

## Ludwig van Beethoven and the modern music inspired by his compositions

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**Abstract:** *Ludwig van Beethoven's music remains one of the best known worldwide, both by music lovers and people without high quality music knowledge. His music has withstood the passing of time because of the universal human values it embodies. In this paper we will focus on the following works: Opus 70 by K. Stockhausen and Ludwig van by Maurizio Kagel, which represent two different interpretations of Beethoven's music, while preserving the shared aspect of the poststructuralist, postmodern styles specific of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

Key-words: *classicism, modernity, postmodernism, style.*

### 1. Introduction

Ludwig van Beethoven's music remains one of the best known worldwide, both by music lovers and people without high quality music knowledge. His music has withstood the passing of time because of the universal human values it embodies, which is why it was adopted as the anthem of the European Union. Harmony, love, fraternity, love for nature, revolutionary ideals are some of the ideas which can be found in his art, turning it into a standard for millions of listeners.

"He began to compose in an increasingly individual musical style, and at the end of his life he wrote his most sublime and profound works. From his success at combining tradition and exploration and personal expression, he came to be regarded as the dominant musical figure of the XIXth century, and scarcely any significant composer since his time has escaped his influence or failed to acknowledge it. For the respect his works have commanded of musicians, and the popularity they have enjoyed among wider audiences, he is probably the most admired composer in the history of Western music", Kerman J. said conclusively in his article dedicate to Beethoven (Grove's Dictionary).

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In this paper we will focus on the following works: *Opus 70* by K. Stockhausen and *Ludwig van* by Maurizio Kagel, which represent two different interpretations of Beethoven's music, while preserving the shared aspect of the poststructuralist, postmodern styles specific of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 2. Results and discussions

### a. ANALYSIS: Karlheinz Stockhausen OPUS 70

Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928 – 2007) was one of the most visionary musical creators of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, benefitting from the evolution of the techniques for manipulating the sound through electronic means. Equally sanctioned and contested, he was among the first to apply electronic techniques to music, also introducing elements of randomness in serial composition, and promoting the concept of sonorous spatiality. The electronic composition was practiced in both his versions, with or without live performance, and after 1950 the idea of sonorous spatiality, as it can be noted in the following compositions.

Fig. 1. Kocher, Ph., *Retrinking open Form*, 19th Generative Art Conference, Florence, 2016

Belonging – from the point of view of the educational space – to one of the two main European centres aimed at promoting electronic music, Köln, disciple of Olivier Messiaen, Stockhausen was made famous by his series of 19 works for piano, by *Kontra-Punkte* for ten instruments, *Gesang der Jünglinge* (concrete and electronic music), *Gruppen* for three orchestras, *Kontakte*, *Mikrophonie I* (live electronic), *Hymnen*, but especially by the grand opera cycle entitled *Licht*.

A year prior to finishing Opus 70, Stockhausen had started a project, *Musik für die Beethovenhalle*, which included works such as the sextet for voices *Stimmung*, *Fresco* for four orchestral groups, work which should have been interpreted in the lobby of the Beethoven room in Bonn for five hours.

This initiative did not remain singular in his creation, being followed three years later by the project "PARK MUSIC COMPOSITION", written for five separate groups of interpreters, spread through the park. This wider cycle also includes the work dedicated to Beethoven, Opus 70, which implements a postmodern model in reinterpreting the message of the great musician from Bonn.

Postmodernism is a movement that developed in the mid- to late 20<sup>th</sup> (1960-1980) century across cultural studies, philosophy of science, economics, linguistics, architecture, literature, contemporary art and music, defined by an attitude of scepticism, irony and moral relativism, deconstruction and post-structuralism, musically materialised through simple and consonant harmonies.

"Postmodernism has become the buzzword of contemporary society over the last decade. But how can it be defined? In this highly readable introduction the mysteries of this most elusive of concepts are unravelled, casting a critical light upon the way we live now, from the politicizing of museum culture to the cult of the politically correct" (Butler 2003, 15).

Stockhausen achieved – through his creation – a process of disintegration, not only at the level of sound, but also at the level of the stylistics of the original music composed by Beethoven, thus, we are presented with a postmodern vision, which introduces the ideas of fragment, fracture, dislocation, presenting pieces of different themes, from different creations by Beethoven, out of context, combined in a new configuration and distorted with the means of electronic music, field in which the visionary K. Stockhausen excelled.

## **b. ANALYSIS: Mauricio Kagel - LUDWIG VAN**

Kagel's work is a tribute to Beethoven on the occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth, "which consists of three separate, but closely related, versions: a film, a musical score and a recording. The score is an entirely indeterminate collage of Beethoven's music. The film raises the problem of Beethoven's reception and of the function of its music, which consists of unusual performances of Beethoven's works" (Stavlas 2012, 2).

