



## -Background on Maya's music and surviving the siege of Sarajevo-

---



Maya Petrovna aka Maja Petrovna Hilcisin is an operatic 'crossover' mezzo-soprano, multi-instrumentalist, film composer, and performance artist, who dreams of owning a black sheep as a pet one day. She was born in Sarajevo (Bosnia), in a country that no longer exists, Yugoslavia, inhabited by old cultures, passionate about pickled cabbage and drinking songs about broken hearts. It's a place of majestic mountains, contrasted by bleak soviet style buildings that follow you through the country like Mona Lisa from Alcatraz. Strong imagination was a place of survival and in mountainous-rural village Sumblovac, where part of Maya's early upbringing also took place. Maya's mother finished law degree, and dedicated her life to helping people survive corruption. Maya's father received 1984 Olympic remembrance for his achievements in alpinism, climbing peaks that swallowed many lives. Hence Maya ended up becoming a music composer.

Her first introduction with music began with few years in pre-junior rhythmic gymnastics, where she showed early devotion and was taken by Bosnian champion Aida Hadžić to advanced classes, which overtook most of her after-school time. When Maya was 10, her country dismantled into four-year-long war, ending her training with higher adrenaline running from dropping bombs, and the siege of Sarajevo, what became the longest of a capital city in the modern history of Europe. But before excrement has impacted rotating blades, Yugoslavia was Europe's much-admired socialist diplomats, multi-linguistic culture with the free university system.

Maya grew up in infamous suburb Dobrinja (Federation side). The notoriously bombed border was one of the last places to receive humanitarian help in the city of Sarajevo. For periods, they chased few floating beans in a soup made from melted snow. Life moved into the underground with casual trips to drinking water pumps, which required running through streets with snipers. Maya was homeschooled by her mother, to compensate for missed school classes. A form of play left was a guitar with improvised strings made from a fishing line. Maya learned guitar 'by ear' and taught herself how to read music from books passed around. Finding refuge in hours-long strumming of dissonances until French aid worker introduced her to few Pink Floyd cassettes. When electricity was back on after many weeks, Several Species Of Small Furry Animals Gathered Together and Careful with That Axe, Eugene, was played in a loop.

The siege of Sarajevo ended in 1996. The city introduced bus into town, which looked like an object stolen from a war museum. Maya attended formal music education in operatic singing, classical guitar, and piano at Sarajevo Music School, by walking 8 km each direction few times per week. For a few years, she played wide classic repertoire for guitar. But the singing led to the writing of her first compositions. The consequences of war brought a lot of melodies, and composing more than interpreting other composer's work, impacted her creativity immeasurably.

After the war, mono-ethnic nationalism divided Bosnia. Maya was born into a family of mixed ethnicities carrying a rare surname, which some members of her family identify to as Polish, some as Russians. Her Muslim mother and Orthodox/Catholic father remained neutral socialists, which targeted them as spies on both ends of no man's land, following multiple interrogations by armed authorities, and prolonged ethnicity-based school provocations for both Maya and her sister. Bosnia was no longer a place of growth she could identify with on either side of the ethnic division.

Following the graduation at Sarajevo Music School in 1999, Maya departed Bosnia by herself at the age of 17, Via Esperanto Youth Organisation, who helped her find temporarily place in a Catalan foster family. She later made Barcelona her base for few years, where she joined an Argentinian punk/electronic band Organica, who she recorded a self-titled album as a vocalist and lyricist. Maya later moved to Holland, Asia before establishing a base in Sydney and London. Choreographed in-between old-fashioned immigration offices, her journey took over a decade of exacting narratives. She mopped her way up the Western world, through public toilets, street performing, pole dancing, before becoming a certified nursing assistant, where she worked for few years in the private sector of multiple-sclerosis and Parkinson disease. From the extended list of unconventional paths, it was the journey from catheters to music industry

that immensely influenced Maya's music performances today, and her scenographic fusion of radically diverse co-existing realities. She also traveled to Rudolf Steiner centres for autistic children in different countries, playing her original music compositions, designed to help to their emotionally challenged development.

