

"Spanish Bells"

Llorenc Barber

In his piece "Spanish Bells", the "Linguofarincampanologist" Llorenc Barber plays a small, collapsible bell-tower with sticks, breath and voice. But it would be wrong to imagine that this was just another instrument being played; what happens here is an intimate yet also ceremonious dialogue between an instrument and its player, an encounter of the metal cavity of the bell with the fleshy, damp cavity of the mouth, an expression of absolute communication.

"Spanish Bells" is not based on a score although a sequence of 'movements' and formal lines becomes apparent in the course of the piece. It is a 'structured' improvisation. The use of certain techniques and the relevant sound potential leads to formative tendencies. The improvisation follows a formal idea, the structure, however, can be changed any time. "It is my language. Forms take shape unintentionally. I prefer being honest and independent, using only what I have in my hands. I want to depend on the place and the audience. I do not want to repeat myself. I want to surprise myself."

The story of the instrument is a story of chance. Looking for an ashpan for his stove in a small factory, Barber found an old iron kind of dish and was thrilled by its sonar qualities. In the course of time, he acquired a large collection of such pieces in different sizes. Actually, they are used as lids for water containers. He started to invent his special technique of playing bells rather incidentally by talking to the bells and touching them with his mouth. In his first concert a single bell was being used with a stick. The new technique of mouthplay found its purest expression in concerts of two bells of about the same size and played with very soft sticks so that above a hardly perceivable fundamental tone a music of intersecting harmonics and their oscillations happened. Gradually only, Barber assembled several bells and developed the percussive side of the instrument, "I need time, I do not jump."

According to Barber, the "Linguofarincampanology" — something like the "tonguetroatbellology" — is an art and a pseudo-science exploring the movement of the clappers, brains, muscles, bells and masks, with the mutual pervasion of the exterior, the metal cavity of the bell and the inside of the body, the cavity of the mouth. That is to say, a music of dual cavities. The blowing, breathing and singing of the cavity of the mouth together with the metal cavity creates a kaleidoscope of upper harmonics and sound combinations pursuing their own courses (aerodynamic labyrinths). The sound of the one cavity is food for the other one. Metal changes into flesh and the throat becomes metallic. The mouth is a double filter and resounding body for the bells and for itself: it swallows the sound of the bells and excites it by breathing and by uttering tones into common vibration, it creates a collision/ a union out of which rises a third — something found, something beautiful and enlightening. The tongue and the lips which sometimes touch or almost touch the bells. The specific bearing of the body close to and somewhat below the instrument, the ritual dance of the arms lifted up: "My music is a personal game of love-making, being kind towards an instrument, loving a material, kissing it for love."

Matthias Osterwold