

properly answer longstanding open questions related to, in particular, massive star formation. LAOG provided the opportunity to make me feel comfortable with optical interferometry and to start exploiting the VLTI to do my science. All this, while enjoying the green pastures of Le Vercors and the Belledonne.

The interest in using the VLTI to study massive star formation I shared with the astronomers at the School of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Leeds. At a conference in Catania (2005), I established first contact with that group. This eventually led to a move to England in autumn 2006. At Leeds, I took up

a post-doc position that was 100 % dedicated to doing high angular resolution observations of massive young stellar objects. The Leeds group manages to provide an ambitious scientific environment where the Friday-afternoon (or any day really) pub visit is part of a healthy standard protocol. My stay in Leeds turned out to be a very fruitful period in my career in which my interests in optical interferometry continued to develop and expand. This path went naturally hand-in-hand with an increased experience with the VLTI facility.

Last February, together with my wife and two-year old son I moved to Chile in

order to take up a position as VLTI staff astronomer. To my mind, in the last couple of years, the VLTI has shown its abilities to provide the community with unique astronomical observations at mind-boggling angular precisions, leading to impressive breakthroughs in a range of areas in stellar astrophysics. With the advent of PRIMA, the imminent arrival of PIONIER and the future second generation instruments, the impact the VLTI will continue to have on the advancement of astronomy and our understanding of astrophysics will be invaluable. I am sincerely grateful that I can be a part of this ongoing effort.

Fellows at ESO

Nadine Neumayer

Looking at the crystal clear winter night skies I so often enjoyed – growing up in the middle of nowhere in south-west Germany – I always asked myself where all “this” comes from and where it will all go. I was fascinated by the fact that our planet Earth is just a tiny blue dot orbiting a star amongst millions of stars in a galaxy amongst billions of galaxies in a possibly endless Universe. This thought still blows my mind, and makes me want to learn more about the origin and evolution of the Universe.

After high school I wanted to find out what the life and work of an astronomer would be like. So I travelled to Chile to visit the La Silla Observatory (Paranal was still under construction at that time). Little did I know that I would end up working at ESO!

With a deep wish to become a professional astronomer, I went to the University of Heidelberg for my undergraduate studies. Afterwards I moved to Cam-

bridge, in the United Kingdom, for one year to take Part III of the Mathematical Tripos. It was during that time that my interest in black holes arose. Back in Heidelberg I finished my Diploma (MSc) with the thesis that led to my first publication – signed with my maiden name Nadine Häring. I had found my heart in Heidelberg and stayed at the Max-Planck Institute for Astronomy for my PhD, studying the nucleus of Centaurus A in great detail.

Half way through my PhD I had my first daughter, Johanna. With the great support of many people and a fellowship from the Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard-Foundation, I finished my PhD thesis at the beginning of 2007, already knowing that I would start an ESO Fellowship at the end of the year. My second daughter, Lena, was born just a few months before I started my Fellowship at ESO. Luckily, ESO contributes to a daycare unit together with the neighbouring Max-Planck Institutes, and I was more than happy to receive confirmation that both girls had a place there.



Nadine Neumayer

My research focuses on the co-evolution of black holes and galaxies and I am especially interested in how black holes get to the centres of galaxies in the first place. Along with my research I also have functional duties at ESO where I am involved with the education and Public Outreach Department, and I am part of the VISTA Science Verification Team. I am also co-organising the monthly Wine and Cheese Seminar, which has allowed me to interact with many visiting as well as ESO astronomers.

ESO is a great place to be scientifically, but also because it is a very family-friendly employer. I am happy to be part of it and to have the opportunity to live my childhood dream!

Irina Yegorova

Like most astronomers I was fascinated by the night sky from my childhood. In addition, visiting a planetarium at the age of five, and a passion for science fiction during my school years, made me choose the profession.

I did my undergraduate studies in my home city, at the Odessa National University (Ukraine). My master's thesis was dedicated to studies of sodium enrichment of stellar atmospheres. My first observational experience at the Crimean Observatory just confirmed my desire to be an astronomer. Later I moved to Trieste, Italy, to do my PhD thesis at SISSA-ISAS (International School for Advanced Studies). My PhD project was dedicated to studies of dark and luminous matter in spiral galaxies. Although SISSA-ISAS is a theoretical institute, I always tried to expand my research towards the observational side. I remember writing a proposal for VIMOS and later reducing the data after obtaining observing time. At that time I could not imagine that only a few years in the future I would be supporting VIMOS.

I joined ESO in July 2008 as a fellow. Since my first visit to the Paranal Observatory, I have been enchanted by this place. It is so special: modern technology telescopes, the deep blue sky and the red stony landscape that gives you a feeling of being on planet Mars, rather than on Earth. For functional duties I support Melipal (UT3), and I am the instrument fellow for VISIR, the mid-infrared spectrometer and imager. Working at Paranal is challenging, but also very enthralling. It gives me an opportunity to appreciate the latest astronomical investigations, from the Solar System to redshift 8, and beyond.

When I am at Paranal I try to use any free minute to look at the stars. The southern hemisphere night sky is one of the most amazing things that I have ever seen. Looking at it reminds me of how lucky we are to uncover the secrets of the Universe. The visible sky is so beautiful and knowing that it represents only a small fraction of what can be seen makes it even more enigmatic.

Despite its geographical isolation, Chile has become a very active centre for astronomy, with such important sites as the VLT and ALMA and in the future the E-ELT. Therefore Chile offers plenty of opportunities to meet astronomers from institutes worldwide. Our science life in the Vitacura office is really vivid. Enthusiastic observers coming back from their



Irina Yegorova

campaigns are excited to share the first results of their observations. The Vitacura office is full of enthusiastic people, and you can feel at the forefront of both technology and research. This gives me inspiration for new ideas for my research. My current scientific interest covers the wide topic of galaxy formation and evolution — starting from giant spiral galaxies and finishing with tiny dwarfs. I study the dynamical properties of these objects, together with their chemical evolution history. Understanding the origin of spiral galaxies means understanding our own origin as inhabitants of the dearest disc galaxy to us, the Milky Way!



A 360-degree panorama of Paranal Observatory and the southern sky taken before morning twilight. The Moon is just rising and the zodiacal light is visible, while the Milky Way stretches across the sky.