

ensemble LUX

Beat Furrer Streichquartett Nr. 2 (1988)

Beat Furrer's string quartets have been composed in between 1984 and the very present day. These exemplary pieces provide a cursory insight into his compositional development in the concentrated density of the quartet: In the first string quartet, Furrer uses the free mobile form in places, which makes the musicians co-creators in the sequence and order of certain passages, a technique developed by Furrer's important teacher Roman Haubenstock-Ramati. In the second, noise becomes increasingly important. In the third, the longest at almost 50 minutes, he engages with the structure of the sounds and allows the composition to emerge from this. Furrer searches for new forms of melodic design in the fourth and so far latest quartet, which lasts around twenty minutes. What all four string quartets have in common, according to Andreas Karl, "is that they test and formulate formal principles that have been relevant for Furrer for several years, sometimes more radically than in other pieces. It is precisely because of the tonal homogeneity and familiarity of the string quartet formation and its sounds that Furrer succeeds in formulating these principles with such clarity. "

Beat Furrer, born in Switzerland in 1954, has lived and worked in Austria since his studies. He is a co-founder of Klangforum Wien, which he directed for many years, and was Professor of Composition at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz from 1991 until his retirement in 2023. Together with Ernst Kovacic, he founded the international Ensemble and Composer Academy for Contemporary Music impuls in Graz.

beatfurrer.com

Olga Neuwirth Akroate Hadal (1995)

Olga Neuwirth Settore (1999)

On the roughening of sounds. Notes on Olga Neuwirth's chamber music

Olga Neuwirth's music is full of shifts, breaks, deformations and associative references. The starting point of her works are sound, image and language materials of the most diverse origins and qualities, which she combines without aligning their respective characteristics. Mostly characterized by unpredictable formal progressions in which the music ramifies as if in a process of organic growth, the composition proves to be a reflection of these heterogeneous source materials. This also includes the specific handling of the musical instruments, whose timbres the composer usually manipulates by means of unusual tunings and preparations in order to be able to develop variously differentiated sound situations on this basis. It is not sufficient to regard this roughening of sounds as an attitude of rejection towards conventional beautiful sound; rather, it also articulates a need to exploit the hidden potential of sound generators, to make it usable for composing and thus to gain means of expression for the formulation of contemporary musical figures of speech on the basis of unusual types of sound production. Although the composer repeatedly traces her vocabulary back to generation processes that are based on the sound and resonance behavior of the instruments used, the process can be traced most clearly in the chamber music pieces, especially in the works composed for strings.

For the title of her string quartet *Akroate Hadal* (1995), Olga Neuwirth chose - as previously in the ensemble composition *Vampyrotheone* (1994/95) - a reference to Vilém Flusser and Louis Bec's description of a fictitious, octopus-like deep-sea creature with the name "Vampyrotheutis Infernalis". This title is not only inspired by the short treatise by the two cultural philosophers; the mythical creature also becomes a cipher for the music itself and its soundscapes. For just as the members of the genus "Vampyrotheutis" have a skeletal mobility and a preference for unrestrained devouring, the string quartet is reminiscent of a writhing organism that seems to suck the music it produces back into itself and literally devours it. At the beginning of the work, the sound of strings prepared with paper holding clamps and paper clips dominates; conventional sound production is replaced by a comprehensive repertoire of unusual sound production methods and playing techniques, which the composer uses to create precise noise sounds, so that the instrumental sound is broken up from within. These rough surfaces of the sound material are joined by sudden changes of direction in the music, in which the unusual formal aspects of Olga Neuwirth's compositions - the abrupt cuts, superimpositions and rapid contrasts as well as the heterogeneity of the various sound mixtures - become apparent.

