

Sir Harrison BIRTWISTLE

SONGS 1970–2006

NINE SETTINGS OF LORINE NIEDECKER

NENIA: THE DEATH OF ORPHEUS

SONGS BY MYSELF

ORPHEUS ELEGIES

CANTUS IAMBEUS

FANTASIA III

LULLABY

FRIEZE I

INTERVIEW WITH BIRTWISTLE

Alice Rossi, soprano
Das Neue Ensemble
Stefan Asbury, conductor
Kuss Quartet

Soloists of the Hochschule für
Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

SIR HARRISON BIRTWISTLE ON HIS SONGS

Interviewed by Stephan Meier

The part of this interview between ** can be heard as track [27](#) on the CD.

Yesterday the Sinfonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks premiered your piano concerto, entitled Responses: Sweet Disorder and the Carefully Careless.¹ This weekend we have you as a guest in Hannover and on Monday you go to Porto to attend the next performances of the piano concerto. Touring round Europe – meanwhile, when do you compose?

I'm composing now. I'm not being funny, but you know, then there is the whole question of sitting down and doing it. I've been busy this year because I had a birthday² and there's been a lot of celebrations around. But I've still been working and the important thing about working, which I suppose all of you, all you, everybody realises, is that you, even in small pieces, in small packets, if you're consistent and keep at it, you can create a lot of work. But obviously, when you are moving around Europe, you can't do that, but I've worked pretty hard this year – apart from being here, as it were.

So would you, like Stravinsky, note something on a napkin?

I don't know I'd like to be like Stravinsky.

For putting it on music-paper you go to your working place.

Yes, and I've always had a special room, a space. For many years I built in three, maybe four, places octagonal studios, but my latest house doesn't have that because (I don't know if you have that in Germany) of building regulations on interesting buildings: as soon as you want to do anything interesting, you're not allowed to do it; you've got to make it look as boring as everything else. But I do have a place where I go to, at some distance from the house.

You would say this place is what you need most for composing?

¹ The world premiere of *Responses* was given by Pierre-Laurent Aimard with the Sinfonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks conducted by Stefan Asbury in the Herkulesaal in Munich on 24 October 2014.

² Birtwistle's 80th birthday fell on 15 July 2014.

It's the only place, the only place. I can put things down and leave them without anybody cleaning them up or moving my pencil or whatever.

In our concert programmes, we have instrumental music and we are going to hear your vocal music.

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My songs. I have to apologise for my songs in what you are about to hear, because they are an aspect of my personality that is to do with my melancholia. I don't write fun songs. I use songs in order to express the thing that sets me going with songs. And so, consequently, when you hear the songs of mine, you see a personality of what I would call melancholia. In England we have a very potent piece of melancholia in the Elizabethan music of Dowland, which I'm very attached to. And I think, in a way, not self-consciously, but I've tried to, in a way, tried to express some of the qualities of Dowland. But the most wonderful thing about Dowland is that they're like pop singers in a sense. Only one sense: the extraordinary thing about pop music is that the singers, the makers of the invented song, they are the singers; the singer and the song is the same thing – The Beatles, you know, and things like that and all those people. Whereas we don't have that anymore. I write the music, and somebody else sings it or plays it. And Dowland, that wonderful thing, where presumably he was a lutenist, he'd play the lute and [had] the relation of the instrument that he played and then he sang and he also wrote the texts of it. So that, I think, not particularly self-consciously, has permeated my work in setting text. Before music, I was very interested in verse and texts of poetry and now today (it sounds very high-flown: I've got to be careful of this) I do read verse a lot. It's the one thing that I read: a lot of modern verse, a lot of old verse, with an eye to what is possible to set, really. I mean, that's one aspect of it always at the back of my mind: is this settlable?

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Can you explain what is settlable? Why is something settlable?

Well, I don't know. It's something that I can see that makes the juices flow for other possibility. It's to do with the text in terms more than the content but the words that you sing. I work with an English poet called David Harsent who has written opera libretti for me,³ and I also wrote a song-cycle⁴ for [Mark]

³ Birtwistle set Harsent libretti in the operas *Gawain* (1991, rev. 1994) and *The Minotaur* (2008), and the music-dramas *The Woman and the Hare* (1999), *The Ring Dance of the Nazarene* (2003) and *The Corridor* (2008) all use Harsent texts.

⁴ *Songs from the Same Earth* (2012–13), settings of ten poems by David Harsent.

Padmore, the wonderful English tenor, and I encourage to [write] words which instil a sort of music. A word that comes off the top of my head is words like 'cool' or 'dark' or, you know, whatever, you know, it pushes the direction of where the music would go. It's interesting that I came to Celan as an innocent about his poetry. I had bought a house in France, and at the point where I had more or less moved into the house, I was commissioned to write a song. The only thing I had in this house in France was this poem in *The New York Review of Books*. I didn't know about Celan, I didn't know the baggage of the fact that he was Jewish, that his parents died in Auschwitz – I didn't know anything about this: it was just a beautiful poem, and I set it. Once I had set it, I got interested and found all the baggage of the poet later. I was criticised by German-speaking people because I had set them⁵ in English. Well, I didn't have any alternative. To being with, I only knew them in English and it was the English that set me going as to what I wanted to do. At the same time, I was asked to write a piece for the director of my publisher who was 90, and would I write a piece for string quartet.⁶ So these two pieces come from the same brain at the same time, because the music that I had written for the song, when you write a song the music begins and then the music in a sense has a life of its own.

If you take any song by Schubert or whoever, what the composer is bringing to it is a sort of interpretation of the mood of what he does: you set a song, a poem, to music. It's something that, you know, when you make jelly, you set it, you fix an element, you fix an element of the poem. Because then it becomes in a sense the composer's view of it. If somebody else sets it, it might be slightly different. Now it becomes personal because when the poem is set and I've written music... There's another whole layer of the idea of what the relationship of music to the text is. Let me come back to Schubert because he is a good metaphor for what I talk about. In Schubert's setting of poems, they're simply – I say simply, they're wonderful, don't get me wrong! But the relationship of the two things is simple, particularly the piano music that goes with the song is sort of background, it's actually illuminating the text. But what has happened through the time since that period is that the accompaniment – or the music that is parallel to the text – has a sort of independence. It's a reflection of much more musical content than you would say of a Schubert song. I'm using Schubert as a metaphor for this, so if you take something like *Pierrot lunaire*, I've heard it played without the text, just as instrumental music.

What I did with this piece of Celan, because the string quartet was actually a reflection of the music that I'd taken from the poem, I wrote a piece that was *about* the poem, if I can make that point strong, it

⁵ Birtwistle composed *Three Settings of Celan* for soprano, two clarinets, viola, cello and double-bass in 1989–94, adding six more in the following three years to produce his *Nine Settings of Celan*.

⁶ The first of the *Nine Movements for String Quartet* of 1991–96.

was music about the poem; and so the piece exists as a set of string-quartet movements and as settings of the poems that I chose.⁷ Consequently you have two ensembles in this situation, one for string quartet and one for soprano and this group of instruments. One is a setting of the poem and the other is a reflection of it, and it becomes about the poem.

My thing that I was saying, my apology in a way, that this piece is the lowest point of my melancholy and it's tough grub (do you understand the word?); it's not easy music.

