|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **About you** | **[Salutation]** | William | [Middle name] | Kinderman |
| [Enter your biography] | | | |
| University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign | | | |

|  |
| --- |
| **Your article** |
| Kurtág, György (1926--) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Unlike his friend György Ligeti, who emigrated from Hungary in 1956, György Kurtág remained until after the end of the Cold War in Budapest, where he taught at the Academy of Music. At the time of writing, he remains a key figure in musical modernism, whose vocal and instrumental works have received much attention, and whose opera *Fin de partie* based on Samuel Beckett's play is eagerly awaited.  Kurtág’s style builds on Bartók and Webern and his formidable mastery of the Western musical legacy. Kurtág was born at Lugos in the Bánát region of Romania. He became a Hungarian citizen in 1948, but moved to France in 2001, assuming dual citizenship in 2002. In 1947, he married the pianist Márta Kinsker, who has contributed importantly to his artistic development. During 1957-58, he took part in courses with Messiaen and Milhaud in Paris, overcoming a creative crisis with the support of the Hungarian psychologist Marianne Stein. |
| Unlike his friend György Ligeti, who emigrated from Hungary in 1956, György Kurtág remained until after the end of the Cold War in Budapest, where he taught at the Academy of Music. At the time of writing, he remains a key figure in musical modernism, whose vocal and instrumental works have received much attention, and whose opera *Fin de partie* based on Samuel Beckett's play is eagerly awaited.  Kurtág’s style builds on Bartók and Webern and his formidable mastery of the Western musical legacy. Kurtág was born at Lugos in the Bánát region of Romania. He became a Hungarian citizen in 1948, but moved to France in 2001, assuming dual citizenship in 2002. In 1947, he married the pianist Márta Kinsker, who has contributed importantly to his artistic development. During 1957-58, he took part in courses with Messiaen and Milhaud in Paris, overcoming a creative crisis with the support of the Hungarian psychologist Marianne Stein.  A superb pianist and chamber music coach, Kurtág has composed an extensive ongoing piano series *Játékok* (Games), parts of which he has often performed in concerts with his wife Márta, with his own pieces alternating with his transcriptions of J.S. Bach. He has been a composer-in-residence in Berlin and Vienna, and received prestigious recognition such as the Ernst von Siemens Prize and Grawemeyer Award. One of his impressive orchestral works is *Stele* (Greek for ‘memorial slab’), op. 33, commissioned by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in 1994. As Alex Ross puts it, this work evokes an historical reference, whereby ‘Beethoven’s ghost walks again’. Yet as Kurtág confessed to Claudio Abbado, its concluding seven-note chords have the rhythm of ‘a gaunt figure staggering on,’ conveying the irreducible experience of the individual as a means of conveying aesthetic meaning.  Kurtág’s vocal compositions include settings of texts in Hungarian, Russian, French, English, and German. His cycle of forty songs based on extracts from Franz Kafka’s diaries and letters, the *Kafka Fragments*, for soprano and violin, op. 24 (1986), may be regarded as a kind of modernist *Winterreise* (Winter’s Journey). Like Schubert’s *Winterreise*, the *Kafka Fragments* center on the archetypal theme of wandering, the seeking of a path that remains profoundly elusive. The entire second part of the four-part structure of the cycle is devoted to ‘Der wahre Weg’ (‘The true path’), a notion that is interrogated skeptically in this ‘Hommage-message à Pierre Boulez’. The static slowness and hypnotic repetitions of the song, together with its motives of stumbling and precarious balancing on a suspended rope, are reminiscent of Schubert’s ‘Leiermann’ (‘The hurdy-gurdy man’) at the end of *Winterreise*, while the extensive use of quarter tones in the violin invites comparison in relation to the last movement of the last work Bartók completed, his Sonata for Violin Solo.  Characteristically, some features of the *Kafka Fragments* point beyond, connecting to other works by Kurtág and other composers. For instance, his setting of ‘Der begrenzte Kreis’ (‘The closed circle’) as III/6 of the *Kafka Fragments* is linked to a Kafka text, yet also corresponds to parts of his independent chamber music work, the *Hommage à R. Sch*., op. 15d. In turn, the *Hommage à R. Sch*., like the *Kafka Fragments*, engages deeply with the legacy of Robert Schumann, and absorbs his pair of contrasting characters, Florestan and Eusebius, while also making reference to E.T.A. Hoffmann’s fictional figure, the Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler. Kurtág’s inscription to the last piece of his *Hommage*, ‘Meister Raro discovers Guillaume de Machaut,’ alludes to Schumann’s intermediary figure Raro, a kind of musicological superego who negotiates between the divergent spheres of Eusebius and Florestan while exploring medieval isorhythmic technique in a spirit of fresh creative discovery. Elsewhere in the *Kafka Fragments*, on the other hand, Schumann’s pair of characters help inspire one of Kurtág’s most operatic inspirations, the ‘Szene in der Elektrischen’ (‘Scene in the electric streetcar’), a suggestive dream-vision in which the dancer Eduardowa is accompanied by two different violinists playing two contrasting styles of music. As these examples indicate, Kurtág’s art displays an astonishingly rich allusiveness, and its openness to the legacy of the past proves entirely compatible with the highest originality and sensitivity of musical expression. |
| Further reading:  (Beckles Willson)  (Farkas)  (Kinderman)  (Sallis, Elliott and DeLong)  (Varga) |