

c o n t e m p o r a r y

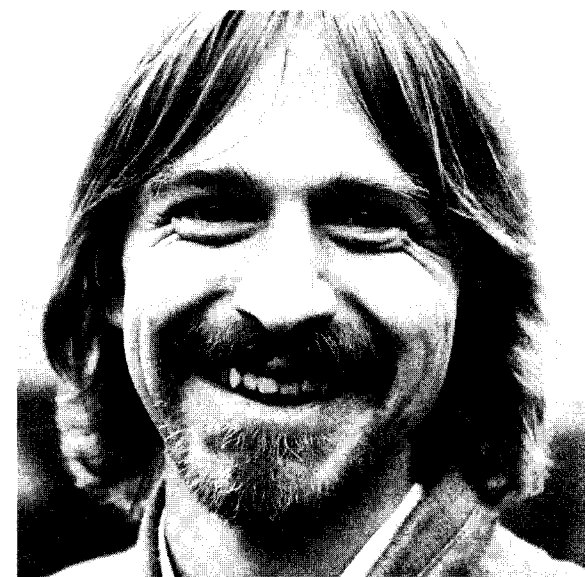
s w i s s c o m p o s e r s

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René **WOHLHAUSER**

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1977	Lemuria for 2 flutes and tape, Ergon 1 Nesut for piano solo, Ergon 2
1978	Souvenirs de l'Occitanie for clarinet solo, Ergon 4
1979	Fragmente für Orchester Ergon 6
1980/81	flautando for 2 flutes, Ergon 7 (revised 1987)
1979/84	Piano Quartet Ergon 9 (partially revised 1987)
1984/85	Percussion Trio Ergon 10
1985	CI-IC for flute and viola, Ergon 11
1985/86	Duometrie for flute and bass clarinet, Ergon 12
1986	Orgelstück Ergon 13
1986/87	Drei Stücke for Piano Ergon 14 Metamusik clarinet trio for 3 b-flat clarinets, Ergon 15
1982/88	Adagio assai for string quartet, Ergon 16
1988	Atemlinie for solo horn (and tam-tam), Ergon 17
1989	Lumière(s) for organ, Ergon 18
1991/93	in statu mutandi for orchestra, Ergon 19
1993/95	vocis imago for flute, clarinet, percussion, piano, violin and cello, Ergon 20
1995	Prestissimo solo version for xylophone (also marimbaphone), Ergon 21/1; trio version for xylophone (et al.) a tre (also marimbaphone), Ergon 21/2

There are various ways of doing a composer portrait. We have chosen the one that allows the composer full liberty to present himself from the angle that seems best to him. So as to give the collection of wide-ranging notes a sort of formal unity, we have chosen the principle of the interview. Starting from a question common to everybody (What do you feel when you confront a blank sheet of paper?) the conversation branches out, taking as many directions as there are different personalities... It's a feeling that isn't determined primarily by a 'horror vacui'. That may creep in now and then, but what predominates is the potential infinitude of possibilities opening up to me, the unlimited vastness of material to be structured. Confronted with that, I rapidly need to develop a strategy or extrapolate a principle from the conglomerate of initial ideas so as to concentrate these free-floating energies in a specific direction, towards a specific focus. Only then can the process of concretization start that allows imaginary sounds to be set down in written form.

Where does the impulse to go in a specific direction come from? With every new piece I'm continually propelled towards a new starting point without actually trying. It may be a vague idea of sounds I need to realize, or a noise, a conceptual idea, or a complex optical or geometrical structure that slowly transforms itself into sound, or even the inner image of a so-called cybernetic system, where the organism of a composition generates itself, growing so to speak out of its initial structures on its own momentum. A fascinating idea.

You have repeatedly explored the antithesis of order and chaos in your works. My inspiration derives powerful generative impulses from dialectic forcefields. I am, for example, fascinated by the way the philosopher Gilles Deleuze develops the idea of a multi-dimensionally networked rhizome maze without a centre, without a periphery and, above all, without an exit – which makes it potentially endless. It's thrilling to see something ground-breakingly creative emerge within this network, to recognize that the human spirit is capable of taking certain given or perhaps freely set premises and developing out of them an artificial organism that suddenly awakens to a life of its own.

