

# Hear – Taste – See: UISGE BEATHA – Waters of Life

## Towards the Innovative Potential of Synaesthetic Experiences for *Musikvermittlung*

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*Sarah Chaker*

### Artists

Petra Stump-Linshalm, composer

Heinz-Peter Linshalm, contrabass clarinet

Jutta Goldgruber, painter

### Programme

Petra Stump-Linshalm (2015): “UISGE BEATHA [ujkʲe 'beha] – A Guide to Flavours for Solo Contrabass Clarinet”

- 1) the smooth flowing one
- 2) delicate spice and a whiff of smoke
- 3) mizuwari – mixed with water
- 4) nutty undertones
- 5) with a hint of sea salt
- 6) cigar box, smoky
- 7) angels' share
- 8) peat monster

### Moderation

Sarah Chaker

Fig. 1: Sketch (extract) of the piece “nutty undertones” by Petra Stump-Linshalm

2

Kontrabassklarinet  
Petra Stump-Linshalm

**nutty undertones**

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Source: with friendly permission of the composer

## “UISGE BEATHA” – the Concept

Even though the “Waters of Life”, set to music by Petra Stump-Linshalm, can be enjoyed purely for its sonic qualities, the special appeal of this composition – especially for *Musikvermittlung* – lies in the synaesthetic experience that the work makes possible and provokes. By serving different, seemingly appropriate types of whisky for the various pieces for contrabass clarinet solo, the senses of hearing and taste are brought into a close relationship during the performance. Even if the pieces of the composition were written in standard musical notation (see fig. 1) and are performed by the musician in a quite classical/traditional concert setting, the audience nevertheless has an active and participatory role to play, insofar as people are encouraged to relive the suggestions of the composer’s sonic interpretations, brought to life by the performer’s playing, and to compare them with their own gustatory sensations by tasting the different types of Scotch whisky that go with each piece. For Petra Stump-Linshalm, “the idea is that I say, ‘To me, the whisky [...] sounds like this,’ and then everyone can just see, do they find that too? Do they find it [the

sonic correspondence] appropriate? Many people might not even think about how something might sound that tastes like this or that.”<sup>1</sup> Jutta Goldgruber was so inspired by UISGE BEATHA that she subsequently created pen-and-ink drawings of the individual pieces – some with pen, some with brush, some with pipette – and thus helped the “Waters of Life” to find a visual equivalent in her “embodied studies” series.

Due to reasons of time and cost, only a shortened version of the actual performance concept could be presented at the lecture series, although the basic structure and sequence still corresponded to the actual concept: Jutta Goldgruber’s paintings had already been positioned in various places in the hall before the event began, so that the audience had ample opportunity to view them during the event. Chronologically, the artistic performance consisted of the following elements: in a first step, Heinz-Peter Linshalm performed all the pieces of the work one after another (initially unaccompanied by whisky).

This was followed by a short break, during which the subsequent programme and the performance concept of UISGE BEATHA were briefly explained to the audience by the artists. In the course of this, two (instead of the originally planned six) varieties of whisky were handed out to the audience one after the other, and the corresponding pieces – in the case of the lecture series, we had decided in advance on “delicate spice and a whiff of smoke” as well as “nutty undertones” – were performed (once more) by Heinz-Peter Linshalm, who had also been kind enough to procure the varieties of whisky corresponding to the two pieces from his trusted whisky store before the event.<sup>2</sup>



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- 1 Supplementing the shared podium discussion in our lecture series, the information in this article is based on a Zoom interview which Sarah Chaker conducted with Petra Stump-Linshalm, Heinz-Peter Linshalm and Jutta Goldgruber on September 6<sup>th</sup> 2021.
  - 2 At this point we would like to offer our heartfelt thanks to the whisky store Potstill in Vienna (<https://www.potstill.org>) for their friendly advice and altruistic support during the lecture series event, for which the management provided us with whisky glasses for 60 people free of charge – many thanks!

The synaesthetic tastings were followed by a moderated conversation with the artists and the audience.

## Genesis of the Piece: Passions and Pragmatics

UISGE BEATHA, one of the early works of the composer and clarinetist Petra Stump-Linshalm, was created in 2015, still largely free of external constraints: “It was so unintentional back then, I had no deadline, no one said how long it [the work] had to be or could be, or how many pieces it had to be. It was still such a completely free time. Then I liked this whisky description, and then this one and this one, and then at some point I thought, ‘Now it’s good.’” (Stump-Linshalm 2021) A joint trip to Scotland by the couple Petra Stump-Linshalm and Heinz-Peter Linshalm had provided the two musicians with lasting inspiration in advance: “We were interested in whiskies at this time [around 2015], because we had been on a trip to Scotland two years earlier, and that was very interesting. We visited distilleries and learned about how whisky is made and all the different varieties. And then there are the beautiful descriptions on the whisky bottles: How does it smell? How does it taste? How does it linger? And that’s very poetic.” (Linshalm 2021)

