

THE SHIFT TO THE RIGHT

A DYSTOPIC RADIO PIECE
BY GEORG SEESSLEN
AND MARKUS METZ

THE POGROM OF 1938

WOLFGANG BENZ
ON THE FAILURE OF
CIVIL SOCIETY

BAUHAUS

GRET PALUCCA IN THE
MASTERS' HOUSES

WILFRIED WANG
ON THE MYTH BAUHAUS

MENTALLY DIS-ORDERED MUSIC

Caspar Johannes Walter

FROM “LABOR BEETHOVEN 2020”

“Labor Beethoven 2020” – an initiative of the Music Section of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin – gives young composers from Israel, Greece, Germany, and Kosovo the chance to develop and realise their visions of a musical future without external pressure. Reliance on commercial interests is of as little importance here as the idea, unfortunately often encountered, that one specific kind of musical thought has precedence over all others. The involvement of artists from the margins of Europe is deliberate: the universities and music academies of Thessaloniki (Greece), Tel Aviv (Israel), and Basel (Switzerland), with their mentors Dimitri Papageorgiou, Ruben Seroussi, and Caspar Johannes Walter, have each assembled a team of three younger composers, who are discussing the problems of today’s art at annual meetings, and have the opportunity to perform new works in collaborative projects, whether this occurs within or deliberately outside conventional forms of performance. Partnerships not only between composers and performers, but also with artists in other disciplines, receive targeted support to enable them to develop their artistic ideas over the course of several years.

BEETHOVEN TODAY

With his characteristic obstinacy, Beethoven transcended the boundaries of the existing norms in his own day. Which makes it all the more refreshing to see him acting as a catalyst for a young generation of artists who also cross borders. From the perspective of the present, we can see in Beethoven an inventive spirit whose music, at certain spectacular moments, goes far beyond the limits of the language and conventions of his time: he provides an example of how strong and visionary music can be. Conventional music theory, with its desire to order different phenomena and systematise this order – thereby creating a model of reality – cannot grasp him accurately, since at many important moments in his music, Beethoven steps outside reality and, precisely for this reason, becomes pure sonic sensation.

Here is an example. In the Piano Sonata in D minor, op. 31, no. 2 (“The Tempest”), he causes a harmonically expansive recitative (“Largo, con espressione e semplice”) to become blurred by the sustaining pedal, creating an impression of distance. Without forewarning, the music then continues “Allegro” – enharmonically confused, without pedal, dry as dust. We are abruptly wrenched from a place far away to the here and now. In this sense, his music is mentally “dis-ordered” – in other words, it moves things from the positions they normally occupy. And in this, he was by no means alone in his time. [→ fig. 1]

Beethoven stretches the boundaries of a work and forces them open at the same time.

Akkad Izre’el

BEETHOVEN AND THE ALCHEMIST’S KITCHEN AROUND 1800 AS CREATIVE MODEL

Following their youth together in Bonn, Anton Reicha’s and Ludwig van Beethoven’s paths repeatedly crossed. In the electoral court orchestra of Bonn, Reicha was a flautist and Beethoven a viola player. They met again in Vienna; later, Reicha moved to Paris, where he enjoyed high regard as a composer, theorist, and teacher – with students including Berlioz and Liszt. At first, Beethoven and Reicha developed on similar lines, but then their ways separated entirely. While Beethoven became the embodiment of an era even during his lifetime, Reicha dedicated himself to the unusual, the bizarre, and the unexplored.

Today Beethoven is anchored in our consciousness to an extent that is perhaps already too universal. The multi-talented Reicha, by contrast, is mainly known for his utilitarian music for wind ensemble; his innovations are largely forgotten. It is worth taking a look at the two together. It must have been a highly productive time for revolutionary ideas and visions. This fertile soil, from which Beethoven drew a great deal of his power, can be seen in the last section of Reicha’s *Cours de composition musicale*, where he is concerned with opposites that “have not been discussed until now”. In addition to a theoretical and practical reappraisal of quarter tones,

he also demands composite time signatures such as 7/4 time, in order to abandon “the habit of hearing only two types of time signature and the slowness of learning and teaching new ones”. Particularly challenging is his appeal to “learn from physicists and mathematicians” the forms that audible sound waves describe in the air, so as to “determine the various grades of enmeshment of which music is capable” by analysing these forms.

Here, moreover, the reference to Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni is obvious – of whom Napoleon said: “This man makes sounds visible.” Chladni was a physicist and astronomer, but in 1802 (the same year as Beethoven’s “Tempest” sonata) he also presented an

Beethoven’s work is characterized by “the search for extremes, the maximisation of sonic possibilities, and the development of new conceptions of form”.

Adrian Nagel

important study of acoustics, in which – besides brilliant speculations on the tuning system of music – he set out his theory of “sound figures”: patterns that become visible when various high notes cause a metal plate that has been dusted with powdered resin to vibrate.

The decisive idea for these experimenters was the unity of music and science, and it characterised the age just as much as the idea of a universal art transcending the individual disciplines. Beethoven and quarter tones or “sound figures”? It scarcely sounds imaginable. But with Beethoven, we must always reckon with the crossing of boundaries – and with the fact that these transgressions, for all Beethoven’s popularity, are seldom understood. [→ fig. 2]

THE “LABOR BEETHOVEN 2020” STUDIOS

Beethoven’s transgressions and singularities are now inspiring the “Labor” participants, alongside the thoroughly concrete materials of the alchemist’s kitchen of his day. The freedom of the spirit to create something unique is as exciting as its individualisation of form. On the basis of these resources, some of the young artists involved in “Labor Beethoven 2020” have started projects that they are working on in several stages, in self-elected teams. In their studios, aspects of materials research are combined with reflection and artistic experiment. Here are some examples from the multitude of individual “Labor” projects and events:

The “Cymatics” studio by Anda Kryeziu can be seen as a direct descendent of the Chladni/Reicha tradition. Kryeziu is working together with physicist Andrea Heilrath, electronics expert Justin Stewart, and clarinetist Djordje Kujundzic to incorporate coincidences between sound and form in an installation. This will provide interfaces (open mikes), with which forms can be improvised spontaneously.