Olga Neuwirth's second string quartet *settori* (1999) is characterized by very similar sound impressions: As in *Akroate Hadal*, the listener is swept along by a swirling flow of sound and drawn from one surprise into the next. But the two works are not only similar in their effect: the Italian title *settori* (excerpts) is to be understood quite literally, as the material of the younger piece comes from the older quartet. Here, the composer once again makes it the subject of her compositional exploration by consistently developing various aspects and, in doing so, building on all those characteristic elements that already determine the musical course of *Akroate Hadal*. But only in very few places - such as in the first bar and at the end of the *settori* - the source material is taken over without any changes. Such rare moments then function as internal references to the origin of a music whose point of reference otherwise remains concealed to the listener. As in general, the sounds of *settori* are already concisely formulated further developments in which the previous sound moments are viewed from new angles. They thus form a musical commentary on the older work, a new reading in which the string textures are unfolded in a different way.

olganeuwirth.com

Thomas Wally 15 Miniaturen (2024)

Three strands of inspiration come together in my new string quartet "15 Miniatures": Firstly, the string quartet works of Arnold Schönberg; secondly, some other compositions for string quartet (and string trio) written by composers with a connection to Vienna and Judaism; and thirdly, my own *Bagatelles*, which in 2024 are already more than 20 years old. The idea of the miniature form is of course, among other things, a recourse to my own "4 Bagatelles" from 2003; in these new 15 miniatures, reference is now made - in various ways - to a total of 15 works by other composers, but not, as it could be considered, to one specific work per miniature as a basis for inspiration. The 15 works by other composers are partly autobiographical, as ensemble LUX played a cycle in the Or Chadasch synagogue in 2022, where works by composers with a connection to Judaism and Vienna were presented. The idea of composing a "meta work" that would reflect these almost 100 years of special music history was already born at that time. The composers and works that were performed back then are (in chronological order) are: Erwin Schulhoff, 5 pieces (1923); Alban Berg, *Lyric Suite* (1926); Arnold Schönberg, *String Quartet no. 3* (1927); Alexander von Zemlinsky, *String Quartet no. 4*

(1936); Roman Haubenstock-Ramati, *Ricercari* (1948/78); György Ligeti, *Métamorphoses Nocturnes* (1953-54); Alfred Schnittke, *String Trio* (1985); Olga Neuwirth, *Akroate Hadal* (1995) and Settorelli (1999) as well as Luna Alcalay, *relatif à la sonorité* (1998). The appearance of the names Alban Berg and Alfred Schnittke shows that the reference to Judaism should by no means be understood in a narrow sense. The list of these 10 works is extended by 5 further compositions: namely the other three string quartets by Arnold Schönberg (published during his lifetime) - String Quartet No. 1 (1904/1905), String Quartet No. 2 (1908) and String Quartet No. 4 (1936), as well as the 2nd String Quartet (1968) by György Ligeti and the String Quartet (1995) by Chaya Czernowin. Reference to these 15 works is made in a variety of ways. In terms of a general theory of musical reference, I would distinguish three different main possibilities of musical reference: 1) the literal reference, 2) the compositional reference and 3) the formal reference. Point 1) naturally includes the simplest form, the quotation. Although the quotation is simple in terms of the idea, it is not so easy to implement it compositionally: After all, what is quoted should not appear as a foreign body, but should be integrated and blend completely into the new work, as in a transplant. Related to the quotation is the allusion or imitation. Under point 2) one can imagine the adoption of a certain compositional method: e.g. the idea of the canon of timbres as at the beginning of the 2nd movement of György Ligeti's 2nd String Quartet or the composing of horizontal symmetries as in Luna Alcalay's *relatif à la sonorité*. The formal reference cannot be strictly separated from point 2), here one could mention the creation of a piece with the "shard technique" of Chaya Czernowin's String Quartet. As mentioned at the beginning, reference is also made to my first string quartet, the 4 Bagatelles, which turned twenty years old in 2023. At least one work per miniature serves as a basis for inspiration: but of course there can also be several works that - in whatever form - live in or "behind" these short pieces. The composition of the 15 miniatures was funded by the SKE Fund, the City of Vienna and the BMKÖES.

(Thomas Wally)

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