



MUSIK DER JAHRHUNDERTE

Second International Student Conference GLOBAL INTERPLAY in Cairo

The Second International Student Conference "Identity and Creation" took place in February from 13th to 17th, 2006 as part of the Cairo Opera Festival in Egypt. After an informal meeting where people got to know each other on the opening day, all participants had the opportunity to introduce themselves and to speak about their respective musical backgrounds. Kofi Ansah, member of the Accra group, held a lecture on the musical tradition of Ghana. He dated back its roots to colonial times, in order to give a concise overview of the most important stages of its development. Starting with Dr. Ephraim Amu, one can distinguish between four generations of composers in Ghana, whereas the members of the GLOBAL INTERPLAY teams from Ghana are representing the current generation.

On the next day, Christine Fischer, the Director of „Musik der Jahrhunderte“, explained the fundamental ideas of the project and its reference to the World New Music Festival. At first Ms. Fischer briefly outlined the history of the New Music in Germany, acknowledging that New Music has increasingly distanced itself from society in the past since its beginnings in the last century. But more recently, particularly among younger composers, there has been a unique desire to seek a counterpart in society. This tendency can also be seen in the various educational projects initiated by „Musik der Jahrhunderte“, which sufficiently reveal that the interest in New Music is increasing again. Within these projects, GLOBAL INTERPLAY plays a particular role, since intercultural dialogue has not only led artists to an extension of their technique, but also encourages them to reflect on their role in society.

Oliver Schneller's lecture was a "tour de force" about the most significant terms and categories associated with the main conference theme "Identity and Creation". Starting from reflections about locality and community, Schneller defined 'identity' as a term that implies self-reflection, self-definition and a conscious representation of the "self." Just as fascinating was his differentiation between a vertical and a horizontal dimension in his concept of culture, an approach that allowed a flexible description of the phenomenon of modern societies. It was this flexibility of thinking that led Schneller to the optimistic conclusion that as a result of globalization, one may find someday New Music in one's local record store in the World Music section, rather than in a dusty corner among the classical music selections.

While considering the examples of historical quotes from the Arabian culture, Azza Madian demonstrated that there are prevalent concerns about the loss of cultural identity which not only seems to be a world phenomenon which appears in the Age of Globalization, but has already been detected in the 8th Century. Contributing factors for such a loss of tradition are an asymmetric balance of power and the dichotomy between dominating and dominated culture, i.e., the colonial rulers and the colonized. So far, this can be considered as hazard with regard to the realisation of one's own culture, which is to be the main source of



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creativity and inspiration. The tendency to neglect one's own culture is occurring in Egypt right now. Therefore, this seems to have disastrous consequences, a thesis that Madian pointed out while referring to the example of the functional change of traditional music in Egypt. As a consequence of The Revolution in 1952, the cultural policies implemented by the government, showed that the Egyptian folk dance, as popularized by various newly founded dance groups, seem to represent only a surviving fraction of the authentic, traditional music that had formerly been passed down through oral tradition. It is now the most significant task of composers and musicians to recall this fragmented Egyptian legacy, in order to free the blocked channels of creativity and innovation again, which are constitutive factors and therefore, indispensable to the further development of Egypt's own cultural identity.

In opposition to this thesis, Basma El Hussein, another guest lecture from Egypt, supported the view that the cultural institution has a positive function, particularly for young artists. Furthermore, Western influences could offer great possibilities for the development of creativity, so that the phenomenon wouldn't necessarily result in a loss of traditional cultural identity. In the following discussion, both lectures stated more precisely their arguments but were unable to convince each other due to the merits of their different views. The incompatibility of these two positions was in my opinion, the result of differing premises. Logically, a break with one's own tradition can be understood to be a moment of liberation, setting unimagined creative forces free which can also be experienced as a trauma, to which artistic production succumbs. However, the decisive factor appears to me that the individual artist reflects this tension in his or her concrete work and therefore tries to respond to it.

