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space 2

Hermann Scherchen: alles hörbar machen I , by Luca Frei

Opening Saturday September 19, 2.30

September 19 November 7, 2015

Hermann Scherchen: alles hörbar machen

“Yes, my dear, we live in Ticino and more precisely in Gravesano, 9 kilometres from Lugano, in the most absolute calm and in an old stone house with very thick walls, a large swimming pool, a forest, fields and fruit trees. The house has twelve rooms. I have never been so happy in my life.” (Letter to Wladimir Vogel, 1953)

Hermann Scherchen: alles hörbar machen is an archival exhibition that presents the complete digitalisation of the Gravesaner Blätter and a display of the original volumes. The exhibition also includes a photographic edition comprising 24 prints based on an original photo album that exhibits the activities of the electro-acoustic studio between 1954 and 1961.

I have chosen to focus upon Scherchen’s pioneering research in electroacoustics because I consider it not only extremely interesting for its unique interdisciplinary approach, but also an historical testimony of a shared desire, in that time, to develop technological means and redefine their role in society. Scherchen believed in the emancipatory potential of music, and he welcomed the development of television, as he had done previously with the radio, as a new means to reach as many people as possible, and through musical listening, to cultivate their aesthetic appreciation. Thus, “alles hörbar machen,” his motto that appeared for the first time in his book *Handbook of conducting* (1929), should be understood not only in technical terms, e.g. literally to make every sound and every detail audible, but also as a pedagogical impulse to free the sound from all constraints and limitations so that, in its turn, it can free and elevate the spirit of the listeners.

In a letter from 1956 Scherchen, who was then 65-years-old, wrote that the studio *marked the beginning of a spiritual collaboration that was really international and without trivialities, because there is no institution, no directorate, no “Gravesano system,” but only the work*

done for the love of art and science (excerpt from his diary of 1956). Scherchen might have been referring to the quarrel at the time between electronic music and concrete music, between the Studio for Electronic Music in Cologne, founded in 1951 under the direction of Herbert Eimert, and Pierre Schaeffer's Groupe de recherche de musique concrète in Paris, also founded in 1951. Scherchen's interest in television and cinema, the transmission and the perception of sound, as well as the psychological and physiological responses associated with it, went beyond these dissonances, as some of the titles of the following conferences that took place in Gravesano confirm: "What is popular music?" (1955), "Artificial reverb and first auditory refractions" (1956), "Electroacoustic music in radio, cinema, and television" (1958), "Music and television, music and medicine, music and mathematics" (1961).

The Hermann Scherchen Electro-Acoustic Experimental Studio in Gravesano was inaugurated in 1954 under the protectorate of The International Music Council, Unesco, with an international meeting titled "Music and Electroacoustics" that brought together composers, musicians, researchers and technicians in electroacoustics. Reports from the participants were collected and published in the book "Gravesano: Musik, Raumgestaltung, Elektroakustik" (Ars Viva Verlag, 1954).

The studio's activities and the results from its research work, as well as the summaries from the congresses, were documented in the *Gravesaner Blätter*, a quarterly review published between 1955 and 1966 (bilingual, in German and English, from 1957). The wide range of subjects included hall acoustics, instrument design, loudspeaker systems, equipment's maintenance, compositional technique and aesthetics, psychoacoustics, and music sociology. Notable contributors included Iannis Xenakis, Luigi Nono, Pierre Boulez, Pierre Schaeffer, Luc Ferrari, Henri Pousseur, Abraham A. Moles, Lothar Cremer, Werner Meyer-Eppeler, Roelof Vermeulen, and Henry Cassirer. As Scherchen himself noted, *the Gravesaner Blätter is not a specialised magazine. It aims to serve a new synthetic research field, where, without compromise, the overall problems of music, electro-technique, and acoustics will be presented scientifically.* The "Gravesano Scientific Record" series accompanied the volumes at irregular intervals, and included sound experiments and demonstrations, as well as new and unreleased compositions.

Luca Frei

Hermann Scherchen (1891-1966)

His talent and his love for music appear from his earliest youth. He starts musical education at the Musikhochschule in Berlin, and in 1907 he starts playing the alto in the Blüthner orchestra and, later, with the Berlin Philharmonic and the Krolloper. On the other hand, he learns his métier of orchestral conductor as an autodidact. After World War I he conducts two workers' choruses, creates the Scherchen string quartet and the contemporary music journal *Melos*. In 1933, he leaves Germany in disagreement with the National Socialism. In Winterthur he takes up the direction of the Musikkollegium orchestra, which is supported by its sponsor Werner Reinhart, and makes it famous throughout Europe. In 1923, he commits himself in favor of the Internationale Gesellschaft für neue

Musik (IGNM). In Brussels, he sets up his own musical publishing company *Ars Viva* and – besides publishing works badly known or totally unknown works of the past – he also dedicates himself to modern composers such as K.A. Hartmann and Wladimir Vogel. In 1937 he settles down in Switzerland. After World War II, Scherchen acts between 1945 and 1950 as musical director of the Zurich Radio (then renamed as Radio Beromünster). From 1950 onwards he works with the summer courses in Darmstadt (*Ferienkurse für Neue Musik*). In 1954, he settles down in Gravesano, where he builds his electroacoustic studio and organizes a series of congresses. The Studio of Gravesano becomes a sort of must-see destination for young composers (Ussachevski, Luc Ferrari, F.B. Mâche, Yannis Xenakis). He finally publishes a quarterly review of music, the so-called *Gravesaner Blätter* in which he publishes the results and reviews of these research studies. Scherchen always has been an undaunted champion of modern music, and he conducts a great number of first performances (A. Schönberg, P. Hindemith, A. Webern, E. Krenek, E. Varèse, L. Nono, L. Dallapiccola, P. Dessau, B. Blacher, H.W. Henze, A. Haba, A. Roussel, K. Stockhausen, I. Xenakis, et al.). During the première of Malipiero's *Orfeide* that he conducts in Florence in June 1966, he faints; and on June 12, 1966, he dies of a heart attack. He is buried in Gravesano beside his last wife Pia Andronescu, who joined him not even two years later.

Luca Frei (Lugano, 1976)

Luca Frei is an artist based in Malmö and Berlin. Frei uses a range of media including installation, performance, drawing and text. His practice is concerned with the ways in which art might provide a measure of agency by creating alternative spaces designed to encourage free learning and emancipatory practices. His projects are usually developed in response to a specific context, compelling Frei to adapt his approach according to given situations.

His works explore the borders between art as an autonomous aesthetic practice and as a shared public process. They often take the form of staged environments or structures that invite public participation and dialogue, while eschewing the ideological designs of grand utopian visions. Inspired by alternative pedagogical models, Frei's works elicit an active engagement characterized by play and associative thinking, privileging a learning process based on independent reflection and experience.

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Wed - Fri 10.30 - 12.30 15.00 - 18.30

Sat 10.30 - 12:00 15:00 - 17:00

Mo - Tue by appointment

