# Mathias Spahlinger (1944–)

Mark Barden

German composer, major figure in the post-war avant-garde. Born 15 October in Frankfurt am Main, Spahlinger took in his childhood lessons on vielle, recorder, gamba, and cello with his father, a cellist with the Frankfurt Opera, and later developed considerable proficiency on piano and saxophone. Heavily involved in the Frankfurt jazz scene, he initially considered a jazz career. However, in 1962 he began an apprenticeship as a typesetter, concurrently studying composition privately with Konrad Lechner. Formal composition studies followed with Lechner at the Akademie für Tonkunst Darmstadt and with Erhard Karkoschka at the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Stuttgart. From 1982–89 Spahlinger served as Professor of Composition and Music Theory at the Hochschule für Musik Karlsruhe. In 1990 he succeeded legendary pedagogue Klaus Huber as Professor of Composition and Director of the Institute of New Music at the Hochschule für Musik Freiburg, a position he kept until retiring in 2009.

Spahlinger’s wide-ranging, often radical compositional approaches refuse categorization into a single compositional style. An affinity for and deep understanding of Second Viennese School techniques and aesthetics are apparent in early works (*fünf sätze, vier stücke*). *Rough (strange?)* breaks with this entirely, forcing a confrontation between jazz soloists and a classical orchestra. *éphémère* uses household items as instruments and involves deliberately provocative theatrical moments. While *farben der frühe* restricts itself to traditional techniques, other pieces explore primarily extended techniques (*adieu m’amour*). *nah, getrennt* takes microtonal repetition to a durational extreme. Several works incorporate musicians’ autonomy as formal determinants (*doppelt bejaht*, *128 erfüllte augenblicke*, *vorschläge*) while others thematize the concept of tempo composition (*off*) or open form (*passage/paysage*).

Influenced by the 1968 protests, 20th century European political history, and thinkers such as Marx, Engels, Liebrucks, Wittgenstein, *et al.*, Spahlinger emphasizes in his work both political engagement and music’s ability to awaken social consciousness. He defines new music as “music in which the relationship of the parts to the whole is fundamentally altered”, highlighting musical parameters’ autonomy as opposed to the various dependent parametric relationships, or established *Gestalten*,that exist in traditional classical music. In many works this autonomy is expressed through musical analogues to the Hegelian and Adornian concept of determinate negation(*bestimmte Negation*); material is carefully organized to negate large- and small-scalle rhythmic, harmonic, pitch-based, or structural conventions (*furioso, gegen unendlich*). This rigorous approach to deploying material is coupled with a profound knowledge of instrumental idiom and sound production, evident in his meticulous, systematically notated scores. Like contemporaries N. A. Huber and Lachenmann, Spahlinger attempts in much of his instrumental writing a *musique concrète instrumentale*, exploring intensely a myriad of extended instrumental and noise techniques with the credo that “every sound can be material in new music” (lecture at Leuven in English on YouTube).

## Key Works

• *128 erfüllte augenblicke [128 fulfilled instants]* for soprano, clarinet, and cello (1976)

• *éphémère [ephemeral]*, for percussion, veritable instruments, and piano (1977)

• *extension*, for violin and piano (1979–80)

• *adieu m'amour [goodbye, my love]*, for violin and cello (1982–83)

• *in dem ganzen ozean von empfindungen eine welle absondern, sie anhalten [in the whole ocean of sensations, find one wave, and hold it]*, for choir groups and playback (1985)

• *passage/paysage [passage/landscape]*, for orchestra (1988–90)

*• nah, getrennt [near, separated],* for alto recorder (1992)

• *und als wir* *[and as we]*, for 54 spatialized strings (1993)

• *vorschläge [suggestions],* text-based improvisation concepts, open instrumentation (1993)

• *akt, eine treppe herabsteigend* *[nude descending a staircase]*, for bass clarinet, trombone, and orchestra (1997–98)

• *farben der frühe [colours of early morning]*, for seven pianos (1997–2005)

• *doppelt bejaht* *[twice approved]*, etudes for orchestra without conductor (2009)

## Further Reading

Little has been written about Spahlinger in English. The CMR piece dedicated to his and N.A.Huber’s work is the best starting point, though CD liner notes, particularly those by Peter Niklas Wilson (*furioso*, Kairos, 0012692KAI; *extension*,hat ART CD 6131) are also quite useful.

English

• Grove

• “Music of Nicolaus A. Huber and Mathias Spahlinger” *Contemporary Music Review Vol. 27, No. 6, December 2008,* (best English language source. Articles by Kane, Blume, Spahlinger, Schüle)

• Kane, Brian. “Aspect and Ascription in the Music of Mathias Spahlinger” *Contemporary Music Review Vol. 27, No. 6, December 2008,* pp.595–609

(Insightful piece on repetition and “skeptical puzzles”. Extended discussion of rimshots in *éphémère*.)

• Blume, Philipp. “Mathias Spahlinger’s *128 erfüllte augenblicke* and the Parameters of Listening”, *Contemporary Music Review, Vol. 27, No. 6, December 2008,* pp. 625–642

(Excellent analysis from an expert source on German contemporary music.)

• Warnaby, John. “A New Left-Wing Radicalism in Contemporary German Music?” Tempo, New Series, No. 193, German Issue (Jul., 1995), pp. 18-26, Cambridge UP, publ.

(Vague and prone to unfounded assertions, though useful as a general overview of Spahlinger and several of his contemporaries.)

• Spahlinger, Mathias (2008). this is the time of conceptive ideologies no longer. *Contemporary Music Review*, 27(6), 579–594.

German

• Sebastian Claren, Johannes Kreidler, Jörg Mainka, Rainer Nonnenmann, Dorothea Ruthemeier, Marion Saxer und Tobias Eduard Schick. “Mathias Spahlinger” *Musik-Konzepte 155.* (142-page issue with various articles written principally by close associates and former students)

• Spahlinger, Mathias. “

• Dohmann, Andreas. “’Wo bleibt das Negative?’: Zur musikalischen Ästhetik Helmut Lachenmanns, Nicolaus A. Hubers und Mathias Spahlingers” *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 62. Jahrg., H. 3. (2005), pp. 177-191 (©Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, Sitz Stuttgart)

[Thoughtful analysis of Adornian concepts of negation, enlightenment, and truth in the three composers’ works. Confrontational, provocative.]

• MGG

• Jean-Noel von der Weid: Die Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts. Frankfurt am Main & Leipzig 2001, S. 408f. ISBN 3-458-17068-5

• Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht: Geschichte der Musik als Gegenwart: Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht und Mathias Spahlinger im Gespräch. Ed. Text und Kritik, München 2000. ISBN 3-88377-655-6.

Supplemental Materials:

1. Composer photo: <http://ntslive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/mathias-spahlinger.jpg>

2. Composer bio: