

Tigran Manssurian

- Biography -

Tigran Manssurian was born on 27 January 1939 in Beirut, Lebanon as the child of an Armenian family. He was repatriated into Soviet Armenia in 1947, attended the Music College and finally the Conservatory in Yerevan in 1965. He then completed a term as aspirant in the composition class of Lazar Martirosovich Sar'ian in 1968 as well. In 1963–64 he was concertmaster of the Choreography School in Yerevan, 1964–65 editor at Armenian Radio and has been teaching analysis and form at the Yerevan Conservatory since 1967.

Together with Ervand Erkanian, Alexander Arutiunian, Alexander Adjemian and Avet Terterian, Manssurian belongs to the leaders of the Soviet Armenian avant-garde. His spiritual models include Debussy, alongside the Armenian national composer Vartabed Komitas (1869–1935). He is aware of the national legacy of Armenian culture and is impressed by its natural lyricism – from this a certain sound mysticism results in his music which has nothing to do with forceful folklore. Manssurian has the following to say about this: "The medieval monody of Armenia plays a major role in my music. It is my cultural memory which helps me understand the present." Instrumental genres dominate his oeuvre – concertante and chamber music forms. He has turned primarily to texts by Armenian poets in his vocal works, but also to those by Federico García Lorca (*Three Romances*, 1966), the Czech Vladimir Holan (*Intermezzo*, 1973), Hans Christian Andersen (the ballet *The Snow Queen*, 1988) and from the Bible (*Miserere* for voice and string orchestra, 1989). Poetical forms of ancient Armenian poetry such as "Tagi" and "Airenen" have exercised an influence on his musical forms.

Manssurian's music reveals strongly gestural components, also when it is orientated on conception of sonoristics – the research into and expansion of sonic possibilities through playing techniques and electronic distortion – and minimal music. In his *Four Miniatures* for piano (1969) one can still sense traditions of neoclassicism; in the *Three Pieces for Piano* (1971) one senses the confrontation with the legacy of Webern which was generally widespread in the Soviet musical world at that time. In his *Silhouette of the Bird* for percussion and piano (1973), improvisatory gestures are combined with the search for new sounds and sound forms. The first traces of minimalist reduction are noticeable in *Nostalgia* for piano (1976), e.g. in expanded time spans and rests, as is also the case in the ritual *Tovem* for 15 instruments (1979) with the use of ancient Armenian musical materials – a composition dedicated to Alfred Schnittke. Other pieces were dedicated to Krzysztof Penderecki (the "madrigal" *Two Girls*, 1980) and to the memories of Shostakovich (*Concerto No. 1 for Violoncello and Orchestra*, 1976) and Stravinsky (*Since I Do Not Hope* for 15 instruments, 1981).