

## **Gérard Zinsstag**

Gérard Zinsstag prefers to call himself a "loner". If this implies a fierce need for independence, a refusal to be inveigled into some ideological or aesthetical trend or confined to a group or coterie, one cannot but agree. His irrepressible quest for intellectual freedom, his rejection of dogma, of revealed truth for the sake of free examination, also expresses itself in his love of wide open spaces and of nature. But this loner is not isolated, and certainly no misanthrope. If his music enjoys integrating every manifestation from real life, giving, in every sense of the term, many "mixed" works, if aesthetic risk, including carefully considered eclecticism as a means of enrichment - leaves him undaunted, if his acute consciousness of a musician's active role in the world community largely opens him to his fellow musician's efforts, he has also wisely and calmly known how to preserve that vital space allowing him to emerge without encroaching on another's territory.

A late starter in composition, having spent time finding himself, this concentrated and thoughtful artist is less of a dazzling sprinter than a long-distance runner. These are the ones who go furthest. First and foremost a creator, but an organizer too, Gérard Zinsstag devotes much time and energy to the immense and selfless task of running the Festival he has launched in Zurich (Tage für Neue Musik Zürich) in reaction against the prevailing inertia, passivity and spirit of routine, and which he runs against heavy odds. Filled with curiosity, generous and broad-minded, Gérard

Zinsstag is that rarity: a composer who does not belittle his colleagues but offers help and encouragement instead. Both his Zurich home and his chalet in Schlans are open and hospitable places. The cult of friendship is an expression of elegance of the heart and spirit with this true humanist. And confronted with so little affectation, so much naturalness and kindness, one is surprised to discover that within fifteen years of persistent and discreet work, he has carved a choice place for himself: that of one of the most individual and accomplished composers of his time.

Harry Halbreich

Born 9 May 1941.

First twenty years: Geneva. Early musical influence by father. Latin in secondary school, flute at the Music Academy, flirts with the University, first solitary attempts at composition. Two years complementary training and "vie de Bohème" in Paris. Sienna Summer Course and discovery of Italy, long stay in Rome, interrupted by seedy and endless touring across Europe. End of attempts at composition.

Second twenty years: Zurich. Eight carefree, bourgeois years with the Tonhalle Orchestra. Then total break with everything and everybody. Rebirth of a "delayed" composer. Two years composition study with Hans U. Lehmann, two more with Helmut Lachenmann. Hard Swiss debut of a non-independent composer. Continual hunt for money, performances, publishers. Darmstadt Summer School: stimulation, contacts, new long-lasting friendships. Fear of being or becoming a mediocre, local composer. Doubts, humiliations, fights, hopes and an opening: Donaueschingen

1979. Before which, an exceptional, peaceful, winter stay at San Francisco ! A welcome digression with a year in Berlin as guest composer of the DAAD, followed by a confused training course in the IRCAM'S bunker. Second trip to the States, staying at 84 Charles Street, New York, protectionist reality of American musical life. Birth of Silvio: the child's joyful daily provocation, first French words uttered, new dimension in tenderness and temporality. Setting up of contemporary music Days "Tage für Neue Musik Zürich" as a sign of peaceful revolt against Swiss stagnation. By the way: no Bach or Beethoven prize, no distinction, no reward, simply no prize at all, but full of spirit.

### **wenn zum beispiel...**

In 1975 I was commissioned a work by the Swiss-German Television. At the time my artistic and intellectual development was heavily influenced by surrealism and concrete poetry. That was why I used a "4 voice" text by Franz Mon, whose polyphonic structure could not be perceived in its entirety by the reader, since the discourse disintegrated into four differing variants. The text's simultaneity could however be more simply perceived through a musical structure, which abolishing the reader's confusion, also no longer compelled him to read 4 lines at a time.

1. *If, for example only one person finds himself in a room, he can*
2. *If, for example in a room one person only finds himself, he could*
3. *If only one person for example finds himself in a room, he should*
4. *If in a room for example only one person finds himself, he should*

In the score, the words, both grouped and isolated, with their morphemes and phonemes have been accompanied with paralinguistic signs. These signs have been partly written in letters, partly in graphic notation. Thus each voice fulfils its own destiny: they disappear one after the other until only one is left. Does language converted into music represent its own uncommunicability or rather does it represent the faculty for revealing several meanings? Music shaping and transforming a concrete text invites the listener, beyond the music, to play with the given material, for only then can language thrive in the complexity, contradictions and magic it engenders: music as a metalanguage expressing the inexpressible and leading to the word.

