

The age of globalization produces many transnational biographies. The career and work of the Italian-Luxembourgish composer Nigji Sanges are also shaped by the different traditions and life stories of her family: “The diversity of musical influences and sound worlds plays an important role for me. My own compositions are influenced by the music of the most diverse cultures - they are the roots of mankind. Observing my environment also inspires me a lot, especially nature. My life has already taken place in different environments: Zaire, Japan, Italy, Greece, Colombia, Luxembourg.”

Nigji Sanges' paternal grandfather, Mario Sanges, was from Naples, Italy. Both Mario Sanges and his sister Rosetta studied piano at the Naples Conservatory. Mario Sanges arrived in Ethiopia as an officer at the end of 1935, in the context of Fascist Italy's attack on the Abyssinian Empire, which violated international law. He stayed in Ethiopia after the war and met his future wife Anthoula Missailidis there. Her father, a Greek, came from Constantinople. The couple had their son Ennio - Nigji Sanges' father - in Ethiopia; the family later moved to the Republic of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), where Mario Sanges worked as an engineer. Ennio Sanges worked as a pilot and ran a factory, among other things. It was there that he met Nigji's mother, Philomène Assana, whose cousin was a clarinetist and played African jazz.

Nigji Sanges was born on 22 February 1984 in Kinshasa in the Republic of Zaire. Today, the city is not only the largest city in Africa, but also the largest francophone city in the world and at the same time very multilingual. Nigji Sanges lived in Kinshasa until she was five years old. “In this culture, in my environment at the time, there was always music everywhere,” recalls the composer. Kinshasa was followed by a few months of traveling to Japan and through Europe. During this time, they traveled a lot by car and listened to music, she recalls. As a result, she had always “associated landscapes with music”, which might explain her later sensitivity to film music. The family spent a few months in Corinth, where her grandfather lived after the death of his wife. According to her father, Nigji Sanges spent a lot of time singing as a child - probably because she could not communicate in Greek: “Singing improvisation was a pastime.”

In June 1989, the family moved to Luxembourg City. Nigji Sanges played the recorder at elementary school, became enthusiastic about the instrument and, at her parents' request, was enrolled at the *Conservatoire de la Ville de Luxembourg* and later also at the *Conservatoire du Nord*. She took solfège, violin and recorder (fipple flute) lessons. The latter with Johny Fritz, to whom she showed her first attempts at composition, and with Marion Michels.

Her enthusiasm for music grew: in order to memorize the music of other composers so as “not to forget” it, Nigji Sanges tried to notate what she heard with her still rudimentary knowledge. At the time, she was very enthusiastic about Mozart's 40th Symphony and also came into contact with arias by Giacomo Puccini and Giuseppe Verdi through her father, who listened to

a lot of opera music. “Opera,” says Sanges, “is the predecessor of film and film music, so to speak.” In her youth, she watched many films, especially Italian classics (such as those by Bernardo Bertolucci or Federico Fellini) and fell under the spell of the music of Ennio Morricone, Nino Rota and Ryūichi Sakamoto. Sanges retrospectively describes the music of the television series *Rivière Espérance* by Bruno Coulais as “the trigger for deciding to become a film music composer.”

Over the years, other subjects were added at the Luxembourg Conservatory: piano, harmony and chamber music. Nigji Sanges describes her lessons with Romain Becker as formative, as he not only recognized her passion for composing, but also took it seriously and gave her the freedom to try her hand at composition as part of the harmony course. Her enthusiasm for jazz music began in her teens; she attended courses in jazz harmony and composition with Gast Walzing. At the age of 18, Nigji Sanges began composition lessons with Alexander Müllenbach.

After finishing school, Nigji Sanges moved to the *Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse de Lyon*, the only conservatoire national supérieur in France where film music was taught. She took courses in orchestration and pursued a specialization in film music; her teachers included Loïc Mallié (a student of Olivier Messiaen), Patrick Millet and Luca Antignani. She studied film music with Joseph Horowitz and contemporary composition at the *Royal College of Music* in London. The final station of her musical training was the *Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse de Paris*, where she took courses in orchestration (Anthony Girard) and electroacoustics (Yan Maresz and Luis Naon) in addition to the newly founded film music class under Laurent Petitgirard. Nigji Sanges has taught at the *Conservatoire du 10e* in Paris and since 2021 film music, composition, orchestration and harmony at the *Conservatoire de la Ville de Luxembourg*.

