

“ The Summit”

Alban Berg

Sonata op. 1

Franz Liszt

Sonata in B minor

Interval

Frédéric Chopin

Sonata No. 3 op. 58 in B minor
- Allegro maestoso
- Scherzo. Molto vivace
- Largo
- Finale. Presto ma non tanto

The word “dissolution” can be interpreted in different ways. In so-called tonal music, it describes the moment of change from the dominant to the tonic. The built-up tension dissolves into the harmonic centre of the piece. A satisfying experience!

However, something completely different can also “dissolve”, something that makes the dissolution described above impossible: the system of order and hierarchy of musical harmonies, the greater significance of certain notes in a certain context, in short: tonality itself can dissolve.

Why this schoolmasterly excursion?

For the undertaking at hand - an encounter with the three sonatas by Berg, Liszt and Chopin - we need some provisions. As with hiking at high altitude, stamina and endurance are required (from both listeners and players) and, last but not least, a sure sense of direction. But who feels sure of themselves at the first chord of the Berg sonata?

The piece takes the ground out from under our feet, exactly where we have stood for so long, trusting in eternally valid orders. It is as if the units of measurement no longer apply on our map, the difference between centimetres and kilometres has been erased!

At the same time, one thing is clear: there is no anarchy here. The music is developing according to its own - new - rules and Berg is not completely reinventing the wheel: once the ears have become accustomed to the new weather conditions, amazing melodic expanses, rhythmic initiatives, harmonic rock are revealed

... and views of the summit: Liszt's world concept, his Sonata in B minor. How does it actually begin? With a pause, with a lot of silence, with nothing. And then the knocking of something in pianissimo - totally un-monumental. Of course, it doesn't stop there and the characters that play here are so dramatically contoured that Goethe's Faust has often been used as a comparison. Liszt achieves the masterstroke of developing his themes from motivic similarities, so that Gretchen and Mephisto, for example, have the same genetic code. The piano becomes an orchestra and a theatre stage, the pianist a narrator, the music a drama. And how does it all end? With a pause, with a lot of silence, with nothing. And with sounds whose resolution feels like redemption.

Anyone who remembers the beginning of Alban Berg's op. 1 at the start of the Chopin Sonata will realise how far we have wandered. The ground that was taken from us is back and serves as the basis for Chopin's great late work. This music is created out of the piano - the instrument is made to sing and never stops. Chopin can thus travel through a world that revolves around the sun (i.e. the tonic) and whose diversity knows no bounds. The nuance, the touch, the subtlety are decisive for the filigree reliefs of this music. There is a small universe in the meaning of a semitone step - this is one of the similarities to be heard with the previous works. And when the summit is reached in the last movement with the turn from B minor to B major, resolution becomes jubilation!

Leon Wenzel