

COLLECTION
BBVA FOUNDATION - NEOS

Nikolaus Brass
songlines

“SONGLINES” FOR SOLO STRINGS

Prologue · viola

A brief fanfare, as loud in its intensity
as the length of the signal,
you're suddenly thrown into a raging torrent,
the fanfare is not kingly,
it plunges downward,
figures and glissandos begin high above, repeatedly aiming and darting downward.

The limits of the instrument are the limits of the plunge.
Without them this brief, violent signal would tear us into the abyss.

Klaus-Peter Werani

songlines I · violin

It's fascinating to hear and play music so closely in communion with nature in the broadest sense: the nature of sense perception, of dreams, of the subconscious.
How can such things be put down in notation?
Therein lies the mystery:
with Brass, two performances of the same piece with the same players are never alike, yet it always sounds like the same piece.
Just as the same river one enters is never exactly 'the same,' yet is always recognizable.
I asked him, "Nikolaus, how do you do that?" He answered with a slight smile and a shrug of the shoulders. I suspect he knows pretty well what he's about. But one thing is clear: at the back of it is great confidence in his players – and in himself.
In this music, amazement and wonderment form a very large part of the performance. Experiencing the magic of the minor third! In this music, we don't pass through the rooms of a familiar building. No, the path through the score is more like shipping out to sea – with no weather report!

Helge Slaatto

Intermission · viola

A bit of memory,
dripped sparingly onto the page by an invisible hand,
with scarcely time to ponder paths taken before.
Then, at the end, a prolongation, a written-out state of mind,
in which light and shadow meekly wrestle with each other.

Klaus-Peter Werani

songlines III · viola

The viola lilts
on crumbling ground,
surmounting great distances, heights and depths to form a delicate, inward song.
The Prologue's violent gesture remains, now more controlled, the unbridled cascades
channeled into a broad stream.
This river grants time to tarry and create.
Great liberty, seemingly codified in signs.
The limits of the imagination are the limits of my playing.
At the end a sharp eruption, a full retreat,
outside and inside stand still with large question marks.

Klaus-Peter Werani

songlines IV · violin and double bass

I recognize something – perhaps the vision of striding through two landscapes (deserts?
forests? seacoasts?), just within calling distance, the one more to the north, the other
further to the south, but always intuitively in agreement about the directions, about
tarrying, about proceeding, fully lost in thought, completely forgetting time, following or
losing tracks. Closely observing and noticing things very near and small. Nikolaus, where do
you find this music of the soul? That's what I thought: you won't tell us.

Frank Reinecke

songlines V · violoncello

We'd met just a short while before. Now a couple of weeks later, with almost no advance
warning: a solo piece with a personal dedication ...
In a reverberant, noisy shell of a new apartment I'd just moved into, on the sandy concrete
floor, I made the acquaintance of music that could hardly be further removed from this
sort of "modernist noise-making": an enchanted music, yearning, intimate, almost singing
softly to itself. Then huge eruptions capable of holding their own against a masonry drill for
a short while before the music withdraws into still more secret recesses. During the
recording session in Bavarian Radio's large studio, I transport myself inwardly to my homey
construction site, cold and solitary. The loudspeaker emits friendly words of
encouragement from the composer and studio engineer: "We've got it in the bag, just play
it once more, because it was so beautiful!" Suddenly we're finished, and Swabian noodles
are waiting next door.

Erik Borgir

Epilogue · double bass

The pitch B somberly signifies Death. The hoarse sub-contra B, some 31 vibrations per second, the lowest, last pitch on the mighty, black, five-string orchestral double bass. Anything beneath it is beyond the threshold of hearing, suspended. It is precisely this sub-contra B that prepares the stage for Death in *Wozzeck*. The pitch B is also the last and highest pitch in the C-major scale before the 'new' C resounds, the *Resurrexit*, the Light, but this is hidden for the time being. Yet the F, the pastoral sound of Nature, stands up to the B, clear and resolute. Then it makes its appearance, the buoyant C, utters a cry of lamentation together with the heroic E-flat, falls back exhausted, ebbs away ...

C sharp: sorrow. The F sharp, celestially remote, where is it luring us?

So pure, so limpid are the signs set down in the Epilogue.

Frank Reinecke

Translation from the German: J. Bradford Robinson