

## Torsten Rasch

You spent many years of your life in Japan – how has this influenced your music?

Besides a preference for certain Japanese instruments, I would say it hasn't really influenced my music. But there are (musical) art forms which have made a deep impression on me, especially the Japanese Noh-Theatre. It's still lingering in my thoughts, and it will probably show up in one of my pieces in the future.

Other than Japanese culture what would you say are the most important influences on your style of composition?

A great variety of musical styles from the past and the present. Musicologists always insisted on the point of the dissolved harmonic system at the end of the last century, and the impossibility of a continuance in that style. I feel very much at home in a dissolved harmonic language and think Schoenberg could (and should) have continued much longer in the style of his Op. 16 Fünf Orchesterstücke for example.

You have completed two operas in the past few years, ('Rotter' in 2008 & 'The Duchess of Malfi' in 2010) and in the past you have also written many film scores. In what way does a visual art form impact your music?

Visual artforms haven't made a huge impact on my composing – however, words (sung or spoken) appeal to me greatly. To me, the instrument of the human voice is the most fascinating of all. Writing for film, as I have in the past, does mean subordinating one's material to allow for the importance of a visual journey, which is a helpful exercise (in terms of collaborating with others).

Writing an opera is the most challenging enterprise for me – not so much for the visual component (because I'm not the director who's staging it) – but in terms of musically visualising drama, being able to organize it, and make it emotionally involving.

Punchdrunk, the experimental and unorthodox theatre company produced *The Duchess of Malfi* this summer. What hurdles did you come across when composing music for them?

There were certain restrictions with the instrumentation, since the musicians had to move whilst others played. It was much more of a challenge to dispense of the narrative of the story which is essential to Punchdrunk's style. However, on the other hand, one really got the inimitable experience of actually being *in* the story, not just hearing or following it as you would when you see a staged opera in the usual style.

Do you consider the audience when you're working on a composition?

It would be an impossible task to compose *for* the audience, because one never knows who's in the audience. How does one assess what they like or dislike? I'm the first one listening to the music, and it has to pass that test first.

What do you say when asked to describe your music?

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My music is highly expressive and highly organized. A continuing examination of the balance between the intellectual and the emotional side of expression.

How important is it that music be accessible on first hearing?

For me it very much is. But that doesn't mean it has to be simple or pleasing. There has to be a comprehensible factor, which involves me in the music. There is of course no formula for it but it certainly has a relation to the above mentioned balance between emotion and intellect. The latter often dominates in modern music which sometimes leaves me unsatisfied and perplexed.

You have a number of premiere performances in the UK this year, including your latest orchestral work 'Le Serpent Rouge' which is to be performed by the BBC SO and André de Ridder – do you feel that the UK is a fitting home for your music?

I think that in the UK, music is listened to without any "philosophical contamination" which has been accumulated in Germany through many years of dominance of certain constitutive institutions (which are still important here). Music is perceived in the UK (and other countries) on a more impartial level, without the concept of how music **MUST BE** composed for our time. I have the impression that it's judged on only the one condition: is it captivating or not? In this sense I feel very "at home".

