Raum und Zeit im Überblick

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<th>Uhrzeit</th>
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Beginnzeiten und Dauern können sich ändern, aktuelle Informationen beim Eingang.

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Zugang zum Halbstock mit Buffet und WC

Buffet durchgehend geöffnet, Tee im Ticketpreis inbegriffen, Speisen und Getränke durchgehend erhältlich, so lange der Vorrat reicht.

Sehr warme Kleidung wird empfohlen, der Prunksaal ist seit seiner Gründung unbeheizt. Decken sind vorhanden.

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Prunksaal der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek
erbaut 1723–1730 im Auftrag von Karl VI.
nach Plänen Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlachs
Länge knapp 80 m, Kuppelhöhe 29,2 m
Deckenfresken 1726–1730 von Daniel Gran
rund 200.000 Bücher aus den Jahren 1501–1850
einschließlich der rund 15.000 Bände umfassenden Sammlung des Prinzen Eugen von Savoyen im im Mitteloval

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Nacht: 00:00–05:03 und 18:12–00:00, gesamt: 10:50
Tag: 06:50–16:25, gesamt: 09:36
Sonnenuntergang 06:52 | Sonnenaufgang 11:38
Astromnische Dämmerung: 05:03–05:39 und 17:36–18:12
Wahrer Mittag: 11:38 | Wahre Mitternacht: 23:38
Monduntergang 03:08 | Mondaufgang 15:36
Mondlicht 92,9% (Vollmond am 12.11.2019)
Music Mapped Across the Storm

Michael Hersch: *sew me into a shroud of leaves*
Andrew Farach-Colton

In this fashion Grünewald,
silently wielding his paintbrush,
rendered the scream, the wailing, the gurgling
and the shrieking of a pathological spectacle
to which he and his art, as he must have known,
themselves belong.
(W. G. Sebald: *After Nature*)

«Michael Hersch’s music can be ‘an open wound’», says violinist
Patricia Kopatchinskaja. «Everything is crystal clear, there is no
decoration, no superficial beauty, no compromises.» Indeed, one
might consider Hersch’s work as following in the tradition of
composers like Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Luigi Nono, Galina
Ustvolskaya and others who, through their music, have expressed
their horror at man’s seemingly infinite capacity for cruelty. Sim-
ply consider the writers Hersch draws on for inspiration – Thomas
Hardy, Ezra Pound, Osip Mandelstam, and Czesław Milosz, for
example – to sense his profound sympathy for those who suffer.
Hersch has said that when he reads something that resonates with
him, his reaction can be so visceral and immediate that the words
themselves may appear «like fire on the page.» Not surprisingly,
then, many of his instrumental works are intimately connected
with poetry. His own description of *the wreckage of flowers* for violin
and piano (after Milosz) as «a shattered song cycle without words»
could very well characterize the vast majority of his output, includ-
ing the three works that make up *sew me into a shroud of leaves.*

Of the various poets who have set flame to Hersch’s creativity,
Christopher Middleton holds a special place. They met in 2001 as
fellows at the American Academy in Berlin and felt an immediate
spiritual kinship. Within a year, inspired by Middleton’s verses,
Hersch had begun a three-hour, 50-movement work for solo piano
that in its vast scope was unlike anything he’d yet written. And
while there are other concert-length works for the instrument in
the repertoire, in terms of dramatic range and emotional force,*
The Vanishing Pavilions* is *sui generis.* It took Hersch nearly five years
to complete and was composed without any commission or op-
opportunity for performance; he wrote it simply because he felt com-
pelled to. And, in the end, he gave the premiere himself, playing
the 350-page score entirely from memory.

That was in October 2006. A few years earlier, his closest friend,
the historian Mary O’Reilly, had been diagnosed with cancer.
Then in 2007, while writing the second part of the trilogy, Hersch
received a cancer diagnosis himself. Hersch’s treatment (which,
as he later put it, included «surgeries, radiation, indignities»)
was ultimately successful, and in 2008 he completed the trilogy’s
second part, *Last Autumn*, for horn and cello – this time with W. G. Sebald’s long poem *After Nature* as the textual spark. O’Reilly died the following year, a devastating blow that would have a pronounced effect on his work.

