

ductions share a heterogeneity and novelty of approach. They are in turn the result of DOMTS' wanting to present as wide as possible a variety of music theatre approaches in the biennale as possible. As with the unpredictability of their own performances, these capricious forms of music theatre are not a scattershot hoping to find the next big thing, but rather are symptomatic of a shift to productions whose form of presentation is intended to be an extension of the artistic expression of its organizers.

It will be argued that DOMTS have placed their focus on the development and commissioning of individual productions for the biennale, rather than on the precise "composition" of commissions during the time of the festival. The tendency to compose situations out of heterogeneous elements visible in both composers' individual artistic practice seems to have been applied to the development of works, with the end results of this experimentation being presented at the festival. What this represents is an unusual and interesting shift for DOMTS towards festival administration using the know-how of their respective artistic practices, argued to be a form of music curatorial approach to the festival.

While in the older biennales led by Henze and Ruzicka, commissioning and assembling the programme occurred largely along established lines, DOMTS make the process of commissioning into their main form of artistic expression as leaders. Rather than produce compositions, they choose artists.<sup>1</sup> In order to understand the connotations of this hybrid form of practice between management and artistic creation, comparisons are drawn to the curatorial discourse in order to reveal some of the implications of this shift in their artistic practices. The investigation in the previous chapter on curating in the field of theatre will also prove useful, as the translation of curatorial practice into theatre practiced by Florian Malzacher and others can serve as a useful model for understanding curatorial practice beyond its basic understanding as concert dramaturgy in the field of music theatre.

## 4.2 Hans Werner Henze

### 4.2.1 Henze's Compositional Practice

Hans Werner Henze would position his compositional style consistently within the "grand" European tradition (Petersen 2012, 2). As he would describe his stylistic approach, he still saw many possibilities left in "the path from Wagner to Schoenberg," something that can be clearly heard in his music as well. Despite the influence of the Darmstadt school, and his adaptation of dodecaphonic technique, and while

<sup>1</sup> Claire Bishop notably formulates a similar idea while discussing relational aesthetics and changes in curatorial practices in the 1990s (Bishop 2014a, 244).

integrating changes in compositional techniques such as aleatoric principles and electronics, this link to tradition would remain visible throughout Henze's career. In describing this relationship between the compositional developments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and how he relates them to the grand European tradition, he says that

in my works for the theatre I have therefore never completely left tonality, not even in the earliest ones. My music is nourished by just this state of tension: the abandonment of traditional tonality and the return to it. (Henze quoted in Palmer-Füchsel 2001)

This is seen for instance in his dodecaphonic technique, which was often heavily inflected with tonal implications in his choice and manipulation of rows, often leading to works having a neo-classicist/neo-tonal sound. This mix of and tension between dodecaphony and tonality would define Henze's musical "engine" throughout his career, but would often later on be accentuated by other influences or new compositional techniques.

Henze has produced various forms of musical output, including orchestral works, vocal music, and chamber music, but it is his range of music theatre productions (opera, ballet, dance drama, vaudeville, show, radio opera, etc.) for which he is perhaps best known, and which are of greatest interest here. These include works such as *The Bassarids* (1964/65), first premiered in Salzburg in 1966, which remains one of his best-known. It also includes works that are more experimental and explicitly political in their subject matter, like in *Der langwierige Weg in die Wohnung der Natascha Ungeheuer* in 1971, which bears the influence of Henze having participated, at least superficially, in the 1968 revolution. Based on texts by writer Gastón Salvatores, it tells of a student who sets out on an odyssey across Berlin to participate in the promised revolution—an ultimately unfruitful venture.

#### 4.2.2 Henze's Biennales

Henze initiated the first edition of what was then called the Munich Biennale: International Festival for New Music Theatre [*Münchener Biennale: Internationales Festival für neues Musiktheater*] in 1988. The festival's main goal was to function as a laboratory for young composers to experiment with the production of new music theatrical works, which emerged from Henze's view that there was a widening cleft between the musical avant-garde and the theatre. The idea was that by commissioning and working with young composers, giving them the time and resources they needed to familiarize themselves with the genre, this gap could begin to be overcome.

The biennale established itself as an institution to develop small, flexible operas that could both adapt to a variety of halls, and also eventually make their way into bigger opera houses. Rather than focusing on sure hits, the biennale was intended

to take programmatic risks, and explore new possibilities for the development of a compositional music theatre aesthetic suited to overcoming this gap. Stylistically, though open to experimentation, the festival strove to make music theatre more popular to a wider audience, including especially young people and the underprivileged, in fitting with the composer's aspirations at a future synthesis of the avant-garde and populist styles. He specifically names the English Opera Group (later the English Music Theatre Company), founded by Benjamin Britten and others in 1947, as the model for the early biennales (Henze 1988, 7). The group's stated manifesto was to "encourage young composers to write for the operatic stage, also to encourage poets and playwrights to tackle the problem of writing libretti in collaboration with composers" (Archive of the English Opera Group). The significance of the group for Henze was that it used simple means and small ensembles to put on interesting productions, allowing them to be flexible and adventurous in their programming (Henze 1988, 7). This mix of approachability and relative simplicity of means would be a defining feature of many of the early biennales.

