTOTYPE Festival | 2018 | 80 min

ORCHESTRAL

Grand Guignol | Orchestra, choir, voice and electronics | 2025 | 45 min
So We Will Vanish | Song cycle for mezzo-soprano and orchestra | 2021 | 25 min

CHAMBER

Three Diana Vreeland Songs | Suite from forthcoming opera, singers and chamber ensemble | 2018 | 29 min
Rooms | 4 pieces for 5 pianos | 2017 | 24 min
Theta | String Quartet | 2017 | 20 min
Nattvittje | String Quartet, for Sirius Quartet | 2011 | 13 min
Seven Eight | Pieces for 8 clarinets, for Joshua Rubin | 2010 | 14 min
Desperate Contract | Violin and piano | 2008 | 8 min
In Case of Brahms | Piano solo | 2005 | 11 min
Nasty Fucker | Flutes and electronics, for Claire Chase | 2004 | 12 min

POP

Nobel Prize Banquet | Performance with Anna von Hausswolff and the Royal Swedish Orchestra | 2018 | 24 min
The Spirit and the Cloud | Song cycle with Mariam Wallentin and ACME, NYC performance | | 2012 | 30 min
Until We Bleed | Song with Lykke Li and Kleerup | 2008 | 5 min

THEATER

Titta en älg | Mellika Melouani Melani | Royal Dramatic Theatre, Stockholm | 2024 | 100 min
Romeo & Julia | Gustav Deino | Unga Klara / Helsingborgs stadsteater | 2023 | 155 min
They Will Drown in Their Mothers' Tears | Farnaz Arbabi | Unga Klara, Stockholm | 2020 | 120 min

VISUAL ART

Frailty of Man | Alexander Ekman | Artipelag | 2022 | 120 min

Atelier | François Rousseau | La Maison Européenne de la Photographie | 2009 | Paris

RECORDINGS

Hammer | Music for Alexander Ekman's dance piece | 2025

Crypto | Music for Guillaume Côté's dance piece | 2022

Witches | Chamber music for Mari Carrasco's dance piece | 2022

Shift | Chamber music for Alexander Ekman's ballet | 2021

Rooms | Chamber works for five pianos. | 2020

Play | Music from Alexander Ekman's "Play" at the Paris Opera and Ballet, feat. Callie Day | 2018

The Echo Drift | Chamber Opera, feat. International Contemporary Ensemble, Blythe Gaissert, John Kelly | 2018

Internally Black | Music from Mari Carrasco's "Svart Invärtes", feat. Nordic Chamber Orchestra | 2018

Cow | Music from Alexander Ekman's "Cow" at the Semperoper, feat. German National Youth Orchestra | 2018

Black Forest | Music from Mari Carrasco's "Black Forest" | 2018

Player | Music from Daniel Proietto's "Player", feat. Norwegian National Opera Orchestra | 2018

Paper Plane | Music from Mari Carrasco's "Paper Plane", feat. clarinetist Joshua Rubin | 2017

A Swan Lake | Music from Alexander Ekman's "A Swan Lake", feat. Norwegian National Opera Orchestra | 2016

Dithers | Cello works, feat. cellist Clarice Jensen | 2016

Midsummer Night's Dream | Songs from Alexander Ekman's "Midsummer Night's Dream", feat. Anna von Hausswolff | 2016

Phantasmata Domestica | Chamber works, feat. Black Sun Productions, Othon Mataragas, Lydia Lunch | 2012

Tyll | Music from Alexander Ekman's "Tyll", feat. Mivos Quartet, flutist Claire Chase | 2012

Nattvittje | String Quartet, feat. Sirius Quartet | 2011

Day Comes Apart | Song cycle with text by Rob Stephenson, feat. mezzo sop. Abby Fischer, pianist Yegor Shevtsov | 2010

