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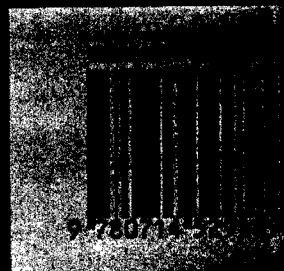
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Stockhausen

Lectures & Interviews
Compiled by
Robin Maconie

music



INTUITIVE MUSIC

*From the lecture INTUITIVE MUSIC,
filmed by Allied Artists, London 1971*

The term intuitive music is one I have purposely introduced. Not only in order to make it clear that I have something specific in mind, but also to rule out other things. For example, music played freely without a score is sometimes called free improvisation, like let's say free jazz, though making free jazz has its own rules: as the word says, it should still sound like jazz, otherwise people would just call it free music. Then there is improvisation in folk music, in India for example. But there is very little actual freedom in this music. The system is very restricted: an Indian musician learns from his master all the rules of how to make small variations of the ragas and talas, and there is very little personal invention, practically none. This method of improvising has

changed very little in the history of music. I try to avoid the word improvisation because it always means there are certain rules: of style, of rhythm, of harmony, of melody, of the order of sections, and so on.

After 1964 I started to tour intensively with a group of players. I had done tours before, but then we played music that was determinate, precisely written in traditional notation. Now I became more and more daring in what I was giving my co-players and myself as graphic material. There was the score of PROZESSION 'Procession' which consists only of plus and minus and equal signs, and instructs the players to 'use events from my previous compositions' as raw material. The pianist draws on the Piano Pieces I-XI; the tam-tam player draws on events from MIKROPHONIE I; the viola player takes material from GESANG DER JÜNGLINGE and MOMENTE; the electronium player draws on SOLO, GESANG DER JÜNGLINGE and I think also from MOMENTE. So each player takes his raw material from these previous works, and then transforms it according to transformation signs. All I have composed in PROZESSION are transformation signs, which tell what to do with the events they have chosen.

A plus sign means to play an event that is higher, or longer, or louder, or which has more limbs than the event you have just played, or that you have heard being played just before. A minus sign means play an event that is lower, or softer, or shorter, or has fewer limbs. By limbs I mean clearly-defined segments or components within a certain duration. If there is one limb, you hear only one attack, there is no segmentation. If I play ta-ta: finish, then I have two segments, or limbs as we say, *Glieder* in German. When the number of limbs increases, then it

means a plus sign; with a minus sign the number decreases.

These four categories are always considered from one musical event to the next. Higher or longer or louder or more segments; minus sign, lower or softer or fewer segments or shorter. Equal sign, play the same as what you have just heard before or played yourself. That's all: a series of signs. The four players should play for any length of time greater than twenty-three minutes, I say in the introduction to the score. That is a duration we have found as a result of many performances to be the minimum required in order for the piece to develop. After that, the piece can end at any moment that a player feels it should end. The score also says that if you start a new performance and it sounds like the previous one, stop and start again. Likewise, if it comes to an end and the ending sounds like a previous ending, the players should continue and try to find an ending that has not occurred before.

You see, the process of transformation is emphasized more than usual, but what is transformed is less specific. What is given is genetic rules for the development of a music. The process goes further in KURZWELLEN 'Short Waves'. Then in 1968 all of a sudden I reached the moment in my composing where I gave practically nothing to the performer, even to myself as one of the players of our group. Then and there I wrote fifteen texts. In 1969 we recorded twelve of them over eight days, two hours per day, without prior rehearsal and in most cases without prior discussion. There were some we discussed, but they were texts we had played before in public.

The first text from this collection AUS DEN SIEBEN TAGEN 'From the seven days' reads as follows:

for circa 4 players

Circa already: four, maybe three, maybe five. But not seven.