[→ fig. 3]

An interdisciplinary collaboration is taking place in the studio of Adrian Nagel and visual artist Eva Gentner. They

have already presented two projects which engage with the surface structures of images and sounds, and reveal common ground between them in a reduced, strict form. One aim of these works is to sharpen perception, allowing the viewer to identify microscopic changes in the surfaces as an inherent dynamic force. Their planned “sound robot” project will continue this line of investigation: by means of (relatively minimal) movements, the acoustic and visual spaces are redefined.

Psychobjectivity is a collaborative installation by Akkad Izre’el and Ari Rabenu. Cables are connected to a member of the audience, who walks around and hears sounds via headphones, which are related to the

objects in the surroundings. At the same time, these objects “speak” acoustically: they are fitted with loudspeakers without membranes (so-called transducers), which use the object itself as a resonating body. “An approach to the inner and outer perception of sound”: perception and imagination, inner and outer, reality and virtual space overlap.

[→ fig. 4]

HITZACKER SUMMER MUSIC DAYS

In July 2018, the “Labor Beethoven 2020” was a guest at the Summer Music Days in Hitzacker, one of the most important German music festivals which, this year, was entirely focused on the music of Beethoven. The concept of networking had top priority for the premieres of all the “Labor Beethoven” composers’ works. In Hitzacker, cooperation with the prizewinners of the German Music Competition, who performed the new works, gave rise to partnerships that will continue to enrich the “Labor” in future projects as well.

Eleni Ralli projected sounds across a lake, and thereby achieved such a concentration of listening that even very quiet sounds were perceptible across vast distances. Faidra Chafta Douka and Thanos Sakellariadis explored the Paetzold recorders, which are rarely found on the concert scene: huge, deep-sounding instruments with an impressive mechanism that almost appears machine-like. This pairing will compose further works for the prizewinning duo of Elisabeth Wirth and Maximilian Volbers. One event that impressed everybody was the first performance, by Julius Schepansky, of the accordion piece *lucasbox* by Guy Rauscher and Batya Frenklakh: a composition that uses open, sometimes graphic forms of notation to express certain things in the piece with greater precision. The successful cooperation between the young composers and interpreters was rounded off with a composition for the entire prizewinners’ ensemble by Manolis Ekmektsoglou, which he also conducted.

[→ fig. 5]

THE FUTURE OF THE “LABOR” – THE “LABOR” OF THE FUTURE

The next working meeting will take place in February 2019 in Berlin, at both sites of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin. The focus will be on two areas of activity: artistic exploitation of the Academy’s spaces, and preparation for the subsequent events. The Black Box is an exciting performance space in the basement floor of the Academy at Pariser Platz – a charismatic, stone-built hall with a viewers’ gallery – and powerful but also beautifully interesting acoustics that are worth using as a topic in themselves. The “Labor” composers will consider the properties of this space in their compositions, and perhaps even make them a central concern. On 24 February 2019, “Labor Beethoven 2020” is inviting everyone to an open day in the spaces at Pariser Platz.

CASPAR JOHANNES WALTER is professor of composition at the Musik-Akademie Basel. He has received important prizes for his work in the fields of orchestral composition (Iriano Prize, Japan, 1992; Wien Modern, 1995) and ensemble music (Stuttgart, 1991), as well as awards such as a fellowship from the Villa Massimo in Rome. In 1998, the portrait CD featuring chamber music by Caspar Johannes Walter, issued by the German Music Council on the Wergo label, received the German Record Critics’ Award. His interests as a performer – he is a cellist in the Thürmchen Ensemble, which he co-founded in 1991 – are mainly oriented towards younger composers in the fields of experimental music and music theatre. Since 2014 he has been a member of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Music Section.

THE PARTICIPANTS at the first working meeting at the Academy in Hanseatenweg, Berlin, in 2017: Thanos Sakellariadis (Thessaloniki), Manolis Ekmektsoglou (Thessaloniki), Faidra Chafta Douka (Thessaloniki), Anda Kryeziu (Basel), Adrian Nagel (Basel), Eleni Ralli (Basel), Guy Rauscher (Tel Aviv), Dimitri Papageorgiou (mentor, Thessaloniki), Caspar Johannes Walter (mentor, Basel), Oliver Wille (artistic director of Hitzacker Summer Music Days), Ruben Seroussi (mentor, Tel Aviv), Ari Rabenu (Tel Aviv), Akkad Izre’el (Tel Aviv)

Further events: The “Labor” is giving a guest performance in May 2019 at the Experimental Center of Arts, Thessaloniki. During the concluding events in March 2020, commissioned works by all nine composers will be presented. Alongside this, a publication will appear, installations will be created, and podium discussions conducted, in which, as well as all the participants, subject-specific experts and guest performers will be involved.

“Labor Beethoven 2020” has been created to mark “BTHVN2020”, a series of projects to commemorate Beethoven’s 250th anniversary, and is supported by the Commissioner for Culture and the Media.

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