Hans Werner Henze

Hans Werner Henze (1 July 1926 - 27 October 2012) was a German composer. His large oeuvre of works is extremely varied in style, having been influenced by serialism, atonality, Stravinsky, Italian music, Arabic music, and jazz, as well as traditional schools of German composition. In particular, his stage works reflect "his consistent cultivation of music for the theatre throughout his life".

Henze was also known for his political convictions. He left Germany for Italy in 1953 because of a perceived intolerance towards his leftist politics. In 1976, Henze was amongst the first composers to be publicly involved in the antinuclear movement. He lived in Cuba from 1969 to 1970, and again from 1981 to 1986. In 1988, Henze founded the Mürztal Workshops in the Austrian region of Styria, concentrating extensively, in particular to Britain and Germany, as part of his work. An avowed Marxist and member of the Communist Party of Italy, Henze produced compositions honoring Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara, titled Das Flöß der Medusa (The Raft of Medusa), the placing of a red flag on the stage sparked a riot and the arrest of several people, including the librettist.

Hans Werner Henze

Life and works

Early years

Henze was born in Gütersloh, Westphalia, the eldest of six children of a teacher, and showed early interest in art and music. That and his political views led to conflict with his conservative father. Henze's father, Franz, had served in the First World War, and was wounded at Verdun. He worked as a teacher in a school at Bielefeld, formed on progressive lines, but it was closed in 1933 by government order because its progressive style was out of step with official views. Franz Henze then moved to Dünne, a small village near Bünde, where he fell under the spell of Nazi propaganda. Books by Jewish and Christian authors were replaced in the Henze household by literature reflecting Nazi views; the whole family was expected to fall into line with Franz's new thinking. The older boys, including Hans, were enrolled in the Hitler Youth.

Although the Henze household was filled with talk of current affairs, Hans was also able to hear broadcasts of classical music (especially Mozart), and eventually his father realized that his son had a vocation as a musician. Henze began studies at the state music school of Braunschweig in 1942, where he studied piano, percussion, and theory. Franz Henze rejoined the army in 1943 and he was sent to the Eastern front, where he died. Henze had to break off his studies after being conscripted into the army in 1944, towards the end of the Second World War. He was trained as a radio officer. He was then captured by the British and held in a prisoner-of-war camp for the remainder of the war. In 1945 he became an accompanist in the Bielefeld City Theatre, and continued his studies under Wolfgang Fortner at Heidelberg University in 1946.

Henze had some successful performances at Darmstadt, including an immediate success in 1946 with a neo-baroque work for piano, flute and strings, that brought him to the attention of Schott's, the music publishers. He also took part in the famous Darmstadt New Music Summer School, a key vehicle for the propagation of avant-garde techniques. At the 1947 summer school, Henze turned to serial technique.

In his early years he worked with twelve-tone technique, for example in his First Symphony and Violin Concerto of 1947. Sadler's Wells Ballet visited Hamburg in 1948; this inspired Henze to write a choreographic poem, Ballett-Variationen, which he completed in 1949. The first ballet he saw was Frederick Ashton's Scènes de Ballet. He wrote a letter of appreciation to Ashton, introducing himself as a 22-year-old composer. The next time he wrote to Ashton he enclosed the score of his First Piano Concerto, as well as his first stage work of real note, the jazz-influenced opera Oedipus Rex. The premiere of Oedipus Rex in September 1949 and staged for the first time in Wuppertal in 1958. In 1948 he became musical assistant at the Deutscher Theater in Konstanz, where his first opera Das Wunderkind, based on the work of Cervantes, was created.

In 1950 he became ballet conductor at the Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden in Wiesbaden, where he composed two operas for radio, his First Piano Concerto, as well as his first stage work of real note, the jazz-influenced opera Boulevard Solitude, a modern recasting of the traditional Manon Lescaut story.

Move to Italy

Henze left Germany in 1953, in reaction against homophobia and the country's general political climate. His publisher, Schott's, had also offered Henze an advance on royalties, on condition that he leave his conducting posts to focus on composition. This financial incentive allowed Henze to move to Italy, where he remained for most of his life. He settled on the island of Ischia in the Gulf of Naples. Also resident on the island were the composer William Walton and his wife Susan, who took a great interest in the young German composer. Henze's Quattro poemi for orchestra in 1955 made clear that he had moved far from the principles of the Darmstadt avant-garde. In January 1956 he left Ischia and moved to the mainland to live in Naples, initially he suffered further disappointment, with controversial premieres of the opera König Hirsch based on a text by Carlo Gozzi, and the ballet Maratona di danza, with a libretto by Luchino Visconti. However, he then began a long-lasting and fruitful creative partnership with the poet Ingeborg Bachmann. Working with her as librettist, he composed the operas Der Prinz von Homburg (1958) based on a text by Heinrich von Kleist and Der junge Lord (1964) after Wilhem Hauff, as well as Szenen aus Arias (1957) and his Choral Fantasy (1964).

He composed his Five Neapolitan Songs for Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau soon after his arrival in Naples. A later sojourn in Greece provided the opportunity to complete his Hölderlin-based work Kammermusik 1958, dedicated to his pianist, Benjamin Britten, and premiered by the tenor Peter Pears, the guitarist Julian Bream, and an eight-member chamber ensemble.