In addition to the shared passion for whiskies, a more factual aspect also provided the impetus for the creation of the work. According to Heinz-Peter Linshalm, the “initial spark was something rather casual or incidental”, namely the simple fact that in the field of contemporary art music, the currently available music literature for contrabass clarinet solo is very negligible<sup>3</sup>: “There is so little, it is a very idiosyncratic instrument, many composers find it rather difficult to use. And that was my first nudge to Petra: ‘Why don’t you write something especially for contrabass clarinet – for me and my contrabass clarinet!’” (Linshalm 2021)

For Petra Stump-Linshalm, *Musikvermittlung* – or the intention to create a work involving *Musikvermittlung* – did not play any role in the composition process:

“I was really only concerned with the pieces at first. When I hear music myself, it triggers a lot of images and stories in me. [...] And it’s also the same

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3 This aspect was also mentioned by the cello quartet Die Kolophonistinnen, who are at present also faced with too little (contemporary) concert repertoire for their instrumentation (see Sarah Chaker in this anthology).

when I write [music], it's very pictorial, very emotional, much of it has a story. And with this piece I thought a lot about the sense of taste, and what it feels like in the mouth, and then I thought that others should also know that and be able to taste it. At first, I thought it was something for friends, for a fun evening, but then it grew. And then Jutta came and said she paints to my music, and I said: 'What?' [laughs] And then the project developed step by step like that." (Stump-Linshalm 2021)

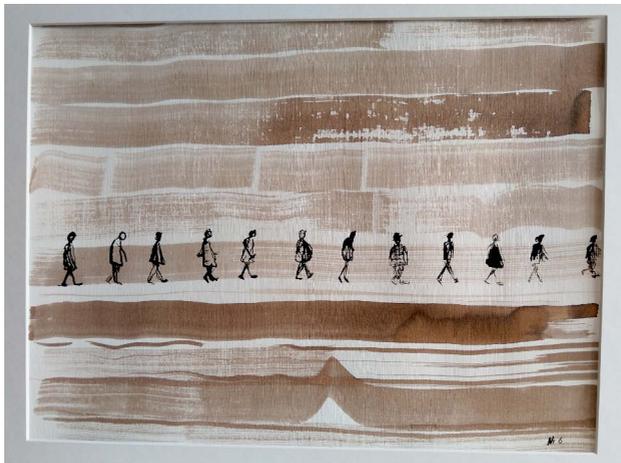
In this context, it should also be mentioned that the varieties of whisky were not fixed once and for all by the composer. In principle, different whiskies can be served and drunk with the individual pieces, although they must be well suited to the taste of the individual pieces. In the preparations for a planned performance of the work, the couple therefore goes to a whisky store for precise advice: "We get something recommended to us for the respective tastes." In doing so, Heinz-Peter does not play the pieces to the salespeople in the store, but rather takes a detour via language: "We simply explain what the particular thought behind the respective piece is, how it should taste, and the salespeople then recommend something to us, and that works out well" (Stump-Linshalm 2021), whereby, according to Heinz-Peter, the advisors additionally also specifically ensure "that the sequence of whiskies is a good one" (Linshalm 2021).

Jutta Goldgruber also emphasises the effectiveness of linguistic descriptions of taste experiences in combination with sonic experiences, and how this can stimulate creative action: "I had this CD from Petra, and then listened to the pieces of UISGE BEATHA for the first time, and I found these descriptions of taste so inspiring. I didn't drink whisky [while listening to the CD] with it, but just these [literal] descriptions and the titles of the pieces in turn immediately elicited images or associations, or almost taste experiences in me." (Goldgruber 2021) So even though language cannot replace the experience of taste, it seems to trigger it at least. Language thus plays an important role in the context of this work, even if this may not be obvious at first glance (the "poetic" and thus inspiring character of whisky descriptions, which Heinz-Peter Linshalm addressed in the interview, has already been referred to above).

According to the artist, the corresponding drawings by Jutta Goldgruber for UISGE BEATHA were created individually and retrospectively, and were born "from the resonance that the respective pieces of music produced in me – in the form of moods, associations, movement [...]. The examination does

not take place analytically, but is an interweaving of the music in forms, lines, inner images; a further development of motifs, a deepening, a development into something of my own.” (Private mail correspondence between the author and Jutta Goldgruber) In the process of their creation, the individual paintings did not follow the sequence of the music pieces, and also differ significantly from each other in their artistic approach, as Jutta emphasises: “With some of them I came more from the descriptions and from the images, others I did at the same time and in connection with the music, and then also listened to it inwardly, and then painted. It was very different, there wasn't one approach.” (Goldgruber 2021) Very openly, Jutta Goldgruber also addresses obstacles in the creative process that existed alongside feelings of success: “There were pieces that immediately flowed, and there could be two paintings to go with them. And there was one that didn't want to come into being at all. Then it was really that I thought, I still have to do this, because I want to have it [the series] complete, but it took a long time before it finally unscrambled itself for me and felt then right.” (Goldgruber 2021)

*Fig. 2: Ink drawing of Jutta Goldgruber corresponding to “delicate spice and a whiff of smoke” of Petra Stump-Linshalm*



Source: Jutta Goldgruber, with friendly permission of the artist

## Synaesthetic Experiences as *Musikvermittlung* (?)

According to the statements of many people present at the lecture series, the performance of UISGE BEATHA was an extraordinary and intense experience, as we can deduce from the numerous positive feedbacks that reached us during and after this performance. In their seminar papers afterwards, numerous students of mine also described this concept as a particularly successful and innovative example of *Musikvermittlung*.

