

GESPRÄCH ÜBER BÄUME

The piece was composed for the Ars Nova Ensemble Nürnberg which premiered it under the direction of Werner Heider in November 1976.

The title alludes to Brecht's lines from the poem "An die Nachgeborenen" (To Those Born After Us) and signals discomfort with writing a piece that, originally at least, wanted to be nothing but a musical piece. Discomfort and guilt feelings in view of the bad times may make it almost appear a crime to have a "conversation about trees" under such circumstances, and that also means: to listen to music, to pursue purely musical issues, and to compose music. After Auschwitz it was impossible to write poetry, declared Adorno, paraphrasing Brecht perhaps subconsciously. That is wrong—not only because it is possible to write poems about Auschwitz, but also because it is important, in view of the terror, to hold on to what makes life worth living, and that includes also poems and pieces of music. Continuing in the mode of quotation and paraphrase, we might think of Eisler's statement: "Once the most urgent social ills have been resolved, it is possible to pursue again *l'art pour l'art*." We are far removed from that state—that's the reason for the guilty conscience, as long as we understand music as something that is not disconnected from reality but that takes a position in the world, reflecting its contradictions and hopes to contribute to changing and improving it. In other words, trees, and conversations about trees, are part of life!

As it turned out, however, I was unable to succeed in a pure "conversation about trees". I kept the title because I liked it. I think some of the tensions of the late summer of 1976 (when the piece was written) reverberate in the music: for instance, the overwhelming victory of the left in Italy, which radicalized the political situation, and the death of Mao Tse-Tung (a Chinese song found its way into the piece). As far as the purely musical is concerned, I wanted to write a piece that is structurally clear and illuminating. It is an essay in achieving clarity and comprehensibility. I have written several such "essays" since then (the last one is even called *Essay 2*). Others are projected.

[2 August 1979]