Rolf Elberfeld's lecture "Multiple Modernities and Contemporary Music" was unfortunately not presented by him due to a cancellation. However, I was able to read it out. Modernity is defined structurally in terms of differentiating societal subsystems by Elberfeld. In the course of the European expansion in culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, the European system of art, among other elements of modern society, was implemented in various non-Western cultures. The individual acquisition together with an even stronger developing self-reflection, led to the conception of the emerging various traditions. This process of transformation and reflection thus resulted in the European modernity being; a modernity among many. The controversial discussion which followed this lecture made clear that in Egypt, the transformation process described by Elberfeld seems definitely not to be completed.

The contributions from Nahla Mattar and Victor Adan are differing from those previous lectures because they were the predecessors who spoke explicitly about their own aesthetic and compositional approaches at the Cairo Congress. Nahla Mattar presented on Wednesday afternoon her multimedia work "Scars", based on a self-written text about an Egyptian woman born in the 1970s who, through the experience of migrating to the West, was able to break the stereotypical clichés and initiated the path of self-discovery. The connection



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between the individual, the political and the cultural levels were convincing not only as a theoretical concept but also as a sensual experience. In her concluding remarks, the composer emphasised the intercultural aspect of her work by pointing out that “Scars” which employed a “three-dimensional theatrical ritual”, is said to illustrate a design concept that is completely familiar in the current Arabian culture but totally unfamiliar to Western civilization.

Victor Adan’s “From Music to Geometry to Meta-Music” provided the listener an insight into the Composer’s Workshop of the New York GLOBAL INTERPLAY team. With Adan, creative processes are evoked by reflections of visual arts, such as architecture and sculpture. Thus, sculptures are considered to be two-dimensional objects which gain their third dimension only through their perception of time. The realisation of this idea into music as well as the tight connection with mathematical principles leads to multidimensional musical objects. That is, to musical material, which Adan then uses for composing. While using the example of a simple melody, Adan reflected the rich amount of material to be gained through this process. Unfortunately, due to a lack of rehearsal time, Adan’s composition “Principia for Cello and Piano” was withdrawn from the previous day’s concert program. Therefore, it wasn’t possible to get an impression of the aesthetic substance of the tonal product resulting from this compositional approach. Shaymma Salah, an ethnomusicologist from Cairo, followed this with a performance of folk music from various regions in Egypt. It was very surprising for all participants that in the following discussion, students from Ghana pointed out commonalities between their own and the Egyptian folk music. To conclude the lectures, Benedict Sackey of the Accra team gave a lecture about the differing function of the ostinato in European and African art music.

The event was closed by a performance of an Arabian folk ensemble, which proved impressively what a tremendous richness is to be found in this culture beyond washy world music. This performance is to be considered from my point of view as one of the highlights of the Cairo Conference.

It was the particular appeal of this second student conference that the seminars were embedded in the “Arab Perspectives” Music Festival at the Cairo Opera House. Through a generous gesture of the festival organizers, GLOBAL INTERPLAY was represented by two concerts in the festival program. Thus, all participants had the opportunity to get an impression of their colleagues’ abilities. Without exception, the extremely successful compositions were performed by an ensemble from Stuttgart’s College of Music, which offered an outstanding level of expertise, particularly in the first performance. Despite having a short time for rehearsal, the quality of the performance was more than impressive. In a closing discussion, the extremely exhausted participants stated that - the densely packed time schedule allowed virtually no free-time activities outside of the official program—they also expressed the view that the personal acquaintances had greatly contributed to a mutual understanding of other cultures. There seems to be a difference, whether one is considered to be a listener of a musical performance from a different culture, or has the chance to speak



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directly with the composers about their music. For the students from Egypt and Ghana, the project has obviously opened up new, previously unprecedented perspectives. On the previous day, Mrs. Hussainy pointed out that in the Egyptian society there are actually countless creative young people who, because of lack of perspectives, are forced to give up their interest in arts after turning getting twenty. This situation appears to be an unavoidable fate which however, has already been shown by the outstanding and excellent work of the Egyptian mentor Amr Okba and his GLOBAL INTERPLAY team.

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