

1000 Structures - On the Work of Mauro Hertig

Monika Voithofer - SKUG Musikkultur magazine, April 26, 2018 (translated from German)

A Radical Structuralism - that is what the young Swiss composer Mauro Hertig strives towards. On May 2, Jeunesse is dedicating a portrait concert to him with Ensemble Platypus at ORF Radiokulturhaus.

No, »Tandem Trapez«, »Vektorium« or »Tempong« are not utopian sci-fi machines, but titles of works by the Swiss composer Mauro Hertig. But the association is not all that wrong: Mauro Hertig is a designer, craftsman, architect - in short: composer. He builds structures and fills them with sounds. With invented sounds, with stolen sounds or with sounds left to the musicians themselves. He wants to "build on the basic structure of life, as plain and simple as it sounds". In the pieces this does not sound plain and simple at all. Improvising is an indispensable tool for him, mostly on the guitar. The resulting pieces carry titles that implicitly stimulate imagination and movement. Such as »Ping Pol« (2015): The lengthy process of composing it took over a year. »Ping Pol« is a kind of living catalog of fricatives. An elaboration of their potentials using a metal slide. A small metal tube grinds over the strings and generates a tonal kaleidoscope from fine noise to loud scratching, clamped in a system of rabid rhythms that circle a fixed pulse. Gradually, the finest harmonic components are unveiled. The movement is circular - a kind of contraction that also takes place performatively, in Difference and Repetition, to allude to Deleuze again.

Listening is Boss

Perceiving the minimal differences is key. Listening is the top priority. Mauro Hertig wants to find a language in which music can do without a

score. He founded the Forum of Applied Abstraction in 2015 in a proposal to advance to the music itself. It is a phenomenological attempt to analyze sound explicitly, contrary to the fetish of the score. "It is not the properties of the scores that should be shown, but only the structures that appear in the recording or in the concert," says Hertig. A "structural hearing" of a different kind with completely new, digital possibilities. So far, there has been too little space for a discourse that focusses strictly on sound. He advocates a culture of debate, at least on this point Adorno would probably agree. The pamphlet is not long in coming - his book on this will be published by Wolke Verlag this year.

But let's continue: The ensemble piece »Flugmagnet« (2017), for example, begins with clearly defined, vacuum-like fields, punctured by hard cuts from the percussion. In between there are floating moments that unfold pneumatically. And here again the momentum of movement is heavy with meaning. The voices are organized like a temporary counterpoint, approaching, exchanging and advancing in their divergent tempos. Oscillating waves that lash and wane.

Tonality from Behind

The interacting play with tempi and pulse is characteristic of Mauro Hertig's oeuvre. This is also the case in his new piece »Triad Hihat«, which will be premiered on May 2nd in the Radiokulturhaus. At the center is an almost prehistoric construct - the tonal cadence. Hertig consequently treats it like an archaeological find. »What interests me about the cadence is that it can be everything and nothing at the same time: it contains the entire tonality, but the tonality itself is a historical structure. Today you can't make a new piece with it as a pure appearance.« Mauro Hertig rolls up the tonality from the back: he dissects it, makes its properties his own and explicitly reveals its inner relationships in the piece. The structure, rhythm and counterpoint of the forces are exhibited. Their implicit tempi are stretched and compressed to the extreme.

"Never before has felt-tip pen on paper sounded so much like music to my ears", says a review of his piece "Stift & Papier III".

Mauro Hertig, who lives in Vienna and New York, is both an architect and researcher of sound who is able to expose rhythm. In the opaque morass of media, concept or performance art, for example, his self-description as a "composer of contemporary music" is clear, consistent and almost daring. But it's less about the academic background (he studied with names like Isabel Mundry and Beat Furrer) than about the art form: contemporary music is concert music, that is: music that solely takes place in the now. In the concert, people gather with their stories, come together and meet in the now. You become a contemporary in a concert. The composer is the architect of the concert and the invisible hand behind it.

Concert: Portrait of Mauro Hertig, Ensemble Platypus, May 2, 2018, 8:00 p.m. ORF Radiokulturhaus, Großer Sendesaal, Vienna; Admission: € 10.00 / 14.00

Link: <https://maurohertig.com>

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