

Angels

*a dance theater in seven images
for percussion quartet & electronics
(2013/14)*

A few years ago, I saw a large poster near my atelier in Munich asking me: 'Where is your angel?' I do not actually consider myself a fan of esoteric trends, but I took that as a sign.

I saw dancers dancing in front of me and heard intense music. Walking towards my atelier I was thinking about the two perspectives from which angels have been portrayed by religion, literature and art through the centuries: the sensitive and solicitous, found in numerous works of art from the Baroque to the present, and the gigantic and powerful. For the first type I heard sustained metallic sounds, for the second the sound of bass drums. When discussing a new project for the percussion department with the Maastricht Academy of Music in the autumn of 2012, I felt sure that the topic of angels, which I had in my mind, would be the right one!

I started planning the piece and soon I could 'see' a form of seven images, in a work for percussionists, dancers and loudspeakers surrounding the audience. A piece which would show seven perspectives on the figure of the angel, without a story. Fragments of various texts would support the music and lead to free dramaturgy. In addition, a personal philosophy of mine should run below the seven images, forming the thread of a non-existent story. In my philosophy, a newborn child comes into this world as perfect as an angel. In the course of its life, the child (or angel?!) becomes a human being when it encounters the various faces of life. Through passion and resurrection in every single moment of life, the human being finds his angel, finds his way back to his own angel!

I

In the first image, the angel brings the message of birth. He appears in both his characters, sensitive but also strong, and brings the joyful message (in Greek, angelia means message) 'et dixit illis Angelus: evangelizo vobis gaudium magnum' [Luke 2:10]. Flapping wings, voices, noises and electrified sounds develop the soundscape and the material of the subsequent parts.

II

The 'guardian angel' is the second image of the work. Slow, fragile, but also very atmospheric music played on bowed crotales and vibraphones, as well as various metallic objects, evokes the image of suspended cocoons.

III

Like in real life, the agony of everyday life makes us lose our angel. The electronic inter-mezzo between the second and third image prepares the atmosphere for the lost angel. An anxious and defused music which makes us wonder 'where have we come from? and where are we going?' [Gen. 16:8].

IV

Michelangelo gave the words 'lux aeterna' a new meaning when he said, 'I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.' The ability to recognize the light in everything is reflected in ascending lines on the vibraphones. Certain frequencies of the vibraphone lines, played on midi instruments, surround the audience. The live instruments and electronic sounds seem to become one!

V

The fallen angel (fifth image) is an ecstatic rhythmic part, building up to highest level of expression! Imitations of flapping wings as well as short rhythmic motives spreading through the percussionists bring the music to a diabolic ostinato before the second electronic intermezzo interrupts the flow of the work and turns the listeners into observers of an image from Dante Alighieri's 'Divina commedia'. Disorientated voices, heavy steps of gigantic beings and fragments of 'paradiso' (canto XXXII 130-135) underline the electrified atmosphere of thousands of angels gathered in the eternal garden.

VI

The hymn 'η ζωή ένα ταφω' (Life in the Grave) is one of the most well-known hymns in the Greek Orthodox Church, and is sung every Good Friday. The 'armies of angels' who are 'astounded' by the message of Jesus' death is reflected here by the sound of tubular bells, vibraphones and gongs. Forward and backward motions as well as frozen moments in the music bring the astonishment of the angels to the foreground. Grained bell sounds spread their amplitude in the hall towards an expressive and apothotic climax before the etheric seventh movement.

VII

'He has risen from death' is the last and eternal image of the work. The resurrection as a state of isolated oscillations and frequencies. Oscillating waves of energy moving in space, like every single atom inside us and our cosmos.

Minas Borboudakis

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