



# A DAY IN THE LIFE

Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Klang – Die 24 Stunden des Tages*, a cycle of compositions based on the hours of the day, was recently performed for the first time in its entirety at MusikTriennale Köln by the musikFabrik Ensemble. Christian Mason attended the two days of performances, and kept a diary of an unforgettable and intense experience.

Throughout his composing life Stockhausen sought musical renewal. Initially, this meant expanding the gamut of compositional possibilities, yet as time passed it became clear that this was also an attitude rooted in a desire to discover the place of the human in relation to a vast, expanding cosmos. If we humans are a microcosm, then we should indeed reflect the growth that we observe in the macrocosm – renewing our selves through our creations. This idea of an inherent relationship existing between small and large scales became increasingly prominent in Stockhausen's work during the 1970s, culminating in his grand 'cosmic drama' *Licht* (1977–2003). When I attended the Stockhausen Courses in 2004, *Sonntag*, the final day of *Licht*, had only just been completed, but the question "what next?" already seemed to hang heavy in the air. When the world premiere of the entire *Klang* cycle (2004–2007) was announced this May, to be performed by musikFabrik Ensemble at MusikTriennale Köln, I found myself on a journey to Cologne in search of the answer.

Rather than being presented with a succession of pieces in a single place, we could choose our own pathway through *Klang's Hours* – paradoxically removing them from the sense

of large-scale temporal progression associated with a 'normal day'. Moving between the nine venues, each with its own micro-cycle of recurring pieces, enhanced the sense of occasion and discovery. It also allowed the rare chance of attending repeat performances if desired. To absorb 21 new works in two days was not really the point, but rather to find a way into the intricate network of relationships that Stockhausen had established between the hours of his 'day', and how that might relate to his 'week' (*Licht*) and other works.

In Stockhausen's best works sound, idea and technique combine to create a unified impact. Spending two days with *Klang*, there were moments when my ears and mind grew tired, but many more of total absorption in the sound. By the end, concentrating on the final flickers of *Cosmic Pulses*, I felt a sense of exuberance at having immersed myself in these works, at having perceived even just a few of the many relationships that course through their veins.

It was appropriate that the weekend concluded with a party at which audience and players alike were welcomed. It felt as though we had been travelling together, and were returning from our journey refreshed, energised and inspired.

### 8 MAY, 15.00, ST ANDREAS

*Freude/Joy, 2nd Hour* (2005), for two harps as one instrument, played by singing harpists, Esther Kooi and Marianne Smit, dressed in ethereal white. A work of beauty and intricacy, characterised by melodic fluidity and textural variety combined with a deeply resonant harmonic language. The archetypes of ascent and descent loom large, but never sound generic in the dreamily ecstatic atmosphere that dominates. At times contemplative, at others almost erotic, the form has a 'subconscious' quality of transforming unexpectedly, yet seeming to make complete sense.

### 8 MAY, 16.00-17.00-18.00-19.00, WDR FUNKHAUS WALLRAFPLATZ KLAUS-VON-BISMARCK-SAAL

*Natürliche Dauern/Natural Durations 1-24, 3rd Hour* (2005–2006), for piano solo (with finger bells and rin). The music seems to be 'about' attack and decay – the two basic elements of the piano sound. We are requested to sit as close to the piano as possible, so as to listen 'inside' the sound, and can hear the harmonics of decaying lower strings mingling with new attacks in the upper register. A sense of intimacy grows from this 'natural amplification' – there's nothing quite like close proximity to a resonant body. I wonder, what makes a duration 'natural'? There's definitely more to this piece than successions of long decays, and they don't always fade to silence. The score reveals Fibonacci numbers used as a structural device.

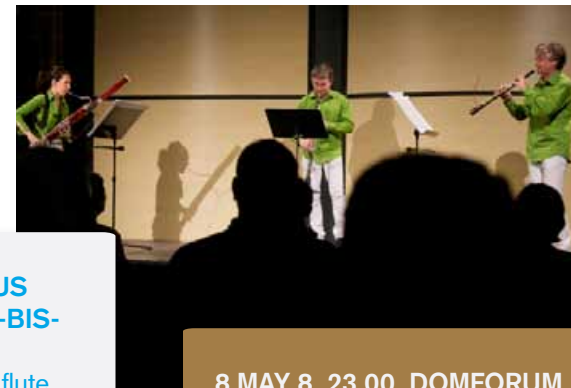
What strikes me after the 24th movement is the realisation that it is either the seed from which the entire work grew, or a compressed recapitulation of it – like viewing a map after walking through a landscape, it reveals on a more comprehensible time-scale the extent of our experience.

**8 MAY, 20.00, ST. ANDREAS**

*Erwachen/Awakening, 12th Hour*, for soprano saxophone, trumpet, cello. Players wearing bright yellow. Limited material, focused on a variety of arpeggio figures – yet myriad shades and colours revealed within this. Little ‘formal direction’; more about ‘being’ than ‘becoming’ – a kind of ‘moment form’. Each player has a cadenza, performed (except by the cello) standing and turning in a circle while playing an arpeggio: if you haven’t already grasped the fact, you now understand that this is music about cycles and recurrence.

