

ATTEMPT AT INTIMACY

Fragments for String Quartet (1999-2000)

Commissioned Work by the Cultural Funds Trust, Saxony

The string quartet as the most personal classical musical form of chamber music even in the twenty-first century evokes nearness and intimacy, caution and distance, isolation and togetherness.

The six fragments for string quartet brings all these states into play, making connection with the important traditions and the compositional cornerstones of this genre in the twentieth century, as well as with the social, structural and spatial experiences in my own work of the last fifteen years.

Intimacy. Intimacy to others and with oneself, with ones own playing. Intimacy with the hearer, with the tone/sound/noise, with the surrounding space. Intimacy with the genre of the string quartet which tradition we take with us from the twentieth century as the structural tools of our craft for working the new/ the other.

The musicians only first form a unified ensemble playing in strict time at the beginning of the fourth fragment. The first three fragments show a string quartet spatially split and musically and structurally extremely independent from one another, with many heterogeneous and partly chaotic quantum-like elements. Quotations and ciphers from Bartok, Ives, Isang Yun, Gamelan music and Alban Berg thread through nearly all the fragments which almost always end with a terse coda.

The first fragment begins similarly to many pieces from my SOLO XFACH cycle, without a note, not with breath even, but with the noise of strokes on the body of the instrument used.

From the fourth fragment the four voices finally come together, on a single note, the now resulting string quartet celebrates in ritual dance/song like a self-absorbed octave machine.

Exactly the opposite yet nevertheless together is the scene played out in the fifth fragment: an in itself diffuse and contrapuntal wild illumination of colour and rhythm, unpredictable and uncontrolled, already pointing to the language of the sixth fragment.

And here a motif from the well-known Violin Concerto of Alban Berg is quoted by the first violin - quasi as a Concerto with the orchestral accompaniment of a string trio which refers to the dedicatee of the composition, the violinist, Louis Krasner, the person who commissioned the work and who was the interpreter of the Violin Concertos of Alban Berg and Arnold Schönberg among other works.

As already in the preceding five fragments, concentrated ciphers penetrate the structures:

A-B (Alban Berg), La = A (Louis Krasner), A-Es (S) (Arnold Schönberg), A-(W) (Anton Webern), La(A)-B (Leonard Bernstein, B-B (Bela Bartok), A-B-F (Andrea and Bernd Franke).

In all the quoted names/ciphers either the symbol/the note A or B appears or both together.

I got to know Krasner in the summer of 1989 during my study visit of two months in Tanglewood in the USA as holder of a Leonard Bernstein Scholarship. There I had the unique historic opportunity to be allowed to work with composers and interpreters who had known Bartok, Schönberg, Berg, Webern, Stravinsky and Copland personally (such as Louis Krasner, the conductor and composer Lukas Foss, the conductor Maurice Abravanel, the violinist Eugen Lehner from the famous Kolisch Quartet and naturally Leonard Bernstein himself).

Louis Krasner and I were quasi-neighbours in Tanglewood and saw one another daily, this wonderful opportunity to meet culminating in a collaboration, filled with many stimulating and unforgettable conversations.

Krasner took charge at that time of the US-American Première of my SOLO 3fach for Violin, Horn and Piano (In memory of Joseph Beuys), which was performed by outstanding young musicians from the USA. He told me about a manuscript he had just written which was planned for a CD release of a recording of Berg's Violin Concerto with Anton Webern conducting which had for many years been believed to be lost.

This recording appeared a year later world-wide and was held to be a sensation because up until then only the original recording with Scherchen had been known.

Auch dies als Referenz an Louis Krasner!

February 2001 Bernd Franke