

Markus Poschner: Of the Mysterious in Music

by Renate Publig



© Bruckner Orchestra Linz

‘Poschner is arriving’, is what one could read on the Linz streetcars—this impressive gesture by the city of Linz gave Markus Poschner, the new chief conductor and opera director of the Bruckner Orchestra, a good start.



And indeed Poschner has already done an enormous amount of work since his arrival early in September: among others, the opening of the Brucknerfest, the highly acclaimed première of Richard Strauss’ opera ‘Die Frau ohne Schatten’ and the performance of Anton Bruckner’s 8th Symphony. ‘We had five different projects in four weeks—such a start makes one be deeply immersed in the matter and the close interaction with the orchestra make an especially intensive making acquaintance of each other possible. Of course there is a difference between presenting a concept in theory and working on its practical execution. It gives me great pleasure to make music with this excellent orchestra; one could have hardly made my arrival better!’

It is important to him to find a common path: ‘To make music is to give and to take, to listen to each other. This orchestra has been familiar with this great repertoire for decades and I, too, have my ideas and notions. The most beautiful part is to add up one and one to three, creating a piece of art together.’



The ‘Bruckner Orchestra’ Brand

To place the focus upon the name ‘Bruckner Orchestra’ and to find one’s place as an Upper Austrian orchestra as a brand playing in

the big league is one of the main emphases in Poschner’s concept. His main interest is in finding new interpretations and perspectives, in making the actual piece of art visible: ‘The written score is only a cipher, a window that one can open to the piece of art. One can try to write down a piece as meticulously as possible, it still remains encoded and only begins to exist in reality when it is made to sound.’ For a deep interpretation artists are hence mainly required to understand what is written between the lines. ‘I want to place this understanding into the centre, because the written score is silent about much. What is the significance of tempo and phrasing? What instruments did the composer have at his disposal? We are a modern orchestra and will be using our modern instruments with few exceptions. But in Bruckner I have to know how F trumpets sounded in order to understand which effect he wanted to attain.’



The Mysterious in Music

In order to fathom new aspects in a work Poschner does not shy away from questioning the familiar. ‘One thinks one knows a piece. But even if I have conducted the Magic Flute very often I still want to re-encounter this piece again and again, to rediscover it also for the audience. All great masterworks are full of mysteries. Especially in our secret-less time, which names, counts and measures everything, it is even more agreeable to turn to these mysteries!’

In Dresden, Poschner turned to the symphonies of Beethoven and then Mahler, in Linz he aims to focus on the pieces and

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composers rooted in the immediate region: ‘If one invests time and energy in intensively exploring a composer’s world it is obvious that one also wants to pass on the insights. With the Bruckner Orchestra, the focus is on conquering the works of Bruckner, and here, too, new perspectives are essential. Bruckner works, for example, very strongly with the temporal aspect: he repeats, draws ritual and expansion into the foreground. I want to take the orchestra onto a kind of quest before the background that in a certain way a Bruckner symphony has to “prove” itself before us so that we can understand its relevance and determine what this piece can and wants to say to us even today.’



The Sound of Our Time as a Mirror of Society

In order to draw the audience from its familiar surroundings one has to make the



Markus Poschner



listeners curious in their auditory habits and to convey the sound of our time, the mirror of our society. 'The music of our time should not be presented as something special but rather as something normal.' Here it is also important to make musical idioms understandable: 'In traffic everybody knows how to react to red or green traffic lights. But just imagine what would happen when the lights turned suddenly blue! It would be a great overload and confusion, nobody would know what to do. This overload happens—or at least seems to happen—in new music because one is confronted with information and signals of which one thinks to be unable to process them!' It is thus important especially for young composers to gain the experience of how their pieces are received by the audience. For this young generation their own, new format, 'Anhörung', is created: 'Young composers get the opportunity to hear their piece not in a concert, but in a public rehearsal. In doing so we wish consciously to give insights into a composer's workshop. The composers can see whether the execution of their thoughts and ideas has the desired effect. And conversely it is exciting for the audience to encounter the creation of a piece as one is first-hand witness of how much mental energy is invested in the creative process, in a composition!'



Music Communication

Poschner is honorary professor at the institute of musicology at the University of Bremen, Germany, since 2010—his focus is on interpretation and communication of music. But how is it possible to draw the audience to the concert halls, to communicate music? 'Our mental agility is taxed to build as many bridges as possible. Many potential listeners are still afraid—e.g. of making "mistakes" during a concert. One should take these fears seriously and try to reduce them. By not overly relying on the traditional ritual that concerts begin at 7:30 pm and take place in a darkened hall with a lit stage. This ritual will always have its justification and will endure, but we have to leave our "temples". Flexibility in time management, perhaps also consider the venue—we have such great concert halls at our disposal!' And, of course, one should also talk about the mysteries of music. 'He have so much to display: how a piece of art is created, how a soloist works—there are so many preliminary stages that are exciting for the audience!'



Jazz—Nothing but Another Dialect

Poschner has a past—and 'hopefully also a future!', as he laughingly adds—as a jazz musician. 'For me jazz is nothing else than a dialect. I profit from reaching new vantage points in classical music and in jazz by dealing with the different idioms. I consider this music's freedom as a great gift. All generations had musicians able to improvise, Anton Bruckner was the greatest improviser of his time! Only today it is a kind of waste product of our perfection that even cadenzas are meticulously written out. And whom can

one blame? But still it is a shame when one can meet musicians only as "reciters". It would be important for the players to be themselves able to compose or at the least to understand music theory and harmony so far as to grasp what is hidden behind the pieces, behind the creative process.'



But still, in spite of so many activities the family remains in the centre of his attention: 'One has so many ideas and of would prefer to realize all of them. But one mustn't lose one's track. It is always important to get a clear head. In order to do so it is important to gain some distance.' He succeeds in doing so when he takes time to play football with his children, for: 'One mustn't be too much dictated by one's calendar!'

