

Samir Odeh-Tamimi: *Garten der Erkenntnis* – Work description

for six solo voices and two trombonists (2010/11) / Sy. 4138

Garten der Erkenntnis, for six voices and two trombones was composed by Samir Odeh-Tamimi in 2011, on commission from Stuttgart's Musik der Jahrhunderte and the Neue Vocalsolisten. The piece is based on the poem of the same name by the Sufi mystic Mansur Al-Hallaj (858-922), as well as a dream of Odeh-Tamimi's. In his dream, the composer saw an old, scrawny man with a white beard. Clad in a green robe, with a red turban on his head, the man hovered above the floor, holding a frame drum in his hand. Odeh-Tamimi realised he was a Sufi sheik, and asked him whom he was. "I", he answered, "am one of those can never be assailed by sleep." Then he laughed loudly, turned sharply twice, started drumming and sang: "ka an na ha ka an na hu." After this, he flew out through the window into the sky. A few days later, Odeh-Tamimi told a friend about his dream, and the latter, well-versed in Sufi mysticism, told him "that was Al-Hllaj" and directed him to the poem "Garden of Knowledge". Up to this point, Odeh-Tamimi hadn't known about it, but after reading it he decided to set it, in exactly the way it had come to him in his dream: "ka an na ha ka an nah u." This persistent, sharply rhythmically organised sequence of sounds, along with the variety of microintervallic vibrati and glissandi in the melodic line (inspired by Koranic chant) create an extremely vital, almost wild ritual that scarcely pauses for breath. Striking solos and sharply contoured out-of-phase duos give rise overall to a tightly knit vocal mesh, a deliberate tangle. Markings for the singers (also active as percussionists) include: "rather angry, and with various kinds of vibrato, brief interruptions, and sometimes singing nasally" (bass, bar 43 ff.), "almost yelled, everyone independently, as fast as possible" (bar 120 f.), and "yelled, rapid, chaos" (the final bars). Sometimes 'chorally' enlarged by the two trombones, they implant powerful signals within this vitalist process, this sound-body-ceremony – enduring sonic symbols of knowledge.

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