

STOCKHAUSEN SEMINAR GIVEN BY PETER EÖTVÖS (HILVERSUM/AMSTERDAM, SEPTEMBER 22-30, 2000)

We are always glad to publish the reports written by students who received scholarships from the Friends. These not only show the results of activities of our Association, but also provide our readers with valuable and interesting first-hand information about important musical events. Below you find the report of Balázs Horváth.

In September 2000, Peter Eötvös gave a seminar, which enabled us to participate in the rehearsals and performance of Stockhausen's "Hymnen". Eötvös conducted the rehearsals with the Chamber Orchestra of the Dutch National Radio during September 19-28 in Hilversum. The rehearsals then continued at the location of the final performance: the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, where the public could listen to it twice in the same evening. The composer, who operated the mixer board himself, recalled during the rehearsals and between the two performances, why and how he composed this opus, and how it developed to its present form between 1966 and 1974.

Stockhausen composed *Hymnen* in 1966-67 in the electro-acoustic studio of WDR (Westdeutsche Rundfunk) in Cologne. The concept was to make concrete music. Stockhausen recorded or bought recordings of the national anthems of all existing countries at that time. His original idea was to create a very long (maybe 6-8 hours) electro-acoustical piece, using all these anthems. Finally, however, it became a composition of about two hours, involving about twenty anthems. The music consists primarily of the transformation of these anthems, but the composer inserted at different places, electronic variations created by generators. An example of this is in part III: the anthem of the Soviet Union repeated 26 times, with modifications to the harmonies in some passages.

Some of the instrumentalists working together with Stockhausen, among them Peter Eötvös, started to make improvisations based on the material of the *Hymnen*, resulting in a concert piece that was recorded on CD: "Hymnen, concrete music for tape with soloists". This inspired Stockhausen to compose an orchestral version of the *Hymnen*. He orchestrated the electronic material, which made it more colorful and lively, although it lost its original sound. This is because most of the time the orchestra is playing the same sounds as are being produced by the tape, but the two performances contrast with each other. This version takes about forty minutes to perform.

The rehearsal of this version occupied the main part of the seminar. The rehearsals were marathons - two, three-hour sessions daily, with a 45-minute break between them. During the breaks and after the rehearsals, we could discuss with Peter Eötvös what kind of difficulties the conductor and/or the orchestra had faced during the rehearsals. After September 25th, we could also approach the composer with our questions, since he was present to oversee the amplifying and mixing. Between September 19 and 22, sectional rehearsals

were held, with Eötvös working with individual instruments or groups of instruments. As I could not participate in these, I asked Peter Eötvös about his experiences. He said that it was necessary to teach the musicians not only how to play and interpret the tunes, but also how to vary their beginnings or endings. This was necessary because in many places in the score, it is not stated what to play, only this: choose a tune/an element/a segment of the music you hear on the tape and play it repeatedly/with glissando/transposing etc. The conductor has to improvise also on the spot, because he must conduct while listening to the tape, and most of these parts are not divided in bars, only defined by time. Eötvös needed two weeks to learn the music again, although he has been working with Stockhausen for 25 years and knows the piece very well. In spite of this depth of experience, several times Eötvös had to ask the orchestra to repeat a certain part for his sake. He also spent many of the breaks, practicing. This was during the rehearsals with the whole orchestra after September 25th. When Stockhausen arrived, Eötvös asked the composer to go through those movements that could cause big trouble for many conductors. This might be the reason that until now, only three or four conductors have performed this music, including Eötvös and the composer himself. It turned out that Eötvös follows the tape and very often does not count the seconds. On the other hand, Stockhausen counts the time for all tempi very carefully. This difference is significant in their work as composers - Eötvös is very receptive, both as composer and as performer, to the creation of a gesture, while Stockhausen is a very precise but theoretical composer. According to his own words, he is mainly a rhythmical composer, although I earlier considered him first of all, as a composer thinking in melodies.

After September 25th, the rehearsals continued with the participation of Stockhausen and his assistant. From that day on, only half of the time was spent with the piece itself. The rest of the time was devoted to the problems of amplification and making the orchestra acquainted with the tape in order to play together with it. The large-scale use of the amplifier made the strongest impression on me, as I, being a composer, am much interested in this issue. The microphones were installed at the desks of the instrumentalists with different settings and from different directions. In the Hilversum studio, only four sound panels were installed for playing the tape and two for amplifying the orchestra. On the mixer board, the relationship between the instruments and the electronics was checked. Next was the mixing. The proportions should, naturally, be varied during the performance according to the characteristic of the musical material. Full amplification was necessary, not only for the proportions of the volumes, but also to give the orchestra the same emphasis as the tape has.

After September 28th, the production moved to Amsterdam, where the concert was to take place. The great hall of the Concertgebouw, built at the end of the 19th century, was very suitable for this piece. In a less

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9. > suitable room, the orchestral and electro-acoustical sounds could easily be confused. The four sound panels for the orchestra (above the podium, directed toward the audience), the four double panels for the tape (bi-directional panels in each corner of the hall), together with the complementary panels under the balconies, created a fantastic sound. They managed to balance the two types of sounds, although the first day in the new hall was spent resetting the amplification of the instruments. The result was magnificent. During the concert, the first time the music was played with complete technical accuracy, but the second time it was real music making.

In addition to the already mentioned consultations, there were a few times when the participants of the seminar (one conductor and three composers, including me) could sit down together with Peter Eötvös, without the orchestra, and in detail, discuss the experiences during the rehearsal. I don't know whether Eötvös had prepared

a paper to present or not because every time we had so many questions that we ran out of time. We were also given the possibility one time to conduct certain parts of the music. Without the orchestra, but with the help of the tape, we could each conduct our favorite part, in different ways. Eötvös gave us suggestions for improvements so that by the end of the seminar, each of us could have conducted one or two minutes of the music.

I would like once again to stress the excellent cooperation between the composer and the conductor, these two completely different personalities. I am happy, that I, with the support of the Friends of the Music Academy could be present and follow this work. I very much regret that this kind of music is seldom performed here, although the Hymnen was once played in Budapest. Those, who were present at this concert in the middle of the 1980's, remember it as a great experience. I did not hear it that time, but after the performance in Amsterdam, I agree, I agree, I agree. It was unforgettable!

Balázs Horváth

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