You were strongly influenced by your studies with Brian Ferneyhough. Your earlier music sounded different if I think, for example, of 'Fragments for Orchestra', which you composed when you were still with Jacques Wildberger. All but a very few of the pieces I wrote between 1977 and 1983/84, from 'Lemuria' to about the Piano Quartet, were triggered by a different compositional and aesthetic stance. They were attempts to translate the impulse directly into sound, which gave them more of a musical-emo-

- 1991/93 **in statu mutandi** for orchestra, Ergon 19
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- 1993/95 **vocis imago** for flute, clarinet, percussion, piano, violin and cello, Ergon 20
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- 1995 **Prestissimo** solo version for xylophone (also marimbaphone), Ergon 21/1; trio version for xylophone (et al.) a tre (also marimbaphone), Ergon 21/2

Selected Bibliography

- 01/90 **Biographical essay** by Christoph E. Hänggi in the Basellandschaftliche Zeitung, Liestal
-
- 07/90 **Über kompositorische, ästhetische und philosophische Aspekte eigener Werke** René Wohlhauser, MusikTexte No. 35, Cologne
-
- 10/90 **Möglichkeiten zum Einwirken** René Wohlhauser, MusikTexte No. 36, Cologne
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- 03/91 **Transzendente Exerzitien** René Wohlhauser, Neue Zürcher Zeitung
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- 04/93 **Gangbarer Weg in unentdecktes Neuland** Fritz Schaub, Luzerner Zeitung
-
- 11/93 **Komplexität und Einfachheit** Toni Haefeli, Dissonanz No. 38
-
- 1993 **René Wohlhauser** Who's Who in Music and Musicians Directory, 14th Edition, Cambridge

Joseph-Gilles Belouze develops the idea of a multi-dimensionally networked rhizome maze without a centre, without a periphery and, above all, without an exit – which makes it potentially endless. It's thrilling to see something ground-breakingly creative emerge within this network, to recognize that the human spirit is capable of taking certain given or perhaps freely set premises and developing out of them an artificial organism that suddenly awakens to a life of its own.

You were strongly influenced by your studies with Brian Ferneyhough. Your earlier music sounded different if I think, for example, of 'Fragments for Orchestra', which you composed when you were still with Jacques Wildberger. All but a very few of the pieces I wrote between 1977 and 1983/84, from 'Lemuria' to about the Piano Quartet, were triggered by a different compositional and aesthetic stance. They were attempts to translate the impulse directly into sound, which gave them more of a musical-emotional thrust. Studying with Brian Ferneyhough, where we tried to think through and structure the various levels of musical substance, led to the evolution of a multifarious network of form-related connections. There, emotivity takes effect on a different level; it seeks a connection between the forcefields of expressive energy, conceptual directionality and formal stringency.

'Fragments for Orchestra', in particular, sounds like an exploration of various compositional techniques. Disparate elements are juxtaposed: quotations, rhythmic passages, chorale-like sections, etc. And they possess great immediacy of expression. Why couldn't you go on in that direction? In 'Fragments for Orchestra' this essentially postmodern idea – at a time when postmodernism was not yet so fashionable – was taken to an extreme, which made further radicalization virtually inconceivable, at least in a way that would have produced worthwhile compositional results.

The unmediated expressiveness of your music is certainly still there, but now it's embedded in a very complex context. Is this tension explicable? Tension can be produced when expression and energy – transported by a well-matched grammar of musical idiom and the resulting conscious formulation of the stylistic environment – develop from a dynamic (contextual) sphere of action, where antagonistic lines of force densify into intense expressiveness. This can happen when formal stringency and conceptual logic give expressive energy the necessary directionality, or when the striving for broader horizons enables works to mobilize their inherent expansionary powers and point beyond themselves.