Seven Eight | Chamber works, feat. clarinetist Joshua Rubin | 2010

Battlefield Bad Company II | Video game soundtrack, symphony orchestra conducted by Alan Pierson, and string quintet | 2010

Life Class | Chamber work for François Rousseau's "Atelier", conducted by Alan Pierson | 2009

Instead | Pop EP includes "Until We Bleed", feat. Lykke Li and Kleerup | 2009

Privacy | Chamber works, feat. flutist Claire Chase, clarinetist Joshua Rubin, pianist Cory Smythe | 2008

Dog | Chamber works, electronic works in collaboration with Rob Stephenson, feat. cellist Jason Wingate | 2008

Battlefield Bad Company I | Video game soundtrack, symphony orchestra conducted by Alan Pierson, and string quintet | 2008

POSTS AND MEMBERSHIPS

Föreningen Svenska Tonsättare (Swedish Composers' Society)

STIM

AWARDS / GRANTS

Otto and Catherine Brunson Luening Award | 2025

American Academy of Arts and Letters

Civitella Ranieri Fellowship | 2025

TCO culture prize (2023 award, presented 2024) | 2024

Golden Prague Special Mention - Melancholia recording | 2024

EBU-IMZ Outstanding Achievement Award (with Alexander Ekman) | 2023

Falstaff Prize director prize (shared with Alexander Ekman) | 2021

STIM grant for music composition | 2019

Wladimir and Rhoda Lakond Award for an exceptional mid career composer - American Academy of Arts and Letters | 2014

SELECTED REVIVALS AND TOURS

Play

Paris Opera Ballet: Palais Garnier, 2017, 2021 and 2024-25; Japan tour, July 2025.

Midsummer Night's Dream

Royal Swedish Ballet: premiere 2015; Stockholm revivals in 2016, 2024 and 2025; Norrlandsoperan, Umeå, 2024.

The Joffrey Ballet: Chicago premiere 2018; revival 2024; Cal Performances, Berkeley, April 2026.

Ballett Dortmund: premiere 2020; revival in the 2023-24 season; Gran Teatre del Liceu and Salzburg Festival, 2024.

Hammer

GöteborgsOperans Danskompani: premiere 2022; return engagement January-February 2025, followed by the Göteborg Opera Dance Festival in May 2025.

A Swan Lake

Norwegian National Ballet: premiere 2014; revivals in 2016 and 2022.

Escapist

Royal Swedish Ballet: premiere 2019; revival 2022.

BIOGRAPHY

"Mikael Karlsson is a shining star of his generation. With an impressive catalog of works for the stage and concert hall, his music reveals a composer of astonishing imagination and emotional power." - American Academy of Arts and Letters

"Mikael Karlsson embodies the composer of the future." (Dagens Nyheter, Johanna Paulsson).

"Mikael Karlsson is to be considered one of today's greatest avant-gardists in opera" OPUS magazine

Mikael is a composer who specializes in dramatic music for dance, ballet, opera, theater and for singers. He also writes concert music for orchestras, chamber ensembles and solo instrumentalists. His work often combines acoustic orchestras and ensembles with live electronics in multichannel surround sound. His music has been performed at Carnegie Hall, Park Avenue Armory, Lincoln Center, MuTh Konzertsaal, Berwaldhallen, MoMA, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Paris Opera Palais Garnier, Oslo Opera House, the Royal Swedish Opera, Théâtre

des Champs-Élysées, at the Nobel Prize Banquet, the Festspielhaus in Baden-Baden, the Edinburgh International Festival and the Baltic Sea Festival, and many other opera houses, festivals and concert venues across Europe, Asia and the US.

