

Karlheinz Stockhausen: *Stimmung*
Harmonia Mundi
Theatre of Voices
Paul Hillier, director
HMU 807408
(207; 78':02")

Karlheinz Stockhausen composed *Stimmung* in a snowbound house facing Long Island Sound during February and March of 1968. He was writing for the newly formed ensemble Collegium Vocale Köhn (a group of six singers who were recent graduates of the Musikhochschule in Cologne), and the work premiered in December of 1968 in Paris. Thereafter, Collegium Vocale performed the work several hundred times and recorded it twice, always using the same version which came to be known as the 'Paris version'.

Stockhausen's *Stimmung* is a fascinating study of sound and texture. It is a mesmerizing 'tuning piece' set as a kind of musical family reunion, whose participants are all the vowel shapes and their aunts, uncles, and first, second and third cousins. Especially in this 2006 'Copenhagen version' where director Paul Hillier and the Theatre of Voices sing so cleanly and clearly, producing an amazing array of overtones that seem to dance out of the speakers of even the most modest of sound systems. One great distinction of this from other recordings of the work was Hillier's insistence that it be recorded in a performance space and not as a relationship of voice to microphone in a studio.

'*Stimmung*' indeed means 'tuning', but as the liner notes by Hillier suggest, it carries other meanings along with it.

'Stimmung' implies not only the outward tuning of voices and instruments, but also the inward tuning of one's soul... Word-play lies at the heart of Stimmung, offering a mirror to the world seen as a continuous process of transformation. Words, syllables, and even individual phonemes are constantly being changed into new forms, their meanings set spinning as one process stimulates another.

According to Stockhausen, he had begun working on the piece singing out loud the parts he had composed. His wife, worried about him waking the children, asked him to sing more quietly. Stockhausen then began to hum softly and became aware of the overtones his humming created. He discovered that the overtones were more prevalent the longer he sustained just one vowel, and then 'positioned' the vowel so as to make the overtone stronger and the sung pitch weaker. Using the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th, and 9th pitches in the overtones series based on Bb (Bb, F, Bb, D, F, Ab, C), Stockhausen worked to find which pitch and vowel combinations created which overtones (up to the 24th partial). This became the foundation for the piece.

Divided into 51 Models, ranging in length from fifty seconds to five minutes, these sound studies are not unlike Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Often composer explore and exploit the possibilities of a single idea, which manifest into much more than the idea itself. As a performance piece, this work is daunting (78" of *a cappella* singing, staying in tune to the fundamental Bb) but explored in sections could make extremely interesting program material for excellent high school and college choirs.