Mentioning Schoenberg, who said he only needed the first phrase of a poem to set it into music, and mentioning Schubert: we don't have to seek an idea of 'absolute music' in your work, as being 'pure' musical sounds, but we have to always seek a mood, seek a theatre, seek a situation?

I mean, no more than anybody else. I'm not unique. It's the nature of the music.⁸

Then you came across Lorine Niedecker, the American poetess.

She's an interesting lady, and I was very attracted to her aphoristic poems which are autobiographical in a sense. She apparently spent her life cleaning offices, as a cleaning lady, and is greatly admired by very eminent poets now.⁹ It's like the poetry of Sappho, or Emily Dickinson: they're aphoristic, small statements. The questions of her life – the thing that recurs more, that comes back more than anything, is the question of water in her life: that she had problems with the pump that you pump water from; she wrote a set of poems about a very heavy bucket, she called it a stone bucket cause it must have been very heavy to lift only because it had water in it. There's a lot of that. I was very struck by these poems. These poems are set for a cello and a voice, and what I attempted to do was to embrace the intimacy of the verse, the fragility of the verse. I come back to the thing I'm talking about: this question, of what the secondary material is: the verse? the cello? which is not necessarily, it depends how you listen to it. I invite you to

⁷ The *Nine Movements for String Quartet* together with the *Nine Settings of Celan* form Birtwistle's *Pulse Shadows*.

⁸ Cf. Michael Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, Robson Books, London, 1984, p. 34:

Birtwistle conceives all his music theatrically. It is not merely dramatic in the sense that Beethoven's music is dramatic; it is as if the platform were a stage and the players dramatis personae. His first task, therefore, is to set the scene and locate the players within it; his second is to establish these characters. Since drama requires conflict, in both these areas there must be strong conflict. Control is therefore contrasted with waywardness.

⁹ Lorine Niedecker (1903–70) was born near Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, and grew up in rural isolation. In the 1930s she was associated with the 'Objectivist' school of American poets but slowly fell from public attention, living in considerable poverty and working as a hospital cleaner in Fort Atkinson. A revival of interest in her poetry in the 1960s coincided with a second marriage which at last brought her a degree of financial stability.

listen to it in these terms: what the relationship is of the cello with the voice. This is intimate poetry, this is someone expressing very inward thoughts, and I attempted to have it *sotto voce*.

There's one personality which has re-occurred in your work: you wrote Nenia: The Death of Orpheus in 1970, and then came The Mask of Orpheus, your first big opera, in 1986; in 2004 you wrote the Orpheus Elegies, and then from 2008 there's the scena The Corridor, which is the moment where Orpheus looks back.

Well, there was a famous day of my life, because I was commissioned by Covent Garden to write an opera, which was going to be *Faust*. And in the course of doing it, thinking about Faust, I realised that Orpheus was a better subject. Why? Because it uses music as a subject, as the energy of the narrative. And when telling a myth, use a myth that everybody knows – in the case of the one you're talking about, when he turns, everybody knows what that means. (This is another talk I could give you, I'd give you two hours on this, but anyway.) So Orpheus has been something that's been with me, and maybe an obsession, but it means, it simply meant that I didn't need to think of a subject-matter anymore, because there was sufficient in it to last me a life-time.

Now for tonight's Orpheus Elegies, for which you chose the version by Rainer Maria Rilke, which of course we find very nice.

Yes, wonderful! But I didn't set the words. Like in Debussy's preludes, where he writes at the end of the prelude what it's about ('Claire de lune'), not at the front, I put at the end of each a text from Rilke. I set it because I worked very much with a very wonderful harpist and oboe-player. It became this sort of idea of writing 'time in music'.... Oh dear, I'm getting into areas we can't deal with because it's too difficult. If there was time, I could, I'd have a go, but it's the question of continuity and discontinuity; and I wrote what I call 'musical postcards' for harp and oboe, and they're very short little things. I encourage the players to put them in any order they like, apart from the first and the last, and to choose from them. In the course of doing them, I thought that I can't not have something of the text, so I introduced a counter-tenor to sing some of the fragments from the poems. So the whole cycle has a counter-tenor; but I see the oboe as being the voice of Orpheus, not the counter-tenor.

So again, this is a sign that for you instrumental music and vocal music are two sides of the same medal?

Exactly right, yes, you've got it right, that's exactly what it is.

SIR HARRISON BIRTWISTLE'S VOCAL MUSIC

by Stephan Meier

From the very beginning of his career, well before his international breakthrough with the chamber opera *Punch and Judy* in 1968, one characteristic of Harrison Birtwistle's output has been its considerable emphasis on vocal music. This impression is reinforced by his ongoing engagement with the Orpheus myth and by his use of vocal techniques – such as hocket – in instrumental music. This inclination to vocal writing was present in his very earliest works and has continued to grow since then. Alongside major commissioned works and operatic productions there have emerged – partly in response to commissions – entire series of smaller works scored for chamber ensembles with voice(s) or with vocal characteristics. This recording aims to put this music under the spotlight.

Nenia: The Death of Orpheus (1970)

Nenia: The Death of Orpheus for soprano and ensemble ^[1] was commissioned by Jane Manning and first performed by her and Matrix, the group newly founded by the clarinettist Alan Hacker. It was Birtwistle's first treatment of the Orpheus myth, and a whole series of works in various forms were to follow, among them the opera *The Mask of Orpheus* (1973–84). The text of *Nenia: The Death of Orpheus* was written by the electronic engineer, writer and composer Peter Zinovieff (born 1939), who was also to write the libretto of *The Mask of Orpheus* and provide the texts for a number of other Birtwistle works. In the traditional version of the myth, Orpheus is torn apart by Maenads, who throw his head and lyre into the river Hebrus. Zinovieff adds an imagined dialogue with the dead Euridice confirming their love. Birtwistle deconstructs Zinovieff's text, tearing it apart in an echo of Orpheus' own dismemberment. The soprano part is polyphonically treated – an approach which may have been suggested by Berio's *Sequenza III* for female voice, composed in 1965, five years earlier – since the singer takes three roles: narrator, Orpheus and Euridice, all operating in different 'times' as well as layers of sound: spoken, half-sung and sung. These layers are mirrored in the ensemble, which comprises crotales, a partially prepared piano and three bass clarinets which, Michael Hall has suggested,¹ represent the Maenads when they flare into frenzied activity at the end of Euridice's song.

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 77.

Orpheus Elegies (2004)

Birtwistle described the 26 miniatures for counter-tenor, oboe and harp which constitute his *Orpheus Elegies* as ‘postcards with cryptic texts.’² They are responses to Rilke’s *Sonette an Orpheus*. Birtwistle offers the performers numerous opportunities for freedom of interpretation – for instance, in the selection and sequence of the pieces; a few are notated in the form of a mobile, that is, without fixed relationships of the instruments and singer in time. The choice made for this CD presents three with the counter-tenor singing Rilke’s original poems [4] [6] [9] and five purely instrumental [2] [3] [5] [7] [9], two of them [5] [8] making additional use of a metronome that the singer sets in motion. The score prints fragments of Rilke’s text at the end of each movement that does not set one of the sonnets:

No. 1: ‘Da stieg ein Baum. O reine Übersteigung!’ (‘A tree has risen. O pure transcendence!’)

