



Joy of Influence On the Work of Gordon Kampe

Fear of influence. Introduced by the American literary scholar Harold Bloom, this term describes the artist's fear of tradition. Bloom develops a picture of an artist so intimidated by the preceding generations that they are barely capable of personal, individual expression anymore. The only way out for them is the liquidation of resistance through symbolic patricide. What Bloom asserts for literature can certainly be applied to other disciplines too. The development of New Music in particular could easily be recounted as a succession of such conquests: time after time, patriarchs were declared dead so that the birth of their heirs could be celebrated all the more forcefully.

Gordon Kampe does not need to bring about anyone's metaphorical demise in order to write his music. 'In my case', says Kampe, 'the driving force is more an explicit *joy of influence.*' And the influences to which the composer, born in 1976, surrenders *unreservedly* – in the true sense of the word – are extremely heterogeneous. They extend from the Classical-Romantic music tradition and the operas of the *verismo* style to literature (Petrarch, William Blake, H. P. Lovecraft), cinema (Stanley Kubrick, Akira Kurosawa) or visual art (Velázquez, Günther Uecker) and quickly reach areas that, using the smug label of the 'popular', are generally declared no-go areas for sensitive aesthetes.

Gordon Kampe, however, has no interest in a systematically spiritualized music that draws its 'sublimity' from a varyingly manifest integration of inlays from high culture, or which seeks to please with the specious nobility of textbook craftsmanship. On the contrary, Kampe prefers the direct, the unabashed, the non-encoded. This rejection of a hierarchy of taste is conveyed equally by work titles like *Schmackes, Butter und Fische* or *Gassenhaueramaschinensuite* [Popular Hit Machine Suite] or preferred expressive markings like *immer feste druff* [give it some welly] or *volle Möhre* [full throttle].

Even if the image of the down-to-earth provocateur seems a logical choice here, Gordon Kampe is far removed from any form of iconoclasm. His compositional approach certainly does not follow the impulse of an opposition to particular musical styles or tendencies. Rather, it is the result of an attentive aesthetic perception in which an entirely different form of subtlety articulates itself, one that establishes a clear logical distance from iridescent spectral chords or an expertly sprinkled smattering of Rimbaud. Kampe's sensitivity manifests itself in the brilliant inventiveness with which he puts *world* into music.

'World' refers here – in true Wittgensteinian fashion – to everything 'that is the case', with all its contradictions, discrepancies and absurdities. Nothing is excluded; notions of the 'inadequate' or the 'illegitimate' are largely alien to Kampe's compositional practice. In that sense, the heterogeneity of stimuli and materials stems from a fundamental willingness to ground everyday life in aesthetic access. Ultimately, nothing is safe from this 'usurpation' – neither the delicate lustre of Tchaikovsky nor the completely failed translation of instructions for an electric Christmas candle that promises the user 'Teutonic cosiness for home sweet home'.

'Composing music', says Kampe, 'is usually like a game to me, often with things that – viewed from a distance – don't belong together. [...] When I'm working on a piece, I'll amalgamate anything that isn't nailed down.' With acumen, wit and furious musicality, Gordon Kampe manages to develop these amalgams into compositions of outstanding originality. A central attribute of this music can perhaps be encapsulated in a word that may seem a little remote at first, but reveals its truth all the more emphatically when one listens: honesty.