In my words exists the full bitterness
Of an autumn day, steady drizzle
Under a dreary, low sky.
They are crushed words,
Woebegone, that make me feel infinite pity.
(Marin Sorescu: *The Bridge*)

There had always been a tension between the public and the private in Hersch’s music. The dark, often deeply harrowing images he conjures in *The Vanishing Pavilions* and *Last Autumn* have a universal resonance, yet they’re communicated with an intimacy that’s peculiarly personal, and this ambiguity between confidentiality and communality amplifies the music’s emotional charge. After his own cancer battle and O’Reilly’s death, however, there was a shift. On the surface, it might seem that the music became even more intensely private, but perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it was now concerned more with violence from within than from without. This is quite overt in *On the Threshold of Winter*, for example, his 2012 monodrama based on the poems Marin Sorescu wrote while in hospital dying of liver cancer, and in its companion work, the elegy *I hope we get a chance to visit soon* (2017), a setting of O’Reilly’s letters to Hersch intertwined with poetry by Rebecca Elson (another cancer victim) and, again, Middleton. Is the shift discernible in his works that don’t deal directly with illness? That’s for the listener to decide. Hersch himself has said that every work he’s written since O’Reilly’s death «has been a kind of assessment of that experience and relationship», but that, aside from the monodrama and elegy, the other works «have, at least on the surface, kept some distance from the events that set the music into motion.»

Quickly man destroys the house
Whose beams he put up with care
She who prays he might change
Scrubs the raven’s wing white.
Wash me with flowered water,
Sew me into a shroud of leaves.
May these tears the wind blows
Wet the blossom of your face.
(Marius Kociejowski: *Uzbek Variations*)

The trilogy spans this shift, of course, as it encompasses 15 years of creative work (2001–2016). The third part, *one day may become menace*, is, again, scored for solo piano, this time with texts drawn from poetry by Marius Kociejowski. But in terms of scope, it almost stands apart, being longer even than the two previous parts combined. Still, there are striking similarities among the three component works.

To start with, there’s structural continuity. The three parts of *sew me into a shroud of leaves* are divided into books of approximately 20 movements each – there are two books in both parts one and two, and three in the third. Many of the movements serve as companions to the poetic fragments while the remainder have more common titles; in *The Vanishing Pavilions*, for instance, these are called *intermezzi*. And while it would be going too far to say there’s a narrative aspect to the music, there’s no question that each book has a distinct dramatic arc, and that there’s a strong family resemblance, so the general shape of these arcs is similar – ascending in intensity and peaking near the end. Not only that, but this shape can be discerned in larger form over the entirety of each part, as well as over the 11 hours of the trilogy as a whole. Hersch often plans his work in his head before committing a note to paper, which makes the conceptual design of *sew me into a shroud of leaves* an especially impressive feat of musical/architectural engineering.

Another formal element is the complex network of motivic, harmonic and atmospheric relationships Hersch uses to tie each work together. Sometimes entire movements are repeated, underlining crucial structural joins or creating bookends for smaller groups of movements. And connected to this on a more fundamental level is the sustained opposition between the dense and ferociously cluster-choked and the sparse and openly tonal (or pre-tonal, as it’s sometimes described). Quieter passages often give pause for absorption after periods of chaos or turbulence, although they play an even more prominent role than that because often their mournful nostalgia is so evocative. And yet, there is no particular focus on the nostalgia, but rather something amorphously archaic, like something long lost and faded in our memory.

Poetically, too, there’s continuity. The last part of the trilogy may have been written after Hersch’s cancer diagnosis and O’Reilly’s death, but Kociejowski’s poetry is, like Middleton’s and Sebald’s, concerned primarily with violence from without. The poets’ voices are distinct, yet filtered through Hersch’s sensibility, they appear connected.