No. 2: ‘Dieser erst oben doch biegt sich zur Leier.’ (‘He, only at his top, bends towards a lyre.’)

No. 5: ‘Und mit kleinen Schritten gehen die Uhren neben unserm eigentlichen Tag.’ (‘And with small steps, the clocks tick past our authentic day.’)

No. 12: ‘... – ‘Der Leier Gitter zwängt ihm nicht die Hände.’ (‘... – The lyre’s lattice doesn’t force his hands.’)

No. 25: ‘Gibt es wirklich die Zeit, die zerstörende?’ (‘Does it truly exist: Time the Destroyer?’)

Adapted in part from Andrew Clements, The Guardian, 10 July 2009, by kind permission of the author

Nine Movements for String Quartet (1991–96)

The cycle of the *Nine Movements* was created piecemeal. A second cycle, corresponding to the *Celan Settings* of Paul Celan’s poems,³ revealed parallels to the composer himself⁴ and eventually led to the interleaving of both cycles to form *Pulse Shadows*, premiered in 1996. Although each of the *Nine Movements* was written as a self-contained piece and can be performed as a single interlude, or several movements can be dispersed through a programme, and although some elements were not developed beyond the movements in which they appear, they nevertheless share stylistic nuances. Birtwistle plays brilliantly with the polyphonic tradition of the string quartet and enlivens it in inimitable fashion with his own idiomatic touches. The two movements presented here – *Fantasia III* of 1996 [10] and *Frieze I* from five years earlier [20] – are highly expressive and demand virtuosic quartet-playing.

² Booklet note, Oboe Classics cc 2020.

³ Cf. note 3, above.

⁴ Birtwistle discusses the correspondences between the works in his interview on pp. 4–5.

Nine Settings of Lorine Niedecker (1998/2000/2011)

Bleak, sparse? Rather, stringently concentrated: miniatures to verse by the lesser-known American poet Lorine Niedecker [1]–[19]. Birtwistle wrote the first three of nine Niedecker settings for Elliott Carter’s 90th birthday and three more in 2000; an additional three Niedecker settings were composed in 2011. Any selection of songs may be performed, but No. IX, the last of the first set [19], should always be included and placed last. They are brief items, of one to two minutes’ duration, that demand incredibly precise musicality from the singer and cellist, who have only a few words and notes to conjure up multifarious thoughts and feelings.

Meret Forster, head of the Editorial Department, Classical Music, Bayerischer Rundfunk

Lullaby (2006)

Birtwistle has paid sentimental homage to ‘the North’ in a number of works with autobiographical overtones, sometimes treating it in an historical-mythical manner, as in the chamber opera *Yan Tan Tethera* of 1984 (Birtwistle termed it a ‘Mechanical Pastoral’).⁵ This setting of a poem, part lullaby, part carol, by Martin Luther translated by three late-Mediaeval Scottish poet-brothers – James Wedderburn (c. 1495–1533), John Wedderburn (c. 1500–56) and Robert Wedderburn (c. 1510–c. 1555)⁶ – can be seen in this light. Birtwistle would doubtless dismiss it as a *pièce d’occasion*, but the fact that this is his second setting of the text – the first, for children’s choir and ensemble, was in *Music for Sleep* in 1964 – speaks otherwise. It sets the text for two soprano parts; the only previous recording⁷ used two choral groups, and so this one employs two solo voices.

Songs by Myself (1984)

Birtwistle’s *Songs by Myself* [22]–[27] are scored for soprano and an ensemble of seven instruments: flute (doubling alto flute), vibraphone, piano, violin, viola, cello and double-bass. The title is entirely accurate: words and music are both by Birtwistle. ‘Words for music are hard to come by’, he explained. ‘These were dredged from the silt of my subconscious during spates of holiday melancholy on the island of Symi in the Southern Dodecanese in the spring of 1983.’⁸ Birtwistle’s texts seem to have been written more with

⁵ ‘Yan tan tethera’ is a dialectal variant of ‘one two three’ in a rhyming system used to count sheep (and stitches in knitting) in northern England; once widespread, it is now largely defunct.

⁶ ‘Ane Sang of the birth of Christ’, published in the Wedderburns’ compilation *Ane Compendious Buik of Godly and Spirituall Sangis*, of which a second edition appeared in 1567 (the first has been lost); its contents had probably circulated as broadsheets before being anthologised.

⁷ By The BBC Singers under Nicholas Kok on Signum Classics SIGCD 368.

⁸ Quoted in Harrison Birtwistle and Christopher Logue, ‘Texts’, *Contemporary Music Review*, Vol. 5, Issue 1, 1989, p. 97.

the sounds of the words in mind than their meaning. The third song [24], for example, opens with a string of colourful images that nonetheless seem secondary to their cumulative effect as vowels and consonants. The vocal line thus proceeds both independent of meaning and independently of the support of the ensemble, which often takes the form of recurrent ostinati. The effect is to create a world of internal contradiction which skirts around concrete meaning in a series of intimate, surreal monologues.

Cantus Iambeus (2004)

The *Cantus Iambeus* of 2004 [23] might at first appear to be a latter-day continuation of the famous *Carmen Arcadiae Mechanicae Perpetuum* of 1977–78: almost identical instrumentation (the *Carmen* for an ensemble of fourteen players and the *Cantus* for thirteen), comparable duration. But even at a first hearing every detail of the music makes it clear how much Birtwistle's style has evolved. The different layers of the texture are much more refined and more buoyant and use richer registers. They interact with less extreme contrasts. At the same time they are completely unified by the use of iambic rhythm, acknowledged by Birtwistle in the invented Latin word in the title. They are unified, moreover, in a single, linear form, with the tempo gradually slowing from the chord clusters at the beginning to the single interval at the end.

Stephan Meier born in 1966, is a percussionist, conductor and composer. He is the Artistic Director of *Das Neue Ensemble* and of the *Netzwerk Musik 21 Niedersachsen*.

Alice Rossi was born in Varese, Italy, in 1992. At a young age she learned the rudiments of harmony, rhythm and singing from her parents Gio Rossi and Jenny Ricci, two experienced jazz musicians. In 2000 she began her formal education in classical music along with keyboard studies with Claudia Bracco. After a few years she decided to devote herself to singing and began studying privately with Francesca Lombardi and Enza Giacoia. In conjunction with her academic studies, Alice also concertises regularly, one recent example being in Britten's opera *The Rape of Lucretia* with the conductor Arturo Tamayo and stage-director Daniel Bauch at the Palazzo dei congressi in Lugano. In addition to the classical repertoire, she also enjoys other genres of music such as jazz, blues, pop and folk.



Photo: Alessandro Ligouri

The **Kuss Quartet** – Jana Kuss and Oliver Wille, violins; William Coleman, viola; Mikayel Hakhnazaryan, cello – first came to prominence in 2002 with first prizes from the Deutscher Musikrat and the Borciani String Quartet Competition in Reggio Emilia. A Borlotti-Buitoni Award followed in 2003, as did their selection for the ‘Rising Stars’ programme of the European Concert Hall Organisation. The Kuss Quartet’s schedule now features such venues as Carnegie Hall in New York, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Wigmore Hall in London and the Philharmonie in its home city of Berlin. Its many festival engagements have included the Schubertiade Schwarzenberg, the Salzburg Festival and the Edinburgh Festival.



