

Sound – Rupture – Continuation

On the Death of Klaus K. Hübler

by Nikolaus Brass

‘A person is isolated when they cannot establish a connection to the outside world. But they will face the demands of life in a framework that goes beyond their understanding and possibilities of communication. They can only break away from this sickness, perhaps a form of acquired autism, by sensing and using the power within and without to express themselves to others, even at the risk of not being understood. This is not primarily a problem of sickness, however, but of art.’

Maria Hübler wrote these lines about *Maske – Mutmassungen*, a piece for accordion that her husband composed in 1995/96. In the brief text she perceptively describes a state that precisely characterises the person and the composer, his fate and his art. The dates are important in this context, as they document the fact that *Maske* was one of the first pieces to be written after the life-threatening illness that kept him close to death for months and ultimately almost destroyed his capacity for movement and speech. With a cruel rupture, it divides Klaus’s life and work into ‘before’ and ‘after’. And now, due to the mundane accident of a fall in his home – a result of the impaired mobility caused by the illness – that life has come to a sudden and unexpected end.

But not his music. The music has not ended, it still lives. Like his memory.

I first met Klaus in the late 1970s among a circle of students, budding musicians and composers that had formed at the Munich Academy of Music around Peter Kiesewetter, an influential composer well-versed in a variety of disciplines, an independent mind whose judgement was never compromised by adherence to any school. His profound knowledge of music history as the history of expressive behaviour in music had a lasting effect on us, the younger generation, of whom Klaus was the youngest. He looked younger than his twenty or twenty-one years, and soon picked up the affectionate Bavarian nickname ‘Burle’. But it was Burle who very soon outstripped us all, and whom we could barely follow in his compositional thinking, which became even more intricate in the 1980s during his studies with Brian Ferneyhough.

But that same Klaus would return from the gatherings at Peter Kiesewetter’s country home, which were often very lively and only thinly disguised as composition lessons, not only with the obligatory hangover, but also with a lifelong compositional mentality that honoured the dignity of each individual note, something that

provided the existential foundation for his music until his last works. Both in such dense instrumental miniatures as *Opus breve* for cello or the radical *Reißwerck* for guitar and in the organic proliferations of ensemble pieces like *‘Feuerzauber’ auch Augenmusik* or *Epiphyt* for flute and chamber orchestra, where he split the musical statement into several separately-notated levels of articulation, he is still concerned with ‘the tone’, the individual note, an essential communicative sign – both in its reduction and its infinite sonic shadings – constitutes an unmistakable characteristic of his work. Even though Hübler often hid the ‘message’ of his music in subtle allusions that only a precise examination of the scores can uncover, his characteristic titles and expressive markings (*Hörsermon*, *Lamento ed arioso*, ‘Il dolore’, ‘blass und mit keinerlei Ausdruck’ [pale and completely expressionless], and so forth) reveal references that belong inseparably to the associative subtext of his compositions. At this level, his early love for Alban Berg had a lifelong effect. This makes the title of his piece *Kryptogramm*, scored for orchestral torso – the last work he began before his illness, part of a larger compositional project that was never continued – virtually programmatic. Cryptogram: a hidden text.

In the second half of the nineties, thanks to much support from musician friends as well as loving and attentive care in his personal life, he achieved a continuation that was alarmingly new. All the compositional elements that were already there before returned, but in a compressed, intensified, radicalised and concentrated form. He radicalised the relationship between sound, script and structure; the one could no longer be separated from the others. The structure called for a script, which in turn spawned the sound, and vice versa: the sonic imagination invented a script that revealed the structure. Here, if anywhere, composition became a ‘sign of life’. Here someone was giving a sign of life; that was how I always heard Klaus’s late works. Signs of life that tell with eloquence and the utmost intensity of a life in all its ruptures and its totality.

Even though a harsh twist of fate had largely deprived him of his ability to speak and move unassisted, Klaus Hübler nonetheless took part in musical life. At times when no one came, he was there: whether at *musica viva* or at concerts by the Munich Society for New Music (MGNM), semi-private concert series in galleries or in entirely private circles, events which attracted a small, highly interested audience from Munich and environs. In 2010, as part of the concert series ‘Verhört – KomponistInnen im Gespräch’, the MGNM presented a lecture concert of Klaus’s music featuring the violist Klaus-Peter Werani, the accordionist Andrea Kiefer and the flautist Sylvie Lacroix, all long-standing proponents of his work. There was no need for him to use words: the composer spoke through his late works and the reflections of his performers. As long as his music has performers and listeners, Klaus Karl Hübler will not fall silent.

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