

Róbert Wittinger was born at Knittelfeld in Austria in 1945, but grew up in Budapest. He belongs to the youngest generation of Hungarian composers. He was strongly influenced by Zolt Durko in Budapest, by impressions gathered during a visit to Warsaw in the autumn of 1964, and by the 1965 International Holiday Course for New Music in Darmstadt. His decision to stay in the Federal Republic of Germany was dictated more by musical and economic considerations than by political ones. His first scores were received with warm interest. A progressive Professor at a Music Academy said of Wittinger's Symphony No. 1, dedicated to Arthur Honegger, that it was "absolutely perfect from the point of view of composition technique". After a difficult first period, 1967 brought four first performances. Michael Gielen was one of the first musicians to take up Wittinger. He received two impressive commissions in 1968: for the Donaueschingen Music Festival and for the Darmstadt Holiday Course. He completed five new scores in 1969. 1970 brought another five first performances, one of which was in Darmstadt. This meant that Wittinger had become one of the most sought-after young composers in Germany. He had achieved this with twenty compositions in only eight years.

Wittinger's musical language is one of balanced contrasts. Thus taste, elegance, stylization, and - in keeping with the basic principle of balance - the proportionment of the sections of each work, in other words, what is normally called musical form, take on a dominant role. Primarily, in contrast to György Ligeti, Wittinger is not interested in the problems of the smallest transition, or in bursting the bounds of form or of absolute musical material, in social or political effects, or even in the musical powers of language. It might be said that he has specialized by limiting his interest to all that sounds, and this would to a large extent also explain his rapid success. Like other forms of specialization - as for example, pure scientific specialization - it has, depending on the point of view, the advantage or disadvantage of being amenable to integration in existing conditions and institutions almost

without conflict. Wittinger does not experiment, not even with pure tonal material. This, however, does not mean that he does not take up and integrate in his music the results of other people's thoughts and experiments. But he is not interested in attempting the absolute, in investigating consequences, or in the limits of applicability. To combine contrasting or apparently independent elements with one another is a question of compositorial tolerances, compensations, and tendencies for Wittinger - and this is the direct implication of such titles as "tolleranza", "compensazioni", and "tendenze". The composition techniques which Wittinger primarily uses in this connection are functional cause and effect, substitution, and inversion, and asymmetric proportions or periods. This is nothing new. These techniques are to be found fully developed in Wagner, Mahler, and also Schoenberg. In Wittinger's music the periods and quasi-periods are shorter and more intertwined. Such functional relationships are dependent on a subtle feeling for sound, and a precise knowledge of instrumental capacity: Wittinger possesses both of these qualities in abundance - to such an extent, indeed, that some consider that they form the basis of his talent. But he never allows himself to be carried away by his feeling for sound.

His stylization principle does lead him to not search directly for new tone colour, but enables him to make use of existing ones. In this way Wittinger's amazing talent has collected a comprehensive palette of sound in a very short time. There was a constant cry in the sixties for the establishment of syntax and vocabulary in New Music - a then unfulfilled yearning of the Classicists which Wittinger has in the meantime fulfilled.

"irreversibilitazione per violoncello solo e orchestra" op. 10 is Wittinger's second solo concerto after his "consonante" op. 5 for cor anglais. Commissioned by the Südwestfunk for the Donaueschingen Music Festival in 1968, it was dedicated to Heinrich Strobel for his 70th birthday. It was given its first performance by Siegfried Palm with the Südwestfunk Symphony Orchestra

under Ernest Bour. It comprises seven overlapping phases. The solo part alternates largely with the orchestra, the entries being very clearly punctuated. The title implies that the material (with few exceptions) is not re-used during the piece. Stress is laid on beautiful sound and subtle instrumentation.

"OM per orchestra" op. 12 was commissioned by the Hessischer Rundfunk for the 1968 Darmstadt Holiday Course for New Music, and was given its first performance by the Hessischer Rundfunk Symphony Orchestra under Hermann Michael with Róbert Wittinger (as the soloist in the "coda") on the large gong. In the score it says in 14 different languages: "This difficult gong beat can only be performed by the composer; for this reason he should be invited to every performance!" This gong beat represents as it were the nadir of Wittinger's formal connective technique.

"tendenze per tre suonatori" op. 14, was written at the suggestion of Christoph Caskel, Aloys Kontarsky and Siegfried Palm at the 1970 Darmstadt Holiday Course. Its four parts contain the greatest possible variety of time indications: series of demisemiquaver runs without barlines but with accents, which are intended to be played as fast as possible, various time signatures, passages timed by the second - especially pauses and held sounds -, alternating times and quasi-times in which the events take place in a definite order but only at approximate points in time. These various forms of time are not developed out of one another but are balanced against one another.

"struttura simmetriche per flauto solo" op. 17 was written in 1969 for Willy Freivogel, the solo flutist of the Stuttgart Rundfunk Symphony Orchestra. The work has three sections and is based on three kinds of formal symmetry: retrograde motion in the first part, combinations of passages in the second (scheme: A₁ - A₆, B₁ - B₆, A₁, B₁, A₂, B₂ . . . A₆, B₆), and a central symmetry round central notes in the final section, which makes increasing use of pauses as it develops.

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