

Beyond Extended Techniques – Creating a New Language of Sound in Contemporary Flute Music

*by
Petra Music*

Nicolaus A. Huber's piece „First play Mozart“ as an example of a solo flute piece with a new, reflected, diverse and unique musical language.

As flutists interested in the compositional surroundings of our time, we have opened our mind to new sounds composers desire in specific pieces. We have learned to embrace the beauty of air sound, flutter tongue, harmonics and whistle tones. We have learned to treat our instrument percussively in key clicks, pizzicatos and tongue rams. We have started to sing and play at the same time and we have even found ways to play multiphonics on a single air stream. Sometimes we intuitively understand why we do what we do – at other times we just do it because the composer wants us to. However, we are always free to make up our own mind about the music and we are challenged to tell our own story within the boundaries of the piece. So I would like to introduce you to „First play Mozart“ by the German composer Nicolaus A. Huber, born in 1939.

The story

Nicolaus A. Huber's piece „First play Mozart“ is a wonderful example of a composition featuring a new language of sound. Nicolaus A. Huber decided not to write for flute anymore after hearing Gazzeloni in Darmstadt with a recital introducing several new solo flute pieces. Nicolaus He was simply disturbed by the similarity all these pieces shared. When Roswitha Staege commissioned a solo piece for flute a few years later, Huber retreated his decision and challenged himself to find a more unique language on the instrument.

Air sound is not equal to air sound

What first springs to mind when listening to „First play Mozart“ is the variety of different air sounds. The player is challenged to toy with different embouchure placings, to inhale and exhale at different times turning the whole composition into a „breathing piece“. The theme of the piece is variation. A different kind of variation than the one used by Mozart, but still - Huber manages, in this composition, to build a bridge to the past in using the same techniques with different tools. Variation now means variation of sound rather than variation of intervals. Next to the traditional sound, there are four major sources of sound production he uses throughout the piece: an airy sound with minimum tone, a „distant sound“, produced by blowing from a varied distance (0-8cm) across the mouthhole, directly blowing into the mouthhole and a spiraling movement of the hands which adds an unstable element to air sound. Furthermore, Huber uses several percussive elements, multiphonics and distorted sounds. His notation is very specific about the articulation and he even differentiates between consonants such as h, d, t, b and p as well as ph, dh, th and kh in explaining the desired

sounds. He also specifies the size of the mouth cavity for achieving a certain sound. (*demonstrate these techniques playing short excerpts of the piece – 3min*).

Why is the composer so specific? These tools have allowed the composer to interchange from one sound quality seamlessly to the next and it makes room for a multitude of variations in every single sound quality. In his performance notes, Huber stresses the importance of transition between different sounds . He writes:

It is recommended to listen to Karlheinz Stockhausen's Study I and Study II in order to get an impression of the basic sound of the poise colors required here, of the breathing dynamics, the means of producing the shortest possible contrasts, melodic sequences of noise sounds, sequences of melodic tones and intervals which are highly expressive yet not stamped by instrumental techniques, romantic expressiveness, the polyphony between volume and fingerings... One could thus expand the aura of flute playing in a modern direction by using the instrument's resources to make the most of the organic creative structure of the player and to learn from the mechanical apparatus how to enter other expressive musical domains, since an apparatus does not know the inertia of organic creative structures and it can produce sounds at will. This would bring lightness and perhaps freshness into the work.

A „breathing piece“?

Upon the first performance of „First play Mozart“ I had to draw parallels to the aesthetics of the poet Paul Celan. The creation of a new artistic language is an essential element in both, the work of Huber and Celan. Paul Celan has introduced a language with the power to completely destroy the meaning of a word and at the same time open the word to the broad variety of all of its connotations. His major work is entitled „Atemwende“, a term he invented to describe the moment in which the human breath turns from exhaling to inhaling. A moment that incorporates the decision to live, representing life itself. If „First play Mozart“ is understood as a breathing piece, this moment of rebirth is very prominent. The variety of possible sound colors reflect human life as a whole. Returning to the title „First play Mozart“. It is said that in the process of composing the piece, Huber started every session with playing Mozart's Piano Sonata KV 133 to focus his mind on the piece, hence the choice of title. As a conclusion to this little excursion to Paul Celan in context with „First play Mozart“, I would like to quote a line of his poem „Anabasis“ taken from the Mozart motet „Exsultate, Jubilate“ which reads in latin „unde suspirat cor“ – and then the heart shall sigh.

