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Not Only of This World

Lisa Streich's Music Between Minutia and Faith, Between Here and Hereafter

by Rainer Nonnenmann

Like the wings of seraphim and cherubim, two harps extend the curves of their golden frames around the ensemble placed in the center. Normally more restrained when it comes to expressions of faith, Lisa Streich uses an instrumentation with obvious biblical connotations in *GRATA* for cello and ensemble (2011). The construction of the piece can also be understood symbolically: between sustained string notes, fierce organ clusters, and the metallic fortissimo attacks of five apocalyptic trombones, the solo cello appears as a solitary *vox humana*, with fragile cantilenas, breathy harmonics, and trembling recitatives. In addition, the score contains verses from the 'Gloria' of the Latin mass that are not spoken, yet nonetheless point to the life and death of the Son of Man and God, Jesus Christ. 'Domini fili unigenite', 'agnus dei', 'qui tollis peccata mundi' – the Lamb of God died on the cross for the sins of the world. Similarly, the cello is suddenly left alone with a solo, abandoned by all: *ecce homo*. Similarly, Streich's filigree duo *SERAPH* for cello and organ (2013) unfolds as a tender coming into being and passing away of sounds, which the listener can experience as an allegory of fleeting existence.

The composer and organist Lisa Streich, born in Sweden in 1985, does not display the spiritual background of her music in missionary fashion; alongside deeply existential questions, her work is also shaped by the quotidian, simple, trivial. Yet even without programmatic titles, texts or commentaries, one can hear in her pieces that something essential is at stake. The expressive power of her music owes itself to clearly defined materials and differentiated structures. For example, Streich often specifies six different speeds at which string players bow their instruments, harpists run their hands across their strings, and trombonists perform glissandi with their slides. The prerequisite for any musical creed is, first and foremost, the greatest possible compositional and notational precision. While the title of *ASCHE* [Ashes] for clarinet and cello (2012) refers ambiguously to burnt things, the period of Lent, or German slang for money, the piece's compositional technique and form all the more unequivocally show a process of convergence of the wind instrument and the string instrument across sonic differences and spatial distance. The cello, positioned in the middle of the stage, and the clarinet, placed as far as possible to the right, initially play strictly in alternation. And although they never coincide, they interlock seamlessly to form a monophonic line until finally the instruments merge through extended playing techniques, multiphonics, and unisons in the higher register. This instrumental anamorphosis can be interpreted theologically as a negation of the *principio individuationis*, but need not be. The purely musical process and the flickering beats and differential tones, which inscribe themselves on the ear very physically, even painfully, are captivating enough on their own.

Streich's output encompasses vocal, choral, solo, chamber, ensemble and orchestral works, including *AUGENLIDER* for prepared guitar and orchestra (2015), as well as the pocket opera *...MIT BRENNENDEM ÖLE* (2011) on texts from the Old and New Testaments, and also electronic compositions and pieces for electronically or mechanically expanded instruments. In *PIETÀ* (2012), the cello strings are played – independently of the performer – with thin paper strips that rotate on small motors, allowing the body of the cello, subjected to martyrial abuses which are magnified using microphones, to develop a mechanical life of its own. Streich expands this grotesque symbiosis of playful machinery and the Paschal notion of the resurrection of the crucified in *SAI BALLERE?* for piano trio (2015) and *ZUCKER* for 'motorised ensemble' (2016). The magic of inanimate matter and serendipitous coincidences is the subject of Streich's performance installation *DER ZARTE FADEN DEN DIE SCHÖNHEIT SPINNT* (2014). Four percussionists feel their way through loose sequences of sounds, only coming together for synchronous tutti actions at certain points. From time to time they also pull on a string, stretched using rope winches, with small strips of metal, plastic, leather and cardboard attached to it that stroke the surfaces of percussion instruments, egg slicers, bottles and glasses. The incidental nature of the delicate resulting sounds, as well as the changing distribution of rolls among the players and objects develop great intensity and magic.

Lisa Streich's music has an enveloping beauty; it is both earnest and playful, forceful and pregnant, physical, cruel and tender – not only of this world.

Translation: Joseph Lake