

Note of intent, Benjamin Lazar, director

"Composition is not apart from life.
Being a composer, is not dreaming of a music full of stars,
and not being able to realize it."

K. Stockhausen

A world in the world

Donnerstag – Thursday is the first opera out of the seven operas written by Karlheinz Stockhausen gathered under the name of *Licht*.

By giving to this cycle, composed over 22 years, the name of *Licht*, and also by naming each opera after the days of the week, Karlheinz Stockhausen imposes his work as a new creation of the world. Creator and hero of this work, his personal history (the death of his mother under the Nazi regime, his admission to the conservatoire, his journey) is mixed with a completely new cosmogony that he has invented.

Stockhausen has not limited his work to composing the music and writing the text of his operas. He has also written, in a very precise way, all the movements and gestures of the soloists (instrumentalists, singers, dancers, choir). He has invented a dance allowing visualizing the music while listening to it. He has also planned how the audience will be welcomed in the hall at the beginning and at the end of the opera. Stockhausen, in *Donnerstag*, has worked on what the audience will keep in mind after the show and he composed *Vision*, the last scene of the opera, in which the opera is played in a very synthetic way, as a dream of the whole opera.

Observing this kind of approach of the music, it's easy to go back in the past where we find Wagner and his "oeuvre totale" but we should go back further more, to the royal ballets and operas of Louis XIII and Louis XIV. There we find this will of creating a symbolic universe, which links together life and the actions of a man to the myths of humanity.

We haven't seen, since the baroque period, this kind of book of full of images where a singer, a dancer, and –new fact- an instrumentalist can represent at the same time the same character.

As during the baroque period, Stockhausen think of the instrumental music, the lyrical music, the gesture as many rhetorical variations of a unique speech answering and completing themselves.

Stockhausen's goal is huge: there is in his approach the will of going beyond all the traditional limits of the operatic world and also the will of changing deeply the way the spectator sees the world.

It's such a defy: we have to go along with the interpreters through the path made by Stockhausen but in the same time we will have sometimes to take an other way in order to give a wider access to the universe of one of the greatest composers of the 20th century.

To see the music

Staging *Donnerstag*, is first about puzzling out this abundance and understanding this interweaving of languages.

As in the oriental theatre to which Stockhausen make references, the score is accompanied by a lot of details allowing the right interpretation. Stockhausen is the first stage director of his work, and the interpreters are at the outpost to understand and to get used to his intentions and his language thanks to a practice going through several years.

The act of the interpreter begins with an assimilation of all the indications more numerous than in any other works: movements, gestures, rhythms, repeats and variations are very demanding for the memorization and the endurance.

Once this first step is done, the interpret gets access to a great sensation of liberty and ease. The more thrilling example is in the second act of *Donnerstag*, notated and staged with a great precision, but who can finally seem to be a long trumpet concerto improvised like a jazz session.

The matrix of the seven operas, his DNA, fits in one page, called the super formula. Composed at the end of the seventies, it contains three melodic lines. Each line is associated with each character archetypical of the work: Lucifer, Mooneve, Michael the archangel.

This super formula includes a formal strake: Stockhausen renews with the *Licht* cycle, by breaking off with his former works dealing with the experience of discontinuity, adding contradictory autonomous modules one with another, as in *Momente* (1964). He also breaks off with his working process in which he gave a complete freedom to the happenstance and the interpreter execution.

In the *Licht* cycle, everything is under control and organised.

Following Stockhausen's footsteps into seeing the music in order to hear it in a better way, the melodic lines of the super formula will be invisible and readable in a given space – in a non-systematic way, as we go along the opera – with colours landmarks. This sound and colour association takes place at the boundary between the highbrow analysis (the colour scheme will be directly linked to the musical direction) and the childhood game (we won't be that far away from Simon board game, in which you need to memorize different sounds in a row, associated to four colours).

A learned work and an image book

The playful and immoderate dimension of *Donnerstag* led us to the stadium image, as a space with the ability to welcome a wide headcount, from a simple piano/voice to a whole orchestra.

Behind the bleachers, some LED screens with wheels (similar to billboards). The bleachers surround a performance space where Michael's journey and trial take place. The screens receive the colour game explained above, also the images wanted by Stockhausen in Michael's journey around earth, and old movies rushes popping up like furtive memories like Jonas Mekas or Guy Maddin's oneiric editing.

Big stadium lights illuminate the lawn; the light can get really low, creating an oppression feeling, like operating table lights. The empty bleachers welcome the intimate and isolated scenes, lighted up on the lawn, and can also welcome the entire orchestra and choir who will become interpreters and spectators at the same time. The LED screens bring some density to the image compared to a simple projection. There are also LED screens made off small independent lights, an analogous principle to the *Donnerstag* one, creating a complex world based on simple elements.

There is in *Donnerstag* a childish story and tale telling pleasure – sometimes painful, as in the mother's death scene – in a melodic pleasure, here to counterbalance the cycle's system rigour. The costumes are the key to help understanding the balance between the myth and the autobiography, between the clever musician's and the gifted child's visions, always amazed by his musical gift.

Stockhausen gives indications on the costumes he would like to be worn, he also mentions oriental (Japanese, Indian) and antique (Greek tragedy) theatre sources, opening an investigation scope more free and varied than the costume aesthetics in the early 80's – although we could refer from time to time to this retro-futurism stem from science fiction movies.

We will head towards very elaborated costumes, non realistic, bordered on casual clothing (for some historical from the 40's), relating the border explored by Stockhausen in *Donnerstag*, between archetype and intimate. The judges in *Examen* will look terrifying like Kathakali gods. However, their blue colour ranges, differing from the traditional red and green, will bring them into the composer's world, linking them with the three archetypal figures from the super formula.

***Donnerstag*, a work in motion**

Ultimately, it is all about putting together an in motion work; we are not presenting

a fixed contemporary music monument, but a dynamic work. As Pedro Garcia-Velasquez, composer, would say, this motion comes from a desire to produce « a more than human work », based on a human experience. It is this precise desire that we want to show. In the same energy and dynamic, we will gather the scattered elements of a fractioned life, confronted with its personal demons and History violence, with the desperate desire to put sense into it: this is the key of this work's emotion. *Donnerstag* pictures a man considering music as an attempt to push human life's limits: « It is necessary that it is presented to the audience as to me, like something incredible as something that I didn't know at any front, inexplicable, like life, that I can't explain ».