

“Clarity like Flashing Stars”



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Violist Tabea Zimmermann gave the world première of Georges Lentz’s *Monh* in 2005. The influence of the Australian desert and the night sky, already evident in some of Lentz’s other works, is again a crucial factor in this piece. Zimmermann talked of her admiration for it in an interview with the Berlin Philharmonic:

“Georges Lentz wrote an extraordinary viola concerto for me. But one can’t

really call it a concerto – Lentz himself doesn't; it is called Monh, which means 'the sky over the desert' in the Aborigines' language – and the piece actually sounds like that," explains Zimmermann.

"The world première took place at the opening of the Philharmonie concert hall in Luxembourg – they commissioned it. Before that, I had had no contact with the composer; I had listened to his chamber music and I thought it was extremely good and it appealed to me. Then when the score arrived, I read it and thought, 'This can never work' – a triple piano – ppp – downwards in the solo part, for instance, incredibly subtle and quiet – I thought, 'How can that possibly work?' – but then I tried it and found that it was thoroughly playable."

The work lasts 30 minutes, written in a single movement: slow and soft. Zimmermann describes her excitement: "It is fascinating and it works in a way I have seldom experienced – particularly because of the frugal gestures and special effects – except you don't hear them as effects, but as the most profound expression. You actually hear that sky over the desert, the clarity, like flashing stars – and then the viola, the solo instrument, appears – like a human factor amidst all that. There is an altercation, a confrontation between the cosmic impression and the human voice which culminates at the end in a kind of chorale, which nearly brings tears to my eyes every time I play it, because it is so uplifting. There is also a 25-second general pause when you start to wonder, 'What will happen in the auditorium today – will the audience be able to stand this quiet?' – and yes, it works."

Apart from its special form, the piece is notable for its unusual orchestration. As Zimmermann explains, "There are two solo violas in the orchestra with their C strings tuned an octave lower, for instance. The sounds from those low, loose C strings are so strange that no one has any idea where they are coming from in the hall – they are very special sounds."

VIDEO

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