With these thoughts in mind we may also gain a better understanding of the finale of „First play Mozart“. It starts with a panting section of fast exhales articulated with different consonants and irregular accents leading into two glissandi upwards in pianissimo. This section is very powerful to the listener not only through the techniques used, but specifically through the exhaustion the player goes through during this section. The exhaustion thus becomes a human part of the piece, almost making the piece alive. After a few interjections the player reaches the final note, an almost inaudible multiphonic of a 12th. This interval (perceived as a perfect 5th) magically turns into a representative of the following silence.

„Atemwende - Breath turn“ may be a metaphor for „life“, but then also „death“ must not be omitted, a fact which is nicely reflected in the last bar of „First play Mozart“. (*play the last two pages of the piece – 3min*)

Score sample p. 7-8

FIRST PLAY MOZART
für Flöte solo

Nicolaus A. Huber, 1993

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Wb. 2336

p.15 and 16

15

mit weicher Zungenstimulation
poco rallentando

5" D♯♭ oder C♯

2" Trem. sehr schnell

3" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

4" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

5" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

6" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

7" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

8" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

9" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

10" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

11" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

12" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

13" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

14" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

15" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

16" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

17" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

18" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

19" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

20" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

21" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

22" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

23" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

24" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

25" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

26" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

27" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

28" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

29" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

30" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

31" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

32" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

33" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

34" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

35" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

36" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

37" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

38" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

39" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

40" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

41" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

42" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

43" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

44" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

45" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

46" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

47" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

48" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

49" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

50" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

51" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

52" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

53" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

54" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

55" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

56" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

57" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

58" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

59" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

60" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

61" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

62" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

63" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

64" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

65" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

66" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

67" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

68" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

69" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

70" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

71" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

72" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

73" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

74" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

75" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

76" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

77" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

78" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

79" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

80" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

81" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

82" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

83" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

84" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

85" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

86" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

87" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

88" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

89" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

90" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

91" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

92" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

93" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

94" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

95" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

96" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

97" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

98" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

99" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

100" Trem. sehr langsam öffnen

WB.2336

16

wie ein Hauch

keine Dauer

Flöz. (Kehlkopf)

15" ff possibile

poco articolato

3" poco rit.

Flöze durch immer größere
Erweiterung dem Umlaufen
quasi-articolato

WB.2336

ABSTRACT

"ALS EINE AUSSICHT WEIT..."

LITERARY QUOTES IN NICOLAUS A. HUBER'S MUSIC FOR FLUTE

Petra Music, DMA.

College of Fine and Applied Arts, School of Music

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2008

Jonathan Keeble, Adviser

This paper provides a comprehensive introduction to Nicolaus A. Huber's music for flute, not only presenting his chamber music compositions with flute but also showing the importance of other aesthetic concepts to these pieces focusing on literary quotes. The importance of Hölderlin's writings for Huber's music is explored and Huber's aesthetics are described in relation to the historical and cultural background of avant-garde composition in post war Germany. After introducing Huber's compositional concepts such as "conceptual rhythm composition", "critical composition" and his use of fragmentation, rhythm, tonality and text, his music is explored and discussed in a brief analysis of his chamber music works with flute.

Furthermore, the paper focuses on Huber's approach to the flute and the specific language of sound that he creates for the instrument. Extended techniques are presented and explained in their possible meaning in connection with Huber's compositional concepts. The pieces discussed show a wide range of Huber's musical ideas: theatrical elements ("Covered with Music"), experimentation of sound in combination with repetitive elements ("First play Mozart"), representation of political actions and the incorporation of everyday objects as remnants of a different time ("Als eine Aussicht weit..."), the creation of floating landscapes of sound, connected through a network of connected tones ("Leggiero mit Weissglut"), the experimentation with fragmentation and juxtaposition of opposites found in "Offenes Fragment", the use of underlying text ("O dieses Lichts"), experiments with rhythm and time as in "Die Leber des Prometheus", the reinvention of harmonical concepts ("Don't fence me in") and the combination of chord clusters ("La Force du Vertige"). A translation of his essays "Kritisches Komponieren" and "Konzeptionelle Rhythmuskomposition" and his not yet published program notes to "Leggiero mit Weissglut" and "Die Leber des Prometheus" are appended, bringing finality to the paper.

