

Jens-Peter Ostendorf

- Biography -

Jens-Peter Ostendorf, born on 20 July 1944 in Hamburg, studied at the Music Academy of his home city, in particular the subjects of music theory and composition (Ernst Gernot Klußmann, Diether de la Motte), music pedagogy and conducting (Wilhelm Brückner-Rüggeberg). In 1968 the Bach Furtherance Prize, a stipend of the city of Hamburg, made it possible for him to work at the composition studio of Stockhausen and to participate in the latter's collective composition "Musik für ein Haus" (Music for a Building). From 1969 until 1978 Ostendorf was director of stage music at the Hamburg Thalia Theatre. He also co-founded the group "Hinz & Kunzt," an ensemble for scenic music particularly dedicated to the work of Hans Werner Henze, during this period. In 1972 Ostendorf also began a period of study of experimental phonetics at the University of Hamburg.

In 1973/74 he received the stipend "Villa Massimo" of the German Academy in Rome. There he became a friend of the French composer Gérard Grisey, co-founder of the group "L'itinéraire," whose material-orientated aesthetic Ostendorf shared from this point onwards. The Roman studio discussions animated Ostendorf to intensively occupy himself with the physical conditions of timbre. – He was invited to take up a working residency at Villa Massimo again in 1976 and also at the Villa Romana near Florence in 1977.

In 1979 Ostendorf undertook a study-trip to the Sahara and to the island Djerba (making recordings of Tuaregg vocal music and songs of the Jews of Djerba). A half-year stipend sojourn at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris immediately followed. In 1980 he worked at the IRCAM in Paris and accepted a teaching position in music theory, composition and analysis at the University of Bremen. In 1981 and 1983 he visited Cuba in order to pursue musical and sociological studies there. He participated at the Congress for Electronic and Computer Music and supervised programmes of Radio Cuba in Havana.

In 1987, during the course of the festival „New Music from the Federal Republic," he was invited to Kiev in order to attend the Ukrainian premieres of his orchestral works *Mein Wagner* (1983) and *William Ratcliff: Psychogram* (1984). During the same year, the city of Gütersloh organised a six-day Ostendorf Portrait.

Ostendorf, known as a composer of film music, but especially for his renewal of music theatre – *William Ratcliff* (after Heinrich Heine, 1979/82; 1st new version 1987, 2nd new version 1992), *Murieta* (Pablo Neruda, 1978/84), *The Fake Prince* (after Wilhelm Hauff, 1989), *Questi fantasmi ...!* (after Eduardo de Filippo, 1990/92), *Cyrano's Voyage to the Moon* (after Cyrano de Bergerac, 1992), *The World Master Builder* (after Bruno Taut, 1993) – lived and worked in Hamburg and Formentera, Spain. His production ceased during the mid-1990s as a result of an incurable illness. Ostendorf died on 7 March 2006 in Norderstedt near Hamburg.

Theodor W. Adorno was not progressive enough for the younger generation in Hamburg around 1968. Their thinking was more in line with that of Hanns Eisler. Adorno's thesis that music is – like all art – "just as much a social fact as a fully-formed thing in and of itself" was insufficient justification for the music that Ostendorf and his fellow students had in mind: belligerent, political, "relevant to society" music which would attack and intervene, not disdaining to "dirty itself" from and with reality. Instead of settling for unrealistic "l'art pour l'art," like their academy professors, whom they accused of being snobbish "eminences," the young people musically criticised what was insufferable in politics and society: Vietnam, Chile, atomic bomb tests and concentration of capital.

Ostendorf collected set pieces from only too-well-marketed "music of distraction," in order to reset them in a pointed, "debunking" way: music as a weapon. There resulted a "community of fighters" with Hans Werner Henze, then at the height of "citizens'" destruction" ("Essay on Pigs," "The Raft of Medusa"): within the group "Hinz & Kunzt" Ostendorf was involved in Henze's "Cantiere" in Montepulciano in Tuscany.

From those years, Ostendorf retained a certain tolerance towards the musical material. Integrating echoes of various stylistic levels and social spheres in his music presented him with no particular aesthetic problems. Ostendorf hardly placed any value on being an "original genius." Mere row and interval calculation interested him just as little. Two characteristics mark the physiognomy of his writing: a substantial monophony or at best two-voiced polyphony which fans out into a varied polyphony gained through "heterophonic" multiplication, as well as a "twelve-tone-like" basic shape, formed out of nine different notes, extending over the whole work, more or less determining the entire oeuvre. The mother cell, which begets new daughter cells in each work, contains three tritones: a a-flat g d-flat c b-flat e e-flat d-flat c-flat e-flat a.

The oeuvre as a "large-scale variation cycle," indeed a "gigantic Passacaglia" – this self-definition does indeed render Ostendorf a unique case, an "original." Time and again, he was occupied with the phenomenon of time and processes running their course in time: this was the reason for his affinity with film music and music theatre. As a decided "time former," he loved marked forms – in the Heine opera William Ratcliff (1979/82; 1987; 1992) there are sections marked "Rondeau," "Passacaglia," "Processes" and "Reprise," all primarily closed formal entities. Ostendorf's operatic music searches for extreme situations of drama. A figural division in three (two singers, one pantomime) and eleven-part multiplication of voice on tape correspond to the ego-splitting of William, for example. Nor does the composer shy away from the speechlessness of horror: when men of the Ku-Klux-Klan rape and kill Murieta's wife Teresa, Ostendorf's music is etiolated into toneless noise (Murieta, 1984).