Photo: Neda Navace

The Quartet’s repertoire ranges from music of the Renaissance to works by Helmut Lachenmann and György Kurtág, with whom the players maintain a close relationship. The Quartet’s debut CD, *Bridges*, with works by Schubert and Berg, was released in 2011, to be followed by another, *Thème russe*. A third recording with the Schubert Quintet, featuring cellist Miklós Perényi, was issued in 2013.

Das Neue Ensemble was founded by its members under the artistic direction of Stephan Meier in Hannover in 1993 and has since risen to take its rightful place among the leading international contemporary-music ensembles. In 2005 it received the ‘Inventio-Preis’, awarded by the Deutscher Musikrat for innovative programme concepts, and in 2008–11 it was selected along with Musik 21 Niedersachsen as a driving force in the national New Music promotion network of the German Federal Culture Foundation. Its ‘Gelben Klänge’ in the Sprengel Museum, Hannover, brought together music and the visual arts; stellar compositions rang out under the open sky in ‘Moonlight Serenade’; and ‘DaDaBus’ traced the life and work of Kurt Schwitters. Its programmes for children captivate young listeners, and since 1996 the ‘Mobile Musik’ subscription concert series has reached an exceptionally wide audience by virtue of its uncompromisingly high standards.



Photo: Hannes Malte Mahler

Das Neue Ensemble has worked with such eminent composers as Mark André, Earle Brown, Carola Bauckholt, Wolfgang Rihm, Richard Rijnvos, Johannes Schöllhorn and others. Guest soloists and conductors have included Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Johannes Kalitzke, Peter Rundel and Sarah Maria Sun. The group has made guest appearances in Amsterdam, Cologne, Hamburg, Kraków, Munich and Paris. Commissioned by Westdeutscher, Norddeutscher and Bayrischer Rundfunk as well as Austrian Radio

public-service broadcasting, it has performed concerts for radio and made a number of CD recordings.

Das Neue Ensemble is supported by its association of friends, Musik für heute e.V., which also provides rehearsal rooms and office space in the Alte Grammophonfabrik in Hannover.

Brigitte Sauer, flute*

Nehil Durak, oboe

Udo Grimm, clarinet*

Uwe Möckel, clarinet

Sebastian Wendt, clarinet

Cem Aktalay, bassoon

Paola Martínez, horn

Markus Schwind, trumpet

Mateusz Dwulecki, trombone

Stephan Meier, percussion

Mirjam Petri, harp

Sebastian Berweck, piano

Josje ter Haar, violin*

Thomas Huppertz, violin

Heleen Hulst, viola

Reynard Rott, cello*

Benedict Ziervogel, double-bass

**permanent members*

Chief Conductor of the Noord Nederlands Orkest, **Stefan Asbury** is a regular guest with many of the world's leading orchestras. Recent and current highlights include performances with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Sinfonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, the Copenhagen Philharmonic, the Seoul Philharmonic and the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra. Previous seasons have included guest engagements with the London Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, RAI Turin, Seattle Symphony Orchestra, Dresdner Philharmonie, West Australian Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestra of St Luke's. Stefan

Asbury enjoys frequent collaborations with the Basel Sinfonietta, WDR Sinfonieorchester, hr-Sinfonieorchester, NDR Sinfonieorchester and ORF Radio-Symphonieorchester Wien. He is also a regular guest conductor at festivals such as Automne en Normandie, Wien Modern, Wiener Festwochen, Munich Biennale, the Salzburger Festspiele and La Biennale di Venezia.

Since 1995 Stefan Asbury has served on the faculty of the Tanglewood Music Center and has held the Sana H. Sabbagh master-teacher chair on the Conducting Faculty since 2005. He has strong relationships with many composers, including Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Oliver Knussen, Steve Reich, Wolfgang Rihm, Unsuk Chin and Mark Anthony Turnage, and collaborates regularly with Ensemble Modern, Klangforum Wien, Musikfabrik and the London Sinfonietta.



Photo: Eric Richmond

Soloists of the Institute of Chamber Music and Lied, Hannover University of Music, Drama and Media (HMTMH): new music, unconventional concert ideas and experimentation are presented by students of the HMTMH Lied class each year at their 'Liederfest', now six years old. Artistic collaboration with such eminent composers as Aribert Reimann, Wolfgang Rihm, Helmut Lachenmann and now Sir Harrison Birtwistle shapes and inspires these young musicians and regularly leads to invitations and concert appearances – for example, at 'das neue werk' in Hamburg, the Heidelberger Frühling, Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin and Kunstverein Hannover. The principal professor of the chamber-music and Lied course of study is the pianist Jan-Philip Schulze.

The *raison d'être* of **Musik für heute** is the dissemination and promotion of new music, to which end it regularly stages introductions to concerts and new works and offers its members special 'HörProben' ('sound clips'). Direct dialogue with contemporary composers is also an important feature of its work; guests, also at private 'house concerts', have included Helmut Lachenmann and Johannes Schöllhorn, and the pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard was guest soloist for the concert '1, 2, 3 Klavier'. Along with this immediate and personal involvement with new music and its composers, the association also supports numerous international productions by Das Neue Ensemble, commissioning new compositions and backing exceptional projects such as the Ensemble-Gesellschaft, a joint venture by six contemporary-music groups in Germany.

Mobile Musik, the subscription concert-series of Musik für heute, makes a virtue of necessity; the ideal space in Hannover for chamber music is that which is most appropriate for the particular concert theme, and therefore 'Mobile Musik' creates 'composed concerts' that actively involve the venue in events such as 'Gelbe Klänge' ('yellow tones') in the Sprengel Museum of contemporary visual art, 'Tango Alemán' at Tango Milieu or 'Moonlight Serenade' under the open sky.

The network **Musik 21 Niedersachsen** connects new-music initiatives in Lower Saxony, finding artistic and performance forms that respond to and create around the regional and cultural settings of this wide and varied land, and seize this opportunity to carry the contemporary music into the future next on a broader and better established basis. **Musik 21 im NDR** is the name of its series in cooperation with NDR at Kleiner Sendesaal des Landesfunkhaus, curated by Heike Hoffmann, Matthias Ilkenhans, Dr. Margarete Zander and Stephan Meier.

ZUR VOKALMUSIK SIR HARRISON BIRTWISTLES

von Stephan Meier

Von Beginn an, nicht erst seit seinem internationalen Durchbruch mit der Kammeroper *Punch and Judy*, ist Sir Harrison Birtwistles Œuvre von einem starken Schwerpunkt auf Vokalmusik gekennzeichnet. Seine bis heute anhaltende Auseinandersetzung mit dem Orpheus-Mythos verstärkt diesen Eindruck ebenso wie vielfältige vom Vokalen auf das Instrumentale übertragene Stilmerkmale seiner Musik, um etwa die Hoketus-Technik zu nennen. Diese Tendenz zum Vokalen hat auch in seiner jüngsten Schaffensperiode nicht ab-, sondern eher noch zugenommen. Neben großen Auftragswerken und Opernproduktionen entstanden und entstehen ganze Serien von kleineren kammermusikalisch besetzten Werken mit Stimme oder mit vokalem Charakter, z. T. als Auftragswerke. Ziel dieser Produktion ist es, ein erstes Schlaglicht darauf zu werfen.