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SAMPLE CHAPTER (3.1. and 3.4.)

CHAPTER 3: HUBER'S COMPOSITIONS FOR FLUTE

3.1. Use of the flute: extended techniques as a language of sound

The acoustic similarities between the sound of the flute and the human voice, is an important tool for expression in Huber's work. As a flutist, the musician has many possible ways to imitate linguistic models. The sound of human breath – in both directions and their connotations – are the most immediate element of the tone color. As previously mentioned, in Huber's music language, rhythm and repetition become parameters which can open music to another level of interpretation and understanding. Huber's music provides the listener with a wide range of extreme sound colors as well as detailed transitional types of sound. Huber uses theatrical elements, quick transitional passages between single sections dedicated to a certain quality of sound, return to traditional notational concepts or show the rhythmical structure as a consequence of human breath. All in all it can be said that the quality of the flute sound reflects a wide range of characters in which Huber takes a special interest in his compositional style. The acoustic principles are simple. The embouchure shapes the airstream towards the edge in the headjoint and, depending on the shape of the air stream, a different tone or color can be produced. Because the tone is produced in a relatively free way, there are many possibilities to influence the tone or to expand the instrument's possibilities of sound production.

As an example for Huber's use of the flute, the extended techniques in his solo piece should be investigated further, since Huber's ensemble pieces basically follow the same language. The piece "First play Mozart" plays with a variety of sound colors. Huber notates in a very exact way and differentiates between subtlest changes of sound. He uses four different sources of sound production and varies them. First, there is an airy sound, created by an exact described position: *Air noise with minimum tone; should yield a "warm noise", not a bright hiss. The embouchure is "normal" and the mouth-hole turned somewhat outwards*

(except when otherwise indicated). Hold the instrument low, to the right, diagonally to the front and away from the body. The fingerings influence the tone color.¹ The second basic sound resource is "distant" sound: the player blows on the edge of the mouth-hole from a varied distance (from 0 to 8 cm): *Blow at a distance of about 8 cm or 4 cm (etc.) from the mouth-hole. Direct the airflow exactly on the edge or keep it there. The lips are tensed normally. Avoid all air noise arising in and escaping from the mouth. The fingerings clearly affect the tone color.*² This technique naturally has a ghostly character. It also enables a different kind of crescendo/decrescendo and adds a theatrical aspect to the performance, because the movement of the player's hands corresponds to the change of sound. The third quality is the sound created by directly blowing into the mouth-hole: *Close the mouth-hole and blow directly into the tube. The fingerings affect the tone color somewhat less.*³ For this sound color, the position of throat, tongue and lips is essential. Without enough resistance, the phrases cannot be sustained. Huber gives exact directions on which vowels or consonants he wishes the sound to emulate and also varies the technique in how open/closed the mouth-hole should be. The special quality with this technique however, is the possibility to breath in through the flute or breath out trough the flute. This gives a wide field of compositional possibilities and, having previously discussed the importance of breath as a symbol in Huber's music, is a tool to open the music to an immediate "human" understanding of sound. Also, Huber varies the directions from which the mouth-hole may be opened up; the movements of the hands representing another theatrical event throughout the piece. Besides these new types of sound, he works with traditional sound in an experimental way. More traditional types of extended techniques, through the use of special fingerings, harmonics and percussive elements are widely used. The percussive element to hit the mouth-hole with the left index finger must be mentioned. Another theatrical element is Huber's use of a spiraling movement while playing sustained notes: *In the given time-frame, "reel" back and forth with the flute in various directions, horizontally and vertically, holding it in both arms while playing in a moderate, irregular tempo. Make soft, round motions, which help to color the*

¹ N. A. Huber: First play Mozart. Edition Breitkopf 9094, Performance Notes, Notation.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

*sounds in an irregular and continuous (internal) manner.*⁴ This adds an indeterminate element to his music since the execution of this technique will be found to be different from player to player. In addition to this, Huber's notation in articulation is very exact. He uses different consonants to start tones and further varies them throughout. He differentiates between h, d, t, b and p as well as ph, dh, th etc. and uses terms like narrow/wide mouth cavity or further differentiations. Not only a diverse musical vocabulary is important for understanding and playing Huber's music, but an ability to gradually transit from one technique to another or several others is essential.