The musical work appears in a special historical and social context which regards the attitude towards tradition, the anti-authoritarian movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and its impact on avant-garde composers, Beethoven being considered a symbol of the past. Indeterminacy and experimentalism were two of the tendencies which Kagel combined in his creations: the indeterminacy of the musical score raises special difficulties in its interpretations (it is not only a propagator of the initial message of the composition, but also a factor determining the quality and the content of the message itself).



Fig. 2. *Ludwig Van (1970) film by Mauricio Kagel*

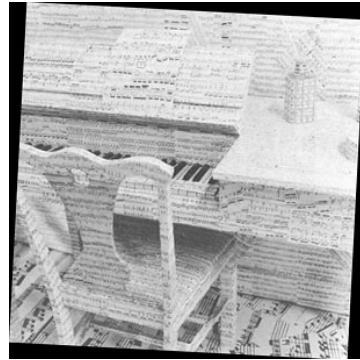


Fig. 3. *Ludwig Van (1970) film by Mauricio Kagel*

The musical score is derived from an already existing film (*Ludwig van: Ein Bericht*): “the whole score consists of 45 photographs and closeups of the walls, furniture and props of the music room that Kagel constructed for the purposes of the film. Different degrees of clarity can be found even in the same picture, depending on the distance from the camera and the angle from which the picture has been taken. In some of the photographs long fragments of Beethoven’s music can be found intact, whereas in others the fragments are much shorter – there are even some one-note fragments. Therefore, not all the fragments can be identified. (...) It is also interesting that there is not a single singing part in the photographs” (Stavlas 2012, 89).

“The piece’s openness and – restricted – indeterminacy communicate Kagel’s intention” (Heile 2002, 79). The 45 pages of the score contain fragments of Violin and Piano solo Sonatas, of Symphony No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 8 and 9, of *Fidelio* Overture, of String Quartets, this work of homage becoming, on this anniversary

occasion, a real panoply of the creations of the Titan of Bonn, in the context in which both the symphonic and the chamber music are approached.

The fact that the author is inspired by all rich, complex universe of the great German composer (chamber music, symphonic music, opera) is another stylistic mark of postmodernism, which tends to reconfigure a certain reality from different perspectives, possibly distorted, from fragments that - reunited - no longer form the same initial unity.

The creative and unconventional aspects of the performing art are more important. In *Ludwig van: Hommage von Beethoven*, performers has practically no role. It doesn't matter what they do, but "what the performer may do, it allows performers to play Beethoven's music outside the rules set by the composer and by the commercial-ethical-musical-social pressures mentioned above. Thus, the traditional composer-performer hierarchy, according to which the performer has to obey the instructions of the composer and the former's only role is to convey the message of the latter to the audience without altering it in any way, is overthrown" (Stavlas 2012, 142). Music is no longer about invigorating an aspect of the past (the score with its well-represented signs, impossible to cancel), but music represents a possible value of the future, of an eternal present of interpretation of every moment - in fact a new aspect related to postmodernism.

The idea of indeterminacy and openness has direct repercussions related to the form, which becomes flexible and articulated on other coordinates than the strictly classical ones: "the polyvalent form of a musical work is constituted by its randomly generated tempo structure. For this kind of music the original concept of 'open form' is extended by the use of a computer algorithm that not only generates an aleatory collage of prepared fragments, but also calculates an appropriated tempo progression to arrange and overlap these fragments in a musically meaningful way. The author's collaboration with a chamber music trio is presented and the artistic strategies and technical implementations are discussed" (Kocher 2016).

### 3. Conclusion

Stockhausen's music influenced classical music, but also jazz and popular music, during the 60 years which defined his long musical career rich in innovations. His ample compositions, the same as his chamber, symphonic and opera music display a very wide perspective of the preoccupations of some of the most important creators of acute modernity.

In approaching Beethoven's music, Stockhausen uses the deconstructive ideas of postmodernism, "reaching Minimalism and Poststructuralism" (Sim 2001, 3), trying to reformulate Beethoven's discourse by recomposing it in the perception of the listener who knows the composition, who can find it and rephrase it, bringing their own contribution). This may be one of the great contributions that the 20<sup>th</sup> century could bring as a tribute to Beethoven's music.

M. Kagel illustrates the same conception about the brilliant music of the past centuries, redefining the classical roles of the creator, the interpreter and, why not, of the public. From a pragmatic point a view, the analyses need to be supplemented. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the manner and the means that the composers chose to express them are also important, in addition to the content of the message itself. The personal version of a work which is never finished, which is left open deliberately, represents a challenge for both the interpreter (the one who can be seen and heard on stage) and the public that assimilate the message, internalizing it and finding in it inner spiritual resources.

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