

A close-up portrait of Alfred Huber, a middle-aged man with short, light-colored hair, looking slightly to the left. He is wearing a light-colored, vertically striped button-down shirt. The background is dark. A white grid is overlaid on the image, featuring a large circle and a smaller square with a spiral inside, representing the golden ratio. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of his face.

audite

Alfred Huber

CHAMBER MUSIC

Eszter Haffner
Othmar Müller
Niek de Groot
Martin Kerschbaum
Catherine Klipfel
Morgenstern Trio

audite

HD-DOWNLOADS

stereo & surround
available at audite.de

ALFRED HUBER (*1962)

Impossibile

Sonata for Cello, Piano and Percussion, Op. 20

- I. Corona 4:30
- II. Interlude 6:55
- III. Die gestundete Zeit 4:51

Phi

Sonata for Double Bass and Piano, Op. 27

- I. Moderato 5:48
- II. Andante 5:42
- III. Adagio – Allegro 4:41

Pi

Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 32

- I. Allegro 5:35
- II. Adagio 6:00
- III. Presto 5:08

Plus lucis

Piano Trio, Op. 35

- I. 5:49
- II. 4:27
- III. 5:32
- IV. 5:29

recording:

September 28 - October 2, 2020
(Lisztzentrum Raiding)
August 31, 2020

(Muziekgebouw Eindhoven, Kleine Zaal)

February 10 - 11, 2021

(Schafstall, Marienmünster)

executive produce:

Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

recording producer & editing:

Dipl.-Tonmeister Justus Beyer

recording format:

pcm, 96 kHz, 24 bit

photos:

cover + p. 2: Johannes Huber
Eszter Haffner: Nancy Horowitz
Othmar Müller: Lukas Beck
Niek de Groot: Tatu Hiltunen
Catherine Klipfel: Irène Zandel

art direction and design:

AB•Design, Detmold

audite

info@audite.de • audite.de

© 2022 + © 2022 Ludger Böckenhoff

For more than a hundred years, composers have been exercising sovereign control over their musical material and compositional decisions. Thus, for a century, the question of how musical works might be understood by an audience keeps being raised. “Understanding” in this case does not mean a mere rudimentary comprehension of musical events, but a penetration into the musical structure that also enables anticipation, the emergence of expectations, the aspect of surprise and thus an experience of “meaning”. According to Theodor W. Adorno, who repeatedly provided pointed propositions in the field of music theory and who also epitomised a point of reference for Alfred Huber, the performer was the only entity even capable of understanding contemporary music. This question of “comprehensibility” of contemporary music is also eminently important to the composer Alfred Huber. His response, however, is more optimistic than that of Adorno. For years, Huber has been addressing communicative processes in music on both a theoretical and a practical basis, approaching them via information theories, music philosophy and also with the means of neurocognitive science – but above all musically. His composing is based on the understanding of music as a language that can, and wants to, reach an addressee. Certainly, the composer is often tempted – as in his works *PHI* and *PI* – to calculate and construct with complex extra-musical categories. But this never occurs at the expense of musical expression. As we shall see, the composer prefers to give up constructive calculation rather than curb the momentum of the music.

The understandability of Alfred Huber’s musical language is guaranteed by various fundamental musical decisions. The composer develops his music motivically and thematically. The movements expose musical inventions, sometimes small micro elements, sometimes larger complexes, providing the thematic as well as harmonic material which determines movements or even an entire work (as in Op. 35). Motifs are condensed into themes, melodies or cantilenas; these are developed further, split off, varied, enlarged, reduced or mirrored, thus forming larger sections. Alternating these then produces the macro format of movements. By opting for this basic decision, Alfred Huber takes up the compositional tradition of the nineteenth century, in particular Beethoven, whom he explicitly names as an inspiration for his Piano Trio, Op. 35 (incidentally, it was piano trios that were to become Beethoven’s official opus 1; in this genre Beethoven considered his compositional powers fully developed for the first time).

Even more than the system in which the pitches are arranged, it is the rhythm of Alfred Huber’s music which represents the most influential element of his extremely agile, motoric works. Propulsive, concise rhythms and patterns, often syncopated, consistently drive musical events forward towards new climaxes, often followed by moments of relaxation and restart: this is heartbeat music, as it were, with systoles and diastoles.

Each part has its own life, contributing to the polyphonic fabric. The ensemble sounds in this music are often developed from scales and modes, enabling the composer repeatedly to create regions with tonal reference points, whilst avoiding any dependencies relating to harmonic functions (a few exceptions apart). The harmonic structure is therefore also configured into micro moments of tension and relaxation. At other points, the texture transforms into strident intervallic layers, demonstrating how much this music seeks its expressive freedom.

The Sonata for Cello, Piano and Percussion, Op. 20, of 2013 is entitled *Impossibile* and dedicated to Othmar Müller, the cellist in this recording. The element designated as “impossible” is an extra-musical programme: the first movement is assigned to Paul Celan’s poem *Corona*, a love poem for Ingeborg Bachmann (“We love each other like poppies and time”) of 1948, and the third movement is attributed to Bachmann’s *Gestundete Zeit*, her reply, as it were, and also her rejection of the relationship (“Suspended time, until revoked / becomes visible at the horizon”). The middle section is entitled “Interlude”. The listener may be surprised by the rapid motion and concise rhythms of the two outer movements, which sometimes even reveal a proximity to blues or jazz, in apparent contrast to the non-metrical poems. However, the sonata is by no means a “song

without words” or a translation of poetry into the medium of music, but instead it is an independent creation, deriving substantial stimuli from certain rhythmic and phonetic constellations of the poems. The composer conceived the middle movement as a “reflection on squaring the circle of creating an independent work which, at the same time, superficially has only indirectly to do with the word compositions, but is inconceivable without the underlying poetry.”