4. First play Mozart (1993)

"First play Mozart" is Huber's only piece for Solo Flute. It was composed in 1993 in collaboration with the German Flutist, Roswitha Staage. In his notes⁵, Huber states that in this piece he does not follow the rules of conceptual rhythm composition but focusses on the subject of repetition. The title does not refer to any specific work of Mozart, but can be seen as an invitation to creative listening: the beginning of Mozart's *Figaro Overture* can be seen as an example of repetition in the process of melody construction. The overture starts with a one bar phrase. The second phrase doubles the first phrase (2 bars) and the third phrase consists of 4 bars. Beginnings and ends of phrases are closely connected, which stresses the evolving distance between phrases. The structure of the figures also shows a system of repetition and elongation in their modification. The first phrase comes up with a motive a, the second phrase introduces a repeated motive b followed by motive a and the third phrase introduces a motive c after repeating motive b, then repeating the sequence of b and c and then introducing the new motives d and e.

As suggested by John Warnaby, Huber reflects the possibilities of repetition⁶ in "First play Mozart". In which disguise can motifs still be recognised in their development? In the performance notes, Huber writes: "It is recommended that one listens to Stockhausen's Study I and II in order to get an impression of the basic sound of the noise colors required here, of the breathing dynamics, the means of producing the shortest possible contrasts, melodic

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Nicolaus A. Huber: "First play Mozart"(1993). In: N. A. H: Durchleuchtungen. Texte zur Musik 1964-1999. Editor: Josef Häusler. Wiesbaden: Breitkopf 2000, p. 376f.

⁶ See Warnaby 2003, p. 33.

sequences of noise sounds, sequences of melodic tones and intervals which are highly expressive yet not stamped by instrumental technique, romantic expressiveness, the polyphony between volume and fingering... One could thus expand the aura of flute playing in a modern direction by using the instrument's resources to make the most of the organic creative structures of the player – which are superior to mechanical structures – and to learn from the mechanical apparatus how to enter other expressive musical domains, since an apparatus does not know the inertia of organic creative structures and it can produce short, long, high, low sounds etc. at will. This would bring "lightness" and, perhaps, "freshness" into the work."⁷ The use of extended techniques is very specific and stresses the importance of variation of sound in context with repetition/variation. In this piece, the title does not directly refer to the nature of the piece but rather expresses the distance or proximity to Mozart's music. Even if the piece does not sound anything like something written by Mozart, both composers follow similar paths in constructing their music. This argument may open up the piece for the listener as a key to another era and time.

The piece is about fifteen minutes long and features a few motives that are intertwined with each other and reoccur throughout the piece in different disguises of sound or quality. The piece starts with an airy glissando upwards, incorporating a crescendo ending on g. Following this, a microtonal downstep over two notes to f quarter tone sharp and a glissando to d three quarter tones sharp with a fermata occurs. On this note, the player moves the embouchure hole away from the mouth up to four centimetres resulting in the airy sound being transformed into silence. This first phrase reoccurs at the beginning of line 6 and at the beginning of line 22. In line three, a rhythmical pattern is introduced: quarternote slurred to a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note slurred to the first eighthnote of a triplet, followed by the quarternote under the triplet slurred to a sixteenth note followed by a dotted eighth note. This pattern comes back in line 20, connected to pitch cascading down (c sharp, g, c, b flat, f sharp), as well in line 23 (extended by two extra eighth notes) presenting a haunting melody in airy sound (f sharp, a flat, f, g, a). In line 25 the rhythmical motive is introduced by movements of the flute to the right and left, followed by its inversion. The movements of the flute illustrate this inversion quite well and make the variation perceivable for the attentive listener. In line 34 and line 40, the motive is shown in different techniques. At first, every note

⁷ Nicolaus A. Huber: First Play Mozart. Edition Breitkopf 9094, Performance Notes.

is represented by a different fingering of c and the rhythm is shown by quick movements of the tongue around the lips (pppp) adding a theatrical element to the execution of the piece. The third motif is a rising scale passage in tongue pizzicato as it is introduced in line 10 and repeated in line 30, it is connected to a triplet motif upwards (line 12, 30).

These four motives are connected by glissando passages in different sound qualities. The distinction between air sounds, which are executed by either inhaling or exhaling, creates a vital breathing aura throughout the piece. Sudden fortissimo inhalations strike the listener and long passages that appear to be played with circular breathing add a thrilling dimension to the landscape of sound. These qualities are opposed by many light playful statements and experimental movements. If we see the human breath which carries the piece as a metaphor for life, the title could be seen in a larger connection with the past. Mozart's works remain "breathing" remnants of his life after all.

