

Iris ter Schiphorst



Iris ter Schiphorst (Photo © Silvia Beck)

OPERAS

Bernarda Albas Haus (with Helmut Oehring)

(The House of Bernarda Alba)

1999

1 hr 30 min

A dance-theatre piece

Text: Based on the play by Federico García Lorca

deaf soloist (female), soprano (male); 7 dancers;
elec.gtr-db-live electronics

"The company that performed Bernarda in Basle goes further in terms of abstraction than all others who have attempted to translate this play into dance. The fable is interesting only in that it creates a hysterical atmosphere which is intended by Schlömer and Oehring: a pressure cooker of suppressed passions, in danger of exploding almost from the start.

The music is involved in the creation of this atmosphere more actively than with most of the other dance pieces... an unconventional form of music consisting of melodically interpolated noises: sung cantilenas soaring over clusters, nervous sawing of the double bass, electronic explosions behind which, almost inaudibly, Schubert's Ave Maria or the distant singing of a muezzin unfolds...

For an hour and fifteen minutes the performance works itself into the nervous centre of the audience." (Jochen Schmidt, FAZ, 19.11.1999)

"The three authors are apparently of like minds and perceptions, thus the resulting dance theatre piece is amazingly coherent. Helmut Oehring and Iris ter Schiphorst wrote a score that reciprocates between extreme states of slow-motion leading to standstill on the one hand and musical congealment in piercing noise on the other. Monotonous repetitions, fractures, new starts of the same ideas, loops, some isolated sounds from outside (bells, a bird) and time and again fragments from Bach and Schubert – memories of the past, of a perfect world, a sense of yearning lost in the noise of an age-old gramophone. To Lorca's characters, Oehring and ter Schiphorst added a peculiar couple, whose function resembles that of the evangelist in Bach's Passions. In reality, though, the two added characters personify the impossibility of telling a story which is actually set in the world of emotions. One of them is the deaf actress Christina Schönfeld, who recounts the basic story of Bernarda Alba and her daughters in sign language, the other is countertenor Arno Raunig, whose text is naturally incomprehensible, as it is sung in cantilena style, and who literally fills the main characters' fate with expression. Throughout the whole work the couple seems strangely unwieldy, also in the musical context, because – though doing what you would expect them to do – they are ultimately impossible to understand.

On the basis of this score, Joachim Schlömer produced a choreography for the ensemble of the Basel dance theatre company which was characterised by realistic symbolism, featuring the stage and dress colours (or non-colours) black/white and occasionally red (Frank Leimbach, Gesine Völlm). The only 'real' dance is a fatal flamenco. Like the music, the dancing style is dominated by discontinuous, fragmentary elements: disturbances, random activism, eruptions leading to nothing. Only Bernarda Alba, with her slow gait and movements, represents frightening steadiness. In all the premieres, music and dance merged to a black emotional theatre consisting of gesture, movement and sound, uncompromising, unvarnished, brutal, but moving. The dancers of the Basel dance theatre company and the musicians Peter Kowald (double bass), Markus Retschnefki (prepared piano, keyboard) and Jörg Wilkendorf (electric guitar) gave definition to dance and sound. And at last I got hold of a seat in the Hebbel Theatre, to experience the necessity of the Dolby surround acoustics (Torsten Ottersberg)." (Giesela Nauck, Positionen, February 2000)

World Premiere: 11 Nov 1999

Basel, Switzerland

Joachim Schlömer, choreographer; Theater Basel

EFFI BRIEST (with Helmut Oehring)

2000

1 hr 30 min

Music theatre psychogram in four acts

Text: Libretto by Helmut Oehring and Iris ter Schiphorst, after the novel by Theodor Fontane (G)

deaf soloist (female), voice, male soprano, female speaker;
solo trp-3cl-2tp-perc(2)-acc-pft(=sampler kbd)-elec.gtr-elec.bass gtr-2vlc.3db-live electronics

"The famous story of the noble daughter who is married and has a lover does not happen for the first time in the Briest family. Hardly accidentally, the introductory scene makes it clear that the daughter is going to be married to the former adorer of her mother, Baron von Insetten for the purpose of social advance. The hopes of both fail, the mother wastes away, Insetten advances, Effi dies from unloving coldness. Thus a female fate is passed on from one generation to the next.