Since 2010, Mikael has written the music for most of choreographer Alexander Ekman's ballets, dance works and installations. Their full evening pieces include *Play*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Escapist*, *Hammer*, *A Swan Lake*, *Cow*, *Frailty of Man*. Their shorter works include *Tyll*, *Resin*, *Left Right Left Right*, and *Tuplet*. All of their full evening pieces are frequently performed across the world and are regularly broadcast on major TV networks. *Play* has had three runs at the Palais Garnier, in 2017, 2021 and 2024-25, followed by a Japan tour in 2025. Mikael has composed two grand operas with longterm collaborator and librettist Royce Vavrek. The first, *Melancholia* - an adaptation of the Lars von Trier film - was commissioned by the Royal Swedish Opera and premiered in 2023, directed by Slava Daubnerová, conducted by Andrea Molino, with a cast that included Lauren Snouffer, Rihab Chaieb and Anne Sofie von Otter. The opera was recorded by EuroArts and has been broadcast on Arté, Medici TV, Mezzo TV and SVT. The opera sold out its premiere run and was dubbed "The coolest opera in a long time [...] visually rich, beautiful and musically exciting by newspaper Expressen, and Sweden's leading newspaper Dagens Nyheter wrote "Composer Mikael Karlsson's and librettist Royce Vavrek's full evening opera is the crowning achievement of the Royal Swedish Opera's 250 year anniversary celebration."

Their second grand opera, *Fanny and Alexander*, was adapted from the Ingmar Bergman film. It was commissioned by Opera La Monnaie / De Munt in Brussels. The world premiere production was directed by Ivo van Hove, and conducted by Ariane Matiakh, with a cast that includes Thomas Hampson, Anne Sofie von Otter, Sasha Cooke, Peter Tantsits, Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen, Loa Falkman and Susan Bullock. *Fanny and Alexander* premiered December 1, 2024. Both operas were orchestrated with Michael P. Atkinson. *De Standaard* named *Fanny and Alexander* the best stage work of 2024. *Die Welt* praised the production as a successful Gesamtkunstwerk, and *Oper Magazine* highlighted the music's vivid characterization of its cast and individual scenes. Their work in dance includes *Crypto* with choreographer Guillaume Côté, and *Evidence of it All* with choreographer Drew Jacoby, with a vocal performance by actress Rosamund Pike.

Mikael's first opera, *The Echo Drift*, with a libretto by Elle Kunnos de Voss and Kathryn Walat, premiered at the PROTOTYPE Festival in NYC in 2018. Mallory Catlett directed the opera. Mallory and Mikael are currently working on a new chamber opera, *Barcelona - Map of Shadows*, adapted from the play by Lluïsa Cunillé. Excerpts were presented in New York in March 2026, with the full production announced for NYU Skirball in fall 2027.

Mikael has written music for choreographer Mari Carrasco's dance pieces *Little Concert*, *Forever*, *Remind Me I'm Not Dead*, *The Heart*, *Burn Baby Burn*, *Paper Plane*, *Black Forest* and *Internally Black*; for choreographers Morgann Runacre-Temple and Jessica Wright's *Coppelia* (with Michael P. Atkinson), *Hotel*, and *Averno*; for choreographer Daniel Proietto's *Rasa*, *Player* and *Blanc*; for choreographer Helen Pickett's *To Be One* and *IN Cognito*; for Hervé Koubi's *Sol Invictus*; and five full evening pieces with choreographer Benoit-Swan Pouffer for Cedar Lake Ballet in NYC. Anne Sofie von Otter and the Swedish Chamber Orchestra commissioned the song cycle *So We Will Vanish* from Royce and Mikael in 2021. The piece received rave reviews and has also been performed by Anne Sofie with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Norrköping Symphony Orchestra and Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, with conductors including Pekka Kuusisto, Ariane Matiakh and Jukka-Pekka Saraste. A recording is in preparation. Anne Sofie is among the premiere cast of both *Melancholia* and *Fanny and Alexander*.

