

**COLLECTION**  
**FUNDACIÓN BBVA - NEOS****Aus Trachila**

Thomas Hummel (\*1962)

**CD CONTENT:****MUSIC AND TEXT IN AN UNUSUAL RELATIONSHIP**

The problem of understanding concepts in the newer fine arts has generated a variety of discussions. As a result, theories about the reasons for this lack of understanding or lack of readability have evolved. Music, as the most abstract of all the arts, has always been uncertain with itself to a significant degree. Today, thanks in large part to research in sound and speech synthesis, well-established possibilities for relationships between literature and music can be broadened. These possibilities range from conventional scoring to many different degrees of articulation of speech resonance in music. Texts may be acoustically inaudible but nevertheless present in their meaning. In such an extreme case as this, all the usual methods of communication are undermined to allow for new depths of perception.

This characterizes the beginnings of Thomas Hummel's preoccupation with *Aus Trachila*, which he composed between 2003 and 2006. Even before this, however, Hummel had begun to explore inventive new relationships between speech and music. This inclination showed itself for the first time in the production of his orchestral work *Nicanor* (1996/97). With a self-developed method, he translated certain words into the sounds of instruments, a great departure both from old-fashioned forms of program music and from associative onomatopoeia. In *Nicanor*, Hummel's starting point was the famous novel *The Autumn of the Patriarch* by Gabriel García Márquez. *Aus Trachila* on the other hand draws its inspiration from two literary works of very different historical periods: the depressing *Songs of Dolour* by Ovid and the highly successful novel *Die letzte Welt*, written in 1988 by Austrian author Christoph Ransmayr, and characterized as typically postmodern.

Hummel's idea to ally these two works comes from the fact that Ransmayr's narrative flows between present time and ancient time and refers to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, one of the most widely read epic works of the ancient world. Hummel is inspired by a part of the novel. Cotta, the Roman friend of Ovid, travels in search of the poet. As legend has it, he has found shelter in a hermitage called 'Trachila'. Hummel takes the element of this hopeful search and reflects it in the structure of his composition. As he himself explains, Cotta's voyage, like his own piece *Aus Trachila*, is a "devoured path through times, cultures and their languages".

Picking up on this reference, one can highlight first of all Hummel's tendency for quasi-prismatic refraction and elaborate camouflage. The idea of steady change – the aesthetic core of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and a concept that has continually inspired artists of all genres since the time of Goethe – is also assumed by Hummel in his piece. It becomes manifest as a moment of generated tension and also aesthetic candidness, the latter in the sense of a permanent searching motion, which is perceivable in a highly suggestive way when listening to the work. Foreignness is therefore

one of the topics of this piece. It manifests itself especially in the articulation of speech, which changes between clear distinction and the transformation of sounds, and raises with it the question of what the perception of speech in general means. But it may also allude to the virtuosic relationship with timbre. Thereby, common timbres of instruments are used in the same way as timbres of unusual and distorted playing techniques. In the first movement of the composition already, speech and music resemble each other in a fascinating way when the vocal artist articulates the text by Ovid in such a way that it simulates the timbre of the orchestra. Only in subsequent movements can the text be perceived in a semantically clear way.

As a result of his education and long-time practice as a computer music scientist, Hummel is skilled in rigorous scientific thinking. And he is able to extend this productive thinking to his compositions. This has an impact in *Aus Trachila* as in other new pieces, especially in the intentional calculation of the attention of hearing in association with text and music. Based on his research of aesthetic perception, and especially on the difference between visual and audio perception, Hummel's music reveals amazing timbre combinations. These play with the possibilities of comparing recollections as well as with allusions to "migrating" – and by these means display a particular musical intensity.

**Jörn-Peter Hiekel**

Translation: Kate Rodriguez

### **Thomas Hummel: About the production process**

The production of *Aus Trachila* is an experiment in recording technique. It is probably the first time that this has been accomplished to such an extent. The work is an attempt to achieve a hyper-realistic recording of a music piece. With this procedure, each instrument of the orchestra is recorded separately with the conductor, musically adapted and spatialized. Specially developed software assists the recording process and the manual placement of all fragments. This innovative software makes this enormously complex challenge feasible, and allows the interpretation to achieve a high level of precision and transparency. With the surround-sound version of the recording, the listener finds himself virtually amidst the orchestra. This production is dedicated to the violoncellist Claudius von Wrochem, who accompanied the project with encouragement and support.

Translation: Kate Rodriguez

### **Ovidio Naso: Tristes (III, 8)**

Ahora desearía montar el carro de Triptolemo,  
el que depositó en la inculta tierra las primeras semillas.  
Ahora quisiera regir los dragones con cuyo auxilio Medea se fugó,  
¡oh Corinto!, de tu ciudadela.  
Ahora me arrojaría a tomar audaces alas,  
fuesen las de Perseo o las de Dédalo,  
para hendir con rápida marcha las tenues auras,  
y contemplar de repente el dulce suelo de la patria.  
Insensato, ¿por qué formas esos vanos y pueriles votos  
que ningún día ve ni verá realizados?

### **Ovid: Songs of Dolour (III, 8)**

Triptolemus' chariot I'd love to ride,  
Who scattered virgin seed on ground untried,  
Or yoke Medea's dragons, the same pair  
That whisked her off from Corinth through the air;  
And I should like to take up wings and try,  
Like Perseus or Daedalus, to fly,  
So long as thin air yields me passage, and  
I all at once behold my native land;  
The home I left behind, my friends for life,  
And most of all the face of my dear wife.  
Why fondly with such childish fervour pray  
For what won't come today or any day?