

Great World-Class Theatre

Reviews of the première of Wolfgang Rihm's *Dionysos* at the Salzburg Festival in 2010:

Lascivious, airy, full of sweetness and constructive irony is how this music is perceived. It is impossible to convey the full extent of its wonders which come pouring out like an overflowing horn of plenty. The instrumentation displays many magical touches; several aspects of the subtlety in the voice leading, coupled with fluent opulence, are once again redolent of the masterly expertise exhibited by Richard Strauss in his later works. But first and foremost, this new work by Rihm is filled with examples of his skill. The music quotations range from the chromatic Bach choral sung by the maenads, to the Prelude to the *Meistersinger*, from the “Wanderer” song which is sung by Herr N. in the salon – and which he continues to sing until he has literally sung his colleague, the “Guest”, under the table – to the distorted orchestral waltz used when the girls pull apart the dummy.

Eleonore Büning, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

“Out of the depths, sounds rise up like mist. Music as a dimension, as the (Earth’s) pulse.”

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Rihm would not be Rihm if the music were not dominated by his own style. Any attempt to ingratiate himself with the music of the past is elegantly sidestepped; there are repeated breaks, for instance when a shimmering, beautiful moment is interrupted or abandoned, or when the direction changes suddenly and unexpectedly. The opening scene is undeniably reminiscent of the Rhine maidens in Wagner’s “*Ring*”, with its laughing women around the speechless N., whereas the second scene plays with the “*Alpensinfonie*” by

Richard Strauss and the third serves up a dearly loved waltz. However, at the very moment when the light begins to shine brightly, it is cut off in its prime: for example, at those points when the choral “Es ist genug” by Johann Sebastian Bach – which was quoted by Alban Berg in his violin concerto and works with a whole-tone row – emerges in the background; even before the listener has realised it, the upwards movement has shifted up another semitone.

Peter Hagmann, Neue Zürcher Zeitung

Rihm has mastered the art of transition to an extent that outshines almost any other composer. No compositional problem is too complex and cannot be solved by him with lightning speed, like a magician. Tragedy is ridiculed, it performs musical capers in order to brawl diabolically, entice quietly, lament sorrowfully, mock exuberantly and laugh uninhibitedly. Rihm demonstrates the full scope of his talents. And he also demonstrates that this ability follows on from an existential compulsion to express himself. Thus, the spirit of music is the source of great world-class theatre.

Reinhard J. Brembeck, Süddeutsche Zeitung

I too was absorbed, as well as impressed and oddly moved.

Anthony Tommasini, New York Times