Nenia: The Death of Orpheus (1970)

Das Werk für Sopran und Ensemble □ ist ein Auftrag für und von Jane Mannings für Aufführungen mit dem damals neu gegründeten Matrix-Ensemble um den Klarinettenisten Alan Hacker. Es ist Birtwistles erste Auseinandersetzung mit dem Mythos Orpheus, der eine ganze Reihe von Werken in unterschiedlichen Gattungen folgen sollten, darunter die Oper *The Mask of Orpheus* (1973–84). Der Text stammt von dem Komponisten und Autor Peter Zinovieff, *1939, der auch als Fachmann für die aufkommenden Möglichkeiten elektronischer Klangerzeugung einige Anziehungskraft auf Birtwistle ausübte und später auch das Libretto zu *The Mask of Orpheus* und Texte weiterer Werke für ihn schreiben sollte. Im Mythos wird Orpheus von den Mänaden in Stücke gerissen, die seinen Kopf und seine Leier in den Fluß Hebrus werfen. Zinovieff fügt einen imaginierten Dialog mit Eurydice hinzu, der ihre Liebe noch einmal bestätigt. Birtwistle dekonstruiert die Textvorlage; und noch der Sopranpart ist wiederum Spiegelbild einer Zerstückelung: Die drei Rollen Nenia/Erzähler, Orpheus und Eurydice gibt die Sängerin in verschiedenen Klangschichten: gesungen, halb tonlos und gesprochen. Ein Ansatz, der mit von Berios fünf Jahre älterer *Sequenza III* (1965) geprägt sein mag. Diesem polyphonen Satz und seiner, man kann sagen, dramatischen Inszenierung entspricht die Wahl des Ensembles aus Crotales, (z. T. präpariertem) Klavier sowie drei Bassklarinetten. In letzteren hört Michael Hall am Ende des Werks den Furor der Mänaden.

Orpheus Elegies (2004)

Harrison Birtwistle bezeichnet diese 26 Miniaturen für Countertenor, Oboe und Harfe als „Postkarten mit kryptischem Text“. Sie sind Reaktionen auf Rilkes *Sonette an Orpheus*. Birtwistle eröffnet den Interpreten dieses Werkes zahlreiche Freiheiten, etwa bei Auswahl und Reihenfolge der Sätze. Einige dieser Sätze sind in der Form eines *Mobiles* notiert, indem der Komponist auf ein klar definiertes zeitliches Verhältnis der Stimmen verzichtet. Die Auswahl auf dieser CD umfaßt drei Sonette [4] [6] [9] und fünf Instrumentalwerke [2] [3] [5] [7] [9], von denen einige [5] [8] auch ein vom Sänger in Gang gesetztes Metronom einsetzen. Neben den Vertonungen sind den Instrumentalstücken Textfragmente von Rilke zugeordnet:

Nr. 1: „Da stieg ein Baum. O reine Übersteigung!“

Nr. 2: „Dieser erst oben doch biegt sich zur Leier.“

Nr. 5: „Und mit kleinen Schritten gehen die Uhren neben unserm eigentlichen Tag.“

Nr. 12: „... – ‘Der Leier Gitter zwängt ihm nicht die Hände.’“

Nr. 25: „Gibt es wirklich die Zeit, die zerstörende?“

z. T. aus *Andrew Clements in The Guardian, 10 Juli 2009, mit freundlicher Genehmigung des Autors*

Nine Movements für Streichquartett (1991–96)

Der Zyklus der *Nine Movements* für Streichquartett entstand Werkteil für Werkteil. Darin einem zweiten Zyklus, den *Celan Settings* auf Paul Celans Gedichte gleich, offenbarten sich dem Komponisten selber Parallelen, die schließlich zu einer Verschränkung beider zu den *Pulse Shadows* führten. Obwohl alle neun Sätze einzeln entstanden und in sich geschlossen sind sowie als Interludium einzeln oder über ein Programm verteilt aufgeführt werden können, und einige Elemente nicht über die Sätze hinweg weiterentwickelt werden, teilen sie trotzdem stilistische Nuancen. Birtwistle spielt virtuos mit der polyphonen Streichquartettsatz-Tradition, die er mit eigener Idiomatik unverwechselbar belebt. Aus dem Livekonzert wurden je eine der „Fantasia“ und eine der „Frieze“ genannten Gruppe aufgenommen.

Nine Settings of Lorine Niedecker (2000)

Karg oder besser: äußerst konzentriert sind diese Miniaturen auf Verse der wenig bekannten US-amerikanischen Dichterin Lorine Niedecker [11]–[19]. Die ersten drei dieser insgesamt neun Niedecker-Settings hat Harrison Birtwistle zum 90. Geburtstag von Elliott Carter geschrieben; drei weitere entstanden 2011. Es sind kurze Lieder von ein bis zwei Minuten, die der Sängerin und dem Cellisten unglaublich präzises Musizieren abverlangen. Wenige Worte und Noten eröffnen vielfältige Gedanken und Gefühle.

Dr. Meret Forster, Redaktionsleiterin E-Musik des Bayerischen Rundfunks

Lullaby (2004)

Die Vertonung des als christliche Parodie entstandenen Gedichts der drei schottischen Dichter-Brüder Wedderburn [21] mutet zunächst wie eine sentimentale Huldigung an „Den Norden“ an, den der Komponist auch in anderen Werken wie der Kammeroper *Yan Tan Tethera* historisch-mythisch überhöht und auch autobiographisch zuordnet. Birtwistle selbst würde sie als Gelegenheitswerk abtun – der Umstand aber, daß diese bereits die zweite Vertonung darstellt, nach der ersten für Kinderchor und -ensemble in der *Music for Sleep* von 1964, spricht eindeutig eine andere Sprache.

Songs by Myself (1984)

An einen Schatten kann sich keiner lehnen, kalte Gedanken können nicht erwärmen, die Zeit steht nicht still – die an Surrealismus und Symbolismus orientierten Widersprüche seiner Gedichte löst Birtwistle auch in seiner Musik nicht auf: *ff* steht gleichzeitig neben *pp*, Akzente fallen gleichermaßen auf die Taktschwerpunkte wie daneben, Motivwiederholungen und *ostinati* sind so dicht verwoben, daß man sie nicht heraushören kann. Die für Momente sehr klar konturierte Gruppierung der Instrumente in zwei Melodiestimmen (Sopran und Flöte), zwei akkordisch geprägte (Klavier und Vibraphon) und einem Streichersatz wird immer wieder aufgehoben, und die Schichten verschmelzen eng miteinander. So entstehen verschlüsselt bekenntnishafte intime Monologe.

Cantus Iambeus (2004)

Der *Cantus Iambeus* [28] mag dem Hörer wie eine aktualisierte Fortsetzung des berühmten *Carmen Arcadiae Perpetuum* mobile scheinen: nahezu dieselbe Besetzung, vergleichbare Dauer. Aber in jedem musikalischen Detail wird auch beim ersten Hören klar, wie sich Birtwistles Stil verändert und, man darf sagen, verfeinert hat. Die verschiedenen Schichten des musikalischen Satzes sind in sich viel feiner und lebendiger artikulierend ausgestaltet und verwenden reichere Register. Sie treten miteinander in weniger extreme Kontraste. Gleichzeitig verbindet sie zum einen vollkommen einheitliches Material: der iambische Rhythmus, den der Komponist im Titel mit einem latinisierenden Kunstwort benennt. Zum anderen sind sie zu einer einheitlichen und linearen Form gefügt; von den Akkord-clustern am Anfang zum einen, einzigen Intervall am Ende nimmt das Tempo immer mehr ab.