"In concrete poetry, a word is but a word, with all it can trigger off; it is the only thing that matters. A linguistic rationality merges with the word play, thus resulting into unthinkable combinations."  
(after Franz Mon, *Texte über Texte*, Berlin & Neuwied, 1970)

The world première took place on 20 September 1976 in Zurich  
The television version was given shortly after. Producer: Peter Schweiger.

## ***Innanzi***

**Innanzi**, my first piece for large orchestra, was commissioned by the Zurich Tonhalle Gesellschaft in 1977. It was premièred however, in Hamburg on 20 January 1981. It has since been performed in Brussels, Berlin, Stuttgart and Paris.

In Stuttgart programme notes I wrote as follows: "A motor pulse and a constantly changing linearity are the two key elements stamping and determining the piece's progress. I intend to reconstitute these two complementary elements -unalienable constituents of our musical tradition- into a new context and thereby achieve a personal kind of musical expression. The generating idea is to simultaneously fulfil these two elements during the whole piece: in part one, the solo doublebass's simple motor pulsion against the complex and hardly tangible linearity of the orchestra, and in part two, the doublebass's simple linearity against the orchestra's dense and complex motor pulsion. The musical material is mainly provided by the use of open strings and their natural harmonics. Almost all the strings play with a loosened fourth string, except for the soloist who in contrast to this, tightens his strings into a new relation: G sharp (1st string) - E - A sharp - F sharp (4th string). The whole piece is tinged with the more or less concealed echo of the aura and colour of this chord."

## **Foris**

Commissioned by Radio Baden-Baden for the Donaueschingen Festival, **Foris** was composed in the beginning of 1979 and premièred on 20 October that same year with Ernest Bour conducting. Although Innanzi was completed the previous year, **Foris** is my first real confrontation with a large symphony orchestra. At that time I was assiduously reading various authors, mainly Sartre (*Situations*), Trotsky, (*his autobiography*), Samuel Beckett (*Murphy*), whom I had the good luck to know during my student days in Paris, and Christopher Caudwell (*Studies in a Dying Culture*). All these authors have left a definite trace in *Foris's* creative process, for I tried to situate the phenomenon of artefact in relation to my surroundings and to the musical tradition I had emerged from: art as social and aesthetic phenomenon (*Adorno*), its sociological and philosophical aspect, the relationship between everyday reality and art, tradition as warrant of continuity and change, the rejection of musical clichés and the integration of originally concrete sounds fusing and merging in an orchestral structure. In a press release, I wrote at the time: "Foris is the individuation of two antithetical elements inherent in my music: noise (reality, hazard, chaos) and "found sounds" (illusion, artifice, order). It consisted therefore of studying and mastering the behaviour of these two categories, which lived and followed their destinies: some were self-destructive, others proliferated. The musical material has mainly issued from the use of chordal blocks of seven and ten sounds, of retuned strings and their natural harmonics. **Foris** is an attempt to refuse and to by-pass certain musical ideals which fathom each other and are transformed through a dialectical process".

## **Trauma**

**Trauma** was composed at the request of Radio Stuttgart during my Berlin stay. It was premièred on 23 April 1981 at Cassel and was performed by the Radio Stuttgart Choir and conducted by Klaus Martin Ziegler. In 1985, after touring the Federal Republic, Trauma was also given at the Warsaw Autumn.

**Trauma** is a musical attempt to critically reveal Christianity's paradoxes; on the one hand denouncing past cruelties and on the other conjuring up the hope of a better, more humane future. For Christianity, being intolerant and uncompromising, has spread more hatred and bloodshed than peace! The degradation of woman to the role of prostitute or witch, and her ambiguous elevation in the Marian cult have influenced men's behaviour for centuries. Life after Death, lux aeterna, in exchange for suffering, repentance, or simply instant happiness on earth? These thoughts constitute the spiritual basis of the work, founded on readings of Ernest Bloch (*Atheism in Christianity*) and Karl Marx. It therefore consists in demystifying Christian obscurantism so as not to have to rely on Divine Providence, a passive state in which mankind expects nothing from itself and everything from Heaven. Thus mankind will succeed in fighting and overcoming life's contradictions. The work is made up of a series of collages with a sacred source on the one hand, (quotations of the Latin liturgy and Bible texts, Ave-Maria of St-Victor of Paris and of Josquin des Prez) and of a secular one on the other (Helmut Heissenbüttel: the future of Socialism, or else this jarring quotation by Wilhelm Raabe: "Oh God, give me my daily illusion!"). This set of quotations constitutes an autonomous text, running parallel to the actual

music, giving off a certain aura and creating a favourable climate in which to show up Christianity's ambiguity. Religion and society's connivance is crystallized in the accusation represented by the record of Katharina Lips' torture in Marburg in 1672.

Gérard Zinsstag  
(Translation: Elisabeth Buzzard)