

Wolfgang Rihm - Concerto Dithyrambe - Sotto Voce - Sotto Voce 2 (2009)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Concerto Dithyrambe for string quartet & orchestra*
2. *Sotto Voce – Notturmo for piano & small orchestra*
3. *Sotto Voce 2 – Capriccio for piano & small orchestra*

Arditti String Quartet

Nicolas Hodges, piano

Luzerner Sinfonieorchester

Jonathan Nott, John Axelrod, conductors

Kairos, 2009

Wolfgang Rihm is fantastically prolific, and only a fraction of his oeuvre has been documented. It is great to hear early works, as in Hanssler's Rihm Edition which ranges across his compositional career to date. This Kairos disc, though, presents three pieces from 1999, 2000 and 2007, Rihm of the new century.

"CONCERTO" -- Dithyrambe for String Quartet and Orchestra (25'45 -- 2000) features the Arditti Quartet and the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester led by Jonathan Nott. It is not a dialogue between the quartet and the orchestra, but rather a "manic monologue" by "a creature with four mouths -- yes, with four heads and four mouths, a beast!" according to Rihm. A single vivace movement, "CONCERTO" is written for an orchestra of only 46 musicians, with "the orchestra like a cage ... [o]r perhaps a body, inside which the nerves (the quartet) 'dance'," says the composer. Using musical material from the 6th and 9th quartets, this is an exhilarating and exhausting piece that is similar in its headlong rush to Jagden und Formen (Hunts and Forms) (1995/2001), which was released as a DG 20/21 disc in 2002, although with quite different

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instrumentation. This will certainly appeal to anyone who liked that Rihm composition from the same period. Personally I don't find either to be among Rihm's finest work, but "CONCERTO" is quite enjoyable.

The piano concerto "Sotto voce Notturmo" (17'41 -- 1999) was joined to what amounts to a second movement several years later in the form of "Sotto voce 2 Capriccio" (11'01 -- 2007). The original piece had a novel origin for the typically harsh, avant Rihm -- Daniel Barenboim asked Rihm to "invent a piece" into his Mozart programs with the Berlin Philharmonic! So that is what he did. A lovely piece, slow and quiet, it is utterly untypical of Rihm. Originally performed by Barenboim with the BPO, it is here performed by the brilliant Nicolas Hodges with John Axelrod leading the Lucerne orchestra. Rihm has never sounded prettier or more like Debussy. The capriccio is like "an answer to" the nocturno, says Rihm, "a motion-filled piece that whispers. It has to do with motion sequences and velocity."

While I would not place this at the top of the growing list of currently available Rihm discs, it is quite fine and more accessible than most. It confirms something we have noticed in recent years, and that is the mellowing of Wolfgang Rihm (see for instance the oboe concerto on the Rihm Edition Volume One set from Hanssler). We just hope he doesn't mellow too much -- we have plenty of contemporary composers who want to sound like Debussy! ---R.Hutchinson

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