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### THE STOCKHAUSEN COMPOSITION AND INTERPRETATION COURSES

**Article:** This article deals with Karlheinz Stockhausen's Summer Courses, which take place annually in a German town Kürten, near Cologne. Last year (between July 31 and August 9) the courses in composition and interpretation hosted 132 participants from 25 countries. The event consisted of: Stockhausen's own lectures, the lectures of Australian composer and musicologist Richard Toop, then, master classes in interpretation held by Stockhausen's permanent collaborators such as Suzanne Stephens (clarinet), Kathinka Pasveer (flute), Hubert Meyer (voice), Alain Louafi (dance) etc. Also, nine concerts were held – six of them were given by the professors, and three concerts by the selected participants – with a total of 29 Stockhausen's works performed; most of them were the pieces from his monumental, recently finished, opera cycle *Licht (Light)*.

The Stockhausen Composition and Interpretation Courses dedicated to German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, born in 1928, were held for the seventh consecutive time from July 31 to August 8, 2004. The unpretentious title conceals an ambitiously conceived event that incorporates, besides the mentioned courses, a mini-festival of Stockhausen's work, a promotion of his publishing house and lectures by eminent musicologists, experts in Stockhausen's production. The courses are held in Kürten, a small town in the North Rhine-Westphalia region, not far from Cologne, where the composer has lived for almost fifty years. The event is jointly organized by Stockhausen's music foundation and the Municipality of Kürten, which lends the High School Centre complex for the needs of the courses. The Centre includes a large number of classrooms and libraries, as well as a very acoustic concert hall that admits around 500 visitors. The courses were introduced in 1997, as a logical sequel to the composer's pedagogical activity of many decades that began in Darmstadt as early as half a century ago. Each year the courses arouse great interest: this year they boasted 132 participants from 25 countries from all five continents – 12 musicologists, 31 composers, 42 performers and numerous music amateurs, admirers of Stockhausen's work.

Karlheinz Stockhausen is considered the greatest living German composer and at age 76 he is still full of creative energy. However, although the composer is making plans for 2017 (!), his strength is obviously beginning to fail. Indeed, despite having preserved much of his youthful charisma, Stockhausen is no longer able during a lecture to compose an entire work in a burst of inspiration (the 1965 composition *Stop* was thus created), or have heated debates with young creators, but rather chooses to read prepared lectures and set apart twenty minutes after his presentation to answer questions. Truth to tell, his work no longer creates controversy either as it did several decades ago, which is why the courses take place in a very peaceful and pleasant atmosphere. The structure of the participants is interesting: while the make-up of young composers changes almost every year (most of them simply come, see and

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go, not particularly impressed by the work of a doyen of the European avant-garde), the faces of participating musicologists and performers have been much the same for years – they are music writers and instrumentalists who have been studying and interpreting Stockhausen’s works for years, practically becoming followers of his cult!

The content of this year’s event included, first of all, nine lectures by Stockhausen during which he explained the ways in which he composed certain segments of his monumental opera cycle *Licht* (*Light*). Each lecture was accompanied by discussions in which participants of the course took part. In addition, eight lectures were held by a musicologist and composer from Australia, Richard Toop, head of the Department of Musicology at the University of Sidney, who has been collaborating with Stockhausen ever since the famous Darmstadt days. Toop discussed the compositions *Adieu*, *Basset-Su*, *Mittwoch-Gruss*, *Pietà*, *Plus-Minus*, *Refrain*, *Stop* and *Telemusik*. Toop’s lectures and concerts concluding every “working” day at the course were practically a mini-retrospective of Stockhausen’s production, an excellent introduction for listeners who came across his work for the first time, as well as a useful reminder for the declared connoisseurs of the maestro’s work. In our opinion, the most interesting feature of Stockhausen’s and Toop’s lectures was the seemingly surprising fact that (as shown by the, from all accounts shocking performance of the ensemble *musikFabrik* at the 12<sup>th</sup> International Review of Composers.zip in Belgrade) avant-garde music writing is still very much alive. Although terms *second avant-garde*, *new sonorism*, *modernism after postmodernism* etc. are today used to describe this phenomenon of the survival and, moreover, new swing of avant-garde sonic worlds, which were believed to have died out in the mid-1970’s, the mini-retrospective of Stockhausen’s work that we attended convinced us of the undeniable continuity of his recent production with works written during the past decades. Namely, after the scores of intuitive music, i.e. total aleatoric music by which he marked the transition from the seventh to the eighth decade of the last century, Stockhausen redefined his own inclination for serial musical thought by promoting principles of composing based on a formula, or superformula. Stockhausen unequivocally defined this compositional technique, which he has been promoting for 33 years – from the 1977 *Mantra* to the final parts of the cycle *Licht*, as a serial principle of musical thought, only he believes that, unlike series or traditional subjects, superformula offers even greater possibilities for precomposing all music parameters. Although the sonic world of Stockhausen’s recent works shows many points of contact with postmodernist eclecticism for incorporating elements of oriental and Far Eastern musical practices, and even *free jazz*, with a specific post-avant-garde sound, the compositional technique by which these works are realized is unmistakably the modernistic “hard writing” because the entire *Licht* cycle (with a total running time of 27 hours!) is composed on the basis of a single three-layer superformula which is the nucleus, or genetic code of this grandiose project. Such a definition is supported by the fact that Stockhausen’s and Toop’s lectures were focused primarily on a formalistic analysis of compositional techniques! Not a single word about context, hypertext, how *Licht* establishes links with other discursive systems – on the other hand, at the lectures we counted the notes in

