métier

MATHIAS REUMERT

20TH CENTURY PERCUSSION SOLOS

DONATONI • FERNEYHOUGH • FUNDAL • HENZE
REYNOLDS • STOCKHAUSEN • XENAKIS

20TH CENTURY PERCUSSION SOLOS · MATHIAS REUMERT

Karlheinz Stockhausen 1928-2007				
1	Nr. 9 Zyklus (1959)			11:18
Franco Donatoni 1927-2000				
	Omar (1985)			12:26
2	I		5:12	
3	II		7:33	
Iannis Xenakis 1922-2001				
4	Rebonds B/A (1989)			11:39
Karsten Fundal b.1966				
5	Möbius #1 (2001)			6:49
Iannis Xenakis 1922-2001				
6	Psappha (1975)			13:20
Hans Werner Henze 1926-2012				
	Five Scenes from the Snow Country (1978)			10:55
7	I.	*mysteriously, tempo of a funeral march*	2:34	
8	II.	*very fast*	1:31	
9	III.	*very slowly, extremely quiet, whispering*	3:05	
10	IV.	*allegretto*	1:38	
11	V.	*andante cantabile*	2:06	
Brian Ferneyhough b.1943				
12	Bone Alphabet (1991)			10:57
Roger Reynolds b.1934				
13	Watershed I (1994)			30:07
TOTAL DURATION				107:54

Photo: Caroline Bittencourt

THE MUSIC

This album consists of a collection of audio tracks taken from *Solo*, a DVD of percussion films that I released in 2015. In order to make these recordings more accessible they are re-released here without the video content. I have added three pieces that are not on the DVD: a new recording of *Zyklus*, a recording of *Möbius #1* (previously released on the album *Ekkozone performs Karsten Fundal*), and a recording of *Watershed* that I made in 2005.

"20th Century Percussion Solos" is merely a shorthand for what is on the album. Obviously this is not a "complete collection" of premillennial works for solo percussion, but I do believe it is a representative one.

Zyklus was the first percussion solo work written for a specific set of instruments (John Cage's *27'10.554" For a Percussionist* predates it, but Cage did not specify his instrumentation). There is much to be said about Stockhausen's piece, but above all the listener should know that "zyklus" means cycle and that the piece is structured as one long cycle of sound colors.

Zyklus is scored for thirteen different types of percussion instruments, nine of which undergo a *cycle of activity* during the course of the piece. That is: one distinct cycle for each of these nine instrument types. For example, one instrument will set out at high intensity and gradually reduce its activity until it becomes absent from the instrumentation, after which point it re-enters and works its way back up to high intensity. Another instrument will have the opposite trajectory: absent at first, climax at the halfway point, absent in the end. Climaxes are reached at precisely every other page in the score, one instrument after another. This recording opens with the snare drum climax, followed one minute and fifteen seconds later by that of the hihat cymbals.

Another minute and fifteen seconds later the triangle has its turn, then the vibraphone, tamtams/gongs, güero, marimba, bells, and tom-tom rimshots, respectively. Instruments are set up in a circle around the percussionist. When an instrument reaches its highpoint of intensity, the percussionist naturally will turn toward it for maximum playing power, whereby, during the course of the entire piece, he or she makes one slow spin around the setup: a choreographic manifestation of the cycle of sound colors.

Zyklus is one of the most meticulously structured pieces of music that we have. (Did I mention that the exact number of attacks on those nine types of instruments are determined by a prime number sequence?). And yet, many decisions of what to play, and when to play it, are left up the performer. For example: a performance can begin on any page in the spiral bound score. Once you have flipped through all the pages, you are back to where you started, and the piece ends as you play the same exact note that opened the performance – hence the "cycle". Fancy playing the piece backwards? Just flip the score! All clefs, accidentals and instrument symbols are written right side up as well as upside down.

The *least* optional music in *Zyklus* is governed by a continuous timeline on which equal distances correspond to equal amounts of time. The actual relationship between distance and time, and thus the actual tempo, is decided by the performer. But regardless of which page he or she chooses to begin with, once two notes or "events" on the timeline has been played, a tempo is established, which should determine the performance's duration. (I say "should" because keeping a steady tempo in complex music that has no apparent pulse is easier said than done). The timeline contains both traditionally notated rhythms and pitches as well as less exact forms of notation: For example: calligraphic lines that the musician must translate into glissandi, and scattered dots that represent tom-tom strokes, where rhythm and order of pitches is left up to the

musician (the *density* of dots in a box translates to approximate rhythmic speed; the *size* of a dot indicates its level of dynamic). An even greater freedom of choice exists in a form of notation which runs simultaneously with and independently of the timeline: geometric boxes containing hundreds of unsorted musical fragments, the order and timing of which are to be decided by the performer. Should these fragments fit neatly between phrases on the timeline so that a clean, linear music results? Or how about utilizing the unsorted fragments as a destructive element in order to obscure those phrases? Could the unsorted fragments even be formed into an autonomous music, complete with its own pulse, independent of events on the timeline? *Zyklus* isn't easy, but it sure as hell is fun!

