## **WDR**



## Karlheinz Stockhausen Michael's Journey

Wiener Taschenoper in cooperation with Wiener Festwochen co-produced by KölnMusik and musikFabrik

Marco Blaauw Trumpet Nicola Jürgensen Bassett horn



musikFabrik
Conductor Peter Rundel

Artistic Concept
Carlos Padrissa (La Fura dels Baus)
Roland Olbeter
Franc Aleu (Urano)

TV Director János Darvas

Producer **Lothar Mattner** 

## Michaels Reise ("Michael's Journey")

from Karlheinz Stockhausen's "Licht" ("Light")

On 25 and 26 August, the Cologne Philharmonie turned into an opera stage; a spectacular scenic performance of "Michaels Reise" ("Michael's Journey") from the monumental opera cycle "Licht" ("Light") by Karlheinz Stockhausen was staged. This event took place on the occasion of the composer's 80th birthday.

In the contemporary music scene since the 1950s, Stockhausen was the leader of the avantgarde. Making the inaudible audible, realising the impossible, pushing open the gate to new rooms once and again, meeting new challenges -- this is what he considered to be the mission of his life, right up to the very end. This is why a trace of the great, the grand is inherent to his music. It was not for him to cultivate the same little garden over and over again, to knit the once found pattern time and time again. This very attitude of Stockhausen deterred musicians and listeners alike who wished to encounter no more than the spirit of past times in music – yet it was also this attitude which elated many people who wanted to see our ambient world being reflected in contemporary art. Stockhausen dedicated one of his main works ("Sirius") to "the pioneers of earth and space" - this was the role he saw himself and all those in who engulfed themselves intensively with his music. Today, with a view upon the completed work, this pioneering spirit is still clearly discernible; at the same time, however, it is becoming ever more clearly audible that this is just beautiful music sounding, which knows how to touch, how to move the listener immediately.

Stockhausen's opera cycle "Licht", in particular, is laid out genuinely grandly; it is a cycle of seven operas about the days of the week from "Monday" to "Sunday", 29 hours of music which the composer worked on for more than 25 years. The time journey through the week which the cycle sets off on is also a journey passing through the central issues of life which every man has to confront himself with, in which he has to prove himself – such a basic theme is attributed to every day, which Stockhausen takes from the traditions that are linked to the names of the weekdays: Tuesday being the day of war and conflict, Sunday being the day of praising the Lord etc. The three protagonists from the Jewish-Christian tradition move through these missions of man's life: Michael, the archangel, who becomes a man in order to lead mankind to God; Eve as a representative of heavenly and earthly love; and Lucifer, the fallen angel, as an antagonist. "Licht" is a cosmic world theatre. Stockhausen does not intend to put an esoteric artistic product on

the stage – rather, he communicates a message to his audience: Here is where your life is being negotiated. The cycle truly belongs to the series of the great works of avowal of our intellectual history like the "Divine Comedy", "Faust" and Claudel's "The Satin Slipper".

Such an oeuvre places the utmost demands if it is to be staged. This is why the cycle has never been performed as a whole so far; two of its operas, "Mittwoch" ("Wednesday") and "Sonntag" ("Sunday") are still even waiting for their premiere. With "Michaels Reise um die Erde" ("Michael's Journey around the Earth"), the 2nd act of "Donnerstag" ("Thursday") can now be witnessed in Cologne. In "Licht", this opera day is Michael's Day – after the 1st act has told us how Michael grows up as an angel turned into a man, who encounters love and is trained as a musician, "Michaels Reise" ("Michael's Journey") depicts his work on earth and, when he meets Eve, his ascent to heaven. The journey which Michael embarks on takes him all around the world in seven stations starting in Cologne and ending in Jerusalem. To these seven stations, Stockhausen has assigned the seven days of the entire cycle with their themes, with each one briefly shining up – so "Michaels Reise" is an excellent introduction to the work as a whole.

The remarkable thing about this act of the opera is the fact that it can do without singers – there are hardly any words spoken. All figures perform on the stage as instrumentalists: Michael as trumpeter, Eve as basset horn player, Lucifer as trombonist or tuba player. Still, it is an opera that we experience here rather than a trumpet concert, since the music is in itself imaginary, scenically laid out - it cries out for a lively staging. A Spanish director's team around the director Carlus Padrissa, which is linked to the Catalan theatre group "La Fura dels Baus", has taken up this task with huge stage machines, a fast-paced movement direction and exciting video projections. What mattered to the team was to translate the 30-year-old work into the theatre language of today in order to open up new spaces, in the very spirit of Stockhausen. The production was premiered at the Wiener Festwochen (Vienna Festival Weeks) in May; there it turned out that the visionary and monumental intention in Stockhausen's work was immediately grasped when the stage performance was shaped by theatre makers who intended to stage the astounding. But: Not only the powerful, sometimes even astounding element of Stockhausen's tonal language is to come into its own but also the cheerful, tender and intimate moment – this is what this extraordinary music theatre evening intends to achieve. It was intended as a gift for Stockhausen's 80th birthday on 22 August 2008 – what a pity that the master, who died all of a sudden on 5th December 2007, couldn't witness any more how his work inspired a new generation of artists and musicians alike and found its way to the audience.