

COLLECTION  
BBVA FOUNDATION - NEOSDonaueschinger Musiktage 2008  
Vol.1 Johnston Mundry Pauset Poppe

## ISABEL MUNDRY

*Ich und du [I and You] for piano and orchestra (2008)*

We are not dealing with any biographical 'I' and 'you' in this work, the music settling more on this 'I' as a place of stable perception and that 'you' as a place of projection. Increasingly, one found oneself dealing with the question – in compositional terms as well as existential ones – as to what is so special, in our media-driven age, about each individual and to what extent the other person is connected with a specific resonance. In this way, the composition tackles just as much our day-to-day experience (just dwell for a moment on the random way we eavesdrop on intimate mobile phone conversations in public places), as the life-bearing issue that relates to the sense of any particular musical thought, where the hopefully not too recondite aspect of the noise of aesthetic plurality at the back of one's mind looms large. One is disposed of course to thinking of the solo instrument as 'I' and the orchestra as 'you', even though the music is built of layers and immanent meanings, of attempts to reach out to the border, of assaults, attributions or other acts of self-determination. Inasmuch, the piano can become the 'you', in that the orchestra evinces itself as an 'I' alternatively, the instrument can become a stranger to itself, in that it mutates from an intimate sound-world inhabited to a machine driven from without.

This 'I' and 'you' are thought of here as musical principles in each case, remaining at large from any or many instruments seeking a representative role. The solo instrument denotes in this constellation merely a focus on shifting conditions. The 'I' is treated in five sections, the transitions of which remain fluid: as an intersection, a place of self-assessment, a landscape, a place of imputation or of self-negation, and as a place of permeability.

Kitaro Nishida describes this 'I' as a "field-like" locus that may not be substantiated from its immediate environment but which as a homeostatic entity is entitatively bonded to it. Reading his philosophical tractus *I and You* decidedly influenced my composition, even if this perusal renders the experiential phenomena general, whereas each sound I composed became an intersection. The contradictory context between general reflexion and obstacles encountered in everyday life continues to determine my musical thought processes. A mirror is held to the desire to think an idea through to its end; and yet, it must be accepted that composing is much more irrational, because I can not achieve an overview of the act of composition itself, as this would entail stepping outside myself. The composition *Ich und Du* deals with these shifting perspectives, which is exactly why – but not in any subjective sense – the work remains biographical.

Isabel Mundry

Translation from the German: Graham Lack

## ENNO POPPE

### ***Altbau [Old Building] for orchestra (2008)***

I need no input in order to compose. The urge comes from the music itself. I can take my magnifying glass and look at the dustiest corner and will always find things which from now on will belong to me. This is not a style, but a technique of observation. The orchestra itself is the old building. Parquet and plasterwork; the façades look better before renovation than with a new finish of apricot paint.

Enno Poppe

*Translation from the German: Graham Lack*

## BRICE PAUSET

### ***Die Tänzerin (Symphonie V) [The Dancing Girl, Symphony V] for large orchestra (2008)***

*Die Tänzerin (Symphonie V)* for orchestra is the second part of a triptych. The first part is *Der Geograf* (The Geographer, Symphony IV) for orchestra with solo piano; the project will be completed with *Erstarrte Schatten* (Frozen Shadows, Symphony VI) for orchestra, six voices and electronics. The central problem of this cycle, one which took centre stage in earlier works, is the quest for the impossible – an impossible that is not meant as a kind of concrete guiding idea (producing an impossible music is at the end of the day not so interesting), but as a thought experiment that leads to the construction of musical dramaturgies, ones that are splintered, uncomfortable, and occasionally insoluble, but which shall be rendered in music.

In this work, the thought experiment consists of engendering the aesthetic affect that reflects the movements of a dancing girl on stage, but not viewed along the usual sight-lines available to an audience, but with the aid of hardly customary visual means from a distant planet. The choreographic movements of the dancer become inextricably entwined with the motion of the planet on which she is dancing, with those of the planet around the sun, and the rotation of the sun itself and the solar system in which it exists, and so on. The questions that emerge have a bearing on aesthetics (at what point does an aesthetic affect become pure observation of a phenomenon?) as well as the question of focus (the dancing girl is the smallest element in the group of elements observed, represents however the aesthetic experience at the centre of the focus).

