

CHAMBER MUSIC (WITHOUT IMPROVISATION)

- 1993 **Sechs halbe Märsche & fünf ganze Nichtmärsche** for brass quintet (2 trumpets, horn, trombone, tuba), 10 min
- 1994 **Eilt, danke** for double-bass quartet, 8 min
Mozart Balls for string quartet, 5 min
- 1995 **Untitled, but lovely** for oboe and piano, 7 min
Farmers and wives for bassoon and piano, 8 min
Three light movements for five heavy dancers for brass quintet (2 trumpets, horn, trombone, tuba), 6 min
- 1996 **Unidentified melodies** for brass quintet (2 trumpets, horn, trombone, tuba), 5 min
Short developments for wind quintet (flute, clarinet, oboe, horn, bassoon), 5 min
Sunaris for chamber orchestra, 5 min 30sec

WORKS FOR JAZZ SOLOISTS (WITH IMPROVISATION) AND ORCHESTRA

- 1994 **Espace** for clarinet and orchestra (string orchestra, 1 piano, 1 jazz piano, 1 jazz vibraphone, trumpet, oboe, flute, clarinet, horn, bassoon), 30 min
Fünf lyrische Kurzgeschichten for alto saxophone and orchestra (string orchestra, 2 pianos, vibraphone, trumpet, oboe, flute, clarinet, horn, bassoon), 30 min
- 1995 **Quelques petits moments pour M** for trumpet and orchestra (string orchestra, 1 piano, 1 jazz piano, 1 jazz vibraphone, trumpet, oboe, flute, clarinet, horn, bassoon), 30 min

WORKS FOR MIXED ORCHESTRA (JAZZ/ CLASSICAL) WITH IMPROVISATION

- 1994 **M** for voice and mixed orchestra on texts by John Cage (voice, string quartet, 2 pianos, vibes, bass clarinet, saxophone, oboe, horn), 30 min
Verkehrte Welt for viol, cello, bass, 2 saxophones, accordion, trumpet, horn, trombone and tuba, 25 min
- 1995 **Die Ballade der verlorenen Tochter** for soprano saxophone, string quartet, vibraphone and bass, 7 min

Selected Bibliography

- 1995 **Zehn Bagatellen über den Jazz**, Mathias Rüegg, Wespennest. Zeitschrift für brauchbare Texte und Bilder, Vienna
- 1997 **20 Jahre Vienna Art Orchestra** Falter Verlag, Vienna

There are various ways of doing a composer portrait. We have chosen to allow the composer full liberty to present himself from the angle that seems best to him. The approach may be subjective, but it concerns only one person: the composer himself. So as to give the collection of wide-ranging notes a sort of formal unity, we have decided on the principle of the interview, starting from a question common to everybody: **What do you feel when you confront a blank sheet of paper?** The notion of the empty sheet of paper is an invention of the educated middle class. I try to avoid the situation if I can. In other words: if I have to do something, I sketch it out in advance. I make the sketches wherever I happen to be – travelling, at the piano. The starting point is a conceptual idea: I look for something that inspires me, something associative. An idea can be triggered by a certain soloist, an event, a commission – it's also important to think about the instruments a piece is to be scored for, the form to be used and the literary subject, if there is one: in 'M – Concerto for Voice and Silence' it was a text by John Cage. If I know what I want, doing it tends not to be much of a problem. I get the music down on paper very quickly.

You say 'have to'. Why? I only compose when I have to. I don't have the time, maybe not even the inclination, to compose for fun. I never write anything that's going to end up being filed away in a drawer – composing is too strenuous for that. As a modern composer, you should do all you can to get your music heard. And you should always make sure your pieces are as perfectly crafted as possible – you can't simply hand in a piece of manuscript paper and then collect the cheque.

Let me turn to the actual process of composing: you say you compose relatively quickly. Composing means leaving out billions of notes. I find it best to make the selection as rapidly as possible. That gives me direct, spontaneous access to the music. There's still a connection with improvisation. The unconscious mind has a greater chance to reveal itself. Besides, I'm too impatient to leave myself very long. The more time I have, the worse a thing gets. When you compose, you're trapped and have to be able to rely on your instincts – there's no rational explanation for that. Critical distance to a piece comes later.

Why did you start composing? I suppose you could say because I was missing something. When I was taking piano lessons, I used to invent my own variations because I couldn't play what I was supposed to. That was the first step.