RIGHT DURATIONS

Play a sound
Play it for so long
until you feel
that you should stop

Again play a sound
Play it for so long
until you feel
that you should stop

And so on

Stop
when you feel
that you should stop

But whether you play or stop:
Keep listening to the others

At best
play when people are listening

Do not rehearse

That's what we used, and there came out of it a performance of, I would say, half an hour, I don't remember exactly. This performance is on a record.

The next text has a little drawing at the top, a curve that goes up out of the paper and then comes back. It reads:

For ensemble
UNLIMITED

Play a sound
with the certainty
that you have an infinite amount of time and space

We played it for a whole night once, in St Paul de Vence, in the South of France, for a music festival. We started playing in a courtyard before the public arrived, then after about two and a half hours the musicians left, one by one, still playing and disappeared into the forest, from time to time coming back into the courtyard and disappearing again, until it all ended at about three o'clock in the morning.

Later I wrote commentaries on these texts. I said imagine someone having the certainty that he has an infinite amount of time and space. I haven't met any person up to now who has really and totally achieved that state; well, I mean, anyone can approach it. It leads to the most incredible sounds and musical actions, if you really think you have an infinite amount of time and space. You don't need to think when it is finished, or whether anybody is listening or not: you don't care whether you die in the meantime, or if the sound may be too long for you to

finish playing, or if the space you need is greater than the hall, or your instrument, or your own body can contain. You have an infinite amount of space. That's it. When one really meditates on this text, it leads to the most incredible actions and sounds.

Another one is 'Connections', for ensemble:

CONNECTIONS

Play a vibration in the rhythm of your body
(Of *your* body. The player's.)
Play a vibration in the rhythm of your heart
(That's possible.)

Play a vibration in the rhythm of your breathing
Play a vibration in the rhythm of your thinking
Play a vibration in the rhythm of your intuition
Play a vibration in the rhythm of your enlightenment
Play a vibration in the rhythm of the universe

Mix these vibrations freely

Leave enough silence between them

Now, you can imagine what kind of reaction I got to these texts. From my co-players, who thought I had flipped out completely (I had, for some time, I must say, but in a very unusual way, not with drugs or anything) — not to mention the people who were not performers themselves, and who had no idea what such a stimulus can generate in a musical mind, well, in a musician. I'll give just a few comments. 'Play a vibration in the rhythm of your

thinking.' When I gave a seminar that same year, 1968, in the Darmstadt International Courses for Contemporary Music, none of the fourteen young composers knew what I could mean by that. I said, just take a pencil, and every time your thinking changes direction, tap it on the table. We could do this together now; it would be quite interesting. These chairs are plastic, just take a pencil or a ring and just tap. The best way is to close your eyes, if not, you look around, and whenever you feel your thinking is changing, then knock on the chair . . . Could you try to slow it down please? Try to keep on the same thought, or block it out, stop thinking for a moment. You think, I am knocking, he is knocking, I am in the hall, oh my hair, how do I look? — each time tock, tick, tock. Slow it down, try to slow it down.

What I mean is, when this is done with musicians, then you will hear that every action has a reaction, a particular sound has many reactions, and you get groups of attacks, I mean, of changes, which happen very quickly. As soon as someone does something which attracts the attention, he interrupts someone who is trying to keep the same thought going, breaks the rhythm of his thinking.

Another example: it says here 'Play a vibration in the rhythm of the universe'. We have a pianist in our group, Mr Kontarsky, who is an extreme intellectual and everything must be intellectually and mentally clear, otherwise, he says, he at least can't do anything. So he said, what do you mean by the rhythm of the universe? What is all that mystic stuff here? And I said, I mean, have you never had dreams where you fly from star to star? He said, no, I don't have them. What are you talking about? Then I said, well, have you any inner view or inner vision of how

the planets are rotating round the sun? — What do you mean? I said, at least you have an intellectual knowledge of how long it takes for the moon to go around the earth, or the earth round the sun; how many days it takes, in earth days, and how many earth days Mercury takes? And he said, I am not so well informed about the planets and, well, I could have thought about it but it's all so slow. I said, no, when it is in your mind it has your own time, hasn't it? Imagine it, just the rhythm of the universe. I mean, I'm not asking you tonight to go beyond the solar system, but just try. And he was saying, I don't know, let's stop and you can get somebody else. I said, well Aloys, you see, perhaps the constellations, think Cassiopeia or the other constellations of the stars. He said, Oh, you mean Webern? I said Yes! He said, well okay, let's start.