Anna von Hausswolff and Mikael composed the music for the Nobel Prize Banquet 2018. The three pieces were performed by Anna, the Royal Swedish Orchestra and members of the Royal Opera Chorus conducted by James Grossmith, with Mikael on piano and pipe organ. Their *Grand Guignol*, for orchestra, choir, voice and live electronics in surround sound, premiered at the Baltic Sea Festival in Stockholm in 2025 with Anna as vocal soloist, the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Swedish Radio Choir, conducted by Christoph Koncz. Since 2014, Mikael collaborates closely with orchestrator, composer, conductor and French hornist Michael P. Atkinson, who either handles or shares orchestration duties for all of Mikael's pieces with an orchestra. For the Scottish Ballet's new version of *Coppelia* (with choreographers Morgann Runacre-Temple and Jessica Wright), the two composed the score together. The show became a breakout hit of the 2022 Edinburgh International Festival and traveled to Sadler's Wells in London. Michael has also conducted numerous recordings of Mikael's music.

Mikael and Michael P. Atkinson also co-composed the score for Scottish Ballet's Mary, Queen of Scots, choreographed by Sophie Laplane and directed by James Bonas, which premiered at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2025 and also travelled to Sadler's Wells in London. In 2026, Mikael composed Arena for Morgann Runacre-Temple and Jessica Wright at the Paris Opera Ballet.

Mikael has written music for the International Contemporary Ensemble, the American Contemporary Music Ensemble, the Mivos Quartet, Sirius Quartet, the Dahlkvist Quartet, Sybarite5, the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, New Thread Quartet, the Swedish Chamber Orchestra, the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra, The Royal Swedish Orchestra, the Oslo Opera House Orchestra, and the Vienna Opera Orchestra. He has supplied music for fashion shows by J. Anderson / Loewe, Henrik Vibskov and Alain Paul Studio, and written film music for Bruce LaBruce, Barbara Hammer and Johnny Taranto. He and his team also composed music for Electronic Arts / DICE's video games Battlefield: Bad Company and Battlefield: Bad Company 2. He has collaborated with performers Callie Day, Rosamund Pike, Black Sun Productions, Siri Karlsson (Cecilia Österholm, Maria Arnqvist), Lydia Lunch, Claire Chase, Joshua Rubin, Raehann Bryce-Davis, Niklas Brommare, Blythe Gaissert, Amelia Watkins, Lauren Worsham, Eve Gigliotti, Isabel Leonard, John Kelly, Abby Fischer and pop singers Lykke Li, Anna von Hausswolff and Mariam Wallentin.

Mikael has released over twenty albums with works for orchestra, chamber works and soundtracks ranging from pop and film music to sound collages, dance scores and avant-garde concert music.

In 2007, Mikael was included in Out Magazine's Out 100 list of influential people. The score to his piece Nasty Fucker was published in Butt Magazine. In 2012, NYC Public Radio's listeners voted him as one of their 100 favorite classical composers under 40. In 2016, he was one of the hosts of the prestigious radio show "Sommar i P1" on Swedish National Radio. In 2023 he was listed third on OPUS magazine's year end list of that year's prominent people in classical music.

In 2025 he received the Otto and Catherine Brunson Luening Award, "for a composer due wide recognition," from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 2014 he received the Wladimir and Rhoda Lakond award "for an exceptional mid-career composer" from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 2021 Alexander Ekman and Mikael were jointly awarded the Falstaff Prize for their work together over the past 10 years. In 2023 Alexander Ekman and Mikael received the EBU-IMZ Outstanding Achievement Award at Golden Prague for their contributions to the performing arts on television. In 2024, Mikael received the TCO culture prize. In 2025, he was a Civitella Ranieri Fellow.

Mikael Karlsson lives in Stockholm, having returned to Sweden in 2026. He moved to New York from Sweden in 2000 and graduated Summa Cum Laude with departmental honors with a master degree in classical composition from the Aaron Copland School of Music in 2005. His teachers include Bruce Saylor, Edward Smaldone, Steven Osgood and Tobias Picker.

In 2014 Mr. Karlsson founded his own production company, publishing company and record label, Rough State Sound.