It’s how the three parts differ, however, that’s more revealing. Take the movements without direct poetic connections: in *The Vanishing Pavilions*, these are all *intermezzi*. But in *Last Autumn* Hersch also includes Scherzo, March, Psalm and Lullaby. And to these in one of the works *one day may become menace* he adds Chaconne, Hymn, Fugue and Song – except that in the final book of the latter (which in itself is nearly the length of *The Vanishing Pavilions*) there are, again, just the poetic titles and *intermezzi*. Titles like March or Lullaby may suggest traditional forms and categories, but here Hersch often takes what’s familiar and makes it unfamiliar; he gives us the idea of a march rather than anything that resembles an actual march itself.

Hersch is specific and detailed in his instructions to the performer, and the granularity of detail accrues from one work to the next. Markings like «with greatest ferocity» and «with the greatest possible intensity» are found often in his scores. And they become especially vivid and poetic in *one day may become menace* – a passage in the fifth movement is marked, «as if a large flock of birds was startled and suddenly erupted from the trees.» These descriptive
directives reflect the music’s physicality, as well as its increasing technical demands as the trilogy progresses. In order to play the premiere of The Vanishing Pavilions, Hersch says, he had to retrain himself to overcome its pianistic challenges. Last Autumn, too, pushes the performers to their limits, requiring a horn player and cellist of unusual stamina as well as technical authority.

Of the three parts, however, one day may become menace is by far the most formidable. Unlike The Vanishing Pavilions it employs extended techniques that broaden the music’s range of colour and texture. Yet an even more daunting hurdle is the music’s increased density. Hersch seems not to be constrained by the limits of two hands and ten fingers; many pages of the score spill onto myriad staves. Although at times he’s clearly pushing beyond what’s possible, Hersch still feels that it’s conquerable.

one day may become menace stands apart in other ways, as well. The Vanishing Pavilions and Last Autumn are intensely focused, with stark contrasts and sharp, clear lines, both vertically and horizontally. Despite their length, both works feel remarkably compact. In the third part, however, these lines often become blurred and the harmonies smeared, in part because of the music’s densely layered complexity. Even the archaic sounding segments seem more indistinct and distant. One can discern vaguely consolatory moments in The Vanishing Pavilions; in one day may become menace these are considerably more elusive. Its shadows are longer, darker, and more ominous.

It would be easy to turn away from Hersch’s grim visions, and particularly in the six-hour third part of the trilogy, where he creates an almost bodily sense of discomfort. It’s the music’s authenticity – as well as its astonishing compositional integrity – that rewards the effort.

The composer Georg Friedrich Haas describes Hersch as “one of those rare artists who are totally melded together with their art.” Those who know Hersch know this to be true. This is really who he is. What this means for the listener who only knows the composer through his music is that however one views me into a shroud of leaves, whether as an extensive emotional journey or an intensive psychological exploration, it’s not a solitary undertaking. Hersch is not a detached guide; he’s a witness, too. He is one of us. It’s this deep humanity that gives his music much of its immense power. As Kopatchinskaja says, “I want to lend Hersch my forces because he faces our pain with urgency, honesty and dignity.”

Michael Hersch — Band A–Z

Andrew Farach-Colton is a regular contributor to Gramophone magazine and has also written for BBC Music Magazine, Opera News and The Strad. His essays and analytical notes have appeared in the program books of institutions large and small, including the New York Philharmonic, the BBC Proms, the Royal Opera House (Covent Garden), the San Francisco Opera, as well as accompanying recordings from Decca, EMI, Chandos, Harmonia Mundi and other record labels. He holds a doctorate in music from the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University and resides in New York City.

sew me into a shroud of leaves

Michael Hersch

With poems by Christopher Middleton, W. G. Sebald and Marius Kociejowski

Part I

The Vanishing Pavilions

All poetical text by Christopher Middleton (1926–2015)

Book 1

1. Prelude

2. … the snows ignite:
A flag revolves, a bird has flown –
Our objects, humble, they aspire:
Learn we our ashes by their fire.

3. Intermezzo (A)

4. … and over that plateau, in a vast and glowing atmosphere,
thousands of heaped stones absorbed the twilight.

