

"Siempre he intentado huir de toda etiqueta o clasificación"

entrevista con Ismael G. Cabral

El Compositor Habla 2021

Ismael G. Cabral: Are you aware that your music makes it difficult for music journalists and musicologists? It is exceptionally difficult to classify ...

Peter Ablinger: Thanks, i'm happy to hear that. i was always trying to escape classification. i'm sure this won't go good for ever. at some point you will be caught in your own prison. but if it went already this long - that's not so bad.

IGC: Allow me one more question about labels. Are conceptual composer or sound artist definitions that approximate your work?

PA: Neither of these terms i would use, to describe what i'm doing. I can see why certain strategies in my work might appear conceptual. but for sure, many others are not. there is also a lot of almost "classic" composition work or even craft. and if i was inspired by visual art, it hardly ever came from concept art. to name some: Mondrian, Giacometti, Tàpies, Griffa, Twombly, Newman, Richter, ... from these maybe only Giorgio Griffa could be considered somewhat 'conceptual'.

And about sound art - allow me to copy-in a very recent notebook entry here:

Perhaps what we do and intend should be called 'music art', but never 'sound art'. It is true that sound art was conceived by some as something that should expand the scope of music: Music as a special case within sound art. But the case is quite the opposite. Using the category of sound as a demarcation proves to be a suffocating limitation. Sound does not even fully encompass hearing, let alone the comprehensive range of non-sound categories of musical practice or even reflection. Music, then, conversely goes beyond sound, takes it into itself, as a subcategory, as a historical phenomenon, as a speculative idea, as a wellintentioned error.

IGC: A few days ago I was listening to LP "4 Weiss", which premiered at Wien Modern. It is a fantastic work but with a

provocative character. How much are you interested in, if not provoking, disturbing the public ... shaking it up?

PA: i want to challenge, provoke, disturb, unease at first myself. and once i have the feeling i found something that goes somewhere or that does something, i want to share it with others, even if some of them might feel uncomfortable with what i'm presenting. and a bit annoying the self-satisfied Viennese audience is a good deed in itself - but not the first reason to do it.

IGC: A few months ago, during the confinement, you recommended in a short article for 'The Composer Speaks', listening to various musicians: James Whitehead / Iliat, Marina Rosenfeld, Bill Dietz, Christina Kubisch and Gabriel Pajuk. Neither belongs to the "canon" of contemporary academic music. Do you feel yourself a bit on the fringes of academy?

PA: yes, a bit. half in, half out. first, i never tried to get an academic position myself. of course i was asked many times for guest positions. some Lao-tse or so somewhere said, if the Buddha is asked to become the major of a small village, he will do so. and as i'm much less than Buddha, how could I not do so. second, my membership in the academy of arts in Berlin is just a title of honor; there is no teaching or other academic business connected to that. third, what i really like in this respect is to have private students outside the academic context. and i always have or had.

IGC: Would affirming that Ablinger is, in music, what Joseph Kosuth or Marcel Duchamp were to art would be an immense reductionism?

PA: it would be embarrassing for me. just let me be peter ablinger, that's enough to bear.

IGC: Returning to your catalog this is immense. It gives the feeling that, at the same time, it is also your own life agenda, your way of interpreting reality. Are there works more important than others or do they all have their function and relevance to understanding who Peter Ablinger is and what he does?

PA: you are right with the catalogue. it's an imposition. but also my first orientation through the jungle... more important than the difference of importance of individual works is the difference as such. what i mean: every single piece - be it a tiny miniature or a big work - is (for me, of course) just a different view on, or aspect of, the same whole thing, the jungle. sometimes i'm focusing on a detail, in others trying to get an overview, sometimes i observe from very near, in others from distant. and each

of this operations gives a different angle, different information about the "same" thing. so the shift from one perspective to another is crucial to get in touch with it, to receive something that never could be contained in a single piece. but starting point can be any item.

IGC: A few days ago the group Continuum XXI premiered an extensive piece of his: WIR ALLE HABEN ES GESEHEN. What interests you about baroque instruments and what listening situation (with the audience lying down) do you propose in this work?

PA: the premiere was in Dresden, early October. i don't know what happened in Navarra, because the group decided to make another version than in Dresden, where also 2 speaking and acting performers were involved. and the "infra-beds" in Dresden had bass-shakers, therefore, using the beds was at first related to inaudible but sensible vibrations (infrasonic) - and again, i don't have informations whether this - and other details - happened in Navarra or not.

the piece was a commission by the group - or by Alberto Arroyo, its leader. therefore the instrumentation was given, i had to react on that. and i did so by grasping a musical perspective that goes back even before baroque, to the "viderunt" of Perotin. when i made this decision i didn't know that the "viderunt" was planned to be performed in the same concert - this is true! on the other hand the arching theme of the overall program was the ritual. so my first reaction was, that i said to Alberto, in this case the piece can't be just 15 minutes - ritual of 15 minutes, what would that be? - and second, the audience has to be taken out from its position of the "objective" listener. the audience has to become part of it. a ritual is something you participate, and not observe it from a distant and safe position. these were some of the starting presumptions for the piece.

IGC: On the other hand, "an den mond", on the Inexhaustible Editions label, is also a very recent offering for 1-31 chanting violinist. How important is complicity (Komplizenschaft) with the performers for you when expressing your musical thoughts? In this case Biliana Voutchkova.

PA: wowh, you have that already? i haven't got a single copy of that so far! well, this piece, of course needs a very specific kind of complicity, as it is not composed beforehand and than recorded, but it is composed through being recorded. therefore such process is extremely dependent on the peculiarities and instrumental possibilities of the person with who i am going to do this, in this case Biliana. the only thing that was

slightly prepared, was some text materials out of which i invented some magic spells which served the singing. a year before, during the first lockdown, i did a similar project with flutist Erik Drescher, a piece called "Wider die Natur"; a CD should appear soon at Kairos. this was the first time - at least since i was a jazz musician at the age of 19 - that i collaborated with instrumentalists in such a way. we could call it composing "al fresco".

IGC: What can you tell us about the program that the Ensemble Phace will finally be able to present in Madrid in December? I have the feeling that it is a great portrait of many of your concerns.

PA: i would say, the program they have chosen will be a good opportunity to examine the above suggested changes of perspective. so it might be not only about the question what an individual piece is doing, and how, but also what 2 apparently very different pieces have in common. Feldman - his voice will be in the program - asked for something related, asked for not what is happening between the first and the last note of a piece, but between the last note and the first in the next piece to be composed.

IGC: You, in Spain, are a visiting professor at the Katarina Gurska center. What do you think students are looking for, in Madrid or anywhere, when they approach you for their lessons?

PA: how can i say or summarize that, they're all different. ok, some are using the opportunity to get a closer understanding of my own work, but this is not so often. usually they are presenting something of themselves and we are discussing that afterwards. my work than doesn't play any role, just my experience.

IGC: What are you composing at the moment? Or when you stop spending your time on these questions ...

PA: ... a piece, also a commission, for a young ensemble from Switzerland. again a longer piece, but this time already on request; for 7 performers, some classical, some non-classical instruments and other objects. and as this will happen as part of a concert series staged in a former metal-factory they called the series "in metal". that's where i remembered some experiments with large metal sheets and transducers that i did in the mid nineties but never made something out of it. meanwhile i have metal sheets and transducers here in my Berlin studio, but i don't know yet in which direction the piece will finally go.

(e-mail interview, original English text)