

Silent mountains and speaking memories

Leo Brouwer's "Viaje a la Semilla", composed at the turn of the last millennium, promises a voyage to the roots. Such a conception of uniting the present with the past, to make it previous to times past, could be considered as the leitmotif of the collected pieces of composers from three continents. Programmatically, this idea is shown in de Falla's "Homenaje", a composition in which space and time are bundled prismatically. This piece is considered the first guitar composition of the twentieth century that doesn't conceive this instrument from the angle of fringe- or folk-music, but brings it up-to-date with contemporary musical thinking, comparable to a piano. This becomes evident by the context of publication.

In commemoration of Claude Debussy, who died in 1918, the newly founded periodical "La Revue musicale" published, two years after his death, a volume with ten new compositions. While other composers like Paul Dukas, understandably, wrote their contribution for the piano, de Falla was the only one who gave preference to the guitar. There are two possible explanations for this attitude linked with the ideas which de Falla developed at that time in order to fuse Spanish music at the periphery of Europe with its central production. Connected with this fusion of musical languages is de Falla's search to bridge the gap between the twentieth century and tradition by using for instance the clavicembalo in an unconventional way.

In his "Homenaje" de Falla shows Debussy's affinity with Spanish musical language, such as the Habanera or the little quotation of four measures near the end, taken from Debussy's piano-music "La soiree dans Grenade", part of "Estampes". Granada, the town of the Spanish guitar with its great history, was not only de Falla's residence, but also and even more the source of his cultural and musical way of thinking. But Debussy's aesthetics has also an effect on de Falla and his special form or design which Vladimir Jankélévitch describes as a "form consisting of interruptions". Not only with the insertion of the Debussy quotation, but also earlier with the multiple sudden changes of gestures we see the idea of a course of time and tempo varying between continuity and discontinuity.

De Falla bridges the gap between past and present with a return to the generic history of the "Tombeau". The subtitle refers to this tradition, but especially to the publication of this piece "Ecrit pour Le tombeau de Debussy". The Tombeau as a musical tomb-stone goes back to a specifically French tradition. Pierre Boulez still belongs to it with his "Tombeau" for Mallarmé. The Tombeau is a soloistic funeral music beyond religious rituals and was not destined primarily for the funeral congregation, but bears witness of compositional communication between the composers themselves. The most played instrument in the seventeenth century, the period of origin of this musical genre, was not a keyboard or a bowed string instrument, but the luth. This was of decisive importance when de Falla opted for the guitar.

In Habana, Leo Brouwer, just 18 years old and looking for models at the beginning of his career as a guitarist and composer, sketched out such musical portraits and created also two "Homenajes" dedicated to Manuel de Falla and Darius Milhaud. In 1961, after short studies in New York, interrupted by the Cuban revolution, he returned to his home country, composed another "Homenaje" for Béla Bartók and was appointed director of the music section in the Cuban institute of cinema and wrote the music for more than sixty movies, among them in 1964 "Un día de Noviembre" by Humberto Sala. On the basis of this score, arranged for guitar, flute, bass and percussion,

he created later the version for a guitar solo of the theme tune, a real hit or most likely to become one.

In the sixties and seventies he took part in the experimental developments of European music as well as in the American minimal music. The connection with Afro-American roots of the Cuban music tradition was always perceptible, e. g. in the dance-like mobility and gentle melody of "Dos temas populares Cubanos", a lullaby with estranging percussion sounds at the beginning or "Ojos brujos", bewitching eyes, with its sliding alternation of duple and triple metres. Even these short pieces show clearly what Brouwer had in common with Toru Takemitsu, when he emphasized: "He composed music for the guitar in the same manner as he did for an orchestra. That's what I do in my music, and that's why I love him". This orchestral thinking is even more evident in "Viaje a la semilla". Very often Brouwer is inspired by literary patterns. His 5th Guitar concert of 1991 refers to Italo Calvino and the solo "El harpa y la sombra", the harp and the shadow, to a novel of the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier. "Viaje a la semilla" is also linked with this novel. It is the biography of a Cuban aristocrat in inverted chronology, from the deathbed to birth. Brouwer didn't depict this retrograde time structure, as we would expect, in crab-wise figures. What he tried to capture is the progression of time slipping away. Permanent changes of metres and rhythmic fields with slightly shifted accents result in a rolling feeling of time. Rhythm shows the influence of Afro-American sources and harmony the impact of the dodecaphonist Arnold Schönberg to whom Brouwer refers in a very unforced way. All that appears to be the musical expression of a Latin-American sense of time described by Alejo Carpentier: The past is present in the presence, and what is more, in a presence where clear signs of the future are recognizable.