Henze moved in 1961 to a secluded villa, 'La Lepraz', on the hills of Marino, overlooking the River Tiber south of Rome. This time also signalled a strong leaning towards music involving the voice.

From 1962 until 1967, Henze taught masterclasses in composition at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, and in 1967 he became a visiting Professor at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. One of his greatest successes was the premiere of the opera Der Barbaren at the Salzburg Festival.

In the following period, he greatly strengthened his political involvement which also influenced his musical work. For example, the première of his failed West Berlin collaborators refused to perform under a portrait of Che Guevara and a revolutionary flag had been placed upon the stage. His politics also influenced his Sixth Symphony (1969), Second Violin Concerto (1971), Jovis (1973), and his piece for spoken word and chamber orchestra, Et Cimarron, based on a book by Cuban author Miguel Barnet about escaped black slaves during Cuba's colonial period.

An established composer

His political critique reached its high point in 1976 with the premiere of his opera We Come to the River.

In the same year Henze founded the Cantina Internazionale d'Arte in Montepulciano for the promotion of new music, where his children's opera Pollicino premiered in 1980. From 1980 until 1991 he led a class in composition at the Cologne Music School. In 1981 he founded the Mürztal Workshops in the Austrian region of Styria, the same region where he set up the Deutschlandsberg Youth Music Festival in 1984. In 1988 he founded the Munich Biennale, an "international festival for new music theatre", of which he was the artistic director.
Henze’s music has incorporated neoclassicism, jazz, the twelve-tone technique, serialism, and some rock or popular music. Although he did study atonality early in his career, after his move to Italy in 1953, Henze’s music became considerably more Neapolitan in style. His opera König Hirsch ("The Stag King") contains lush, rich textures. This trend is carried further in the opulent ballet music that he wrote for English choreographer Frederick Ashton’s Online, completed in 1957. While Mendelssohn and Weber were important influences, the music for Online contains some jazz and there is much in it redolent of neoclassical twelve-tone technique. One of Henze’s most important early ballets, his 1955 //Upupa und der Triumph des Schneelebens (English: The Hoopoe and the Triumph of Filial Love) at the Salzburg Festival, with a text he wrote himself, based on a Syrian fable tale. Other late compositions include Sebastian am Traum (2004) for large orchestra and the opera Phaedra (2007).

Henze lived with his partner Fausto Moroni from the early sixties, and Moroni planned and planted the hillside garden around La Leprara. Moroni cared for the composer when he suffered a spectacular emotional collapse during which he barely spoke and had to be encouraged to eat, living as though in a coma. In 2007, shortly after Henze’s sudden recovery, Moroni died after a lengthy battle with cancer.

In 1995 Henze received the Westphalian Music Prize, which has carried his name since 2001. Invited by Walter Fink, he was the tenth composer featured in the annual Komponistenportrait der Rheingau Musik Festival, in 2000, but owing to illness he did not attend. The music included his requiem. On 7 November 2004, Henze received an honorary doctorate in Musicology from the Hochschule für Musik und Theater München, (University for Music and Performing Arts, Munich). In 1975 he became an Honorary Member of the Royal Academy of Music, London. The English version of his autobiography, Bohemian Fifties, was published in 1998. Henze died in Dresden on 27 October 2012 at the age of 86.

Works

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The textures for the cantata Kannemusik (1958, rev. 1963) are far harsher; Henze returned to atonality in Antifone, and later the styles mentioned above again became important in his music.

Awards

- Ernst von Siemens Music Prize (1990)
- Praemium Imperiale (2000)
- Deutscher Tanzpreis (2001)

References


Further reading


External links

- [Literature by and about Hans Werner Henze](https://archive.org/details/HansWernerHenze) in the German National Library catalogue
- [Hans Werner Henze](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000224/) on IMDb
- [Chester-Novello: Hans Werner Henze](https://www.chester-novello.com/hans-werner-henze)
- [Henze at 80 - BBC website including recorded interview extracts](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01vpzj9)
- [Listen to Henze’s ‘The Electric Cop’ at Accusmata music blog](https://www.acusmata.com/2019/05/26/hans-werner-henze-the-electric-cop/)
- [There is a wide range of Henze clips on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=hans+werner+henze)
- [Project "eSACHERe»](https://esacherere.org/)
- [Intervista a Hans Werner Henze / a cura di Antonella Calzolari e Velo Carratoni](http://www.espacemedia.de/cd/index.php/album/2250)
- [Velo Carratoni (Fondazione Marino Piazzolla) and transcription published in the magazine Fermenti n.232 (2008)](http://www.espacemedia.de/cd/index.php/album/2250)
- [IRCAM](http://www.ircam.fr/)
- [Interview with Hans Werner Henze](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01vpzj9) by Bruce Duffy, November 27, 1981 (mostly about his operas)

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Through a long career, Hans Werner Henze (1926-2012) worked in a wide variety of styles, including atonality, serialism, jazz, neo-Baroque, neoclassicism, rock, and Arabic music. Offstage, he was known for his homosexuality and left-wing political activism. Popular Hans Werner Henze songs include: Fantasia for Strings. Hans Werner Henze was born on July 1, 1926 in Gütersloh, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. He is known for his work on The Exorcist (1973), L'amour à mort (1984) and Young Törless (1966). He died on October 27, 2012 in Dresden, Germany.

Music Scenes

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