The Sonata for Double Bass and Piano, Op. 27, is entitled *PHI*. This number denotes the proportion of the so-called golden ratio, which can be found in nature (snail shells, shells, galaxy spirals) as well as in human (artistic) designs, from international paper formats to the Parthenon temple. It is repeatedly described in aesthetics as an ideal relationship. Two numbers are in the golden ratio if the ratio of the sum of the numbers (a+b) divided by the larger number (a) is equal to the ratio of the larger number divided by the smaller number (a/b). This ratio corresponds approximately to the number 1.6180339 (represented by the Greek letter “phi”). The Sonata Op. 27 is an attempt to apply this ideal ratio to various musical parameters: to the pitch ratio between piano and double bass in the first movement, to the number of notes in the second movement and to the phrase lengths in the third. In movements 2 and 3, the so-called Fibonacci series is used, a sequence of natural numbers whose quotient increasingly approaches the golden ratio. The composer discussed the occurrence of the golden ratio in music with the double bass player of the present recording several times – and with this sonata created an attempt at a concrete application.

In the Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 32, it is the number “pi” that determines an extra-musical pre-arranging of the compositional material. The individual digits of the number pi determine the continuation of the violin part (3 = third, 1 = unison, 4 = fourth etc.). By this means, the composer obtains almost infinitely modifiable tone series from the number pi. In the second movement, it is the phrase length in bars, and in the third movement, it is the phrase length in notes, whilst the strict order is gradually abandoned in favour of the rhythmic texture. Instead, a flamenco rhythm gains the upper hand, demonstrating how autonomous music ultimately remains in the face of extra-musical programmes and systems.

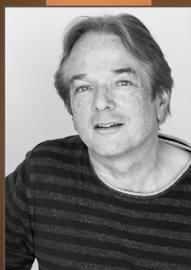
With an enormously educated, middle-class background, Alfred Huber’s oeuvre always ties in with western cultural history. Thomas Mann’s *Dr. Faustus* becomes a point of reference for Alfred Huber in one work in the same way as do poems by Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan on this album. The title of Huber’s first Piano Trio, Op. 35, *Plus lucis*, refers to Goethe’s supposed last words (“more light”) as well as to the romantic-heroic principle of “per aspera ad astra”, according to which Beethoven’s formal design would often have bright, major-keyed conclusions preceded by intense struggles with fate. To get straight to the point, the fourth movement of Alfred Huber’s Piano Trio does not end in a bright major key, but with a B minor triad. However, following Beethoven’s example, this pure triad is almost wrested from a stack of chords with which the piece began and which provides essential melodic and harmonic material for the piano trio: B-F-b (left hand) and f'-a'-d"-f#" (right hand). The B minor triad is already contained in this, as is the tension of several tritones and an augmented octave. The frictions will have disappeared by the end of the work: per aspera ad astra. But before that, they determine the texture of the work. All four movements of this piano trio are created from these notes and the following ones, according to Beethoven’s principle of thematic integration across movements. Written in 2020, the 250th anniversary of Beethoven’s birth, this Piano Trio pays tribute to Beethoven – the “hero of my youth”, as the composer put it.



Eszter Haffner violin,
Austrian artist with Hungarian roots, made her debut in 1991 in the Great Hall of the Wiener Musikverein and has since been at home in concert halls all over the world. She is a prize-winner of numerous competitions and participates in music festivals. Haffner was awarded the Golden Cross of Merit of the Republic of Austria. She holds an university professorship for violin at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen as well as at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz. Eszter Haffner plays the “ex Hamma Segelmann” violin by Nicola Bergonzi (Cremona, 1780-90) from the collection of the Oesterreichische Nationalbank.



Othmar Müller cello,
born in Vienna, studied at the conservatory of his hometown and later at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. With the Artis-Quartett, which he co-founded in 1980, he has performed worldwide and recorded over 50 CDs. In addition, Othmar Müller has been organising his own concert series at the Wiener Musikverein together with the Artis-Quartett for over 30 years. Since 2008 he has led the cello class at the Joseph Haydn Conservatory in Eisenstadt. Othmar Müller plays a cello by Andrea Amati (1573) from the collection of the Oesterreichische Nationalbank.



Niek de Groot double bass,
originally a trumpet player, began playing the double bass at the age of 18. He was first solo double bass of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra for ten years and is professor of double bass at the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen. Niek de Groot plays an instrument by Domenico Montagnana from 1747.



Catherine Klipfel piano,
born in Strasbourg, studied in Essen, Detmold and Cologne.
Since 1999 she has performed as a soloist with renowned orchestras, her recitals have been broadcast by various radio stations and she has received first national and international awards.
In 2005 she founded the Morgenstern Trio. Decorated with prizes and awards (including ARD International Music Competition), it tours regularly through Europe, the USA and Asia.
Independent of the trio, the pianist is also a sought-after soloist and chamber music partner.
Catherine Klipfel is a piano lecturer at the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen.



Martin Kerschbaum percussion,
completed his entire musical education in Vienna. After years as an orchestral musician with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, he now works as a conductor. Martin Kerschbaum is the principal conductor of the Vienna Classical Players, which he founded.



MORGENSTERN TRIO

Emanuel Wehse (cello) joins Catherine Klipfel (piano) and Stefan Hempel (violin) to form the Morgenstern Trio, which has been awarded important prizes (including ARD International Music Competition) and performs on the most important stages worldwide.

audite