This is insofar remarkable in that the work was not conceived and intended to be *Musikvermittlung*: “It was not the intention to make the music communicable to a larger audience with the help of whisky, pictures or whatever. That was not the background, or the reason why the pieces were created. Rather, it has become a *Musikvermittlung* project, despite not being intended as such” (Linshalm 2021). Even if Petra does not mind that her work has been subsequently pigeonholed as *Musikvermittlung*, she also emphasizes that it may be *Musikvermittlung* in its effect, but it was nevertheless not designed by her on the drawing board as a *Musikvermittlung* project. Whether UISGE BEATHA is interpreted as such (or not) depends on the individual perception:

“What is *Musikvermittlung*? It is generally a broad term, or a very narrow one – depending upon how you want to see it. I do think that in the moment when you talk to the audience, when you reveal something about the music, even if it’s something personal, [...] then that is already *Musikvermittlung*. That already spans a bridge, and then everyone has to decide for themselves: can I relate to that, or is it something completely different for me?” (Stump-Linshalm 2021)

In Jutta Goldgruber’s view, the focus in UISGE BEATHA is rather on the transformations and effects between different sensory levels, which undoubtedly simplify the access to the work. Hence, in her opinion, it is questionable whether this effect, which results from the special performance practice of the work, can already be interpreted as *Musikvermittlung* in the narrower sense.

In general, all three artists like to perform outside traditional concert and exhibition settings. Special programmes for children, music performances at readings, in museums and in outdoors were already conceived and realised by the duo Stump-Linshalm frequently in the past, although many performances end up “in the concert hall after all” (Stump-Linshalm 2021). Currently, the composer is working on music for “Stalltänze” [“Barn Dances”] by Barbara Neu. According to Petra Stump-Linshalm, the “desire to connect with some-

thing else is [...] always there. It's just difficult to get it off the ground, and to have organisers who pay a music ensemble and maybe a dance group or something. It's almost impossible to do something like that on your own. [...] I would be a supporter of such a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in which many things are connected with each other. There are many people out there with good ideas, but it's difficult to make it grow, to make it go somewhere." (Stump-Linshalm 2021)

In recent times, it has been observed that, in the (classical) concert life, the institutions are constantly growing, becoming larger and larger, and "they [the people in power] just organise what they want." (Stump-Linshalm 2021) For smaller projects, in contrast, the room for manoeuvre, the chance to appear and to be perceived with an idea at all, is becoming increasingly smaller – a deplorable state of affairs that should be critically examined from the perspective of cultural policy, and also with regard to the possibilities of inclusion and participatory involvement.

## Bibliography

Goldgruber, Jutta/Linshalm, Heinz-Peter/Stump-Linshalm, Petra (2021): Qualitative interview [via Zoom] concerning UISGE BEATHA and *Musikvermittlung*, conducted by Sarah Chaker. Vienna: 6.9.2021.

QR-code: Website for UISGE BEATHA by Duo Stump-Linshalm including audio example; [online: <https://www.stump-linshalm.com/uisge-beatha>].

## Biographical notes

**Petra Stump-Linshalm** studied clarinet at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, and bass clarinet at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam. As a recipient of various prizes and awards – the most recent prize awarded to her was the Publicity Prize of the SKE (an Austrian institution for composers) in 2020 – she pays special attention not only to the classical repertoire, but also to contemporary, experimental and improvised music. She is the dedicatee of numerous world premieres and has collaborated with esteemed composers such as Pierluigi Billone, Beat Furrer, Karlheinz Stock-

hausen and others. Her first portrait CD with her own compositions was released in 2018 by orlando records. Since 2012, Petra Stump-Linshalm has been Senior Lecturer for Chamber Music at the Joseph Haydn Institute for Chamber Music, Early Music and New Music at the mdw. More information: <https://www.stump-linshalm.com/>.

**Heinz-Peter Linshalm** studied clarinet at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, and bass clarinet at Bern University of the Arts HBK. As a musician, he focuses not only on the classical repertoire, but above all on the contemporary repertoire. He is the dedicatee of numerous world premieres and has collaborated with esteemed composers such as Pierluigi Billone, Beat Furrer, Karlheinz Stockhausen and others. With the CD “born to be off-road”, released in 2005 by ein\_klang records, the duo Stump-Linshalm took stock of their successful collaboration with contemporary composers. Since 2011, Heinz-Peter Linshalm has been teaching at Leonard Bernstein institute at the mdw. More information: <https://www.stump-linshalm.com/>.

**Jutta Goldgruber** is a rhythmician, performer and painter and has been Senior Lecturer at the Department of Music & Movement/Rhythmic at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. She uses music / movement / language to improvise, design and create, experiments with painting in the transformation of music, movement and body awareness, and is also an illustrator for books and kamishibai.