Stephan Meier geboren 1966, Schlagzeuger, Dirigent und Komponist. Künstlerischer Leiter von Das Neue Ensemble und vom Netzwerk Musik 21 Niedersachsen.

Alice Rossi wurde 1992 in Italien geboren. Sie erhielt bereits als Kind musikalischen Unterricht von ihren Eltern, den Jazzmusikern Gio Rossi und Jenny Ricci. Sie studierte u.a. bei Claudia Bracco Klavier und nahm später privaten Gesangsunterricht bei Francesca Lombardi und Enza Giacoia. Ihr Studium wird von regelmäßigen Konzertengagements begleitet, u.a. bei einer Inszenierung des *Raub der Lukretia* von Arturo Tamayo und Daniel Bauch. Neben ihrer Arbeit im klassischen und zeitgenössischen Repertoire bleibt sie ihren Wurzeln treu und arbeitet auch als Blues- und Jazzsängerin.



Photo: Alessandro Liguori

Stefan Asbury studierte in Oxford sowie am *Royal College of Music* in London. Das *Leonard-Bernstein-Stipendium* ermöglichte ihm, seine Ausbildung am *Tanglewood Music Center* in den USA fortzusetzen. Dort wurde er 1995 als Dozent verpflichtet und von 1999 bis 2002 mit der Leitung des Bereiches für Neue Musik betraut. Parallel dazu übernahm er für fünf Jahre die Verantwortung als Chefdirigent beim portugiesischen *Remix*. Er gilt als einer der führenden Dirigenten der zeitgenössischen Musik und arbeitet regelmäßig mit den renommiertesten Orchestern zusammen, wie den Symphonieorchestern des Norddeutschen, des Hessischen, des Westdeutschen und des Bayerischen Rundfunks, dem *Koninklijk Concertgebouw Orkest*, der Dresdner Philharmonie, jüngst mit dem *Boston Symphony Orchestra* und dem Gewandhausorchester Leipzig. Als Operndirigent brachte er bei der *Münchener Biennale* 2004 und am *Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie* 2006 neue Bühnenwerke von Johannes Maria Staud und Jan Van Vlijmen zur Uraufführung. Nachdrücklich engagiert er sich für das Schaffen von Steve Reich, Wolfgang Rihm, Rebecca Saunders, Unsuk Chin und Mark Anthony Turnage – dies in Kooperation mit dem *Ensemble Modern*, dem *Ensemble Intercontemporain*, dem Klangforum Wien, der musikFabrik und der *London Sinfonietta*. Regelmäßig ist er als Gastdirigent bei renommierten Festivals präsent wie bei Wien Modern, den Wiener Festwochen, den Salzburger Festspielen und bei der *Biennale di Venezia*. Gemeinsam mit dem Ensemble Intercontemporain nahm Stefan Asbury Kompositionen von Jonathan Harvey auf und erhielt dafür den Choc der Zeitschrift *Le Monde de la Musique*. Seine Einspielung von Griseys *Espaces acoustiques* wurde mit dem Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik ausgezeichnet. Derzeit ist er Chefdirigent des *Noord Nederlands Orkest*.



Photo: Eric Richmond

Sein unverwechselbares künstlerisches Profil mit dem sehr speziellen, weniger plakativ glänzenden als vielmehr sanft leuchtenden Charisma hat dem Ensemble einen festen Platz unter den internationalen Spitzenformationen beschert. Das **Kuss Quartett** (mit Jana Kuss und Oliver Wille, Violine, William Coleman, Viola und Mikayel Hakhnazaryan, Violoncello) wurde 2002 vom Deutschen Musikrat und beim *Borciiani-Wettbewerb* mit ersten Preisen, 2003 mit dem *Borletti-Buitoni Award* ausgezeichnet und von der *European Concert Hall Organisation* für das Programm *Rising Stars* ausgewählt. Seine Weltkarriere führt von der *Carnegie Hall* in New York über das *Concertgebouw Amsterdam* und die Londoner *Wigmore Hall* bis zur Berliner Philharmonie – und umfasst auch zahlreiche Engagements bei wichtigen Festivals, wie etwa der Schubertiade Schwarzenberg oder den Festspielen in Edinburgh und Salzburg.



Photo: Neda Navae

Eine hohe künstlerische Qualität gehört zu den selbstverständlichen Voraussetzungen für ein professionelles Quartett – aber sie reicht heute nicht mehr aus, um auch Zuhörer abseits der treuen Kammermusikabonnenten anzusprechen. Dazu bedarf es neuer Vermittlungskonzepte, ungewohnter Programmideen und nicht zuletzt einer intelligenten Moderation. All diese Eigenschaften vereinen die Mitglieder des Kuss Quartetts wie kaum ein anderes Ensemble.

Weit gefasst begreift das Kuss Quartett sein Repertoire, es reicht von Musik der Renaissance bis zu Kompositionen von Helmut Lachenmann und György Kurtág, zu denen die Gruppe einen engen Kontakt pflegt. Nach dem erfolgreichen Album *Bridges* (Sony Classical) wurde im Januar 2012 wieder eine hervorragend besprochene Konzept-CD veröffentlicht: *Theme russe* mit Werken und Transkriptionen von Tschaiowski, Strawinsky, Schnittke und anderen, nun bei dem feinen englischen Label *Onyx Classics*, wo nach der Debüt-CD (erschienen im März 2011) mit Quartetten von Schubert und Berg 2013 bereits die dritte Einspielung herauskam: das Schubert Quintett gemeinsam mit dem Cellisten Miklós Perényi.

Solisten des Instituts für Kammermusik und Lied der HMTM Hannover: Neue Musik, ungewöhnliche Konzertideen und Experimentelles präsentieren die Studierenden der Liedklasse an der HMTMH jährlich bei ihrem Liederfest, das in diesem Wintersemester zum sechsten Mal stattfindet.

Die künstlerische Zusammenarbeit mit bedeutenden Komponisten wie Aribert Reimann, Wolfgang Rihm, Helmut Lachenmann und jetzt Sir Harrison Birtwistle prägt und begeistert die jungen Musikerinnen und Musiker und führt regelmäßig zu Einladungen und Konzert-auftritten, etwa bei „das neue werk“ in Hamburg, dem Heidelberger Frühling, dem Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin und im Kunstverein Hannover.

Das Neue Ensemble wurde 1993 von seinen Mitgliedern um den künstlerischen Leiter Stephan Meier gegründet. Seitdem haben sich die Hannoveraner einen Platz unter den international erfolgreichen Ensembles für zeitgenössische Musik erobert. Für innovative Programmkonzeption erhielten sie 2005 den *Inventio-Preis* des Deutschen Musikrats; 2008-2011 wurden sie mit Musik 21 Niedersachsen als treibende Kraft für das bundesweite Vermittlungs-Netzwerk Neue Musik der Kulturstiftung des Bundes ausgewählt. Ihre „Gelben Klänge“ im Sprengel Museum Hannover verbanden Musik und Bildende Künste, zur *Moonlight Serenade* erklangen Sternkompositionen unter freiem Himmel, und ihr „DaDaBus“ fuhr auf den Spuren von Kurt Schwitters. Auch mit Programmen für Kinder begeisterten sie neue Hörer; ihre Abonnementreihe „Mobile Musik“ hat aufgrund ihres kompromisslos hohen klanglich-musikalischen Anspruchs ein außergewöhnlich breites Stammpublikum gewonnen. Das versetzt sie in die Lage, aus Hannover aus der Musikgeschichte von morgen Impulse zu verleihen.