I don't know how well these phenomena can be explained, but what is important to me is the possibility of intensive networking, of being able to go different ways at any given point and yet making the inner logic of the chosen route audible, making the points of sound convergence, cell division or mutation comprehensible. The challenge is to devise a musically compelling logic that (after thorough, comprehensive reflection) takes only this one direction with total artistic conviction – a direction that will at least intimate what, ideally, can go beyond the sum of the sounds and perhaps

Selected Discography

Wer den Gesang nicht kennt

(Ensemble Rudolf Jäggi) Lehrmittelverlag Basel-Stadt DDD, 1993

Drei Stücke für Klavier (Ortwin Stürmer, piano) Harmonia Mundi - Ars Musici AM 1086-2, 1993

in statu mutandi (Symphony Orchestra of the AML Lucerne, cond. Olaf Henzold; live from the Schauspielhaus Berlin, 19 April 1994) Magnon PN 2620, 1995

Wohlhauser-Porträt 11 works written between 1978 and 1993, from 'Souvenirs de l'Occitanie' to 'in statu mutandi' - Creative Works Records CW 1026, 1995

Biography

René Wohlhauser was born in Zurich in 1954 and grew up in Brienz. He had already gathered experience as a rock and jazz musician when he entered the Basle Conservatory in 1975, where he studied music theory with Thomas Kessler, Robert Suter, Jacques Wildberger and Jürg Wyttenbach, earning his teaching diploma in music theory in 1979. During his studies he also did diverse courses in such fields as composition and electronic music, but also in philosophy (Hans Saner). He received important impulses in Freiburg i. Br. (Germany) from Klaus Huber and above all from Brian Ferneyhough. Wohlhauser's works have been performed in Switzerland and abroad, at festivals like Zurich's Tage für Neue Musik,

reveal flashes of transcendence. That is a phenomenon which fascinates me time and again and for which there's – fortunately – no recipe. Ideally, we just have to keep trying to attain a spiritual plane we had never known existed, not using music as a vehicle, but embedded in the world of music. That keeps the listening experience exciting and makes it an adventure that invites everyone on this journey into the unknown.

Following that line of thought, your method would have to change from piece to piece, wouldn't it?

Every piece confronts me with new problems without my consciously going out and looking for them. I find it almost impossible to write another piece similar to the one that preceded it. Everything in me resists: I need to grapple with something different and find a completely new method of dealing with it. **Your scores are very complex; they're crammed with instructions and nuances.** The complexity of my work is a consequence of my striving for precision, which results in exact, conscious consideration and scrutiny of the means employed with a view to producing interesting, exciting music. I love intricate, demanding, even cryptic music – music that quests for the secret behind the secrets as a treasure trove of symbols, as a multiplexity – the way I love complex people who carry a cosmos of ideas, possibilities and potential inside themselves.

Doesn't the exactness of some of your instructions test the limits of the realizable? Students today have no trouble at all playing, say, microtone passages that experienced musicians thirty years ago would have considered unplayable. This proves that the oft-cited limits of playability are not absolute (and the same goes for listening habits). I know my interpreters' limits quite well. Tempi, for example, are carefully considered. At first glance, the crowded-looking score might seem a bit bizarre to the unpractised eye; but once decoded, it turns out to be perfectly playable. It's very interesting to work with musicians and experience how they transcend themselves as they deal with that kind of piece and suddenly achieve things they would never have thought possible.

You've mentioned authenticity several times. What does it mean to you? 'Authentikos' comes from the Greek and means something like 'valid, genuine, credible'. So it's a matter of finding an outlet for the autochthonous language that resides in every independent, innovative artist; in other words, a matter of an autonomous aesthetic stance. It's no longer a question of Platonic mimesis, where art is the third level of truth – a copy of the natural objects that are a copy of universal ideas. Nor is the, to my mind already far more appealing, Aristotelian concept of aesthetics in play, according to which art creates reality ('what would be possible') rather than copying it. And I don't think Hegel's definition of 'art' as 'revealing the truth', which was still valid for Schoenberg, seems timely today either. In my opinion beauty and truth have been replaced by the aesthetic claim to authenticity.