Today, Nigji Sanges is primarily active as a composer. She composed the music for the feature film *La Mort viendra / Death will come*, a thriller by Christoph Hochhäusler (prod. Heimatfilm, Amour Fou, Tarantula Belgique). This film was selected for the international competition of the *Locarno Film Festival* (2024) and premiered there. She is also working with director Laurence Thiriat on the film *Femmes Pirates* (prod. Goyaves, Amour Fou), which is due to be screened at the end of 2024. Her collaboration with director Jacques Lœuille is also noteworthy; she composed the music for six of his films. The documentary *Birds of America* (Prod. MK2 / Arte Cinema) was released in 2022. With *Modigliani et ses secrets* (2020) and *Rubens - Peindre l'Europe* (2017), Sanges worked on two documentaries dealing with painting, an extremely fulfilling activity for her, as she is very interested in literature and the visual arts in addition to music and film. Also worth mentioning is Nigji Sanges' music for *Finis Terræ*, a silent film by Jean Epstein (1929), which was premiered by the *United Instruments of Lucilin* as part of the film concert on 2 June 2022 at CAPE in Ettelbrück.

Theater music has also played an increasingly important role in recent years. For the theater director Fábio Godinho, Sanges wrote the music for *Erop* by Romain Butti (Théâtre du Centaure, 2022), *Die Laborantin* by Ella Road (Théâtre des Capucins 2022 / Staatstheater Mainz 2023) and *À la Carabine* by Pauline Peyrade (Théâtre du Centaure 2023). Sanges worked with the English theater director Richard Twyman for the first time in 2024 in the play *Stolen*

*Ground* by Anna Leader (Théâtre des Capucins 2024). Further theater productions are currently in the works, such as *The Beacon / Leuchtfeuer* by Nancy Harris.

In the field of concert music, Nigji Sanges already has almost two dozen works to his name, such as *Malambo* for solo piano, which was written for David Kadouch and premiered at La Scala Paris in 2019 as part of the *Aux Armes, Contemporains!* Festival. *De Magia* for flute, clarinet, prepared piano, two metronomes, percussion, violin, viola and cello (commissioned by the Luxembourg Ministry of Culture) was premiered by the *Kammerata Luxembourg* at the *Trifolion* in Echternach in 2022. “Every genre, every instrumentation requires a different approach. It's almost like a career change.”

Her commitment to the rights of composers has led to Nigji Sanges being on the board of directors of the U2C (*Union des compositrices et compositeurs de musique pour l'image*, formerly UCMF, *Union des compositeurs de musiques de films*) in Paris. She represents the FLAC (*Fédération luxembourgeoise des auteurs et compositeurs*) on the advisory board of the Luxembourg Film Academy and is a member of the *Académie des Arts et Techniques du Cinéma (Académie des César)*.

Nigji Sanges was the initiator of a study on the working conditions of film composers, which was published in 2023 and for which she also wrote the foreword (Jade Tifiou: *Étude de l'impact des conditions de travail sur les compositrices et compositeurs de musique pour l'image*, with a foreword by Nigji Sanges, FEED BACK 2023).

In 2024, Nigji Sanges is Composer of Residence of the second edition of the *Salon de Helen Buchholtz*, which takes place from November to December at the *Bridderhaus* in Esch/Alzette.

*Text (translated with the help of DeepL.com), selection of sources and curation of the webpage: Noemi Deitz*

**How to cite:**

Deitz, Noemi: Nigji Sanges, in: *Music and Gender in Luxembourg*, ed. by Sonja Kmec, Danielle Roster and Anne Schiltz. URL:  
<https://mugi.lu/en/subject/ngji-sanges/> (published online 15.1.2025, last accessed ...)