

Ulrich Leyendecker

- Biography -

Ulrich Leyendecker was born on 29 January 1946 in Wuppertal. At barely the age of 15, when he showed his autodidactic attempts at composition to the then Director of the Wuppertal Conservatory, Martin Stephani, the latter recommended the boy to his colleague Ingo Schmidt, a former pupil of Frank Martin. Schmidt, who took on Leyendecker as a private pupil in 1962, had him "justify every note individually" – a school of compositional responsibility that had a long-term influence on Leyendecker. In 1965 he came to the Cologne Music School, where he studied piano with Günter Ludwig and composition with Rudolf Petzold. Petzold, a pupil of Philipp Jarnach, gave no aesthetic directives in his teaching at all and was also extremely liberal in terms of style. Leyendecker, who saw himself surrounded by fellow students of the most varied backgrounds and orientations, was able to develop unhindered. However, Petzold was strict in contrapuntal training: Leyendecker had to write fugues of all kinds, also under revelation of the tonal prerequisites.

In 1968 he was able to participate at the Darmstadt Holiday Courses thanks to a stipend from the Study Foundation of the German People. In 1967-69, still during his studies in Cologne, he accepted a teaching position in music theory at the Conservatory in Wuppertal. During this time, stimulated by a composition course with Wolfgang Fortner, he intensively came to terms with serial techniques, but without being able to accept them as a composer. He also made the acquaintance of Bernd Alois Zimmermann in Cologne, whose musical thinking, however, only began to influence him during the 1970s.

Following the Academy Final Examination in Composition (1970), Leyendecker first became an instructor at the Rhenish Music School in Cologne, and then became a theory teacher at the Academy of Music and the Performing Arts in Hamburg in 1971. (This position was transformed into a professorship in music theory and composition in 1981.) In 1994 he became Professor of Composition at the State Academy of Music and the Performing Arts in Mannheim.

In 1975 Leyendecker received the furtherance prize of the Province of Nordrhein-Westfalen. In 1978/79 he won the stipend "Villa Massimo" in Rome, and in 1984/85 and 2001/02 the stipend for the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. In 1986 Leyendecker was chosen for the music sector of the Free Academy of the Arts in Hamburg and awarded the Eduard van der Heydt Prize of his home city Wuppertal in 1987. In 1997 the Free Academy of the Arts in Mannheim elected him a regular member.

Born in the first year of the post-war era, 1946, the confrontation with the music of Anton Webern was important for Ulrich Leyendecker at the beginning of the assimilation of the musical modernism which had been banned in National Socialist Germany. However, his study of the Second Viennese School was considerably more relaxed than that of Boulez, Nono or Stockhausen. Leyendecker questioned their derivation of the serial procedure from Webern when he observed how that composer handled the row quite freely in his Symphony, Op. 21. Moreover, during the course of the Mahler reception which began when Leyendecker began composing in the 1960s, his interest was more strongly orientated towards Alban Berg and his leading-tone relationships which preserve a kind of "residual tonality." In Berg's *Orchestral Pieces*, Op. 6, he not only admired the balance between rationality and emotion, but also the architectonic art of gaining large-scale, strongly expressive expanses from brief basic formal units. At the beginning of his instrumental works, Leyendecker often went back a step behind the *a priori* fixed and certain basic formal unit: "He always began as if feeling around in the dark, sometimes in zones of pure noise. Gradually, intervals,

rhythms and audible structures become recognisable. We experience how this material is arranged [...] This genesis of the material is always an extremely exciting procedure." (Vogt 1988, 5). Leyendecker has never attached himself to doctrines and systems, not to mention conceptions of a "scientifically correct music" as he found in composers born during the 1920s and 1930s, nor does he share a belief in progress which supposedly abandoned depleted traditions.

Leyendecker has no interest in open forms, aleatoric arbitrariness or the openness of the fragment. His music takes place in metamorphoses of one and the same basic substance, often in a single, richly subdivided course of development – since the Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (1980) and the Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra (1983) also in different movements, which merge into each other almost without a break. He organises the transformation of the constantly polyphonic texture through more or less film-like "cross-fade," as in the first movement of his 3rd Symphony (1991), where the composer at first strides in a calm broad tonal space which gradually begins to totter through "more or less amorphous segments of small intervals" (Leyendecker 1994). Leyendecker "cross-fades" not only fields of sound but also tempo and metric layers, but in his works of the 1990s he also allows for static formal parts which antithetically contrast with the dynamic sections. He has gradually brightened his earlier primarily dark-coloured orchestral palette. If Leyendecker relies on his own initial material in the 1980s and 1990s, in the *Pensées sur un Prélude – Debussy Variations for Orchestra* (2001) he has recourse to Debussy's prelude "Des pas sur la neige" and, in the orchestral piece *Evocazione* (2005/06), to the commander scene from Mozart's opera "Don Giovanni."