In terms of sound quality, the piece is composed of four parts: Lines 1-12 are dominated by airy sounds of different dynamic and quality. Long glissando passages describe the character of the section. Lines 13-19 experiment with the traditional flute sound and introduce multiphonics, flutter tongue and long crescendo, decrescendo passages. Line 20-33 can almost be seen as a recapitulation of the beginning. The starting motif with the septuplet downwards gets reintroduced and is followed by all the other motifs previously discussed in the same order. Line 33-52 can be seen as the final section. Here, all motifs are creatively extended, in their natures and melodies, and combined. In Line 34 the mood of the piece changes: The flutist hysterically repeats b flat" and b natural" in ffff followed by a decrescending cascading section that beautifully repeats the row f sharp, c sharp and b flat. The repetition of the note g" is sustained over three lines, finally leading back up to b flat" (end of line 41). Next, the finale is introduced: A panting section of fast exhales articulated with different consonants and irregular accents leads into two glissando upwards in pppp and ppp, followed by an accent on e quarter sharp"". The piece ends after a few interjections in ppp and an extended a flat presenting different sound colors. The note is introduced, played with and experimented with, and is slowly taken away from the embouchure by the player. After a moment of silence the almost inaudible multiphonic of a 12th (d quarter tone sharp – a quarter tone sharp) is present. This interval, seen as a perfect fifth, is almost a representative of the following silence. In his essay, Jörn Peter Hiekel adds a

refreshing bit of information to his introduction to "First play Mozart":⁸ while Huber was working on the piece, he played Mozart's Piano Sonata KV 133 every morning before work to focus his mind.



BIOGRAPHY

Petra Music (DMA, MM., MA., b. 1978 in Graz, Austria) completed her Doctorate of Musical Arts in Flute Performance and Literature in 2008 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where she studied with Jonathan Keeble. In Austria, she works with Dieter Flury, principal of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra at the Art University Graz. She also attended masterclasses with Thomas Robertello, Amy Porter, Wissam Boustany, Ian Clarke, Pascal Langlet, Robert Aitken and Moshe A. Epstein. In 2001, she was invited to spend one semester at the University of Melbourne, Australia, working with Mardi McSullea. Petra received her masters degrees in 2005 in flute performance teaching at Art University Graz and in German Philology from Karl Franzens University Graz in 2005. Due to her love for teaching, Petra has been teaching flute at the University of Illinois and various Austrian Music Schools for many years.

For her artistic and scientific achievements, Petra received fellowships from the University of Illinois, the Sofie and Emmanuel Fohn Stipend and the Austrian Government. Furthermore, she was given scholarships for participation at masterclasses in Switzerland, Germany and Scotland. As a soloist, chamber musician and orchestra player, Petra was invited to perform at many festivals like the Flute Festivals of the St. Louis and Chicago, the FIMU Belfort and Steirischer Herbst. During her studies in the US, Petra played first flute in the UI New Music

⁸ See Hiekel, p. 51.

Ensemble, all UI Orchestras and performed with the Martha Graham Dance Company. In Austria, Petra now works freelance with several opera orchestras and new music ensembles such as KlangImpuls, Klangforum Wien and Universitätsorchester Wien.

Her work as a scholar include an interdisciplinary study on Harrison Birtwistle's composition "Pulse Shadows", which is based on Paul Celan's poetry. In 2008 she presented her Doctoral Project "Literary Quotes in Nicolaus A. Huber's Music for Flute". The lecture recital included US premieres of Huber's flute music. Furthermore, Petra has published essays for "Flute Talk" and „Contemporary Music Review“. Petra's special interest in composition has led to collaboration with many talented composers and premieres of their works. For 2009, the Duo Youn Music is planning an international CD production "Metamorphoses" with works by Nicolaus A. Huber (Germany), Rodolfo Acosta (Columbia), Mauro Montalbetti (Italy) Hee Yun Kim (Korea) and Nicholas Vines (Austrialia).

Contact:

Petra Music
Leonhardstr. 38A
A-8010 Graz
Austria
pmusic2@gmail.com
www.young-music.com
phone 011436767296446