Did you have models? It's impossible – audiovisually impossible – to avoid models today. A young musician starting out in the twentieth century hasn't really got a chance. You have to rebel against everything first, otherwise you can't take it. Later on you start having problems because you notice you were wrong about many of the things you rejected. This rejection process targets everything classical, classical jazz and classical 'classical music'. Once you've rejected everything, you necessarily begin moving closer again, because you realize that everything has already been done, that your reasons for throwing everything overboard were ideological, not musical. Rejecting art in itself is nonsense.

What are the consequences of that insight? Either you stop composing altogether or you face the fact that hundreds of years ago, certain people were already making music far more modern than anything you were contemplating. That's just something a person has to live with.

Does that land you in postmodern eclecticism? Not absolutely. When it comes to melody, harmony, rhythm and scoring, it's important to have an idiom of your own. I usually can't think beyond what I'm currently working on. I find it hard to get out of my own skin... in the end it all sounds similar. I'm not good enough to imitate everything. Even if I try to imitate something, the result tends to end up sounding like my work. Sometimes this strikes me as a deficiency and sometimes as a very pleasant advantage. After all, Mozart does very often sound like Mozart. And all of Charlie Parker's up-tempos sound somehow the same, too. But then, if you look more closely, you see that, of course, it's never the same – it's always something different made from the same material.

The devil is in the detail. I'd say so. I may be able to write all but five seconds of a seven-minute composition in two days, but then I need another two days for those five seconds because I'm out to find just the right phrase. But to return to the question of eclecticism: as I see it, a clear line has to be drawn between jazz and classical music. When it comes to jazz, I'm not just a composer, I'm an arranger as well – and that's very important. In jazz you have to create musical opportunities for improvisation, since half the music is improvised by the performers. The pieces are, so to speak, tailored to the musicians. So as a composer/arranger I have to take totally different musical and human perspectives into account. That

Selected Discography

VIENNA ART ORCHESTRA

- Concerto Piccolo** 1981, CD, hat ART
From No Time to Rag Time 1983, CD, hat ART
The Minimalism of Eric Satie 1984, CD, hat ART
Swiss Art Orchestra 1992, CD, Ex Libris
The Original Charts 1994, CD, Verve
European Songbook 1995, CD Verve
La Belle et la Bête 1995, CD, Verve
Nine immortal nonevergreens for Eric Dolphy 1997, CD, Verve/Polygram
Ballads – Quiet Ways 1997, CD, Verve/Polygram
M – Unexpected Ways 1997, CD, Verve/Polygram

MATHIAS RÜEGG

- 3rd dream** 1996, CD, RCA-Victor LCO316

ERNST JANDL

- vom vom zum zum** 1988, LP, Extraplatte
lieber ein saxophon 1991, LP, Extraplatte

VIENNA ART CHOIR

- Five Old Songs** 1985, CD, Moers Music

Biography

Mathias Rüegg was born in Zurich in 1952. After earning a diploma as a primary-school teacher, he studied in Graz from 1973 to 1975 and moved to Vienna in 1976. In 1976 he founded the Vienna Art Orchestra (VAO) and has written most of their programmes ever since (approx. 400 tunes and arrangements). He has also written commissioned pieces for numerous other bands and run workshops all over Europe. Other credits include theatre music for George Tabori and the Serapionstheater, film music and musical collaboration with Ernst Jandl (1983 to 1990). Rüegg has also been the initiator and artistic director of various festivals in Vienna and headed numerous multimedia projects. He co-produced the 'N t M zart' programme for the Mozart Year in 1991 on commission from the BBC. Since 1993 he has been artistic director of a jazz and music club in Vienna, the Porgy and Bess (together with Renald Deppe and Christophe Huber). He began dedicating himself increasingly to chamber music in 1993/94 and has since written concerti for chamber orchestra and soloists and various other compositions.

shifts the question of eclecticism into the background, because compositional originality never has pride of place in jazz. Just think what John Coltrane managed to get out of a fairly banal Broadway tune like 'My Favorite Things'. Eclecticism is a characteristic of jazz. It's a very American quality: Americans take a lighter approach to things – they're not as weighed down as Europeans, who tend to drag a lot of intellectual stress around with them.

