



MUSIC | MUSIC REVIEW

# An Art Tour of Salzburg in Sound

A New York Philharmonic Biennial Program From Austria

By ZACHARY WOOLFE    MAY 30, 2014

New music is thankfully a preoccupation of the New York Philharmonic under Alan Gilbert, but glamour isn't always part of the equation. The orchestra's new-music series, Contact!, has spent most of its time in no-frills, functional halls like the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium; the basement space SubCulture; and Symphony Space, as oppressively shoeboxy as the much-maligned Avery Fisher Hall.

So it was a revelation to have "Beyond Recall," the latest installment of Contact! and part of the NY Phil Biennial, spread out in the soaring Agnes Gund Garden Lobby at the Museum of Modern Art late Thursday. The stage was set in front of an expansive wall of glass through which the museum's Sculpture Garden was visible.

It was a setting that matched, in drama and flair, the ambitions of "Beyond Recall." Organized by the conductor and composer Matthias Pintscher and imported from the Salzburg Festival in Austria, the program had its premiere there last summer under the auspices of the Salzburg Foundation.

For over a decade the foundation has invited artists to create site-specific sculptures throughout Salzburg. Mr. Pintscher was tapped to commission composers to respond to the works, and nine of the results — each about 10 minutes long — were presented on Thursday and played with incisive energy by shifting ensembles of Philharmonic musicians.

This was not simple tone painting. A squiggly sculpture, like Manfred Wakolbinger's "Connection," elicited twinkling, clicking and clacking from Vito Zuraj, not squiggles. The influence of the visual on the aural here was far more obscure, detectable only periodically: in the quivering near-hush that

characterizes both the artist James Turrell’s “Sky-Space” and Mark Andre’s cello-bass duet “E2,” for example, or the dark invocations of Mozart that Jay Schwartz uses in “M,” his response to Markus Lüpertz’s sculpture “Mozart — Eine Hommage.”

Mr. Schwartz’s work begins with low rumbles in the strings; only when the winds enter is it clear that this is a brutal parody of the overture to Mozart’s “Le Nozze di Figaro.” The churn builds to a volume and violence reminiscent of Wagner or Strauss before suddenly dropping out, leaving the bass-baritone Evan Hughes to sing keening, intense fragments of Mozart’s Requiem.

Mr. Hughes was an impressive presence in several works, as was the soprano Jennifer Zetlan, her voice precise without being too cool in the impassioned lyricism of Dai Fujikura’s “silence seeking solace” and the sly, sinuous lines — a setting of the Fibonacci number sequence — in Olga Neuwirth’s “Piazza dei Numeri.” Ms. Zetlan was game for the music’s daunting demands, which in Nina Senk’s “In the Absence” alone ranged from skittish whispers to full wails.

There was a certain wearying sameness to some of the works — a lot of booms followed by scurries — but attractive qualities in all of them, including the looming pauses of Johannes Maria Staud’s “Caldera,” Bruno Mantovani’s careening “Spirit of Alberti” and Michael Jarrell’s setting of St. Augustine in “Adtende, ubi albescit veritas.”

The evening, which didn’t end until early Friday morning, was exhausting but energizing and, yes, glamorous, even if it was also yet another discomfiting example of the puppyish eagerness of the performing arts to ally themselves, whether convincingly or not, with the uniquely rich and powerful world of contemporary visual art.

“Beyond Recall” is repeated on Saturday night at the Museum of Modern Art; 212-875-5656, nyphil.org/biennial.

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