

Peter Ablinger:

VERKÜNDIGUNG ("Annunciation"), 1990

for the masters of flying: Franz Liszt, Alexander Scriabin,
Cecil Taylor

My work on Verkündigung began when Marcus Weiss urged me to come up with an improvisation piece. At first, I was preoccupied with the opposition of proscriptive, "architectural," precisely timed part, and at the same time, open, improvised structures.

Around that time, I happened upon Domenico Veneziano's painting Verkündigung, and found my own musings reflected in that painting's stark opposition between symmetrical Renaissance architecture and the free "gestures" of the angel and the Virgin Mary. At some point, I began striving to dissolve this very opposition of architecture/gesture, aiming for a conception which could contain both elements at once, in every moment - and theoretically in every sound; where one might merge at any moment into the other, or where one may appear in the other's place.

This led me to an increasingly complex notation, to a point where the whole thing reached an essential degree of unplayability. At this point, some of the original improvisatory core remained. (Pinpointing a single tone in its firmly dictated parameters of pitch, duration, and volume encounters a similarly irreducible barrier to that of complete compositional control.) As such, the piece submits to its performers' desire (or lack thereof) either to evade its technical challenges in a no-holds-barred first reading, or to immerse themselves fully in an interminable process of approximation.

(10/93)

Maria Tržan:

All of a sudden, we are no longer listening

Verkündigung (Annunciation), one of the earliest works in Peter Ablinger's catalogue, is a cornerstone for connoisseurs of his work. In Verkündigung, the groundwork for his whole subsequent oeuvre is already laid out; it's all there: series on the one hand, monolith on the other; Noise and densification ("everything, always"), and the thematisation of perception itself: raising awareness about listening, and through listening: about the listener.

Series.

Each of the three instruments plays seven pieces, which not only have the same duration, but also the same form, merely manifested somewhat differently each time - all told, the same form happens 21 times. In talking about this piece, Peter Ablinger refers to the interior of Ulm Cathedral in Muenster. The space itself does not change as we observe it, but every phase of observation, every path through the church's five aisles, reveals to us an altered, updated version of the space. We never perceive the same thing, although nothing changes in the space - nothing but our position therein.

Monolith.

The multiple iterations of the form are scarcely audible, however, as each piece connects seamlessly to the next. This sort of monolithic appearance is characteristic of many of Ablinger's works, and signifies - here and elsewhere - the unity of "space," the unity and unconditionality of the now in the listening process. At the same time, the piece can assume very different outward appearances. The 1990 preface to Verkündigung indicates a whole array of different combinatorial possibilities, from solo piece to 21-piece orchestra. The preface has since been revised, making the trio version the only "official" one - but the composer does, in certain cases, reserve the option of dipping into his original stock of possibilities. And this is how it came to appear on this CD: alongside the two trio versions is a maximal version for 7 flutes, 7 saxophones, and 7 pianos, in which all 21 pieces sound simultaneously, in every moment.

Noise.

By the time we listen to the 'all-pieces-at-once' version, our perspective broadens toward Ablinger's later densification and Noise pieces. "Everything, always" is already hashed out in Verkündigung - and not only in the 21 simultaneous pieces. Even the solo parts tend toward the suspension of figures, a melding of the figurative and the timbral (figure and ground). Individual components of each sonic action - the noises of keyclicks, attacks, fingernails, and articulations - create

their own sonic arcs parallel to the pitch-based components: horizontal, spectral strata layered atop or across each other. As a result, each sound contains at least two "listening directions." In every moment, the ear must decide between vertical, figural listening and horizontal, spectral listening; or it must meld these two to create an individual listening space. The composer himself views this creative process as the critical one: the work emerges from listening.

Listening.

Every so often (even in the hyper-density of the 21-instrument version), an isolated event (something figure-like, which our ears may have constructed from various independent levels of sound) - a melody, a line "appears," calmly and clearly before our ears. It lingers for a while; it simply IS. Such "appearances" are never repeated, even on repeated listening. At other times, it seems as though everything were at a standstill, as though time had stopped, and all its hypertrophic motion were mere illusion; as though we, the onlookers, were the only ones moving in this imaginary space, while everything around us persisted in tense silence. Listening shifts from a process into a condition. All of a sudden, we are no longer listening. All of a sudden, we find ourselves in a space with many layers of depth. The richness and complexity of this space are palpably present, but its details can only be glossed over, skimmed, or fleetingly grasped - and it's no longer about these, anyway: even when the piece ends, we know that we have merely closed a door behind us, a door to a place, to something ongoing. (Liner notes 2001)