

## **Hakan Ulus – Tā Hā**

Tā Hā (طه) is the first verse of the 20th sura of the Qur'an. It comprises two letters from the Arabic alphabet whose exegesis in the Qur'anic context Islamic scholarship has not been able fully to clarify. They are regarded as "severed letters" (ḥurūf muqaṭṭa'a), or – emphasising their metaphysical power – as mysterious or mystical letters. 29 of the 114 suras of the Qur'an start with different combinations of letters. Their function – apart from their structural role of opening the sura (fawātiḥ as-suwar) is rooted in their acoustic-aesthetic qualities. Reciting these introductory letters is powerful, it reveals an aesthetic experience which is aware of its metaphysical power. The Qur'an is considered to be imbued with an aesthetic power that can be made acoustically accessible by recitation. Its emphasis is in particular on the sensual; it focusses the perception of the participants – this kind of recitation is beholden to the idea of *humanitas*.

Reciting from the Qur'an, with its highly developed set of rules (Tajweed), is one of the most exacting genres in Arabic art music. The Tajweed specifies parameters such as pronunciation, duration, breathing, ornamentation and the positioning of caesuras in great detail.

In my work *Tā Hā* for large ensemble, the sura is based on a recitation by Sheikh Shuraim – a proponent of the Murattal style which is characterised by a swift and densely knit performance style. The recitation is my inspiration and point of departure. I have analysed the sura, consisting of 135 verses, in relation to its musical-energetic and aesthetic potential and have incorporated my findings into the work. This transcultural approach, this hybridisation, is relevant for my whole oeuvre.

(Hakan Ulus, 2018)