

Robert HP Platz

The idea of a work that develops processually was already present in germinal form in the early works of Robert HP Platz. In the course of an output that now stretches over a quarter-century, this idea has gradually taken shape, finally coming to the fore in the composition *Grenzgänge Steine* for soprano, 2 pianos and orchestra (1989-93). What is involved here is neither “work in progress”, in the sense of an innately incomplete single work, nor simple cycles of pieces. The conception is different, and unmistakable. Today, Robert HP Platz regards all his work as a continually unfolding overall architecture, within which individual works are loosely grouped into work-complexes. The linking factors between them are motives, instrumentation, or an organisation of tonal centres and structural types that extends from one work to another. But this is not done in a quasi-serial way, through the advance planning of all structural data. Instead of strategic calculation, Platz’s work involves a more intuitive grasp of organic growth, where the laws of development arise from the process itself. Development does not proceed in a goal-directed way, but forms a continual musical flow, whose various windings and branchings feel their way towards an unknown destination.

Within such constellations, individual works may overlap or interlock, permitting partly simultaneous performances; alternatively, they form conglomerates or transitional formations, loosely grouped around a centre of gravity. The basic notion is that of an enormous meta-composition, in a constant state of becoming; to that extent, its significance would be conceptual, rather than aiming at literal realisation – or at least, not as a totality. As far as the overall process – the succession and interpenetration of individual works – is concerned, Robert HP Platz talks in terms of “form polyphony”. An excerpt was heard at the Donaueschingen Music Days in 1996: a single performance comprised the following works, partly interlocked: *Andere Räume* (tape and percussion), *Turm and Weiter* (orchestra), *nerf II* (violin, piano & winds) and *Echo II* (violin, piano, winds & percussion). Whereas the overall architecture tends to follow intuitive rules, the details of each individual work are thoroughly worked out – a legacy of the serial thinking with which Platz has had a deep engagement. But here too, spontaneous artistic decisions take precedence over abstract definitions.

The background to this novel attempt to synthesize macro- and micro-structure is the striving towards an “integral” artwork which may be understood as the sum of all previous artistic experience, depicting the world, as it appears to the composing subject, as fully as possible. The first attempt to master these problematics was the exuberant major project *Schwelle* (1973-78), which occupies an exemplary place at the beginning of Platz’s evolution as a composer. However, only Parts I and III were realised (Munich 1979, Cologne 1981); a complete performance of all six parts fell foul of organisational practicalities. This experience subsequently persuaded the composer not to impose ‘integrality’ through a single work, but to seek it in constellations of works – and ultimately, in a life’s work.

To date, Robert Platz has composed in all genres, often incorporating music on tape: music theatre, orchestral works, ensemble works, chamber music and solo pieces. Yet his list of works also includes music for children – witty, and never banal. His artistic interests cover a broad spectrum. Next to composing, the most important activity for him is conducting. This began with direction of the “Ensemble Köln” which he founded in 1979; nowadays, it increasingly involves guest appearances with international orchestras and ensembles. Friendship with visual artists and authors, an affinity with French culture that goes back to his infancy, and a fascination with Japanese culture have provided further inspirations for his multi-faceted musical world.

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