



Brian Ferneyhough

Allgebrah (1996)

Solo Oboe, 4vln, 2vla, 2vc, db

Duration: 14 minutes

First performance: January 1997, Cité de la Musique, Paris, Didier Pateau, Ensemble InterContemporain conducted by David Robertson

Commissioned by Ensemble InterContemporain

Among the many remarkable individuals producing art in the insane asylum in the 20th century, Adolf Wölfli is surely one of the most haunting. Produced with unflagging intensity over the span of many years, his vastly labyrinthine fantasies are, in effect, the obsessive record of a beleaguered psyche's attempt to ritually enunciate the conditions for a universe annulling the one which his body was absurdly constrained to inhabit. I have been continually drawn back to Wölfli's unique synaesthetic blending of aural, verbal and visual stimuli, into a scarcely-controlled chaos of layers of raging experience, not least because, albeit in a quite different way, my own compositional development has brought me ever closer to a form composed not of self-enclosed structural units, but rather of the only imperfectly registered compaction of continually mutating linear tendencies and sudden catastrophic ruptures.

Allgebrah (Wölfli's own term for the fundamental creative principle underlying his internal vision) seeks to redefine a number of my constant concerns of the last decade, among them the opposition of a solo instrument to a larger body of instruments, the overlapping of multiple strata of sometimes highly contrasted activity and the application of local acts of emblematic will to the subjective selection of materials from those provided by the twelve-layer pre-compositional matrix, itself the result of the superimposition of three distinct types of musical comportment. Thus, it is only occasionally that a single type of activity emerges unambiguously as the object of regard; more often, one is aware of a confusion of relatively independent textures - hesitant statements or hysterical outbursts which, scarcely begun, are sucked helplessly back into the protean flux of generative potential.

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Allgebrah cont.

The solo oboe does not function in an authoritative solistic fashion; rather, it, too, remains confused and unstable, attempting to glean what solace it may from events unfolding and fading too rapidly to be fully absorbed, reproduced and glossed. On numerous occasions, nevertheless, its wild swings and forays do have an effect on the remainder of the ensemble, the latter acting as uncontrollable echo chamber, picking up, amplifying and unpredictably prolonging minute features in the oboe's flickering discourse.

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