

“My craft inspires me”

Interview von Tobias Niederschlag



“In solo pieces, I can examine and realign things.” Johannes Maria Staud

Johannes Maria Staud is this season’s Capell-Compositeur (composer-in-residence) at the Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden: a title associated with three world premières. In an interview with artistic programmer Tobias Niederschlag, Staud offered an insight into his working methods and his image of himself as a composer.

What does your appointment as Capell-Compositeur mean to you?

Staud: Firstly, it is a great honour. The Sächsische Staatskapelle and Semperoper are institutions that have had an impact on musical history. But I am also particularly pleased to have the chance to write three differently orchestrated pieces for this ensemble. It's a very unusual opportunity and one which allows me to try out different things.

You compose works for the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonic, the Cleveland Orchestra and the Staatskapelle Dresden. How did you become established right at the top so quickly?

Staud: I can't really explain it. Perhaps my music has an element of craftsmanship that enables conductors and performers to enter a cosmos of sound quickly. Craftsmanship plays a very important role for me. It also inspires me to invent new sounds.

Are you actually able to try out anything new when writing commissioned pieces for artists such as Daniel Barenboim or Simon Rattle?

Staud: That's always a part of the process for me! I find the pitfalls of routine work far worse. To avoid them, I aim to try out something new in each piece. Sometimes, having the pressure of a commission can actually be helpful.

Christoph Eschenbach is to present the world première of your new orchestral work Tondo with the Sächsische Staatskapelle at the Semperoper in Dresden and then conduct it at the Vienna Musikverein. What inspired you to write this composition?

Staud: It was mainly the special sound of the Sächsische Staatskapelle, which is very warm and very full in the middle section. In this piece, I've grouped a "romantic" sound around the colour of the four horns. The title Tondo – meaning "round" – refers to the snake-like form of the piece: the beginning is also the end so it could be played endlessly. The instrumentation is fairly classical. I was particularly excited to have the chance to invent a completely new sound for this ensemble.

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You are also writing a monodrama for Dresden, which is to première with an ensemble from the Staatskapelle and with Bruno Ganz as the narrator. Can you tell me more?

Staud: It's another joint project with Durs Grünbein, who wrote the text for my opera *Berenice*. In the piece, I refer to questions to which I have not yet found satisfactory answers. Above all, what happens when a narrator or an actor speaks to the accompaniment of music? This soon leads to the subject of monodrama, a form that was largely shaped by Arnold Schönberg. Durs Grünbein, who's from Dresden, and I agreed on his text "Nach den Satiren" from which I've taken large parts and put them together in five scenes.

It's the internal monologue of someone who walks through a city and is aware of historical contexts. It's about suppressed guilt and observing suppressed signs – signs of dictatorship and oppression in city life – and about how it can be possible to carry on as a person and lead an individual life. It's an exciting theme and we're trying to create a blend of a monologue and musical monodrama with many different combinations.

*You have written a solo piece entitled *Celluloid* for Joachim Hans, the solo bassoonist of the Sächsische Staatskapelle. How did you come up with the title?*

Staud: There were two reasons for it. Firstly, I think the bassoon is a little underestimated as an instrument. This has only begun to change during the last few years – at least since Luciano Berio's *Sequenza*. I felt the same way about the old celluloid tapes that are unfortunately hardly ever played any more in today's digitalised age. Secondly, I was also inspired by a poem by Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, which speaks of the "endless expansion of celluloid". Ultimately, the solo pieces in my career to date have always been focused pieces in which I could examine and realign things. That's why I am particularly grateful to the Staatskapelle for this commission.

What plans do you have after your tenure as Capell-Compositeur in Dresden?

Staud: I have a few exciting tasks in the pipeline, which I am very much looking forward to. I will be composing a new piece for Mariss Jansons and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, for instance. I'm also planning to

write a large work for actors, vocal ensemble and electronics for the Festival Agora in Paris. And then, of course, I have plans to write a new opera with Durs Grünbein. The monodrama is sure to be an important starting point, even if it's completely different from an opera as far as theme is concerned.

Interview: Tobias Niederschlag, artistic programmer at Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden



WORLD PREMIÈRES

Celluloid

for solo bassoon
Joachim Hans, bsn
7 June 2011: Semperoper Dresden

Tondo

Preludio for orchestra
Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden
Conductor: Christoph Eschenbach
1–3 May 2011: Semperoper Dresden

Die Auflösung des Marmelspiels

for ensemble and narrator
Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden
Narrator: Bruno Ganz
Conductor: Asher Fisch
4–5 June 2011: Volkswagen's "Die Gläserne Manufaktur" Dresden
www.staatskapelle-dresden.de