

Walter Zimmermann (b.1949) is a key figure in German new music, a prolific composer and a tireless advocate of the work of an extraordinary range of other artists. His music covers every genre – from opera, music-theatre and multimedia to orchestral music to chamber and solo works – and has been commissioned and performed by most of the leading European new music ensembles. His groundbreaking collection of interviews with American experimental composers, *Desert Plants*, offered a panoramic survey of this hitherto little understood musical landscape, and his edition of the writings of Morton Feldman, *Morton Feldman: Essays*, played a crucial role in the re-assessment of Feldman's significance. In his Beginner Studio concert series in Cologne in the 1970s and '80s and as a professor at the Hochschule der Kunst in Berlin since the 1990s Zimmermann has also promoted the work of an extraordinarily broad array of musicians.

His own music has consistently evolved - always original, never following fashion, true to its own highly individual aesthetic principles. In the 1970s his epic cycle of orchestral, chamber and solo works based on the folk tunes of his native Franconia in the south-west of Germany, *LOKALE MUSIK* (1977-81), was a controversial highpoint of the so-called 'New Simplicity', and the music-theatre works *Die Blinden* and *Über die Dörfer* also divided critical opinion. Characteristic of all Zimmermann's work, however, is its grounding in the most profound questions for humanity: how can we live harmoniously, both within society and in the world? As a result many of his works are based on philosophical and spiritual writings - Zen Buddhist texts in *Beginner's Mind*, Meister Eckhart in *Abgeschiedenheit*, Plato in *Wüstenwanderung*. References to other music also abound - Schubert, the Beatles - transformed by Zimmermann to reveal how this music might sound in a world ordered differently. The musicologist Richard Toop has suggested that one of the reasons why Zimmermann's music is not as well known as it should be is that the experience of hearing individual pieces by him can 'tend to emphasise their "otherness" in relation to the main trends in new German music, whereas the hearing of several pieces together reveals a remarkably rich and coherent personal world'

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Many of Walter Zimmermann's works are grouped together in cycles which share the same underlying ideas and two of the more substantial pieces on the second of these two CDs come from these larger groups of pieces: *Abgeschiedenheit* from the cycle *Vom Nutzen des Lassens* and *Wanda Landowskas verschwundene Instrumente* from *Cura Curiosita*. *Beginner's Mind*, the one work on the first CD, is the only one of these cycles exclusively for keyboard. Zimmermann wrote *Beginner's Mind* for the great German pianist Herbert Henck and has described it as the 'result of my study of the contemporary European new music scene'. Typically, Zimmermann's study led him to the conclusion that a new direction was required and that this new direction might be found in the music of Erik Satie and John Cage. While Cage might not seem such a surprising choice, Zimmermann was particularly influenced by the music of Cage's so-called 'naïve' period - works written around 1950, such as the *String Quartet in Four Parts* and the piano piece *Waiting* - which by the mid-1970s was probably the least regarded part of Cage's output. In these works one can find however the qualities which Zimmermann also praises in Satie, 'a highly complex musical landscape written in the simplest manner', and *Beginner's Mind* attempts to trace a process from the complex to the simple, in Zen terms to cast off the old and achieve a new consciousness, 'beginner's mind'.

Zimmermann's inspiration was Shunryu Suzuki's book *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (New York & Tokio: Weatherhill, 1970) which divides the spiritual journey into three phases: 'Leave the Old', 'Clean the Mind' and 'Change your Consciousness'. In Zimmermann's piece this process is preceded by a Prologue, subtitled 'Five Moments in the Life of Franz Schubert', five versions of the old mind which is to be transformed, represented musically by short extracts transcribed by Zimmermann from his own piano improvisations. As the music 'leaves the old' these are gradually simplified and as the new consciousness begins to emerge the pianist begins to vocalise as well as playing the piano, introducing fragments of what finally becomes the 'Beginner's Mind Song'.

#### 1. Prologue: Five Moments in the Life of Franz Schubert

#### 2. *Leave the Old*

Gather everything  
Follow the yardsticks  
Go wrong  
Lose yourself  
Destroy what is around  
Forget what you've done  
Accept the past  
Discover the now  
Become the spur of the moment  
Be self sufficient

### 3. *Clean the Mind*

Let images come and go  
Find perfect existence through imperfect existence  
Change mind weeds into metal nourishment  
Limit your activity  
Dissolve obstacles by constancy  
Burn yourself completely  
Create from emptiness  
Continue in calmness  
Move the swinging door  
Repeat it over and over again

### 4. *Alter the consciousness*

Adapt yourself to stimuli  
Shake up your automatic responses  
Change your emotions into extremes  
Contract and expand your time sense  
Suspend your time boundaries  
Find stimuli you feel at one with  
Grab the emerging ideas  
Use up the unity feeling  
Merge it into overpowering emotion  
Let it release you.

#### *Beginner's Mind Song* (Shunryu Suzuki, 1970)

A flower even falls though we love it  
And a weed grows even though we do not love it.  
What we call I is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale  
and when we exhale  
It just moves that is all.  
Not two and not one  
our body and mind are not two and not one  
our body and mind are both two and one.  
It just moves that is all.  
You think you have body or mind you have lonely feelings  
but when you realize that everything is just a flashing into the vast universe  
you become very strong.  
It just moves that is all.  
In the midst of noise your mind will be quiet and stable.  
We must have Beginner's Mind free from possessing everything.  
When you are you, you see things as they are  
And you become one with your surroundings.  
It just moves that is all.  
For the moon there is the cloud for the flower there is the wind.  
It just moves that is all.  
The future is the future, the past is the past  
Now we should work on something new.  
What we call I is just a swinging, door which moves  
when we inhale and when we exhale.  
It just moves that is all.  
Always be a Beginner.

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