Well, the fact that some of you laugh shows that you share that understanding of Webern. Webern is the extreme constructivist of music: he worked with intervals and points which form very particular constellations. So from that moment, in this particular piece, this pianist has played what I call the bones, the most constructive elements, very few and far between, and all the other players attach themselves like flies on to the clear constructions he plays. Immediately he could do something with 'the rhythm of the universe'. I made a few suggestions and it clicked in his mind. But I have to say, when he came to the sentence 'Play a vibration in the rhythm of your enlightenment', then he simply had a long silence. Well, he was being very honest with himself and he said, I don't know what to do with that indication. When that indication comes I just stop and start again when the next one comes. That's fine.

Now I come to the text which is at the extreme, and which has brought more accusations against me as a composer than anything else during my whole life. Not only the music critics, but intellectuals in general were thinking that I had become a dangerous influence. The text reads:

For ensemble

IT

(IT is the title)

Think NOTHING

Wait until it is absolutely still within you
When you have attained this
begin to play

As soon as you start to think, stop
and try to re-attain
the state of NON-THINKING
Then continue playing

— and so on.

When we first played this text with our group, at a music festival in Brussels, we purposely had not played it before, and against all expectations, it worked.

Since that time we have never had any trouble. IT has been played by many other groups, and I have compared numbers of different performances of the same texts, and have found that they often share very similar characteris-

tics. All the different versions of IT have started with very brief, short, sound actions; then gradually you get here and there a longer sound, which stops as soon as another sound starts, which shows that sounds are cutting off each other. Later in all the versions there is a gradual superimposition of sustained sounds: you have one musician playing, then another starts playing a sound or a certain pattern, and the first is able to keep going. Then it builds very quickly, in every version I have heard: all of a sudden there is a situation reached where they are obviously taken all together by something that is in the air, and are completely absorbed by the sound and react instantly, without thinking. I mean, they just do it, and then very dense structures come about. These last for some time, until at some point one of the musicians plays a sound that goes out of context; then abruptly there are long silences. After that, they try to recapture what they were doing before, but it doesn't work any more.

Of course sometimes you get rubbish. The first sign of it is when preformed material appears, citations, when you are reminded of something that you already know. Then we feel it's going wrong, that instead of automatically recording, there is something in us automatically playing back recorded rubbish. So then we stop. When I hear the Globokar group, for example, even though they claim to play without any written understanding or agreement, it is very obvious that the percussion player every once in a while starts playing tabla rhythms from Indian music. He studied tabla once with an Indian percussion player and these stylistic elements come out automatically. So while there may be no pre-established style for the whole music, certain stylistic elements come into it, and I would try to

avoid them, and draw completely on intuition. The same is true for Portal, the clarinet player. Whenever the groups comes into rage, as I call it, when their playing becomes very heated, he starts playing typical free jazz melodies and configurations that he has played for years, being a free jazz player: certain idioms that come from the group he plays free jazz with, others that belong to the free jazz tradition in general.

Playing intuitive music it soon becomes very obvious which musician has most self-control; in fact, it's alarming how quickly the musicians reveal their physical and spiritual state, whether they are in crisis or have reached a certain kind of equilibrium. Musicians are easily carried away by not listening, and this is often the reason for a performance turning into rubbish, in the sense that they start to play very loudly, so loud that nobody else can be heard, and they don't realize what they are doing. Such players can become very totalitarian in certain situations, and that creates awful situations for the group playing together. Also their sounds become very aggressive and destructive, and at a very basic level of communication and production of sounds, destructive elements begin to work.