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detail, detected scales of dynamic and rhythmic series, “dissected” the superformula and looked for the points at which an extension of some of its segments into complete evening operas could be identified! What is more interesting, Stockhausen seemed firmly convinced that finding the superformula is a discovery equivalent to Schoenberg’s promotion of the twelve-note technique, and that this new, improved serialism should be the focus of attention for generations of young composers!

The following segment incorporated master courses held by eminent artists, Stockhausen’s regular associates, who have been devoted to performing and promoting his works for years, some of them even for decades. The team of docents at the seventh annual summer course included Suzanne Stephens, clarinet; Kathinka Pasveer, flute; Hubert Meyer, vocal; Antonio Perez Abellan, synthesizer, Benjamin Kobler, piano; Marco Blauw, trumpet; Michael Patmann, percussives, and Alain Louafi, dance and gestures. All participants of the course were allowed to attend lectures in docent classes. They also had free access to all the concerts and final rehearsals – the rehearsals taking place in the morning, the concerts in the afternoon. The concerts attracted the attention of a large number of listeners from Kürten and neighbouring towns, so that the auditorium of the High School Centre was filled to capacity every evening. Nine concerts altogether were held during this mini-festival of Stockhausen’s work, six by docents and three by participants of interpretation courses. Considering the relatively tight budget of the event, the selection included chamber and electroacoustic works instead of works written for large vocal and/or instrumental performing ensembles. After all, it was even in operas from the cycle *Licht* that entire scenes (including certain whole operas) were written for different small instrumental or vocal-instrumental ensembles. The chamber sound to some extent dynamizes the almost mandatory presence of the electroacoustic part.

Six docent concerts saw the performance of 17 works altogether, six of which were world premieres. In addition to “live” performances, several electroacoustic works were reproduced from multi-channel tracks, in a darkened hall. Each time, Stockhausen personally directed the performances as the sound engineer, together with his assistant, American composer Brian Wolf. As a producer, Stockhausen creates multilayered sonic landscapes in which every part is coloured in such a way as to be clearly perceived, so that, regardless of the complexity of the procedure, it is easy to follow processes taking place within different layers of the performed scores.

We had the opportunity to hear compositions written over a span of (as long as) half a century, from 1955 (*Piano Piece VI*) to his most recent works. As mentioned before, the musicians engaged as docents and performers have been collaborating with Stockhausen for years, decades even, they know his works to perfection and their dedication yields remarkable interpretations of his highly demanding scores. We shall mention several outstanding achievements in performing. The composition *Quitt* for three wind instruments, performed at the first evening of the festival, dedicated to Kathinka Pasveer, Suzanne Stephens and Marco Blauw, is a *tour de force* for three very distinct wind instruments – flute, alto clarinet and piccolo trumpet. They are expected to play long sustained tones arranged at the distances of halftone

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and quarter tone in an extremely high register. The musicians are supposed to achieve as balanced a colour as possible, but also to attain an almost uninterrupted legato. The result is a monochromatic vibrating static cluster in which different instrumental colours harmoniously shade into each other. The brilliant musicians accomplished the almost impossible task impeccably. Overall, the introductory concert (featuring also the works *Zodiac* and *Piano Piece XIII*) had many functions – it enabled us to hear masterpieces of performing, gave us an introduction into the complex symbolic of the opera cycle *Licht* and pointed out Stockhausen's current interests.

At the third docent concert guest soprano Barbara Hannigan and trumpeter Marco Blauw performed one of the most beautiful pieces from the cycle *Licht*, called *Pietà* – it is a part of the second act of the opera *Tuesday*, dealing with the war between the forces of good and evil. *Pietà* is not only a dirge for a killed soldier, but also an account of a spiritual journey of the soul into the white light. This work was written for soprano, which sings mostly in a very low register, quarter-tone flugelhorn and tape. The musical flow is highly dramatic particularly owing to the dark electronic part, the dissonant cries of quarter-tone trumpet and the voice part that is shaped through alternations between speech, singing, growling, weeping and whispering. This piece represents a distant, post-avant-garde echo of impressive scenes of death from the music dramas *Tristan und Isolde*, *Salome* and *Waiting* by Richard Wagner, Richard Strauss and Arnold Schoenberg, respectively, composers to whose production Stockhausen's grandiose operatic project links up to a great extent. Works such as *Pietà* help Stockhausen refute claims that he is a cerebral composer with no interest in conjuring or stirring up any kind of emotion by his music. His musical expression is very convincing, albeit bearing no similarity with recognizable music representations of emotional states coded in romanticism and expressionism and later made banal by Hollywood and others through excessive exploitation in applied music scores. In his opera *Tuesday* Stockhausen tackles his own traumatic experiences from World War II and sends a deeply humane message that war suffering and destruction cannot be justified or rationalized.

