Wolfgang Rihm: Gruß-Moment 2 - Requiem-Strophen (2017)

1. Gruß-Moment 2 - in memoriam Pierre Boulez 2. "Requiem-Strophen" für zwei Soprane, Bariton, Chor und Orchester (2016) Anna Prohaska - Soprano Mojca Erdmann - Soprano Hanno Müller-Brachmann - Baritone Choir and Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra Mariss Jansons – Conductor 31.03.2017, München, Herkulessaal

Wolfgang Rihm's Gruß-Moment 2 is nevertheless emphatically a new work, albeit performed with a confidence that might suggest otherwise. Rihm's piece – allegedly five minutes long, but significantly longer – is one of twelve commissioned by the Stiftung Berliner Philharmoniker from different composers, apparently given carte blanche as to how they approached their 'album leaf' compositions. It also follows Gruß-Moment 1, written for the Lucerne Festival, for Pierre Boulez's ninetieth birthday in 2015; now, of course, we live in the shadow of Boulez's death, and the piece is dedicated to his memory.

Rihm has written for what looks like an average-sized orchestra: neither Bach's, nor Gurrelieder's. There are interesting omissions, though: clarinets, bassoons (not contra-bassoon, however), and trumpets. On the other hand, there are four players apiece for flutes, horns, and percussion. It is with an English horn solo that the lament or tombeau begins, perhaps inevitably putting us in mind of Tristan und Isolde. (Whether I liked it or not, I could not help but find intervallic and rhythmic correspondences and differences with Wagner's Shepherd Song.) Four horns follow on: as so often with Rihm, forging further links with German Romanticism, albeit more obliquely here than sometimes. Was that even a hint of Bruckner in the string unison lines to come? Oboe and trombone duetting, still more English horn and trombone duetting, put me a little in mind of Stockhausen's Mittwoch, but that was probably just me; for one can play the game of correspondences all one likes, of course, and it is in many ways just a way of finding one's bearing. It was only really with the sounding of the quartet of flutes and percussion together that my ears found something that might possibly remind me of Boulez, and then not overtly. Such, however, is not necessarily the point of a tribute. If this were a tombeau, it was not gloomy, some post-expressionist Angst prior to the close notwithstanding, but then why

should it be? Perhaps this was more akin to an ode from Berlioz, Gluck, even Stravsinky; perhaps not. It intrigued, nevertheless, nowhere more so than in the soft, yet Fafner-like timpani of the closing bars: ‘dolce, quasi cantando’. ---boulezian.blogspot.com

“I go slowly from the world / into a landscape beyond all distance,” writes Hans Sahl in his poem Strophen, which revolves around the final stages of the journey through life, before death awaits us. Wolfgang Rihm has set these verses to music in his new, evening-length choral work Requiem-Strophen, along with a text by Johannes Bobrowski, sonnets by Michelangelo, and a Psalm from the Bible. It may remind you of Ein deutsches Requiem by Johannes Brahms, which similarly does not follow the liturgy of the Mass for the Dead but instead offers a highly personal set of texts culled by the composer. And like Brahms, Rihm, too, keeps deliberate distance from the certainty of faith: “God has given us the gift of doubt. Through this he remains inextinguishably present in us,” he once remarked. ---lucernefestival.ch

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