Versatile border crosser

Wilfried Maria Danner wrote ballet music on behalf of the Deutsche Oper

by Astrid Weidauer

Hans Werner Henze once called him "a genuine talent for the musical and dance theatre". Pierre Boulez confirmed "a great expressiveness and richness in colour" in his music, and Christoph Eschenbach spoke of the "most outstanding talent among the young German composers". In Berlin, however, only insiders knew Wilfried Maria Danner until now. Tomorrow his music will be presented for the first time at the ballet premiere of "... schatten von sehnsucht ... Last Blues" in the Deutsche Oper.

Three Italian choreographers, Mauro Bigonzetti, Massimo Moricone and Renato Zanella, will all be presenting their productions on this evening. "Turnpike" with music from Johann Sebastian Bach, "Apollon" (here with music from Lois V. Vierk and Nick Didkovsky, not from Strawinski) and in the last part "... schatten von sehnsucht ... Last Blues" commissioned by the Deutsche Oper.

Wilfried Maria Danner called his cooperation with Renato Zanella, the ballet director and senior choreographer of the Viennese State Opera Ballet, "a great stroke of luck". He shares the strong attraction to the lyricism of the Italian poet, Cesare Pavese, with him. The last cycle of poems written by Pavese shortly before his suicide in 1950, "Death will come and it will have your eyes", was a direct source of inspiration for Danner's new composition.

"When I first read Pavese's poems, I felt attracted and repulsed at the same time by the force of this language. And I heard music.", said the 42-year old Danner. "I do not wish to create a tautology, a commentary with my music. I try to filter the essences out of the contents of these poems, to process them and to add a theatrical dimension to them." A "silent music of cross-fading" had thus been created, "not typical music for a ballet."

Composing means for Danner always means for Danner at the same time looking over the one's own horizons. Not only the love of Italy and a close affinity to literature link him with Hans Werner Henze, who he regards as one of his most important teachers together with Luciano Berio and Olivier Messiaën. In his aversion towards any dogmas of the new music movement, he again felt drawn to Henze, but from whose enormous shadow he emerged in good time. I see myself as a versatile border crosser who is just as interested in rock, jazz and electronic music as in the classics.

For this reason, Danner's rich range of oeuvres includes not only symphonies, chamber music and operas for children, but also works reflecting a conscious crossover, such as "Miles" which he dedicated to the legendary jazz trumpeter.,

Wilfried Maria Danner, who has received numerous awards (such as the coveted Prize of Rome), scholarships, lectureships and composition commissions, appears to have achieved more or less everything that other composers in his age can only dream of. Nevertheless, the restless composers has a great many plans for the future. He confided, "My dream would be to write radio play or film music".

Definite activities for the future, on the other hand, are Danner's next Berlin projects at the Deutsche Oper as composer in residence, where a chamber opera of his will be presented for the first time next season, and in the 2000/2001 season a grand opera written by him.

Press reviews of the ballet "schatten von sehnsucht ... Last Blues" by Wilfried Maria Danner, premiered on 21.2.1998 in the Deutsche Oper, Berlin

Danner, forty-two year old composer from Cologne, spellbound them in finely chiselled sounds of light density. Sounds which take on form out of nothing, to fall back into silence again; a score which leaves scope for the fantasy of the choreographer as well as for that of the listener. It is music which will almost certainly survive also in the concert hall.

Stuttgarter Nachrichten, 24.2.98, H. Koegler

... and Wilfried Maria Danner found the excellent musical expression for it: Sentimental and intellectual at the same time, sensually beautiful and over-sensitively extravagant, elegant even in the development of the power.

Berliner Morgenpost, 23.2.98, K. Geitel

Danner's music is subtle and delicate

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 10.3.98, J. Schmidt

And as a commission from the Deutsche Oper, Wilfried Maria Danner wrote a very danceable music whose sliding ductus characterised by signal-like cross-overs was mastered with sovereignty by the house orchestra under the leadership of Arturo Tamayo. This premiere received the undivided approval of the audience.

Märkische Oderzeitung, 24.2.98, P. Buske

With his commissioned composition, Wilfried Maria Danner, born 1956, is now continuing the line of composers inspired by dance: Blacher, Egk, Henze, von Bose, Reimann, Rihm.

die bühne, 5.3. - 18.3.98, I. Sieber

... (the music) ... has nerve and sensuality, finesse and power. It impressively and elegantly develops compositional craft.

Die Welt, 23.2.98, K. Geitel

The 42-year old composer, Wilfried Maria Danner, a student of Hans Werner Henze, is referred to as a border crosser between the styles, between the cultures and traditions, between classics, jazz and rock. His ballet music is intensive, colourful and sometimes runs to a dramatic density, only to fall back into an individual, but somehow impressive silence.

Südkurier, Konstanz, 10.3.98, L. Müller

Renato Zanella, the third man of the evening, is no beginner and furthermore is ballet director of the Viennese State Opera. And with the commissioned composition, ".... schatten von sehnsucht ... Last Blues" by Wilfried Maria Danner, he has a subtle, sentimental score as the starting point.

Süddeutsche Zeitung, 24.2.98, N. Servos