Understand, I am not talking about ugly or beautiful sounds, but about very debased, physical, bodily aggression expressed in a determination to destroy one another. Then they play all at once. When that threatens it is most important that I always remind them, and myself as well, 'Don't play all the time, and don't get carried away'. After several hundred years of being forced to play only what has been prescribed for them by others,

musicians today are particularly apt, once they start playing intuitively in a group, to play all the time, and it becomes loud very soon, and they don't know how to get soft again because everybody wants to be heard.

The best number is four or five players. Even with five, it takes a lot of self-discipline to keep quiet for quite long periods during a performance, so that solos, duos and trios occur, and not only quintets all the time. And if musicians are dependent on technique, and they play in a technically self-conscious way, the intuition can't work well: they always want more than they can do, then it becomes rubbish again. That has been my experience. The best intuitive musician is really at one with his instrument, and knows where to touch and what to do in order to make it resonate so that the inner vibrations that occur in the player can immediately be expressed as material vibrations in the body of the instrument.

So finally there remains only one question: either all five players, me included, were liars or were cheating ourselves, or something was going on that worked. That leaves the objection of the intellectuals; well, they fool themselves, what do they mean? As someone who at different times in his life has gone deeper than most into his whole being and the structure of his personality, what the brain is, and what the mind is, when I say, I am thinking — who is saying this? Then this person who is saying, I am thinking, can just as easily say, I have decided not to think now. One is not identified with the brain, but with the brain activity, and that activity, the thinking activity, is something that is responsible to a higher self, one which uses the brain as a computer. That

is all. So acting, or listening, or doing something without thinking, is the state of pure intuitive activity, not requiring to use the brain as a control.

You can think about a lot of things while performing: training your fingers, controlling what you are doing, reacting — aha! now he is playing, now I should do this — all of which is thinking about what you are doing. But you can also act: Now! Now! Now! Now! Now! Stop the thinking, and as soon as you stop, all right. As soon as reflection or thinking starts, also noticing that you are thinking, stop. That is all that is asked. And it needs some time for preparation, some special training of the musicians. I come back to the pianist: he said, it's impossible, I think all the time. What you are asking is absolutely impossible. Well, I said, can't you stop? He said, no, no, I can't stop thinking, that's ridiculous. When I am not playing I am thinking of my next concert or rehearsing the *Piano Piece X* in my memory. I am always thinking. I said, stop it. He said, how? And this was quite unusual for me because, I mean, these are the simplest things in life. When someone says, I can't sleep, and you say, well, stop thinking, then you will fall asleep right away. Or you just decide to sleep, stop thinking and then you can sleep at any moment. Most people can't do that. They haven't even thought about not thinking.

Well, it may seem funny, but it's deadly serious, and the musicians who work with me and who perform these texts quite regularly, at least they think about the possibility of what this might mean for them, and how they could practise it. I am trying to find a technique for myself as a

composer and interpreter, and for other musicians who work with me, to extend the moment of intuition consciously, so that when I want to, it starts, and I am no longer helpless until it arrives, usually at the wrong moment, when I have no time or there is someone wanting to talk to me. And those moments of intuitive working must last as long as I want, but then I will have to find a completely new technique of making music. I can't sit at a table with a pencil and rubber, sharpen the pencil and write down what's coming from intuition, because intuition has a very particular kind of speed, which is by no means congruent with the speed of writing.

There are certain abilities required now in order to play this sort of music that I call intuitive music, that the traditional musician has never learned. He doesn't even have a thought about it. The most profound moments in musical interpretation and composition are those which are not the result of mental processes, are not derived from what we already know, nor are they simply deducible from what has happened in the past. Musicians must learn to become the opposite of egocentric; otherwise you only play yourself, and the self is nothing but a big bag full of stored information. Such people are closed systems. But when you become like what I call a radio receiver, you are no longer satisfied with expressing yourself, you are not interested in yourself at all. There is nothing really to express. Then you will be amazed at what happens to you, when this state is achieved; when you become aware of what happens through you, even for short moments, you will be quite astonished. You become a medium.