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The Alban Berg Quartett plays Boulez' Livre pour quatuor

Pierre Boulez

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Extraordinary digital release for Boulez's anniversary

In celebration of Pierre Boulez's 100th birthday, audite, in co-operation with Lucerne Festival, presents a unique digital release in the 'Historic Performances' series.

At first glance, it seems an unlikely combination: the legendary Alban Berg Quartet performing excerpts from Pierre Boulez' "Livre pour quatuor" – and indeed making its Lucerne Festival debut with this highly complex serial score, which Boulez refined throughout the course of his life.

But this is exactly what happened on 5 September 1983. After Boulez had already appeared in Lucerne as a conductor of the New York Philharmonic in 1975, he now presented himself as a composer in the 'Musica nova' series. In addition to the Third Piano Sonata and the Sonatina for flute and piano (with Aurèle Nicolet and Jürg Wyttenbach), parts Ia and Ib from Boulez' "Livre pour quatuor" were performed. The Alban Berg Quartet, already world-famous at the time, makes its Lucerne Festival debut with these six minutes of music, interpreted with a silvery-warm timbre, expressive yet faithful to the text, vividly moulded, even dramatically heightened – and won Boulez's praise.

Nevertheless, this was the only performance of the "Livre" by the Alban Berg Quartet, which was fortunately recorded by Swiss Radio and Television (SRF). Thus, a musical milestone can be experienced anew more than 40 years later – just in time for the 100th birthday of Pierre Boulez, who maintained a close connection to Lucerne, not least as the founder and longtime director of the Lucerne Festival Academy.

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Qualitätsvolles historisch wertvolles Tondokument

Der hundertste Geburtstag von Pierre Boulez bietet die Gelegenheit, sich mit dem Jubilar zu beschäftigen, was einige auch tun. Das Label audite steuert vom Debütauftritt des Alban Berg Quartetts in Luzern eine Aufnahme mit dem ersten Satz in zwei Teilen aus dem Livre pour quatuor bei. Dabei handelt es sich um die einzige Aufführung dieses Werkes durch das Alban Berg Quartett in seiner Standardbesetzung.

In nur knapp sechs Minuten eröffnen sie die ganze Palette der Herausforderungen, die sich den Spielern mit diesem Werk stellen. Mit ihrem Eintreten für die beiden Teile des ersten Satzes des Quartetts folgten sie der Idee von Boulez, der es jedem Interpreten überließ, welche Teile und in welcher Reihenfolge er dieses bis 2012 immer wieder überarbeitete Quartett aufführt.

Schon in den wenigen Minuten werden die karge Landschaft einerseits und die andererseits wild wachsende Vegetation dieser Komposition vom Alban Berg Quartett eindeutig offengelegt. Die akribischen

Vorgaben lassen sich kaum komplett umsetzen. Trotzdem lieferte das Alban Berg Quartett damals schon einen faszinierend umfassenden Blick auf dieses so reichhaltig ausgestattete Werk, dessen vielfältige Anforderungen jeden Musiker aufs Höchste beanspruchen.

Die Schwierigkeiten merkt man den Interpreten in ihrer lebendig gestalteten Darbietung, die sich auch durch ihr gehaltvolles Timbre auszeichnet, keineswegs an. So spendiert das Label audite eine bereichernde Einspielung dieses persönlichsten Werkes von Boulez.

English translation:

The centenary of Pierre Boulez's birth provides an opportunity to focus on the composer, which some people are doing. The audite label is contributing a recording of the first movement in two parts from the Livre pour quatuor from the Alban Berg Quartet's debut performance in Lucerne. This is the only performance of this work by the Alban Berg Quartet in its standard instrumentation.

In just under six minutes, they open up the whole range of challenges that the players face with this work. With their commitment to the two parts of the first movement of the quartet, they followed Boulez's idea, who left it up to each performer to decide which parts and in which order to perform this quartet, which was repeatedly revised until 2012.

The barren landscape on the one hand and the wild vegetation of this composition on the other are clearly revealed by the Alban Berg Quartet in just a few minutes. The meticulous specifications can hardly be fully realized. Nevertheless, the Alban Berg Quartet provided a fascinatingly comprehensive view of this richly endowed work, whose diverse demands make the utmost demands on every musician.

The difficulties are in no way noticeable in the interpreters' lively performance, which is also characterized by its rich timbre. The audite label thus presents an enriching recording of this, Boulez's most personal work.