At the fourth docent concert, pianist Benjamin Kobler performed *Piano Piece VI*, considered to be one of Stockhausen's most difficult works. *Piece VI* is based on serial constructivism and is distantly related to the "archaic" form of the sonata because the work consists of several sections that are contrastive in terms of character, tempo and "thematic" material and organized according to the principles of sonata dramaturgy. In this truly imaginative work Stockhausen explores different methods of serial constructivism, different textures, timbres and dynamic levels of the piano sound and renders a radical re-interpretation of the term *pianistic virtuosity*. Hence even today, fifty years after its creation, this work remains a real challenge for piano virtuosos eager to prove themselves in the field of modern music. Benjamin Kobler brilliantly handled this massive score, though his interpretation was quite different from the famous recordings of David Tudor and Aloyz Kontarsky, not only because Kobler tried not to emulate the performances that are regarded exemplary, but also because Tudor's interpretation, for example, is based on the first version of the work, whereas Kobler drew on the version from 1961. The pianist

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insisted on a clear presentation of the formal outlines and structure of the work, in which he certainly excelled.

As regards electroacoustic works, whether performed live or reproduced from multi-channel tapes, standing out as a genuine pearl in a sea of uninventive works composed within the cycle *Licht* was *Gesang der Junglinge (Song of the Youths)* from 1955, an indisputable “classic of the avant-garde”, one of the first and most significant electronic compositions. Having heard this work many times on different recording media, we nevertheless got an entirely novel impression in a darkened hall, equipped with a surround system distributing sound in all directions, moving, changing direction, surrounding and imbuing the listener, creating almost physical sensations and engaging not only the sense of hearing, but all other senses as well! Stockhausen created an incredibly powerful sonic ambience that to this day has not lost anything of its interest.

Three concerts by course participants witnessed the performing of another 12 of Stockhausen’s works, also from different phases of his career, and we were pleased to see that the students by no means fall behind their lecturers in terms of performing skills. At any rate, these young artists could hardly be termed students as most of them are already established performers, serious and dedicated to studying contemporary music. At the closing of the courses Stockhausen awarded the most successful performers of his choice ten money prizes. Awards for interpretation went to Marie-Hélène Breault, flutist from Canada, for *Tip-of-the-Tongue Dance*; Michele Marelli, basset-horn player from Italy, and Marc Maes, synthesizer from Belgium, for performing the composition *The Course of the Week*; Horacio Lavandera, pianist from Argentina, for interpreting *Piano Piece X*; Karin de Fleyt, flutist from Belgium, for performing the composition *Xi*; Stuart Gerber, percussionist from the USA, for interpreting *The Comet*; clarinetist Marcelo Daniel, another Argentinean, for his interpretation of the *Harlequin*; Rumi Sota-Klemm, clarinetist from Japan, for interpreting *Basset-Su*; and last but not least, the laureates of this year’s festival were Sun-Yang Nam, pianist from Korea, and Oleg Dziewanowski, percussionist from Poland, for interpreting the composition *Contacts*.

A spontaneously organized accompanying segment of this year’s event was a sonic presentation of works by young composers, participants of the course, from Sweden, Japan, Portugal, Poland, Great Britain, Australia, Germany, Iceland and Thailand. The wide variety of presented works, ranging from neo-romantic pathos to saturated expressionistic sound, to works that bordered on kitsch in their flirting with popular music, was an archipelago of distinct music worlds in the otherwise sonically very recognizable, consistently modernistically conceived universe of Stockhausen’s music that surrounded us.

All the participants of the course had access to a well-equipped library and media archive, under the auspices of Stockhausen’s publishing house *Stockhausen-Verlag* and his Music Foundation. All interested students were able to study Stockhausen’s scores, listen to and watch audio and video recordings of his works, find all the so-far published studies on him in one place and buy scores, compact discs and video tapes at discount prices.

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To sum up, when Karlheinz Stockhausen was developing his concept of summer courses, he principally had in mind the passionate students of his work as well as his loyal “fans”, who thanks to him can find all the valuable information in one place, and confirm or perhaps refute some of their assumptions in a discussion with the composer himself, bestowing to music lovers a temple where they can freely enjoy the music of this doyen of European avant-garde who really has no need to prove to himself or others his own status of a living legend. As we have already noticed, Stockhausen’s pedagogical élan has clearly diminished because, despite his continued unflagging creation, he no longer wants to win over young composers to his “religion” nor does he exclude the possibility of another music opinion. But what is striking is his strong desire to make sure his works live as long as possible and to train a group of musicians who would further promote his works. His efforts towards issuing his own edition of collected works within his publishing house, as well as the entire work of his Music Foundation move in that direction. Stockhausen became great during his lifetime – and now he is focused on maintaining that status even after, as he says, he completes his earthly existence and returns to Sirius, the star whence he came 76 years ago...

Translated by Dušan Zabrdac