

MARIA RADUTU – INSOMNIA



"The difference between paradise and hell: you can always sleep in paradise, never in hell," the famous Paris-based aphorist E.M. Cioran from Romania once said. He should know, because he had suffered from insomnia from the age of 19. The Austrian-Romanian pianist Maria Radutu, an internationally acclaimed soloist and chamber musician has been spared that pain. The reason why she calls her second album "Insomnia" lies in her past when she travelled between Bucharest, Vienna and Paris on the night train. Paradoxically, at the time, the then student felt great freedom in precisely those nocturnal hours, when nothing but blackness could be seen outside the compartment window. It was as though everything fell away from her.

All the social roles faded into the background, when this strangely relaxed feeling set in. Suddenly, she was no longer a student, a daughter, a sister, but simply herself. As an early wanderer between the worlds and moods of Eastern and Western Europe, she formed a kind of double identity that also shapes her musical interpretations. "I believe no art allows us to feel more deeply than music. It does not need the detour of thinking. And the feelings reflected in art are always the same few, regardless of whether the music is contemporary, one hundred or three hundred years old. These are the longing for love, fear, euphorias, and depressions – the ups and downs of life are necessarily depicted in music." And thus there are fear-whipped moods on "Insomnia" just as there is a hopeful, jazz-proximate morning prayer. Nordic minimalism as well as menacingly inflamed textures. The composers hail from all intellectual musical directions, bearing names like Arvo Pärt and Skrjabin, Faure and Raynaldo Hahn, Jean Sibelius and Peteris Vasks, Christoph Cech and Margareta Ferek-Petric.

With her delicate touch, Maria Radutu accommodates all the resulting tensions and dissimilarities with dreamlike ease. Under her knowing hands, the heterogeneous textures transform into a sound that pacifies, without harmonising superficially. "I was not interested in relaxation music", she says, "but in recording music that does justice to the particular sensitivity of the night". Also reflected, at all events, is the feeling of isolation among modern, often uprooted people.

Maria Radutu, who grew up in a prefabricated building in Bucharest, where roughly a quarter of the Romanian national orchestra were her neighbours, was soon identified as a piano child prodigy. At the age of six she began her training, at the age of seven she began participating in competitions and at the age of nine she appeared on TV for the first time. At the age of 14, she arrived in Vienna, at first accompanied by her mother. From the age of 15, she lived in the unfamiliar city on her own. At first, she was very isolated. The first Sundays in Vienna were particularly bad. "I walked the streets and they were empty. That was inconceivable to me. In Bucharest, people stroll in the streets on Sundays. Things weren't exactly entertaining at my apartment either. There was no TV, no radio, not even a CD player. And certainly no computer or internet either". But along with the menace, redemption also grew. "The available range of concerts made it up to me. In this regard, I felt like in the land of milk and honey. However, I had something of a shock when I couldn't get into a sold-out Brendel concert, even though I had the money for it with me. I was refused entrance, because I did not

have a formal ticket. You can get into concerts in Bucharest even when they are sold out; you just have to sit on the floor somewhere. Not being able to get in was impossible for me to grasp. I ran home crying."

The differences in mentality between East and Central Europe have been internalised by now, but only superficially harmonised. The ecstasies of mysticism, poetry and primarily music often cause the old rifts to break open again dramatically. As a result, Radutus's play is usually steeped in a vague longing, referred to as "dor" in Romanian. But before she devotes herself to the already limited scope for interpretation permitted in classical music, she closely scrutinises the circumstances under which a composition was created. "I read a lot about moral history. Only then can we understand how it might have felt to write a love song at the time. Only then can we allow our own feelings in." To her, virtuosity is only a tool. "There is more to truly understanding an instrument than dexterity," she postulates. That perfection can never be achieved is a notion she has resigned herself to. But what drives her, is an inner fire. "It is all about the eternal quest for something more and something better. But any moments of satisfaction are only brief." And thus she only too willingly adheres to the motto of the great Michelangelo: "The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it." © Samir H. Köck