

## Hearing Spaces

The first impression one has of Clara Iannotta's scores is that they look different, in a way that is difficult to define, from those of much contemporary music. Not that the composer, born in Rome in 1983, deviates particularly overtly from established conventions, uses her own exclusive notation system or falls back on forms of graphic representation – no, it is something else that sets them apart. The pages of her scores seem full of light and air, and what happens in them is given time and space to unfold and reach our perception.

And there are a number of things that happen in this music, in a way that corresponds to its visual impression in some respects. Clara Iannotta's compositions resemble spaces which the perception uncovers bit by bit; over time, they develop what is already latent in them from the first sound. For her 2015 ensemble piece *Troglodyte Angels Clank By* (the title is taken from a poem by Dorothy Molloy) the composer framed this with the image of a dark space whose atmosphere consists entirely of dust. At first one cannot distinguish anything in the opaque blackness, but gradually the eye adjusts to the darkness, becoming aware of the particles in the air and the different shades of dark, until finally a single ray of light enters and pulls everything into a completely new perspective. Compositionally speaking, that means a predominance of textures from which individual events – instruments, colours, distinct sounds – slowly emerge. The progress of the music is determined not by motifs and their development, but rather by the constant restructuring, recontextualizing, charging and filtering of a complex sound aggregate.

Clara Iannotta's compositions do not tell a story; they unfold a physiognomy. They conceive spaces of perception in which the ear can, metaphorically speaking, wander about and gather experiences. Their concrete surface character, according to the composer, comes about through the radiation and reflection of an object concealed beneath this surface, as it were. In *dead wasps in a jam-jar (ii)* for string orchestra (2016) this object is very concrete: another piece. Iannotta took the first version, a commission

for solo violin intended as an engagement with Bach's courante and double from the Partita BWV 1002, then expanded and recomposed it for the larger instrumentation. The incessant sixteenth-note cascades of the original are here transformed into waves and whirls of the most varied friction sounds, sometimes verging on the inaudible. The consistently muted and prepared string instruments are joined by animal whistles, friction drums, finger cymbals and other objects which the composer uses to open up a sound space that is both full of fantastic features and very real. This stems from an experimental sensibility that does not content itself with the conventional, familiar way of using things, sounds and instruments. Already urged to build her own toys as a child, Iannotta seeks out the hidden potential of the given; she imagines the counter-intuitive, the concealed other, and makes its possibility aesthetically plausible and compelling in the spaces of her music.

It goes without saying that such an approach also pushes out into real space, and Iannotta is currently working with the artist Anna Kubelík on a project for voices, instruments, dancers and electronics in which the real space of the moving bodies and the imaginary space of the music interpenetrate and influence each other. Such crossing of boundaries is characteristic of Clara Iannotta's compositional work. Her music opens up new spaces of artistic imagination in a way that recalls the poetics of Italo Calvino: it is vivid and multi-layered, light-footed and precise.

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