

words - music – words

Way back in some moment of an improvisation I started to speak. It was not a prepared decision to “*do something with words*”, the words came towards me by themselves in that instant. Many decisions in free improvisation are made intuitively, but the words presumably had been lurking to come up since a while. Everyday words and sentences they were, neither very original nor new sound-inventions. I had just been saying them as to myself. Possibly it was just the sound of speaking, which I wanted to bring into the music in that moment, incorporating something from every-day-life, emerging and disappearing. I had been speaking softly, on purpose and probably nobody in the audience had understood the full text. In that moment I touched something, which since then has been on my mind in different contexts: the appearing and vanishing of understanding and meaning.

My turn to words in music came out of some inner necessity as well. Until then I had been exploring non-wordbound-vocalsounds and avoided words as I felt this path was following the traditional line in vocal music and reassured that tradition. Now I was attracted by words maybe explicitly because of their inevitable directness.

Inspiration came from literature and not just from contemporary and experimental works. Books by Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, Natalie Sarraute, and the Edda became essential. “*Ici*” by Natalie Sarraute (in the German translation of Erika Tophoven) is the only book I ever used as a text reservoir in improvised music. I pasted extracts in a note book, mixed words and passages, added notes and blacked parts. This notebook served me as a word-reservoir for many years exclusively in the trio *selbdritt* with Sylwya Zytynska and Alfred Zimmerlin. Holding the book in my hands on stage was pleasant. It was an object, which I could wander through, jumping through pages and passages, compounding words from here and there. I was drawn by the curiosity of finding and losing correlations, leaving sentences unfinished, forming questions, fading in and out fragments, changing and obliterating layers of time and thus entering into a field of elusive shimmering meanings.

After some time words and sentences turned up by themselves in improvisations, without the book. I couldn't search out for them, but I could prepare myself to grasp them when they searched me and I developed confidence in these spurs of the moment. Sometimes they are words from other languages I am more or less familiar with. Working with them is similar to painting with two or three primary colours. Foreign languages allow me to listen to them differently than to my native language and I listen to myself in a different way when I speak a foreign language. There is more emotional distance. Often it's surprising which words come up. The more incidental they come the better.

Words are also sounds, but sounds are not words. Words occupy the moment with their wide semantic spaces and suck the attention in. Balancing words and sounds right to and with each other is a fragile act. The sensibility of all players is demanded to keep the musical space open and wide. This act of keeping the words in check can only be achieved together in an alert play of overlapping and uncovering words and sounds.

The surface of words is a vital texture of consonants and vowels. It is rough and sounds by itself in the moment I take them on the tongue and let them resonate in the body. A fine resonance of inner and outer space may be the result. Pushing my expression on them disturbs and dissimulates this resonance and narrows the range of meanings. Words do not need my expression, whereas my presence and imagination brings them to life.

Had it first been through speaking that I included words in my music, I also started to sing words in improvisations after some years. Speaking and singing are somehow always linked to each other, can not clearly be separated and take place simultaneously. In speaking is singing and in singing is speaking. I see them as two states of aggregation of the same doing. Singing brings the words in a fluent state, i.e. when sustaining the vowels with the stream of breath. Through this lengthening in time the sound-qualities of a word come forward and the meaning stays back. Pitch comes in - intended or not - and allows the vocal sounds to blend in with instrumental sounds. Repetition touches rhythmic qualities and pushes semantic aspects to the second row. But however I manage to insert the words into the musical texture, they remain strange and resistant in an instrumental context. Their presence even in stages of dissolution is connected to messages and intelligibility.

Where does understanding start ? What stands up when we understand ? Is music something to understand at all ? Does it's impact root in understanding ? In what way is understanding a physical act ? What do I leave up to the words ? Where does a word begin ?

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