To what extent does a listener need to know your premises and methods? As I see it, good music should address and affect the listener directly. To be gripped by the force of artistic expression should

Brian Ferneyhough. Wohlhauser's works have been performed in Switzerland and abroad, at festivals like Zurich's Tage für Neue Musik, the Swiss Tonkünstlerfest and Darmstadt's Ferienkurse für Neue Musik. He is the recipient of a number of composition prizes, among them the Kranichsteiner Grant Award of Darmstadt's Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in 1988 (for his 'Adagio assai' for string quartet) and the Encouragement Prize of the Lucerne Department of Education in 1991.

Wohlhauser has discussed his music in numerous lectures (for example as a visiting lecturer in Darmstadt) and publications. With the composer Mathias Steinauer he founded the Basle Composer Forum and later 'Adesso', a global score distribution system. He has been teaching music theory and composition at the Basle Music Academy since 1979 (and was also at the Lucerne Academy until 1991). The composer lives in Basle.

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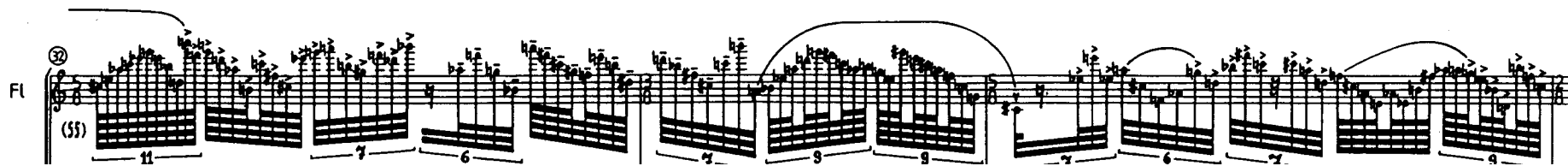
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have been replaced by the aesthetic claim to authenticity.

To what extent does a listener need to know your premises and methods? As I see it, good music should address and affect the listener directly. To be gripped by the force of artistic expression should require no preliminary knowledge. An analytical grasp of a work or insight into its biographical or technical context can, of course, offer an additional, enriching level of more profound understanding.

For example, in the organ piece 'Lumière(s)': in the plural form, 'les Lumières' is the poetic-metaphoric French term for the Enlightenment. 'Light', in the singular, is an electromagnetic wave – I find infrared and ultraviolet waves, which are invisible to us, the most exciting ones. The human eye can distinguish about 160 shades of colour. What fascinates me is the high degree of chromatic differentiation: the fine distinctions between cobalt blue and ultramarine, between cadmium red and vermilion, embedded in a grammar of intensity, pigmentation, opacity and pellucidity. When I wrote 'Lumière(s)', it was under the influence of Claude Monet's light-inspired impression of reality and its illusion reflected in water in the famous Waterlilies, or in 'La cathédrale de Rouen', with its so-called 'effet du matin', a diffuse morning atmosphere, or then 'La Gare St. Lazare', with its fascinating optical mix of steam and sunlight. That may sound programmatic, but through manifold transformations in the course of the composition process, it took on concrete, valid forms of musical autonomy.

In your clarinet trio, which you call 'Metamusik', you refer to Ludwig Wittgenstein's 'Philosophical Investigations' and the way a thing can be viewed from different sides. That becomes eminently clear. But the work is also exceedingly expressive. It even ends with a scream. Screaming is obviously a direct means of expression – in a certain way a barbaric one – that addresses primordial conditions of human existence. The piece might be understood as freeing itself from the web of different possibilities, coded instructions and symbolic fingerposts to arrive at this specific conclusion. Like Plato's parable of the cave, it must work its way through the complexities to reach the light. And I hope that, approached with the necessary intellectual reflection, these interrelations, this increasing profundity, this testing of boundaries, can make a small contribution to developing new directions in music: to discovering dynamic spheres of expression that may demonstrate perspectives of a kind of music that is now no more than a dream, open doors to new and individual listening habits and experiential spaces and, using inherent expansionary powers, according to the title of the piece, offer perspectives of metaphysical transcendence. And I hope that, as a result, the spark of desire for expression will overcome the physical limits of the page, flash through the score, fuel the interpreter's inspiration and kindle the enthusiasm of the audience.



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