5. Intermezzo (B)

6. … explosions of clocks and winds without routine
not fountains not millennia of light inextinguishable
ebbing through column and throat

7. Intermezzo (C)

8. Here the huge root spread: A willow hit by lightning, long
Before we came.
Trees all around,
Their graves in the rock, under a green hood
They heard willow speak to water,
And housed the spring, so it could dwell
In itself, as such a place might wish to do.

9. Intermezzo (D)

10. … pushing through slow centuries:
The space is branching out, blown back.

11. Intermezzo (E)

12. So the flashing knife will split
Memory down the middle…

13. Intermezzo (F)

Music mapped across the storm
Rushing through dark air and the strain of springs

15. Intermezzo (F)

16. Some distance from the graves,
A more or less distant distance from the graves.

17. Intermezzo (G)

18. … and the dead are unappeased.
… those who haunt this tract of earth,
At this little window asking to be named.

19. Intermezzo (H)

20. Beyond the shacks where food is sold…
Beyond any imaginable midpoint of the world
Memory brimmed unbidden with whole colours
Only to end in a choking dust of names

21. Intermezzo (I)

22. … the snows ignite:
A flag revolves, a bird has flown –
Our objects, humble, they aspire:
Learn we our ashes by their fire.

23. Intermezzo (B)

24. Here the huge root spread:
A willow hit by lightning, long
Before we came.
Trees all around,
Their graves in the rock, under a green hood
They heard willow speak to water,
And housed the spring, so it could dwell
In itself, as such a place might wish to do.

25. Intermezzo (C)

26. Let them be the vanishing pavilions.
There will be remnants, surely, for someone.
The road does not lose itself in such a darkness,
The dark beginning to glow, all air
A sparkling to be created
For more than horrors to inhabit.
...the snows ignite:
A flag revolves, a bird has flown –
Our objects, humble, they aspire;
Learn we our ashes by their fire.

And in The Inferno, of the least tormented,
Whirling in filth, thick gloom, the tornado,
None could sithe naked from one chosen
Circle into another.

The air is spreading a terrible hush.
For twilight comes and far, far ahead
Will they shout? Not likely,
Will they still be there?

So the flashing knife will split
Memory down the middle...

Whoever closes the wings
of a fig tree with fruit, one of which
is entirely hollowed out by insects.

...the water boils itself out,
...the earth trembles and the great city
with the iron tower stands in flames,
and darkness comes and with it a yellow dust
that covers the land.

Part II
Last Autumn
All poetical text by W. G. Sebald (1944–2001)
Translation into English by Michael Hamburger

Book 1
1. The air stirs the light...
2. Spreading out above them
   is the branch work
   of a fig tree with fruit, one of which
   is entirely hollowed out by insects.
3. ... in a different consistency
   of the air, whose deoxygenated void
   in the gasping breath of the figures ...
4. A crow on the wing lost a white feather.
The vicar, a limping messenger in a black coat,
appeared on New Year’s morning,
alone on the wide snow-covered field.
5. Scherzo (A)
6. Intermezzo (A)
7. Lullaby II
8. Scherzo (B)
9. March
10. ... a dress entangled in thistles ...
11. Lullaby II
12. Psalm (A)
13. ... with tiny lanterns
   they haunted the rubbish dumps ...
14. ... shade
   in the heat of noon,
   light in darkness,
   shelter from frost and rain,
   conveyance at the hour of weariness,
   help in extremity, so that
   under Thy guidance
   safely we may attain that place
   to which we are drawn:
   ... so that the stars propitiously conjoin above us
15. In the end, awaiting recovery
   she is placed in a hospital where ...
   ... so that the stars propitiously conjoin above us
   In the end, awaiting recovery
   she is placed in a hospital where ...
   ... so that the stars propitiously conjoin above us
16. Intermezzo (B)
17. ... the breaking of time from day to day