Photo: Hanne Malte Mahler

Das Neue Ensemble hat u. a. mit Komponisten wie Earle Brown, Wolfgang Rihm, Carola Baukholt, Richard Rijnvos, Johannes Schöllhorn und Mark André u. v. a. zusammen-gearbeitet. Als Solisten und Dirigenten waren Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Peter Rundel, Johannes Kalitze, Sarah Maria Sun u. a. seine Gäste. Das Neue Ensemble war Teilnehmer der Weltmusiktage, des Kulturprogramms des Deutschen Pavillons auf der Expo 2000 und zu Gast in Hamburg, Paris, München, Köln, Amsterdam, Riga und Krakau. Im Auftrag des WDR, des NDR, des br und des ORB hat es Produktionen für Rundfunk und CD eingespielt. Seine jüngste CD stand 2011 auf der Jahresbestenliste der *Zeit*.

Das Neue Ensemble wird unterstützt von seinem Förderverein Musik für heute e.V., der auch seine Proben- und Büroräume in der Alten Grammophonfabrik angemietet hat. Brigitte Sauer, Flöte, Udo Grimm, Klarinette, Josje ter Haar, Violine und Reynard Rott, Violoncello, sind seine festen Mitglieder.

Musik für heute e.V.: Ziel des Vereins ist die Verbreitung und Akzeptanz Neuer Musik. Dazu veranstaltet er regelmäßig Einführungen zu Konzerten und Werken und bietet seinen Mitgliedern spezielle „HörProben“ an. Auch der direkte Kontakt zu zeitgenössischen Komponisten ist dabei sehr wichtig. Als Gäste, u. a. bei den privaten Hauskonzerten, konnten unter anderem Helmut Lachenmann und Johannes Schöllhorn gewonnen werden, der Pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard war auf Einladung des Vereins Solist des Konzerts „1, 2, 3 Klavier“.

Neben dieser direkten und persönlichen Auseinandersetzung mit Werken und Komponisten Neuer Musik unterstützt der Verein auch zahlreiche internationale Produktionen von Das Neue Ensemble. Er

vergift Kompositionsaufträge und unterstützt außergewöhnliche Projekte wie die Ensemble-Gesellschaft, eine Gemeinschaftsaktivität von sechs Gruppierungen der zeitgenössischen Musik aus Deutschland.

Die Abonnementreihe **Mobile Musik** macht aus der Not eine Tugend. Der ideale Kammermusiksaal in Hannover ist für sie jeweils derjenige, der zum Thema des jeweiligen Konzertes gehört. So entstehen „komponierte Konzerte“, die auch den Veranstaltungsort miteinbeziehen; etwa *Gelbe Klänge* im Sprengel Museum, *Tango Alemán* im Tango Milieu oder die *Moonlight Serenade* unter freiem Himmel.

Musik 21 im NDR: Seit der Saison 2010–11 hat die Musik der Gegenwart in Niedersachsen eine neue Plattform: die gemeinsam von Musik 21 Niedersachsen und der NDR Radiophilharmonie veranstaltete vierteilige Konzertreihe „Musik 21 im NDR“. Im Rahmen der Reihe treten renommierte Interpreten der zeitgenössischen Musik auf, gelangen Werke zur Uraufführung und erhalten Nachwuchsprojekte ihren Platz in den Programmen. Die Künstlergespräche im Anschluss an die Konzerte bieten Gelegenheit die Künstler/-innen des Abends persönlich kennenzulernen und mehr über ihre Arbeit sowie das gehörte Konzertprogramm zu erfahren. Die Programmauswahl trifft ihr Programmbeirat bestehend aus Heike Hoffmann, Dr. Margarete Zander, Matthias Ilkenhans und Stephan Meier.

Musik 21 Niedersachsen 2012–15 vernetzt als überkuppelnder Zusammenschluß Akteure der Neuen Musik, schafft einen Rahmen für die künstlerische Weiterentwicklung und hat das Ziel, eine große Hörschaft zu erreichen. Das Neue Ensemble, das Ensemble L'ART POUR L'ART, das Nomos-Quartett und das Ensemble S erhalten eine vierjährige Förderung; jährliche Projektmittel stehen in offener Ausschreibung zur Verfügung. Projekte im Nachwuchsbereich und das jährlich ausgeschrieben Musik 21 Festival u. a. ergänzen das Programm.

1] *Nenia: The Death of Orpheus*

Peter Zinovieff

Narrator

Orpheus alone on the top of a hill; sings.
 His music, which once moved the shades to tears,
 Now moves rocks.
 Orpheus has turned from women; rejected men;
 Since losing twice his love Euridice.
 She, snake-stung, slipped back across this river,
 (A crazy and, some said, pre-determined whim).
 But what once happened can happen once more,
 So Orpheus sings and plays to move his father Jove,
 To some sort of repentance.
 Singing and dreaming of Euridice
 Whom he sees as a shadow,
 And questions to himself his existence,
 He turns again and again,
 Re-enacting the moment when he last saw her
 Hoping to catch Euridice in time.

Orpheus

'Euridice'

'Euridice'

'Euridice'

'Euridice'

'Euridice, Euridice, Euridice,
 my love
 Euridice, Euridice, Euridice'

Euridice

'Orpheus'

'Orpheus'

'What blame? What sin?
 That of having too much loved
 me?
 Orpheus, my love, love me still
 too much.
 Love me, love me,
 Orpheus'
 'Orpheus'

The snarls of venomous jealous women awoke Orpheus.

They had surrounded him carrying cloves and stones.

They attacked him and killed him.

'Orpheus'

Orpheus was torn apart limb from torso, bones from flesh

'Orpheus'

Blood.

'Orpheus'

All the world and skies mourned and despaired his death.

'Orpheus, my love, Orpheus'

The women were turn to rocks and the rivers moaned,

As his remains were carried on their surface to the sea.

Earthquakes, thunder, floods and darkness.

As is customary.

And that was the passing of Orpheus.

Except for his skull, which, cast up, much later,

On a distant stony shore, was stung,

Or nearly so, by another snake.

'Orpheus'

Orpheus Elegies

Rainer Maria Rilke

4 Nr. 11 Sonnet I¹

Nur wer die Leier schon hob

auch unter Schatten,

darf das unendliche Lob

ahnend erstatten.

Who, in realms of shade,

the lyre dares to raise,

receives in ominous trade

endless powers of praise.

Nur wer mit Toten vom Mohn

aß, von dem ihren,

wird nicht den leisesten Ton

wieder verlieren.

Who, with the dead, on poppy dine,

need nevermore fear:

the true sweetness in his rhyme

shall never disappear.

¹ Rilke's Sonnet I, 9.

Mag auch die Spiegelung im Teich
oft uns verschwimmen:
Wisse das Bild.