During past 20 years, Sydney and London had the most positive impact on Maya's music career. She taught herself programs, moving into a world of technology until a friend encouraged her to study film composition at the renewed Sydney AFTRS (Australian Film, Television and Radio School), where she graduated with a Master's Degree in 2008. AFTRS gave her the opportunity to work directly with orchestras, teaching her the most effective technologies applied in film composing today. Soon after graduating, Maya was invited to work for several months composing original music for 10 'Set to Screen Apple Podcast' series for an acclaimed film director Baz Luhrmann and his film, Australia. Since then, she scored music for 28 movies, from art, TV to documentaries, some of which were recorded with Sydney Studio Orchestra and screened on international film festivals, including a spot featuring Annie Leibovitz, a global advertising campaign by Tourism Australia for Asia and "Suzie Lovitt" film about young Jude Law's son, produced by Sadie Frost.

Maya's music art performances have contributed from Sydney Opera House (CODA band "Music for the eyes" show) to exclusive London Box Soho shows, where her closing live operatic act "Moth" enjoyed several residencies and the official launch of dial smartwatch for celebrity Will.I.Am, and video 'Song of I', directed by Lasse Hoile for Britain's multiple Grammy nominee musician Steven Wilson. Maya's first independently produced solo shows were received to sold-out capacity at the London Looking Glass Cocktail Club, before traveling to European's historical spots, International Rome Film Festival, London Fashion Week, Great Escape, International Sarajevo Film Festival, Venice Associazione Awai, headlining at the Auditorium of Pazin Castle, Prague SWAN, Lapidarium Museum and for independently produced shows in Berlin, including Berlin's Kit Kat. She recorded a debut album with noted Australian violin player Naomi Radom, Ponyclub Massacre (2005), featuring drummer Tony Buck (The Necks), supporting artists such as Hugo Race (former of Nick Cave band) and Kaki King. In the UK, she recorded vocals and lyrics for ambient/industrial album "Blood Debts" by Years of Denial, produced by DJ/producer Jerome Tcherneyan, released in 2017.

Maya moved her base to London following the premiere of film "Australia" and her mother's sudden departure from this world. Part of Maya's upcoming releases is a series of musical portraits about her mother's life, called Portraits of my mother, combining orchestral and choral work. Her self directed full-length solo show was built between London and Tuscany, working alone on every aspect, from writing to scenography, composing all original music and designing all costumes. Maya's restless curiosity led to extremely independent creativity. She learned about costume making from blogs on the internet, and from knitting woollen crafts with her mother, an ancient tradition of Eastern Europe which has influenced her detailed costume work. Her musical inspiration comes from surrealist painters, where she invests a lot of time researching. In 2012, she composed music for paintings by Italian surrealist painter, her partner Giacomo Benedetti. For the closing of his three months London "Metachromecrisis" exhibition, they recreated his paintings into sets, where Maya sang dressed as their characters. Over the years, Maya re-visited the discipline of modern dance, for personal development and to reconnect with elegance and strength that gymnastic thought her, which has influenced the presence of physical theatre in her shows.

Since departing Bosnia 20 years ago, in 2010, Maya played a concert for Sarajevo Film Festival and scored for a Bosnian short film, Neverending story. In 2016 and 2017, she received inspiring attention for headlining performances, Love Songs From the Violent Paradise and Futura Monomania, at the auditorium of the medieval Pazin castle, in the peninsula of Istria. Today's relatively peaceful Bosnia has welcomed few mainstream genres from West, it remains mostly attached to Bosnian traditional song Sevdalinka, originating from Ottoman empire. While observantly respecting the undeniably important continuation of established traditional songs, Maya's style of composing and singing was shaped by 2 decades of cultural adaptations from Spain to Mongolia, across Australia to London. Maya's work is not only autobiographical but based on radically different realities she walked through in West, where a majority of her adult life took place and where she was raised as a composer and performance artist. Learning how to live in personal creative isolation amongst noisiest environments, in cities overcrowded with artistic choices. Maya became an Australian citizen and resident of Europe, fluent in few languages and Cyrillic alphabet. Her music is inspired by environmental changes that affect us all, and not even remotely by specific nation or their tradition. Whether we prefer pickled cabbage over sushi, modern music over traditional, we should keep in mind that we are around 7 billion, producing 2.12 billion tons of annual waste, which only around 9 % get recycled. Perhaps the logic behind our traditional narratives is too avant-garde, that only musical surrealism can define it.