Book 2
24. Whoever closes the wings
    of the altar in the Lindenhardt
    parish church and locks up
    the carved figures in their casing
    on the lefthand panel
    will be met by St. George.
25. March
26. Fragment
27. ... azure-blue,
carmine-red and glaucous green,
in their glow reflecting
the cotton clouds, those white ones
into which without a word the breath
of legends of human beings has been absorbed.
28. Spreading out above them
    is the branch work
    of a fig tree with fruit, one of which
    is entirely hollowed out by insects.
29. On the Basel Crucifixion of 1505
    behind the group of mourners
    a landscape reaches so far into the depth
    that our eyes cannot see its limits.
   A patch of brown scorched earth
Part III
one day may become menace
All poetical text by Marius Kociejowski (* 1949)

Book 1
1. Prelude
2. Sew me into a shroud of leaves
3. one day may become menace
4. Intermezzo (A)
5. A burning of straw in the countryside ...
   An asylum where he may dry his clothes ...
   A soul covered with bruises ...
6. Intermezzo (B)
7. Lullaby (I)
8. March
9. Lullaby (II) – after the nursery rhyme Ah, vous dirai-je, maman
10. Intermezzo (C)
11. Chaconne
12. Hymn
13. Intermezzo (D)
14. Fugue
15. Intermezzo (E)
16. ... the monks’ graves anonymous beneath the lemon trees.
17. Intermezzo (F)
18. ... down the corridor’s bright glare to the courtyard beyond (A)
19. ... darkness fills the stable
   Darkness floods the cradle ...
20. Intermezzo (G)

Book 2
21. We shall wear paper crowns, if need be.
22. Intermezzo (H)
23. ... the birds exploded
   Out of blades of still grass.
24. Who, if suddenly the world broke, would probe the rubble ...
25. ... through his body a disturbed earth.
26. Intermezzo (I)
27. Death is relayed
   From branch to root,
   Rock to unblinking eye.
28. Out of skins stretched
   Upon racks of bone, eyes
   Stare glassily towards
   A cold peripat of sun.
   Beneath snow,
   A struggle of flowers ...
29. Where is the woman running to,
   And who do you suppose she thinks pursues her?
   The branches of the trees scratch her pretty face
   And she can barely see as she stumbles
   Over, across the broken world ...
30. Intermezzo (J)
31. Song
32. The hills deepen with mauve,
   And the bloated sun slides, bleeds over the distant pines ...
   As though piloted by some ghostly flame ...
33. ... gelvanizing the flies ...
34. Intermezzo (K)
35. What is there on a day such as this that allows
   for a massacre ...
36. The sun swings a bayonet through the leaves,
   And descends in slow widening columns.
37. Sleep, child; it is only
   A dream I made for you (II)
38. A hieroglyph of broken twigs,
   The skeletons of small animals,
   The sticking burr of thistle –
39. Intermezzo (L)
40. She is told that she must be always brave,
   Always a companion to stone.

Book 3
41. ... the broken arches
42. Intermezzo (M)
43. The horsemen will know
   And will stay unmoved.
44. A cut sapling gripped in the hand
   And swung through the air.
45. Intermezzo (N)
46. The dead lay sprawled all over the place,
   Their wounds bright ...
   Bits of plaster from the death mask sticking to your face ...
47. The blood filling his shoes.
48. An apostrophe hanging in space.
   A scream flew out up of the bramble.
49. Intermezzo (O)
50. Go, catch the slightest air should any come.
51. Another arrow pierces the lion’s shoulder and
   another the lion’s spine ...
   Smoke hangs above the tumbled brick which
   housed your throne.
52. ... clanging emblems burn in midair
53. ... a world too soaked with blood to revere.
54. ... down the corridor’s bright glare to the courtyard beyond ...
55. Intermezzo (P)
56. ... the innocent who in their madness strayed,
   Who mistook for seraphim a bright lamp
   Beneath the waters camouflaging death.
57. Sleep child; it is only
   A dream I made for you. (II)
58. There was nothing could be done to save
   them.
59. Where did Dante first hear light’s absence?
60. ... I feel death hanging close.
   The salstice falls short ...
61. ... wasps have settled upon our lips.
62. My daughter ... these are distances
   The stammering mind cannot hold.
   A spider draws a line of thin silk
   Across the room’s impossible length.