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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Just do whatever you want

Vienna, several concert halls and theaters, 03.05.2022 [ENA]

The Wien Modern Festival took place this year again (as also several years before) in Vienna in the period from the 30th of October to the 30th of November 2021 in various concert halls, theaters and music clubs in Vienna. If someone would describe the entire festival with the couple of sentences the best expression would be “just do whatever you want” and “we love diversity”.

The festival gave large freedom to its spectators to sit on places wherever they like it. It gave large freedom to artists who were able to perform music of various directions, forms, colors, sounds, installations and to provide various interpretations. The festival could be also, in general, considered as the largest platform in Vienna and in Austria for inspiring encounters between makers and listeners of new music that comes in all shapes, sizes and colors.

The opening concert settled the stage for the festival. The ORF Radio-Symphonieorchester Wien together with Selina Ott, Andrea Sodomka and Marin Alsop performed the music of four modern composers Milica Djordjevic, Thomas Wally, Christian Ofenbauer and Andrea Sodomka. This was a real fest of individuals who dare to do what they want and out of nothing. It was also a real fest bringing together a beautifully scratchy tapestry of sound, the sound interpretation of the opposite of dystopia, the radical satyr play without words and the crystal clear sounds of music.

The festival also included music dedicated to the Halloween times. For example, the performance “Noche de los Muertos: the Artist is absent” the topics of physical absence and mental absence, not-being and not-being-here, missing and death are presented in the work of six artists Gudinni Cortina, Christoph Herndler, JD Zazie aka Valeria Merlini, Joanna John, Christina Kubisch and Ilpo Väisänen through various electro-acoustic compositions at the stage of echoraum.

Especially bright in my memory is the performance The Visit of Little Death due to its very light and positive attitude towards death and virtuous play of Jasmin Steffl, Michael Welz, Rino Indiono and Florian Haslinger with contributions from Michael Artner, Nora Scheidl, Alexander Riff and Michael Scheidl. The performance is a fairytale opera based on the children's book of the same name by Kitty Crowther, winner of the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, the most well-renowned award for children's and young people's literature worldwide.

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The highlight of the festival was the opera in one act Poppaea of Michael Hersch and Stephanie Fleischmann. The opera following the Monteverdi's L'incoronazione di Poppea. It is telling the story of one of the most powerful women in the world Poppeae, the wife of the emperor Nero. Poppeae was born in Pompeji during the first century a.c. and was the second wife of the emperor Nero. She was one of the most beautiful women of her time and received for that time unusually for a woman good education. But Poppeae was also known for her love to luxury and her cruelty.

The story of Poppeae is frightening and skin-freezing and raises the questions if someone who went through such horrors can become a monster by herself. The mother of Poppeae was accused by the empress Messalina in side-step in the marriage and was forced to suicide. The son of Poppeae from the first marriage was murdered after the order of Nero. The pregnant Poppeae herself was beaten by Nero to death. Because the mother of Nero Agrippina, who helped him to become a Kaiser, could not tolerate the divorce of Nero with his wife Octavia to marry Poppeae, Nero after the pressure of Poppeae ordered to murder his mother. Under pressure of Poppeae, Nero ordered to murder Octavia and to send Seneca away from Rome.

Several other talented and powerful people were executed after the orders of Poppeae. Following this story the opera of Michael Hersch and Stephanie Fleischmann was spectacular and according to them: "Poppaea is an opera about a woman whose desire is limitless; a woman who has to endure many things and make her way through a world in which women are systematically silenced. The violence that prevails in this world is extreme. It begs the question: how far have we come? How little have we progressed?" The Basel-based architecture firm Piertzovanis Töws turns the stage design into a statement on taking responsibility for the consequences of one's own actions.

Michael Hersch was described by the Washington Post as "a composer of "uncompromising brilliance". His music was described by the New York Times as "viscerally gripping and emotionally transformative music ... claustrophobic and exhilarating at once, with moments of sublime beauty nestled inside thickets of dark virtuosity ". Stephanie Fleischmann was called "a neo Emily Dickinson" by the Backstage and "a writer who can conjure something between a dreamy road movie and a theatrical coming-of-age tale, and who can piece these elements together in the style of a jagged ballad for guitar" by the Chicago Sun Times. She is the author of libretti for several operas and received several grants and awards from various cultural institutions.

Brice Pauset, Arotin and Serghei showed the Vertigo/Infinite Screen which is the composition written after the story of Alfred Hitchcocks Vertigo. The performance transfers elements of the Hitchcock's 1958 masterpiece into a new intermedial musical and visual composition. This performance is about the perception of signals, sign language and on the Infinite Screen – the image matrix of our time. The performance starts from the shock scenario at the beginning of the film and the masterpiece's colour

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symbolism. During the play the artists lead the viewers through a hypnotic course, like an endless zoom, through a sequence of 12 immersive sound and image worlds, into a microcosm of neurons, pixels, and splintered sound particles.

This performance is a real multidisciplinary project developed in cooperation between Klangforum Wien, WDR and IRCAM – Centre Pompidou Paris.

Other highlights of the Wien Modern festival are Growing Sideways of Brigitte Wilfing and Jorge Sánchez-Chiong. This is a choreographic composition about various patterns of behavior. This composition shows another definition of the music which lays in between choreography, composition, and new media. The focus of the performance is on the Western understanding of progress.

The EXXJ 50 performed concert of Alban Berg for Kammerkonzert für Klavier und Geige mit 13 Bläsern and music of Tanja Elisa Glinser and Johannes Maria Staud.

Only this selection of the performances shows already the immense diversity of the Wien Modern festival. And these were only few of the performances described here. Unfortunately, the festival was interrupted by the implementation of new risk mitigation measures to fight the covid-19 pandemic. But this only leaves spectators in joyful expectation of the October-November of the next year 2022 when the festival takes its place again and will fill stages of various concert halls, theaters, and music clubs of Vienna with diverse music and fascinating performances.

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