

Sheep-Music-Concert-Castle

Henning Christiansen

I have worked with sheep before. For the first time in Graz at "Animal Art", in the autumn of 1987. With one sheep only, plus 12 hens and one cock. They were very peaceful and walked around my table in our cage even though there was a lot of loud music coming from the loudspeakers. The cock was always sitting at the top and his crowing was amplified via microphone and delay. The cock was really thrilled and crowed all the more often — proud as a cock he was. The sheep didn't say much.

The second time was on Hövikodden, Oslo, Henie-Onstad Art Center at the performance of NORDLYD March 28, 1987. That time I had 4 grown-up gestating sheep in a large basement and we, Björn Nörgaard, Ernst Kretzer, and myself, discovered what the smell of the sheep can do to the concert vitality. You might say that we smelled nature in the museum. The concert was called TIEFLAND and lasted for four hours. Björn Nörgaard had made a landscape of sand, gravel and loam.

The third occasion was in the foyer of the Music House in Aarhus, Denmark on the occasion of NOMUS, Festival for New Nordic Music together with 5 sheep, 2 grown-up ones and 3 lambs, black ones. The 5 sheep were fenced in beside a palmtree (indoor garden). Thus the motif appeared to be biblical and the viewers expected me to sacrifice at least one of my lambs, which did not happen, first of all because I really love sheep and secondly because religious sacrifice is not my concern — I enjoy working with animals as a composer according to the slogan: "Save the Nature — use it." I believe that we have to treat animals and plants as friends (indeed, as our family). If we accept nature's conditions, everyone will be better off. This time on the meadow on the banks of the Danube near the Brucknerhaus, I choose 30 sheep — no one in Austria will then expect me to sacrifice sheep. Actually, I am a friend of Hermann Nitsch' and think I understand him, but he is a sacrificing priest and is concerned with original religion, but I am a Scandinavian and for the Scandinavians (the Vikings), I think, food was much more important than sacrifice or perhaps the food was the sacrifice.

That it is to take place in front of the Brucknerhaus brings quite a few ideas to my mind. First of all, I think of Bruckner's great symphonies modelled after nature, from the days of flourishing orchestral culture, great feelings and gazing into the soundscape. Which was always the landscape of a concert hall and musicians dressed up as penguins, many violins.

Originally most ideals of instrumental sounds were derived from animal voices or other sounds of natural phenomena. The violins, for instance: someone found out that stretched out, dried bowels could produce sounds, there is a funny saying: "My bowels are crying." This has been civilized, "refined", and much has been achieved for the human mind (Save the Nature, use it). The strings have played spirituality to the human being. Today, however, I have the opportunity to treat the voices of sheep electrically so that they can be used as instruments for our acoustic expression and also to set us thinking about our present-day relation to nature — also to our own nature as human beings.

I have worked with animal voices before, in the ROMA ZOO, e.g., I made a suite of animal voices which I called SYMPHONY NATURA, I have also worked with the howling of wolves and with canaries (The Green Birdchoir Piano -Museum of Art, Northern Jutland) ("Freedom Is Around the Corner" — Yellow Music in Berlin) and also monkey singing, all of it nature variations on tape. What is important to me now is where and in which context such works are being performed. I have been in concert halls, in theaters, but I am not really happy with these environments for my animal music. I have to construct new "concert halls" for such works and therefore I really like this relatively large "Concert Castle" on the meadow at

the Danube in front of the famous Brucknerhaus, it is ideal for me and I am writing a new slogan: "Sheep instead of Violins." The meadow belongs to the sheep, it is their territory, that's where they belong and people come to visit them. Together with the Sheep's Music coming from a container, I realize another idea in container nr. 2: I have tried to bring Grieg's Peer Gynt-Suite "back to nature". When working on it, I try to imagine what Edvard Grieg had heard in GUDBRANDSDAL in Norway before setting that sound into the musical language of that time and for the concert hall and we must keep in mind that Grieg's Peer Gynt-Suite is still one of the most popular orchestra pieces today. I now take this piece of orchestra music out of its usual concert background and put it onto the meadow on the riverbank in front of the Brucknerhaus together with Sheep's Music. Besides, I am also interested in transporting this piece of music from Norway to Austria in this form. In former days, the transportation of music was not as simple as today, there had been practical and cultural problems that we are hardly aware of today. Music travels light these days.

The background, the space where music happens is what I want to put into the foreground.