Henze's introduction also reveals his unsuccessful plans to perform a staged version of Berg's *Wozzeck* at the first festival. He regarded the libretto as exemplary of a realistic treatment of social issues, and saw Berg's musical language as an ideal fusion of classical forms and a dodecaphonic musical language that did not completely reject tonality, in fitting with Henze's striving for a musical style synthesizing these different genres. As further evidence of the extent of *Wozzeck's* influence on Henze, he writes that despite the work itself not being performed, "in any case, almost every one of our premieres [during the Biennale] stands in the tradition of this work" (Henze 1988, 8; translation added).<sup>2</sup>

In the editorial to the second Biennale (1990), Henze becomes more specific about his vision, as well as about what it implies for the composition of music theatre:

Composing for the *theatre* means regarding music as something physical, communicative, spiritual as well as something with which we can artificially produce good or bad weather, sadness or happiness ... A plot, a stage, lighting and poetry are necessary to help to transport the *dramatic* events and content which are the composer's main concern, and to clarify the *semantic intentions* of the music, to place that which is intended in an unmistakable light, to make the invisible audible, the inaudible visible. (Henze 1990, 10; emphasis added).

For him, music plays an important role in communicating the work's affective message to the audience, "clarified" by other elements in the theatrical apparatus. The

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<sup>2</sup> "Aber nichtsdestotrotz steht fast jede unserer Aufführungen in der Überlieferung dieses großen Werkes."

music theatre productions during Henze's leadership of the biennale largely conformed to a linear dramatic narrative: this means that they maintained the understandability and accessibility of works for a wide audience, in fitting with his populist compositional approach.

The *text* of the story and its narration or description is for him the driving force, moved forward according to a progression of clear signs with a discrete meaning. Text is meant in the sense of a *shared* text that is established between the stage and the public, even in moments when no literal text is being spoken, as evidenced by when Henze claims that the composer's main concern is to unambiguously represent the libretto's semantic intentions.

This concept of a shared text is borrowed from theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann, who identifies it as a key characteristic of dramatic theatre. He writes that

[theatre] wanted to construct a *fictive cosmos* and let all the stage represent—be—a world ... abstracted but intended for the imagination and empathy of the spectator to follow and complete the *illusion*. (Lehmann 2006, 22)

Adding that

even where music and dance were added or where they predominated, the “text,” in the sense of at least the imagination of a comprehensible narrative and/or mental totality, was determining. (Lehmann 2006, 21; emphasis added)

The addition of music to the work does not in other words change this core definition, as it aims at a more fundamental conceptualization of the centrality of a singular textual *logos*, communicated through the various media at the theatre's disposal. The composer may be central when it comes to commissions, but the creation of meaning is left up to the libretto, in other words to the textual frame of the work. Though composers do of course often themselves compose, choose, or have influence on the text, the point is that the text, not music, is the final arbiter of the work's meaning.

Furthermore, in Henze's understanding of music theatre, practitioners take on clear, separate, and distinct roles during the process of production, in following the classical model of operatic production. This meant that first a libretto is created (sometimes by the composer themselves), then is set to music in the form of a score produced by the composer, and lastly realized in production by a director and dramaturg. Though it is possible for one physical person to occupy several of these roles, it shows nevertheless a system of production analogous to the traditional operatic form, centred on the play text. Henze's own music theatre productions carried many different genre identifications, but always had in some way a dramatic libretto, even in his most experimental phases. With the biennale on the other hand, there are productions that adhere less to (without however completely

foregoing) dramatic form, which as a result are given other identifiers under the larger music theatre umbrella.

This can be seen in the organization of the second biennale in 1990: while the first biennale's productions seemed to have been made to be in *Wozzeck*'s image, the second biennale appears to have adopted a broader understanding of music theatre. Its program was divided into four categories of productions, the operas proper with their pride of place, the *Figurentheater*, concerts by the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra and the Musica Viva concert series, and last, in the ignobly-named "Miscellaneous" category, further music theatre productions that did not fit the criteria for being called "opera." This included a jazz-based production from England (*The Wizard of Jazz*, 1990), a "school opera" performed in part by school children (*Abscences*, 1990), a ballet on Marienplatz together with IRCAM (*Träume vom Fliegen*, 1990), and a likely more performative piece on the oppression of women (*Miriam*, 1990), among others.

Despite this seeming diversity of approaches, the staple of the biennale remained the main section of commissions in the tradition of the literary opera—a genre to which also the majority of Henze's own operas could be attributed. Though to an extent the wider umbrella of music theatre productions was present in his biennales, particularly towards the mid-1990s, literary opera was nevertheless still the dominant genre. Henze's emphasis on a plurality of approaches, as well as on the exposure to new music theatre and operatic productions would still however set the tone for the festival's future editions.

A year before the fifth biennale in 1996, Henze asked his colleague Peter Ruzicka if he would like to take over the festival, citing his pending retirement (Ruzicka 2014, 8). Though officially run by Ruzicka, the fifth biennale was a collaboration between the former and current directors, representing a gradual transition from one to another, an approach which was also felt in the style of the productions themselves. While Ruzicka's leadership would change the biennale's aesthetic program in important ways, much of Henze's original impulse would continue to determine the biennale and its form over the course of its existence. The most significant shift with Ruzicka would be in the style of music theatre production that the biennale focused on.

### 4.3 Music Theatre?

In order to understand this stylistic shift that occurred between the tenures of Henze and Ruzicka, and as well in order to establish a framework for understanding these two approaches in relation to that of DOMTS, a closer look must be taken at various possible definitions of the "music theatre" in the festival's name. Taking