Shifting back from Leo Brouwer's "Viaje" to the time of Fernando Sor, born in 1778 in Barcelona and who died in 1839 in Paris, one could imagine that Brouwer's composition like Sor's "Le calme", calm, with the subtitle caprice, is a piece that takes up and develops a spontaneous idea in a free, capricious way. Sor means by caprice the charming digressions and irregular turns of phrases, from major to minor e. g. Sor's piece was probably published by 1832 in Paris at exactly the time when Chopin's mazurkas were all the rage. And the very model of the mazurka shows through in the typical shaping of the ternary time in "Le calme".

Lennox Berkeley and Alan Rawsthorne, born in 1903 and 1905, belong to the generation of English composers who were influenced and even dominated by the ten years younger Benjamin Britten. Berkeley and Britten met for the first time in 1936 and wrote soon afterwards a joint composition, the orchestral suite "Mont Juic" which uses a political background in the form of Catalan themes. In their youth, Berkeley and Rawsthorne, like Britten, looked for stimuli beyond English musical life. Rawsthorne studied in Berlin, Berkeley with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. Berkeley had completely forgotten that, while in Paris, he had composed a guitar piece for the young Segovia. So when in 1957 Julian Bream asked him to write something for the guitar, it was not a premiere. Berkeley picked up the threads of this composition, a sonatina, later in 1971, when he wrote his op. 77 "Theme and variations", a grave piece. In melody and rhythm it resembles a funeral march.

Rawsthorne's "Elegy", also created in 1971, is quite different from Berkeley's variations. It is his last composition before his death in the same year, published by Julian

Bream on the basis of rough sketches. The middle part is called "Allegro di bravura e rubato" and develops in its chromatic runs of semiquavers a mood of panic and anguish similar to what we feel in the music of Schostakowitsch.

Qu Xiao-Song was born in 1959 in the South Chinese province Guizhou. His youth coincides with the cultural revolution between 1966 and 1976. He was sent to the countryside and had to work as a peasant. He discovered nature as an alternative world, the opposite of towns, and this was also the point of departure for his artistic inspiration and the objective of his compositional commitment.

"I can't bring back the original world and I do think that the sensibility of being close to nature is perhaps the most precious thing mankind has lost by civilization." In 1978 he was among the first students to enter the conservatoire of Beijing for compositional studies. In 1989 he lived as a scholarship-holder in New York and decided to stay there because of the dramatic events at Tiananmen square. After years abroad he is now back in China. In 1990 this temporary situation of silence and search resulted in the first piece of "Ji", quiet, silence, a group of now ten compositions. Ji 3 was written for a solo guitar in 1994 and bears the additional title "Silent Mountain" with the motto: "It goes back to where it comes from."

Listening to the beginning of Ji 3 with its regular juxtaposition of tones and a large scale of intervals in different positions one would not primarily think that this is a typical guitar melody. The structure of "Silent Mountain" is like a song with four verses and an interlude. The melody is based on two pentatonic scales, the first one perfect, the second one dramatized by unfamiliar intervals, increasing until the end of the composition. At the end of each verse the music contracts in irregular repetitions of one sound. Vastness becomes closeness, an irregular pulse like an arrhythmia of the heartbeat. "Mysteriously" we find in the score and "peacefully" at the end of the composition, suggested by the harmonics. Heart and soul melt into the vastness of space.

Übersetzung: Theodor Berchem