Performing **Zyklus**: photo by Alexander Banck-Petersen

Obviously, Stockhausen was a force to be reckoned with by any "serious" composer working in Europe – for instance Franco Donatoni, who has said "My distance from Stockhausen, despite my admiration, is that he is always perfecting his ego and his own music, while I want to destroy both one and the other" ("Who's Pulling the Strings?…", *The Musical Times*, Vol. 134).

Omar is the title of Donatoni's late, great piece for solo vibraphone. The score has no bar lines and no time signature, so it is up the performer to decide whether each section of the piece should be played as one very long phrase, or if there should be dots, commas, strong and light beats, and if so, where they should be placed. I spent the entire summer of 2002 in the basement of the Royal Danish Academy of Music, memorizing *Omar* and preparing to perform it in competition at the Concours International de Vibraphone in Clermont-Ferrand, France. I had the week of my life in this ancient city hanging out with fantastic players my own age from all around the world, attending evening concerts by jury members such as Jean Geoffrey and the late, great jazz musician Dave Samuels, and – not least – taking home the First Prize. That led to an invitation to visit the Centre International de la Percussion in Geneva, where I would meet Steven Schick, who made such an impression that soon thereafter I would leave my life in Copenhagen behind and travel half way around the globe to study with him at the University of California, San Diego – an experience that profoundly influenced my life. It all started with *Omar*, so I am thankful to Franco Donatoni for (not destroying) this exquisite piece of music!

Omar was premiered on August 23, 1985 by its dedicatee, Maurizio Ben Omar.

Iannis Xenakis' **Rebonds** is written in two movements that may be played in either order. In contrast to *Psappha* and its clashes between drums, wood and metal, the music of *Rebonds* unfolds on a more subtle level via the opposition of

different “voices” within a monochromatic sound world. Movement *A* is scored for seven drums; *B* for five drums and five woodblocks. *A* and *B* undergo rather similar musical transformations from beginning to end: in each movement two contrasting lines begin as clearly opposites, then interfere with each other, and eventually become integrated. But the paths are different: In *A*, this transformation occurs gradually, in a long, uninterrupted stretch. In *B*, it occurs through sudden shifts in the texture, and these clearly divide this movement into various sections. On this recording, *Rebonds* begins with Movement *B*, which opens with a groove of two independent parts: one stays on the high bongo, the other is a cyclic melody on the remaining drums. Twice, these parts are unified, the steady notes on the bongo becoming transferred to the drum melody. Suddenly, woodblocks in double-speed rhythm interrupt, triggering a process that will eventually tear the opening music apart. Later on, the opening material is presented in its original form, except transferred to the woodblocks.

In movement *A*, a static rhythm between bass drum and high bongo is repeated until a second voice, a slowly moving line, enters. This triggers a steady accumulation of notes, and it soon becomes apparent that the process will continue until there is no more space to be filled. When it finally stops, the sudden silence is loaded with energy, and it is one of the most dramatic moments in any music I can think of.

This recording was done in a single take, no edits, and one thing I think works particularly well is the transition between the two movements. That’s why we are releasing it here as a single track.

Rebonds was written for Sylvio Gualda, who gave the première on July 1, 1988, at the Villa Medici in Rome.

Möbius #1 is way too short for this album. Not to mention: it isn't even from the 20th century. But the album needed something to calm the ears between the two Xenakis behemoths, and this marimba piece by Danish composer Karsten Fundal came to mind. Alongside the other works it almost sounds like a tonal piece of music, at least during the first couple of bars. The piece is based on a pattern of interwoven notes, inspired by the phenomenon of the Möbius strip – the geometric shape that results if you take a paper strip, give it a half-twist, and then join the ends of the strip to form a loop.

I premiered *Möbius #1* on February 8, 2014, at the Frederiksberg Palace Chapel in Copenhagen.

In the world of percussion music, there is a "before" and "after" **Psappha**. Such is the impact this work has had on generations of composers, performers, and rightfully shocked audiences. The title refers to the ancient Greek poetess, Sappho, whose metrical divisions of verses were used by Xenakis in building *Psappha*'s structure. The engineer-turned-composer leaves decisions about two major issues – tempi and instruments – up to the performer. All tempi are written as open-ended minimums, meaning they could go from the specified metronome mark to infinitely high.

The exact instrumentarium is also partly unspecified, but should be selected according to a guideline. In general terms, a total of 16 sound sources are divided between two main categories: one with 9 skin or wooden instruments, the other with 7 metal instruments. Each category is further divided into three groups of instruments arranged according to register and characteristics. It is the opposition between these contrasting groups and their respective musical material that creates energy and forward momentum in *Psappha*.

