

Abstracts

Rainer Nonnenmann: Nature and Nostalgia. Intonation, Tradition and Expression of Martin Smolka's Music

The Czech composer prefers to use elementary single tones, intervals, triads and gestures. The simple material seems almost pre-musical and is yet at the same time highly loaded with tradition, expression and meaning. Smolka uses quarter and sixth notes to detune tonal melodies and harmonies into something as new as it is familiar, which is deliberately clouded and, as it slips away, unfolds a nostalgic expressivity. The melancholy feeling of something irretrievably lost is also conveyed by his handling of traditional expressive characters, old intonation systems, historical musical instruments and, as it were, naturalistic tableaux, whose composed sounds »wie ein Naturlaut« à la Gustav Mahler alternate with concrete demonstrations of the acoustic nature of the soundings. Evidence of this nostalgic dialectic can be found in the ensemble and orchestral works *Rain, a window ...* (1991/92), *Remix, Redream, Reflight* (2000), *Semplice* (2006) and *Blue Bells and Bells Blues* (2011).

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Tobias Eduard Schick: Martin Smolka's Revival of Major-Minor Harmonics through Re-Contextualization and Microtonal Alienation

A central aspect of Martin Smolka's poetics consists in »giving new energy to the spent musical elements such as melody or consonant harmonies and intervals«. Using the orchestral works *My My Country* (2012) and *Blue Bells or Bell Blues* (2011) as well as the choral piece *Poema de balcones* (2008) as examples, Smolka's strategies for a renewal of the expressive potential of major-minor sounds will be analyzed. By losing their former unambiguousness through microtonal alienation, simultaneous layering and re-contextualization, and beginning to shimmer mysteriously and ambiguously, the major-minor tonal sounds, which have sunk to kitsch, often gain new poetic and auratic qualities. In Novalis' sense, this approach can be interpreted as a romanticisation of the ordinary and everyday. At the same time, according to the author's thesis, the clarity of tonal allusions and the simplicity of the structural progressions, but also the intended poetic quality of the music, are curtailed. Thus the striving for a renewed expressiveness is often counteracted, especially by the emblematic quality of major-minor tonal sounds.

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Steffen Schleiermacher: Interview with a Quarter Tone

In this (fictitious) interview with a quarter tone, Martin Smolka's use of microtonality is discussed on the basis of some of his compositions for orchestra, choir or chamber ensembles. His relationship to the music of Morton Feldman, Alois Haba, Charles Ives and Ivan Wyschnegradsky is also discussed. In addition, fundamental aspects of the use, practicability and history of quarter tones in modern music history will be addressed.



Thomas Meyer: An Aesthetic of the Strange. On the Choir Music by Martin Smolka

In the work of Martin Smolka, compositions for choir have received a prominent place during the last ten years when he wrote several works on biblical texts. Still more fascinating are three predecessors based on texts by Henry David Thoreau, Federico García Lorca and Tadeusz Różewicz. Here the combination of simplicity, fine detuning, insistent repetition and sound illustration with remains of older musical language leads to a strange and magic impression. These pieces have to be viewed with in the background of Czech tradition, especially of the Prague artists group Šmidrové and the music of Rudolf Komorous. They developed in the sixties an »aesthetic of the strange« in which things are driven on the edge and you cannot recognize what's serious and what's not – what fits well with Smolka's compositions.

Jörn Peter Hiekel: Martin Smolka's Kafka Reflection *Vor dem Gesetz*

The music theater piece *Vor dem Gesetz*, one of Martin Smolka's most elaborate compositions, can be characterized by the fact that it interweaves serious, factual, meditative, deeply emotional and grotesque moments and integrates them into a dramaturgy that is both surprising and meaningful. As can be shown, this composition ties in with Smolka's earlier work ideas. By oscillating between the existential and the humorous, and also playing out tipping points between the two, it proves to be both a spiritual and pleasurable invitation to reflect on Kafka and on his fascinatingly unusual poetry, full of paradoxes and riddles that contradict simple hermeneutics with relish.



Stefan Drees: Make the Images on the Screen Speak for Themselves: To the Silent Film Music of Martin Smolka

With *Hats in the Sky* (2004) for Hans Richter's *Vormittagsspuk* (1927), *En tractant* (2008) for René Clair's *Entr'acte* (1924) and *Der Puppenkavalier* (2010) for Ernst Lubitsch's *Die Puppe* (1919), Martin Smolka has so far composed three scores for historical silent films. Using *Hats in the Sky* and *En tractant* as starting point, the paper examines the particularities of the harmonic, tonal and formal disposition in the settings of two experimental films and discusses differences regarding the relationship between music and image. The approach to *Der Puppenkavalier* – as a consequence of the more extensive and narrative film – is much more oriented towards the observation of selected details like the investigation of formal strategies and the use of leitmotifs.