

## **Aribert Reimann upon receiving the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize**

Herr Präsident,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Stephan Mösch,  
my heartfelt thanks for your words, which make me happy and at the same time abashed – how right you are in your judgement of what my work has always been about!  
Dieter Borchmeyer, warmest thanks to you for helping me over my dramaturgical difficulties by sending me a copy of the facsimile of Grillparzer's song *Sirenengesang*, fragments of which I then integrated into the opera.

When, towards the end of 2009, I received the news from the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation that I was to receive this year's prize, I was flabbergasted. I hadn't expected to receive this tremendous prize. It is a great honour and pleasure to accept it this evening, and I would like to express my warmest thanks to the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation, to the board, and to all those who played their part.

I am very happy to be able to give one half of the prize money to the Busoni Prize for young composers, which I founded towards the end of the 1980s and which is administered by the Berlin Academy of Sciences and Humanities. Now we can once again award the prize regularly every two to three years. In recent years an award was not possible due to the minimal interest rates. The other half will go to another foundation I established later and which is devoted to the contemporary lied.

The first thing that came into my mind when I heard the news was that the path I had taken in the past decades was the only right one for me. Never looking to the left or to the right to see what was currently in fashion – although when I returned from Darmstadt to Berlin in 1956 I was quite confused. I tried serial composition, but I soon realised that I was forcing myself into a corset that restricted me and kept in everything that I was trying to express in music.

My teacher Boris Blacher – I had just started studying under him – realised this straight away. Six months later I was having a lesson on a violin sonata about which I had an instinctive feeling that this was the only way I could compose (I kept this to myself, of course). He said I should take these bars as a starting point, that would, one day, be my style. From that moment on, I knew which path I had to follow, but I didn't have the compositional skills to come to terms with it, nor to develop things further. I acquired them in Blacher's rigid school, which was occasionally encouraging, and often crushing. A few years later, after a performance in Cologne, he said to me, "music festivals are not good for you, take your cue from everything that happens outside them". With these two pieces of advice he had answered all my questions and doubts and not only given me extremely important support, but also given my inner feeling the sole confirmation that another direction was not possible for me.

Boris Blacher himself followed his path in his own distinctive, imperturbable way and with admirable consistency, and I was extremely lucky to meet him while I was still at school. I am deeply, deeply indebted to him.

The doubts and difficulties returned again and again, however. We are all familiar with this, and everybody learns to deal with it in their own way. As a comfort I reminded myself that I had a second profession that could transport me away from all these difficulties. As an accompanist I not only had material security for the next few years; I also badly wanted to devote myself as an interpreter to other music, to distance myself from composition. This give and take relationship was enormously fruitful for me, and I learned a great deal for my own compositional work.

When I noticed that the countless *Liederabende*, recordings and tours with the many singers were becoming too much and composing was being pushed aside, I had to limit the playing, especially because, happily, I had more and more compositional work. Slowly, teaching replaced playing and became a new imperative. It was important to me to show young singers and pianists the way to the 20<sup>th</sup> century lied, which is so endlessly rich and varied, and I wanted to make them aware of a different way of putting together programmes for lied recitals. The earlier a singer begins studying the 20<sup>th</sup> century lied, the easier he will find singing contemporary music later on – after all, more and more operas, and lieder, are being composed. It is pleasing to see that many young composers are increasingly devoting themselves to the lied, with instruments or with piano, which is no longer limited to its keys for sound production.

Melody was always the only possible basis for my musical thought, although melodic invention, the singing phrase, is not bound to words in any way. Finishing an opera after a long period of work always meant reaching an endpoint. I had to feel my way forward into new terrain with chamber music and orchestral pieces – away from the word, away from plot strands, and I had to find my own images and ideas. When I began work on a new opera I first absorbed the text, moved it into my subconscious and imagined the text in sound spaces using solely orchestral sound textures, all the while searching for a special sound language for the relevant material. It wasn't until I had explored this orchestral sound world that I returned to the structure of the voices – each one, of course, must have its own life – and to the constantly varied approach to the word and its fragmentation. I added melismas between the syllables, so far as the character of the relevant role permitted – moving away from one tone per syllable. Only then do sung words become music inside a phrase – there is no limit to the variations!

Finally, I would like to thank all those who have accompanied me on my journey over the years: my publisher, my composer friends, conductors, orchestras, instrumentalists, directors, theatre managers, above all the many singers who tackled the roles in my operas again and again. As a representative of this group I may single out one singer with whom I worked together for 35 years and who has been my friend for 53 years. In 1958 I visited Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau when he was looking for a repetiteur. One year later I composed the first song cycle for him. It began with *Tenebrae*, a poem that Paul Celan had given me two years earlier in Paris asking me to set it. In 1961 Fischer-Dieskau performed my suite *Ein Totentanz* for the first time with the Berlin Philharmonic under the baton of Werner Egk (this was the piece, by the way, which brought me to Schott), thus presenting me for the first time to a broader public. More cycles followed, with orchestra or piano, up until *Shine and Dark* in 1989. Over the years there were many *Liederabende*, especially with 20<sup>th</sup> century composers, and lots of recordings. In a different way to Boris Blacher, Fischer-Dieskau influenced, and made his mark upon my life, again and again he put in a good word for me and placed his faith in me, for which I am eternally grateful.

It was Fischer-Dieskau who again and again brought up the topic of *Lear*, when we were on tour, when we were in Berlin, until in 1971, after much hesitation, I thought maybe I could give it a try. But the uncertainty about coping with this imposing material persisted. It wasn't until after *Wolkenloses Christfest*, which Fischer-Dieskau performed in 1974, that I could feel the idea of *Lear* becoming stronger and stronger. It began gnawing away at me so that I couldn't escape it any more. One and a half years later I had to begin with the composition, especially since the commission from August Everding and the Bavarian State Opera had been confirmed in the meantime.

Why am I so attracted to opera?

I always ask myself this question before beginning work on a new composition, when I have found its relevance for us today, and so, too, before I began my current project. I want to explore the resonant stage afresh, again and again, this free place where anything is possible, where singing man with all his conflicts can suspend und nullify himself without inhibitions,

where sound flows from him into space, where his inner feeling and burning becomes sound and encompasses him and becomes a quaking he can't escape – where one can breathe freely and openly.

Thank you.