**8 MAY, 22.00, WDR FUNKHAUS WALLRAFPLATZ KLAUS-VON-BISMARCK-SAAL**

*Shönheit/Beauty, 6th Hour*, for flute, bass clarinet, trumpet. Players wearing turquoise blue. It’s dawning on me that a large amount of *Klang* must consist of re-compositions/permutations of this trio material.

**8 MAY 8, 23.00, DOMFORUM**

*Balance, 7th Hour*, for flute, cor anglais, bass clarinet. Players wearing deep green. Yet another permutation of the trio! My appreciation waning, possibly through over-exposure...

**8 MAY, 21.00, WDR FUNKHAUS WALLRAFPLATZ KLAUS-VON-BISMARCK-SAAL**

*Glanz/Brilliance, 10th Hour*, for oboe, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, trombone, tuba, viola. Players wearing sulphur green. With a trio of clarinet, bassoon and viola on stage, and more arpeggios and circular motions, the general air of abstraction was unexpectedly dramatised when three off-stage interruptions from a capricious oboe, a blaring trumpet and trombone duo and a surprisingly agile tuba brought a welcome sense of humour!

**9 MAY, 12.15, KOMED-SAAL**

*Himmels-Tur/Heaven’s Door, 4th Hour*, for percussionist (Stuart Gerber, wearing bright blue) and little girl (wearing a red dress). It is not the sound itself (though this is interesting and unique), but the seemingly futile drama of a man trying to enter heaven, which absorbs us. When the door opens, after a bout of simultaneous foot stamping and rapid pummelling, followed by a desperate double-stroke on the upper two panels, he enters to discover a heavenly world of metallic percussion. So begins a conclusion of joyfully clashing resonances, during which a little girl mysteriously leaves her place in the audience and enters the door. The sound subsides and I wonder – in the best possible way – “why?” The answer remains elusive.

**9 MAY, 14.15, KOMED-SAAL**

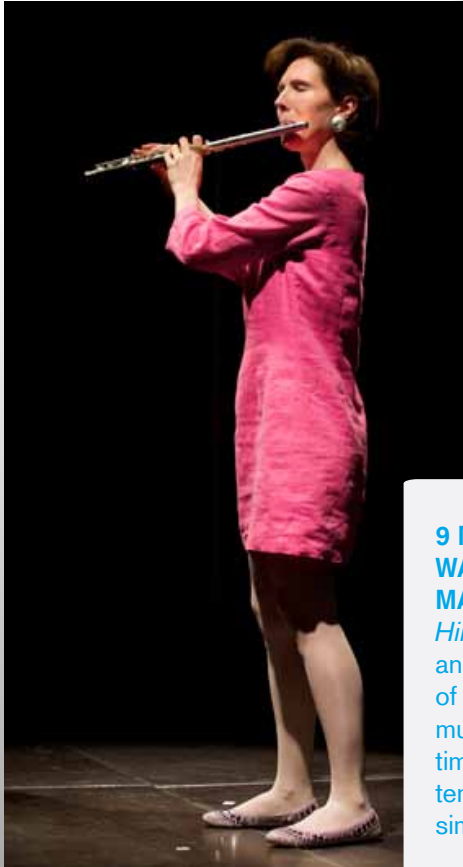
*Orvonton, 15th Hour*, for baritone (wearing 'yellow-orange' quasi-sci-fi/priestly robes) and electronic music (layers 21-20-19 from *Cosmic Pulses*). At moments the quasi-ritualistic invocation of the text (combining words based on the Urantia Book with technical self-analysis!) verges on absurdity: "Orvonton, ich bin ein Bariton" certainly gets a few laughs! Also, something dark and incomprehensible about the music.

**9 MAY, 15.00, STUDIO DER MUSIKFABRIK**

*Paradise, 21st Hour*, for flute (wearing pink) and electronic music (layers 3-2-1 from *Cosmic Pulses*). Beautiful, joyful, inspiring – unusually 'bright' music. Occupying upper regions of pitch space, the electronic part brings to mind a vast flock of virtual birds, chirping incessantly. The flute seems to dance and float below these glistening layers.

**9 MAY, 17.00, WDR FUNKHAUS WALLRAFPLATZ KLAUS-VON-BIS-MARCK-SAAL**

*Himmelfahrt, 1st Hour*, for soprano, tenor and synthesizer. Strangely reminiscent of over-the-top late 19th-century organ music, but with unbearable synthesizer timbres. Tiring to listen to the multiple-tempo counterpoint, despite the pure simplicity of the vocal parts.

**9 MAY, 22.00, STUDIO DER MUSIKFABRIK**

*Hoffnung, 9th Hour*, for violin, viola, cello. Players wearing yellowish-green. Never has Stockhausen sounded so close to Brahms! Not formally, harmonically or melodically – in these respects it is largely the same as the other *Klang* trios – but the *sound*, this being the only traditional string ensemble piece in his entire output, utterly transforms the nature of the idea. The music also demands a captivating virtuosity of the players.

**9 MAY, 23.00, KÖLN PHILHARMONIE**

*Cosmic Pulses, 13th Hour*, electronic music in 24 layers. Like floating through an immense storm cloud: below, an abyss of darkness; above, glimmering rays of bright light just shining through. The richness is born of incomprehensible density: one is dazzled by possibility and rendered helpless... Full of awe, yet frightening, it combines raw sound energy with a grand sense of contemplative speculation.