In order to recount this in a more general way, the two authors deliberately separate role and text. The theatre of voices is underlined with acoustic sounds which, rather than a drama, create a mood, an atmosphere. The instruments, which combine an ensemble of new music with rock guitar, accordion and big-band, are marked by a sense of reduction. Sounds, often pianissimo, appear dampened, tending towards polluted noise. To this are added radio signals, hissing noises and voices as if from a film, their flatness suggesting emptiness and loss of perspective." (Frank Kämpfer, NZfM, 3/2001)

"genuine theatre music which paints states of with a variety of shades." (Stefan Keim, Die Welt, 13.03.2001)

World Premiere: 09 Mar 2001

Kunsthalle, Bonn, Germany

Christina Schönfeld / Salome Kammer / Arno Raunig / Ingrid Caven / Jörg Wilkendorf / Ulrike Ottinger, dir; Ensemble musikFabrik NRW
Conductor: Wolfgang Ott

Euridice

2001/02

chamber opera for voice, chorus, dancers, 7 instruments and electronics

1 dancing singer (female), 3 dancers/narrators (female), dancer (male);
bfl.dbcl-perc-pft(=kbd)-vln.vc.db-electronics

"The voice, and voices, are at the heart of the piece. They whisper and moan, try to get a word in, remember, reconstruct. Iris ter Schiphorst's chamber opera Eurydike, Szenen aus der Unterwelt (Eurydice, Scenes from the Underworld) struggles with the myth of silence... Suspecting a buried layer of cultural history, the Berlin-based composer focusses on the self-reflection of this woman who, from Monteverdi to Gluck, has always been silent... In this work, gestural dance performance, singing, verbal comment and instrumental parts merge in an eloquent, touching manner..." (Frank Kämpfer, Deutschlandfunk/Musikjournal, 23 September 2002)

"... In comparison, Iris ter Schiphorst's Eurydike, Szenen aus der Unterwelt (Eurydice, Scenes from the Underworld), which opened the evening at the Theater am alten Markt (...), is much more memorable, and – not only regarding its well-grounded view on Eurydice, a figure neglected in the myth – more modern than the two ensuing parts of the Orpheus cycle. A few serpentine instrumental lines from the cello and violin at the outset are sufficient for ter Schiphorst to create a much more suggestive atmosphere than her colleagues achieve with all their acoustic and visual kerfuffle ..." (Wolfgang Sandner, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 24 September 2002)

Die Gänsemagd

nach dem Märchen der Brüder Grimm

(The Goose Girl)

2009

1 hr

Opera for children

Text: Libretto by Helga Utz (G)

c.6 singers;
bcl-accordion-vlc-sampler

Der Ort ist nicht der Ort (with Helmut Oehring)

(The place is not the place)

2000

1 hr 10 min

A music-theatre 'action'

Text: Libretto by Iris ter Schiphorst and Helmut Oehring (G). Graphics by Hagen Klennert

3 soloists;

0.1.bcl.1-0.3.0.0-perc(3)-elec.gtr-elec.bass gtr-kbd-4vln-live electronics

"The real excellence of the composing duo Oehring/ter Schiphorst has been, and remains, their highly original tonal imagination and the extreme, often raw energy of their music, which draws on an extensive range of experience from jazz to electronic music, rock and pop right up to advanced artistic music. It would be promising to extend this musical potential, which in any case is latently theatrical, visually and scenically, however it would have to be produced more accurately and consistently than at the première." (Raoul Mörchen, MusikTexte 86/87)

World Premiere: 26 Oct 2000

Deutscher Pavillon, Hannover, Germany

Arno Rauning, soprano/L Lixenberg, soprano/Christina Schoenfeld, sign language;

Ensemble Aventure

Conductor: Christian Hommel