The succession of themes – in *Der Geograf* they are connected by geographic topology, in *Die Tänzerin* by the choreography – is not coincidental. In France during the 17<sup>th</sup> century there existed a poetic-technical literature that engendered a functional and structural connexion between these two techniques of movement (analytical in one case, synthetic in the other), a connexion out of which I would derive a third element in *Erstarrte Schatten*: material and its absence.

These thoughts allowed me to develop apposite music for *Die Tänzerin*, the solution at hand being just one of many, it not being subject to any scientific law nor connected to any subjective discourse. Detail is in a state of permanent collision with the longest developmental passage of a discourse, one which, according to the situation, calls for culturally determined archetypes. An inborn tendency causes me to be constantly aware of detail and even secondary phenomena which otherwise would go amiss. What fascinates me about dance are just as much the sounds produced along the way as the movements in space and the affects expressed by the body; such sounds produced by friction and impact are to be found transposed, composed out, and staged in my music. [...]

Brice Pauset

*Translation from the German: Graham Lack*

## BEN JOHNSTON

### ***Quintet for groups (1965/1966)***

[...] The *Quintet for Groups*, a major orchestral work commissioned by Eleazar De Carvalho in 1965, was completed in 1966, and premiered on March 24 and 25, 1967, by the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. According to accounts from the time, the audience was divided, with booing classical symphony patrons pitted against a few vocal new music fans who eventually carried the day. No recording was made, and it seems circumstances were less than ideal – string players who should have been playing some of the divisi parts were instead enlisted to play percussion, causing rhythmic chaos, one of the harpists only showed up on the last day and the other one refused to retune the instrument. At the same time, apparently the wind players had rehearsed with great attention to detail, writing in all of their microtonal fingerings.

The dynamic between chaos and order, which is often mirrored in the political and musical divisions within an orchestra, serves as formal inspiration for Johnston's piece. The musicians are divided into five groups: a solo woodwind quintet; a choir of brass players; a rhythm section of two percussion, two harps, and two pianos which helps to establish the complex modulations of tempo and tuning; two divisi string groups, positioned left and right. The score combines several kinds of notation bridging freer structures and more strictly determined material. Each instrumental group operates in a distinctively designed musical frame but is open to influence from the others. The overarching shape is a movement between various forms of dissonance and consonance: microtonal, textural, rhythmic.

It is a wonderful set of circumstances that has led to this first European performance of *Quintet for Groups*. In 2007, I had met Bob Gilmore in Ireland, who gave me a copy of his recent anthology of Johnston's writings, *Maximum Clarity*. When Walter Zimmermann asked me to present some seminars to his composition class at the University of the Arts in Berlin, I decided to get to know Johnston's music. I wrote to his publisher, Sylvia Smith, and several weeks later, a large package of scores arrived. I also introduced myself to Ben by email, and he helped me collect CDs, old cassette dubs, and LP records documenting his body of work over the past sixty years. This includes ten string quartets, two major works for microtonal piano, a rock musical for La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club (NYC), and assorted solo, chamber and choral works. I found myself especially fascinated with his complex and unknowable music of the 1960s, and curious about one piece in particular, the orchestral score *Quintet for Groups*.

In late summer, word came that Armin Köhler was looking for an interesting American orchestral work for a program at the 2008 Donaueschinger Musiktage. I called Sylvia, who explained that the very large handwritten score was rolled up in an architect's tube and there was no published copy. To save time, she agreed to send me the original. A day's work in a Berlin copy shop reduced the parchment rolls onto sheets of A2 paper, which finally arrived a few days later at the SWR. At 82 years old, welcome to Donaueschingen, Mr. Johnston!

Marc Sabat