Among my instruments of choice are a large piece of purpleheart wood; a man-sized barrel that my trio was asked to perform on during an oil company's anniversary show (we took it with us); and two abandoned bells that I found one lucky day outside the local public school. Decisions about instruments and tempi are closely interrelated: a set of dry sounding objects will often yield faster tempi, whereas a performer opting for a slow version might benefit from employing more resonant sounds. But personal taste and chance are just as important factors when one chooses instruments. All these questions are part of a thriving debate about what the best or even the "right" version is, and part of what keeps the enigma of *Psappha* alive.

Commissioned by the English Bach Festival and the Gulbenkian Foundation, the work was premiered by its dedicatee, Sylvio Gualda, at Round House, London, on May 2, 1976.

Recording **Psappha**: photo by Christian Holten Bonke

A winter weekend spent in solitude set the mood that inspired Hans Werner Henze to create **Five Scenes from the Snow Country**. Henze relates: "Twice during short pauses in the storm, I went into the woods and noticed the effect of drifts and the collection of snow crystals that sparkled in the sun." Perhaps in an attempt to achieve a similarly varied collection of colors from the marimba, Henze not only specifies a selection of different mallets, but also asks the performer to utilize fingertips, nails, and knuckles. These “extended techniques” are not merely effects, but rather tools of a gifted composer: listen, for instance, to the interplay in the third scene (track 9) between static, recurring E minor chords (played with fingertips) and a soft *rubato* melody (played with a mallet). For a performer, striking the marimba with one’s own hands also creates a heightened physical involvement and intimacy with the instrument, an aspect of this piece that I am particularly attracted to.

This recording was done in one take, and because I regard the sound of mallet changes between each movement as an authentic, integral part of the recording, it is released here without ‘breaks’. I used Henze’s original manuscript score (gracefully provided by the Sammlung Hans Werner Henze), which turned out to have some interesting deviations from the published score.

Five Scenes from the Snow Country was commissioned by Michiko Takahashi and premiered by Peter Sadlo on October 12, 1982, at SDR, Stuttgart.

“This is what insanity looks like”. That was my first reaction to **Bone Alphabet**, a piece that is infamous for its complexity. But I have come to appreciate that this music becomes more fascinating the harder you look (or listen). The instrumentation consists of only seven sound sources. This limitation is what *bone* refers to. The actual instruments are unspecified, however, so it is up to the percussionist to choose among the thousands of objects at his or her disposal. Thirteen distinct groups of musical material – so-called “comportmental areas” –

were first composed, then segmented, and finally redistributed kaleidoscopically, resulting in the particular contrast-filled language, or *alphabet*, of the piece. This figurative use of "comportment" indicates that each group of material *behaves* in a certain way, and, "comportment" often being associated with dance, suggests something inherently corporeal and not just intellectual about the nature of the composition. You must think *and* dance, that's the cool part about it.

By the way, the recording was made in complete darkness except for UV cannons lighting up my mallets. The backs of my hands were painted black and I was wearing a black mask. Someone wiser might have opted for fever obstacles when recording the most difficult piece in the repertoire... but we were making art cinema.

Bone Alphabet was written for Steven Schick, who gave the première on February 19, 1992, at University of California, San Diego.

Watershed was written with the idea that musical messages and identities can be conveyed not only via sound but also through gestural inflection on the part of the performer. Such gestures are built into the piece, devised through a specific multiple percussion setup that was designed by dedicatee Steven Schick in collaboration with composer Roger Reynolds. The strategy was to maximize gesture by an explicit geometrical disposition of four groups of instruments, in order to visualize physically the polyphony of musical character between and among these four groups. To witness this in a live performance is an exciting experience, and I vividly remember Schick's performance at Reynolds' 70th Birthday Concert – I hadn't seen *anything* like it before. However, a recording can also do the piece justice – especially if you know what to listen for.

Skins (drums) are the central family of instruments. They are the "academics" among the four groups: rationally arranged in a tight formation, and with a "rational", un-flexible musical language. For example: devoid of gradual accelerandi and decelerandi, which are instead attempted by incremental rhythmical augmentation. "A kind of philosopher's music" (quote: Steven Schick).

Metals, on the other hand, are lyrical, free, and arranged in a large spiral going around the performer, with the lowest instrument positioned at bottom right and the highest placed far up in the air to the left of the performer. This counter-intuitive arrangement of the metal instruments is not only difficult to perform at, it also *feels weird*. And that is the intention: a sense of unfamiliarity, internally built into the composition through the actual physical setup, will manifest itself, at best, in a corresponding emotional response with the performer.