While we're on the subject: you've made your reputation less as a classical composer than as the leader of the Vienna Art Orchestra (VAO), one of the best-known big bands in European jazz, which you founded in 1977. You've composed vast quantities of material for the VAO yourself, but you've also arranged and adapted a great deal – from Mozart to Mingus, Satie to Braxton, Wagner to Ellington. What is the attraction of arranging music? As a rule, arranging is as time-consuming as composing, because jazz involves a lot of transcribing. But there's one big advantage: you're not responsible for the tune – that's a load off your mind. Arranging music gives you a break from that eternal preoccupation with yourself, which can become boring in the long run. Having to really come to grips with other musicians' work is exciting. Besides, it would be odd if the VAO played nothing but my compositions. Having a signature is important, but there should also be plenty of arrangements. In jazz, arranging is an art form in itself. Gil Evans, whom I consider the greatest jazz writer of all times, actually did very little original composing – and yet he created a whole sound world of his own.

Are there any specific rules an arranger should observe? It's better to go out from nicely circumscribed sources, not big, elaborate constructions. That's something to watch out for, to choose pieces that leave enough space for your own ideas. Good examples of appropriate material would be Satie's piano music, Schubert's 'Winterreise' or pieces from Dolphy's 'Out-to-Lunch' album. Wagner arrangements or Krenek's 'Jonny spielt auf' are very problematic in comparison.

They can only end in honourable failure? Exactly.

How would you describe your position in European jazz? There are basically two kinds of European jazz musicians: the ones who copy everything and the ones who say that anything American is bad. But the really interesting musicians are the ones curious enough to want to know what's going on in the United States and independent enough to have a strong, individual identity of their own. And that would certainly apply to the European musicians with the greatest stylistic influence. It seems obvious that, as a European, I would let my classical roots affect my jazz.

The classical heritage comes through, implicitly or explicitly, in your jazz compositions. You don't draw a strict line between jazz and so-called serious music. When did you write the first work you would categorize as predominantly 'classical'? The classical side only really came into its own in 1993/94. That was when I wrote a piece for clarinet and chamber orchestra for the clarinetist Michel Portal. It was the initial spark. If you always write for jazz musicians and suddenly discover classical ensembles, you're not unjaded and naive. By the same token, new horizons open up on the jazz front as well. After the concerto for Portal, I did a great deal of work in what might be termed borderline areas, but I also wrote perfectly normal string quartets, duos, wind sextets, etc. 'Sunaris', a short piece for triangle and chamber orchestra, was particularly successful. I only got the idea for the piece because the commission was so badly paid that I said to myself: I'll punish them by composing something for triangle.

When you talk about your sources of inspiration, you repeatedly mention Mozart, Bartók and Stravinsky, but also contemporary American composers like Steve Reich and John Adams. Do terms like 'tradition' and 'avant-garde' mean anything to you at all? To me, the European avant-garde is a chapter of history; it's over, like Dixieland. What fascinates me about Reich and Adams is how responsive they are to what's happening today, plus their rediscovery of rhythm. Apart from which, progress and regress are currently being redefined anyway: seemingly simple things have suddenly become extremely valuable. But that doesn't make me one of those people who say everything used to be better. I try to keep away from sentimentality. Every generation has a hard enough time.

Do you have particular aesthetic preferences? I think I'm a lyrical composer. Lyricism appeals to me most and it's also what I'm best at.

Do you consider music to possess any metaphysical aspects? The idea of life without music is inconceivable to me. Music is vital for survival because it can attain a level of perfection that does not exist in life. If there is such a thing as nearness to eternity, to immortality, then in art. Naturally, artists aren't like their works. Artists are as egotistical, imperfect and addle-pated as anyone else.

You credit music with 'nearness to eternity', and yet rumour has it you're thinking of giving up composing. Maybe. But there are a few commissions I have to get out of the way first – and a few pieces for chamber orchestra and improvising soloists that I still want to write. Apart from that, I don't feel a need to go on composing just now: Rüegg the composer has had his musical say. My work is unlikely to improve. But whether I can survive without that aspect of my life is another question. If I were sarcastic, I'd say: the ideal is the artist who's only around for a short while and then disappears again – Mozart, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin. Artists like that don't bother anyone with the problems of ageing and they make space for the next generation.

That sounds like resignation. Absolutely not. I'm not worried about my future.