

Staatsoper Unter den Linden Berlin

# Festival Infektion!

## Kammerkonzert II

Two of the most important works for percussion from the 20th century were written by the Greek composer Iannis Xenakis. And even today, 17 years after his death, his music does not leave us cold. Massive eruptions, not for the faint-hearted.

Iannis Xenakis and the drums - that is a close connection. It is hardly surprising that his two pieces for percussion solo, "Psappa" and "Rebonds A & B" have long since become standard repertoire despite their gigantic difficulties. Drums are often extremely rhythmically dominated, and rhythm is also always mathematics.

Xenakis first worked as an architect and was Le Corbusier's assistant for many years. Only gradually did music gain the upper hand in his work. But that means that Xenakis was very familiar with mathematical methods. And this is what you hear in his music: rhythmically complex - but still surprisingly catchy.

## Not for the faint-hearted

Xenakis limits himself to relatively few percussion instruments. Mostly there are different types of percussion in different tonal heights, plus wooden blocks. This gives the music something archaic, especially in the early of the two solo pieces, "Psappa". This work is also based on mathematical calculations. But that's not really the conspicuous thing.

When the drummer suddenly makes a quarter turn and thunders on a deep drum, it is a shaking tone, then a break. But here you can hear the sound of that stroke for several seconds. And so the piece changes between movement and silence. The volume is remarkable. That's not far from a nearby shooting range. Not for the faint-hearted.

## Body control and penetration

The Greek percussionist Alexandros Giovanos is one of the leading representatives of his instrument in the field of contemporary music. And the reason why it is so could be experienced above all in these two solo pieces by Iannis Xenakis. Some parts are almost impossible to play at this tempo. Actually, he should have had several knots in his arms. But he played this with an apparent casualness that meant that no basic pulse was ever lost, filled with overlapping rhythms.

It is an art to play the percussion instruments so precisely. But even more so, to keep the different levels dynamically apart, so that not everything is just played hard. And you have to understand this music like Alexandros Giovanos, and you didn't know what to admire more about him: his body control or his musical penetration.

## Percussion plus amplified harpsichord

Xenakis' piece "Komboï" requires an amplified harpsichord in addition to the percussion - or the amplification would be too quiet. Here, too, the mathematician is pleased, but what is more fascinating is the playing with sounds, when harpsichord and percussion mix so well that it gets difficult to realize which sound comes out from which instrument. Both instruments are knotted, which explains the title.

Nevertheless, a sense of humour of its own sometimes shines through: When the harpsichord player has incredibly virtuosic scales to play and the percussionist answers with a single note on the vibraphone, it sounds like an electronic loading bell. And even though the harpsichord part, which Ermis Theodorakis fearlessly rattles down, is complex and at the limit of playability, it sounds so simple once you have listened in.

## Challenge

With "Kassandra" Iannis Xenakis has added a scene to his "Orestie" opera. This is music theatre - and a duet. For one singer, mind you. Cassandra and Agamemnon enter into a dialogue here, and as we can notice, the baritone changes between his natural and a falsetto voice. But this is not all: the singer also carries a psaltery in his arm, a lyre on which he repeatedly pulls strings. Martin Gerke really becomes alive through this scene: a chant with a barking voice, declamation, a moaning, howling or cackling. And all this to the thunderous percussion accompaniment, that gets you really shaken up.

The music of Iannis Xenakis, as this evening has shown, has to be confronted. It challenges you either to completely reject it - in some shrill places some have even covered their ears - or to let yourself be carried away, to let the sounds approach you. The three performers involved have succeeded in communicating in this

way, above all the percussionist  
Alexandros Giovanos, who has, in a  
way, become one with the music.

- *Andreas Göbel, **Kulturradio***