

CHEKALIN, MIKHAIL, about „Blowing Off The Inferno“ and „The Return Of The Inferno“

I conceived the idea of creating this composition spontaneously, but not accidentally, as we, Ulli and I, know each other from as far back as the early '90s. It was Ulli who came up with the title; his point seems beyond controversy to me and rather the provocation to sheer delight. For, in the best possible way, it invokes or reveals an infernal contradictiousness of a hell of a time in which we live; also a radical and protestant air, once a must in a work of music, that has sunk into oblivion by now. Here it has found its realization, pulling together those three aspects, composition, improvisation and mixing.

This title gives rise to a lot of things by association; one of these being a Luis Buñuel film „La hija de Juan Simón“ (1965) [a weird and wonderful parable about a saint, who having been seduced by Satan finds himself in a seriously cool scene of the late '60s, which he takes for the Hell. So he asks Satan, personified as beautiful girl (by a far-out chick smoking a cigarette) in a bar-room where they play rock-n-roll music, just for how long he is doomed to remain here; and the answer is “For ever and ever”]. That cool Hell is over and done with, alas; if only we could go back, from our actual hell to that allegorical one...

It's his epoch that an artist expresses, and not just his own self. The saxophone music elements, doing homage to free improvisation era, strike me here as essential in reflecting a contradictious Weltanschauung of nowadays. A contemporary world outlook tinged by an indispensable post-modern eschatological touch doesn't seem so very relevant after all, for what used to be qualified an apocalyptic delusion is more like actual reality where we already live, and it seems to be about time to leave this Inferno, following after the Piper...

Moreover, the Inferno image alludes to the avant-garde art tradition, as it is understood by the humanism, by force of paradoxical play of symbols (negation of negation), as is the case, for example, with the personage of Lucifer...

...this automatically calls to mind my encounters and discussions with Karlheinz Stockhausen which took place in 1990; making personal acquaintance with whom served for me, of itself, as a kind of symbol, implying a passing-on the baton of epoch-making music paradigms...

Another memorable encounter also happened in the same '90; an encounter with Frank Zappa, who spoke highly of my LP album „Post-Pop - Non-Pop“ [recorded in 1980s] and partly to whom this work may be doing homage as well, because the improvisation here plays its own particular role within the framework of composition. And not least of all, at that time, at the very beginning of 1990s, this turning point in history which seemed such a romantic event for so many but which actually turned out to be one hell of a doom, we stroke acquaintance with Ulli. He played a great part in my life, it was he who released my „Night Pulsation“ (as a matter of fact, it was this very piece after having heard which Frank Zappa wished to meet me in person...)

Perhaps a steady reaching for an exit out of Inferno which continues to exist is the basic essential of music for me.

Quite a few among the 20th century musicians have been left searching answers for a „question without answer“ posed by Charles Ives at the beginning of the century. While it would be right to pose one’s own questions. An artist doesn’t give answers, he offers questions.

Besides, the saxophone here, by its very sound, calls to mind a burgeoning liberal epoch of free-wheeling thinking, hopeful expectations, strivings and free improvisation of late 60s - 70s, the epoch which has just liberated itself from the jazz square captivity to make a plunge to higher level of experimental freedom, to supremacist black square.

Moreover, for me as a composer, the saxophone of itself, by some kind of an inherent agogics, possesses this question-mark intonation, which Ulli knows how to express gorgeously, covering the whole range of emotional inflections, from serious to weird. I’d like to believe that we succeeded in offering a new question by this very opus... For a freedom to pose questions rhymes for me with the main problem of our times; as John Faules puts it, the problem of securing freedom of the individual against an fatal threat of the century: a conformism effected by compulsion.

Mikhail Chekalin

Moscow, March 2011

VITA

Mikhail Chekalin (1959, Moscow), is a composer, electronic musician, pianist, painter and video artist, whose professional career traces as far back as the very beginnings of the Soviet underground in mid-seventies.

"Shostakovich for the Electronica Generation", "CDs by Mikhail Chekalin of Post Symphonic music that transcend the boundaries of Electronic, Neo-Classical Jazz Fusion"
A.Patterson, Eurock. USA

"Arguably he is the most influential modern composer of the last 35 years in the former USSR, now Russia. His work was experimental; in fact his creative intent was specifically to break new ground stylistically. He worked outside the boundaries of established culture, while at the same time breaching its borders when possible to make his point and music heard." <...> "Over the span of his career Chekalin has produced some 30+ works that range the sonic spectrum from post pop, to free-jazz, electronic, and post-symphonic. While his music was known to me since the 80s, <...>" *Progression magazine /issue51, USA*

“<...> stripping away the cold academic veneer from post-modern 20th century classical music by splicing electronics into a more freeform, compositional matrix; Chekalin’s a veritable Mother of Invention, molesting pianos, tossing horns about and plastering all sorts of synthetic mayhem across the stereo canvas with pcalculated, Zappafied glee. <...> ...recall if anything Tod Machover’s generative computer-glove exaltations, more spank than Frank...“
Densely plotted listening certainly, and an acquired taste, but tenuous comparisons aside, Chekalin remains a true (if sadly underrecognized) original. " *Darren Bergstein " Signal to Noise“ Issue # 50/ June – July 2008 Circuit Breakers, USA*

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