Oddities, the third group, simply should be small "odd sounding" instruments, preferably including "unpredictable" ones. In a rehearsal, Reynolds once called them "alternative drums": of the same impulse, but of a different texture than drums. A performer chooses his own oddities, which therefore have the ability to put a sonic "fingerprint" on the interpretation. Originally placed on a small table, my solution was to suspend them in the air in order to maximize their resonance.

Finally, Wooden Boxes with rattling wire snares function as "critics," and in two ways exist outside the "playing field" of the other groups: They don't engage musically but instead "comment" or "critique" the other instrument groups, and they are placed just about *outside reach* of the performer, in a spiral going behind his back.

Watershed, then, is a drama wherein these four groups of instruments behave, interact, and ultimately transform.

A few more words about the piece. Three “Rain” sections temporarily suspend the dominating characteristics of each instrument group (on the recording they begin at 3:42, 6:44, and 11:50, respectively). Roger Reynolds describes them as having a “gentle, expansive, natural feel” and offers a metaphor: “The image is that of listening out of an open window, late afternoon – the remnants of a summer storm.” The very first note in *Watershed* – a tamtam stroke – represents the first “tick” in a slow “clockwork” that sounds sporadically throughout the piece. Listen for loud strokes on the metals that appear to be unattached to the rest of the music: first the tam, then another tam stroke, then a third tam stroke followed by a water gong, then water gong alone, and so on. Step by step, the “clockwork” ascends the scale of metal instruments, until, midway through the piece (at 14:57), “The Watershed Divide” is reached, at which point the clockwork changes direction and starts descending. A section follows in which instrument groups attempt to mix, ending with a short, frustrated tamtam “scream” (the first out of four). The next two sections are called “Storm 1” and “Storm 2” (the name speaks for itself). When the latter storm culminates in two tamtam “screams” (at 23:43), a defining moment is reached, and instrument groups now begin to change their “personality types”. For example, the skins become lyrical and take on non-percussive qualities that initially belonged to the metals.

Audiences routinely ask, “why does the piece have to be so long?” It has to be so long in order for this transformation to take place.

Thanks for reading and I hope you will enjoy the music!

Track 1 was recorded on June 25, 2018 at The Royal Danish Academy of Music, Copenhagen, Denmark
Recorded and mixed by Torsten Jessen
Track 13 was recorded in June 2005 at The University of California, San Diego, United States of America
Recorded and mixed by Nathan Brock
Tracks 2, 3 & 12 recorded on January 26, 2012 at the Palladium, Malmö, Sweden
Tracks 4, 6, 7-11 recorded on July 22, 2011 at the Tivoli Concert Hall, Copenhagen, Denmark
Track 5 recorded on February 12, 2014 at The Royal Danish Academy of Music, Copenhagen, Denmark
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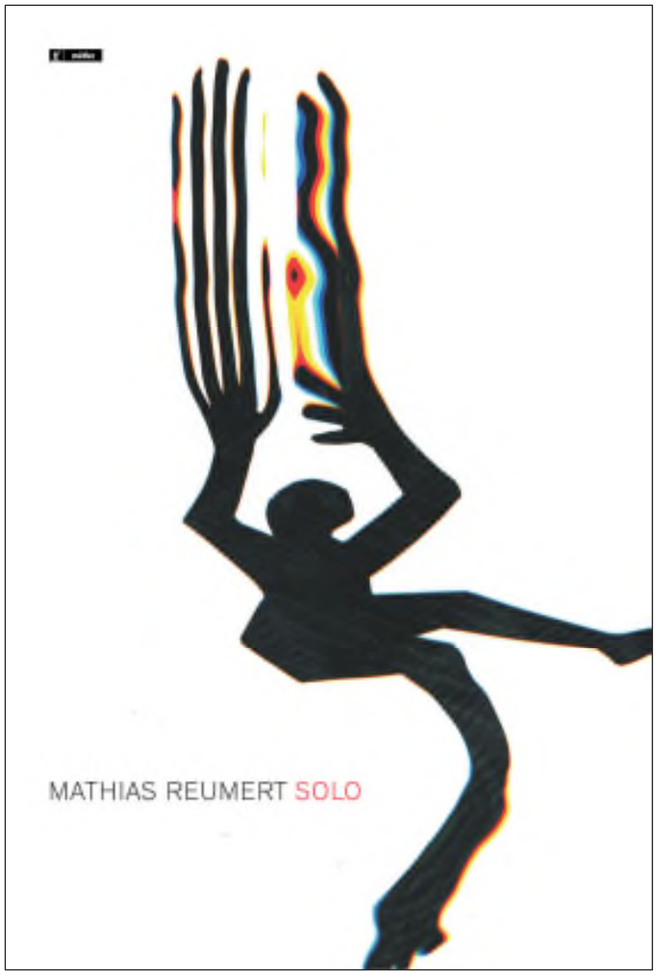

MATHIAS REUMERT SOLO

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Photo: Caroline Bittencourt