Erst in dem Doppelbereich
werden die Stimmen
ewig und mild.

[6] Nr. 14 Sonnet III:
Wandelt sich rasch auch die Welt
wie Wolkengestalten,
alles Vollendete fällt
heim zum Uralten.

Über dem Wandel und Gang,
weiter und freier,
währt noch dein Vor-Gesang,
Gott mit der Leier.

Nicht sind die Leiden erkannt,
nicht ist die Liebe gelernt,
und was im Tod uns entfernt,
ist nicht entschleiert.

Einzig das Lied überm Land
heilig und feiert.

[9] Nr. 20 Sonnet V:
Schließlich zerschlugen sie dich, von der Rache gehetzt,
während dein Klang noch in Löwen und Felsen
verweilte

² Rilke's Sonnet I. 19.

³ An extract from Rilke's Sonett I. 26.

When the lagoon's mirror pane
reflects all unclear,
recall the sign.

Only in the dual domain
can voices appear
forever benign.

Quick though the earth itself churns,
changing like cloud formations,
each fulfilled thing returns
to ancient foundations.

Beyond changing and passing,
freer and higher,
your prelude is alone lasting:
god with the lyre.

Grief is beyond comprehension.
True love has never been learned.
Nor do we know by what agency
we are to death interned.

Only the song over the land
yields blessing and commemoration.

Whipped on by vengeance, they dismembered you
at last,
but your melody resounded intact, in the lion, the
boulder,

und in den Bäumen und Vögeln. Dort singst du
noch jetzt.

O du verlorener Gott! Du unendliche Spur!
Nur weil dich reißend zuletzt die Feindschaft
verteilte,
sind wir die Hörenden jetzt und ein Mund der Natur.

the bird and the tree. In each of these your song
holds fast.

O mournful god forlorn! You inexhaustible trace!
Only because rancor broke and strewed you through
nature
have we learned to hear, become the mouth of crea-
tion's face.

Translation: Robert Hunter

Nine Settings of Lorine Niedecker (2000)

[11] I
There's a better shine
on the pendulum
than is on my hair
and many times
... ..
I've seen it there.

[12] II
My friend tree
I sawed you down
but I must attend
an older friend
the sun

[13] III
Along the river
wild sunflowers
over my head
the dead
who gave me life

give me this
our relative the air
floods
our rich friend
silt

[14] IV
Hear
Where her snow-grave is
the You
 ah you
of mourning doves

[15] V
How white the gulls
In grey weather
 Soon April
 the little
 yellows

[16] VI
My life
by water –
Hear

spring's
first frog
or board

out on the cold
ground
giving

Muskrats
gnawing
doors

to wild green
arts and letters
Rabbits

raided
my lettuce
One boat

two –
pointed toward
my shore

thru birdstart
wingdrip
weed-drift

of the soft
and serious –
Water

[17] VII
Paul
when the leaves
fall
from their stems
that lie thick
on the walk
in the light
of the full note
the moon
playing
to leaves
when they leave
the little
thin things
Paul

[18] VIII
O late fall
marsh –
I
raped by the dry
weed stalk

[19] IX
Sleep's dream
the nerve-flash in the blood

The sense
of what's seen

,I took cold
on my nerves' – my mother

tall, tormented
darkinfested

[21] *Lullaby* (2006)

James, John and Robert Wedderburn

O my deir hert, young Jesus sweit,
Prepare thy creddill in my spreit,
And I sall rocke thee in my hert,
And neuer mair from thee depart.

But I sall praise thee euermoir,
With sangs sweit unto thy gloir;
The knees of my hert sall I bow,
And sing that richt Balulalow!

Songs by Myself

Harrison Birtwistle

22 I

O light set a flame in amber, and freeze
the rose's pulse.

23 II

I lean against a shade, cold thoughts,
so warm your heavy lids with still
shrouded dreams.

This wind which caught me leaving
becalm'd his own shyness... so twist
its keen direction towards a final end.

24 III

Cold statements thaw time's stillness
but once the daydream's midnights
belled slow refrain ends — listlessly
dipping my finger in the petrified waters of
its daytime ring, I move the fretting pulse
of yesterday's tomorrow.

25 IV

Steps; bequeathed entrances, falling
below a line of shore... lie still,
move your eyes, let this vision of time
declare itself void.

26 V

The silence before light cuts a knot of
Dreams.

1—2 2—1 1—2 2—1
glass frame shadows from blue
circles
stops my breath.

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Orpheus Elegies, Nine Settings of Lorine Niedecker, Lullaby and Interview with Sir Harrison Birtwistle recorded live in Kleiner Sendesaal im NDR Landesfunkhaus Niedersachsen, Hannover, on 25 October 2014
Recording engineer: Hans-Ulrich Bastin, NDR

Nenia: The Death of Orpheus, Songs by Myself and *Cantus Iambeus* recorded live in the Orangerie, Herrenhausen, on 26 October 2014
Recording engineer: Hans Erblich, EMR-Audio
Post-recording: Oliver Rogalla von Heyden, HMTMH
Mastering: Hans Erblich, EMR-Audio

Cover photograph of Sir Harrison Birtwistle courtesy of Simon Harsent
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Nenia: The Death of Orpheus und *Songs by Myself* von Sir Harrison Birtwistle
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SIR HARRISON BIRTWISTLE Songs 1970–2006

1 *Nenia: The Death of Orpheus* (1970) 12:45

Orpheus Elegies (2004) 12:09

2 No. 1 2:07

3 No. 2 0:59

4 No. 11 Sonnet I 2:46

5 No. 5 1:07

6 No. 14 Sonnet III 1:30

7 No. 12 0:36

8 No. 25 0:44

9 No. 20 Sonnet V 1:55

10 *Fantasia III* (1996) 1:51

Nine Settings of Lorine Niedecker (2000) 10:30

11 I There's a better shine 0:42

12 II My friend tree 0:35

13 III Along the river 1:08

14 IV Hear where the snow-grave is 0:48

15 V How white the gulls 1:29

16 VI My life by water 2:09

17 VII Paul when the leaves fall 1:06

18 VIII O late fall marsh 0:36

19 IX Sleep's dream 1:23

20 *Frieze I* (1991) 3:50

21 *Lullaby* (2006)** 1:50

Songs by Myself (1984) 7:49

22 I O Light set the flame in amber 0:57

23 II I lean against a shade 1:29

24 III Cold statements 1:36

25 IV Steps 1:30

26 V The silence before light 2:14

27 Interview 3:09

28 *Cantus lambeus* (2004)* 6:20

Alice Rossi, soprano **1** **22**–**26**

Doga Sacilik, oboe **2**–**9**

Jasmin-Isabel Kühne, harp **2**–**9**

Johannes Euler, countertenor **4** **6** **9**

Kuss Quartet **10** **2**

Sophia Körber, soprano **11**–**19** **21**

Sarah Lewark, soprano **21**

Aram Yagubian, cello **11**–**19**

Das Neue Ensemble **1** **22**–**26** **28**

Stefan Asbury, conductor **1** **22**–**26** **28**

Sir Harrison Birtwistle **27**

Stephan Meier **27**

*FIRST RECORDING

**FIRST RECORDING IN THIS VERSION
LIVE PERFORMANCES

TT 60:43