

Airborne string players and choral wizardry in *aus LICHT* Part 3

By Jenny Camilleri, 03 June 2019

The final part of *aus LICHT* is the longest. *Working Together and Opening Up Into Space* is spread over eight hours, including breaks. It comprises episodes from *DIENSTAG* (Tuesday), *MITTWOCHE* (Wednesday) and *SONNTAG* (Sunday). And, for die-hard serialists, there are additional hours of electronic music. Three long operas in three days will test anyone's endurance, but my wonder at [Stockhausen's](#) inventiveness and exuberant craziness increases after every segment. Also, the cast is beyond wonderful, performing challenging music, often by heart, and precise choreography at the same time. And let's not forget the mixing desk team and their electronic alchemy.



aus LICHT Day 3

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Yesterday's cosmic battle continues. The floor is overrun by Michael and Lucifer's troops, trumpets versus trombones, their metal antlers forming a

forest of barbed wire. The music of *INVASION-EXPLOSION* follows the engage-and-regroup dance of combat. Stockhausen experienced the consequences of war first-hand and his spatial recreation of skies raining bombs induces genuine anxiety. When Michael is wounded, soprano Pia Davila appears as Eva to console him. Her piteous duet with Valentin François on the flugelhorn exploits all the physical possibilities of their respective instruments. Michael's flugelhorn sings, sputters and bays. Davila keens, makes consonants resonate and floats them on swishes of air. After the fighting resurges and subsides, Ivan Pavlov performs crazy Synthi-Fou's synthesizer toccata dressed in a Liberace jacket sprouting extra sleeves. I realise that this complex piece demonstrates how Stockhausen expanded the boundaries of electronic music, but it seems to go on and on. On the other hand, madness and time boundaries rarely go together, so maybe that's the idea.

If parliaments discussed love instead of budgets, would the world be a better place? The multilingual *WELT-PARLAMENT* (World Parliament) doesn't answer this question, but depicts assembled politicians with uncanny accuracy. Divided into twelve factions, the Netherlands Chamber Choir chatter indistinctly, scrape their throats and shush each other, presided over by tenor Erik Slik wielding a gavel. Absurd, self-important solos are delivered. They sing in beautiful, polyrhythmic waves. As if Stockhausen doesn't make fun of them enough, costume designer Wojciech Dziedzic dresses them like the animation figures Pat and Mat, the hopeless handymen. They look hilarious, in shapeless jumpers and beanies stuffed with what could be assorted vegetables. And what a phenomenal choral display!



Two excerpts after the second intermission explore the relationship between music and real-life noises, which are not always two different things. While auditioning for a position in an orchestra, musicians play their solos on top of recordings from different locations. This yields interesting combinations, such as flute with nursery school and goats. Sounds and tones clash, mesh and alternate. There's also protracted wackiness, like the frustrated double bass player skit that lasts too long. Music and noise truly merge in the most publicised part of the production, the *HELIKOPTER-STREICHQUARTETT*. We're suddenly in TV show land as a presenter introduces the Pelargos Quartet, who will play the piece in four flying helicopters. They explain that they will not be able to hear each other, and that listening to clicks on a prerecorded track will help them keep time. We follow them via four screens as they are driven to the helicopters. We watch them take off, a string quartet in tops with coloured feathers – talk about musical angels! At first it all feels like a photogenic stunt, which, of course, it is. But soon the rhythmic chopping of the rotors and the string glissandos begin to sound as if they naturally belong together. The cello and the rotors are very close in frequency, the violins and viola flit and zoom above them. Apart from a minor incident with a dislodged violin shoulder rest, it all goes swimmingly. Players and pilots step onto the stage for claps and cheers.



It's been a tropically hot day, but the Gashouder is nice and cool for the grand finale, the *ENGEL-PROZESIONEN*. The audience has been rearranged around a circular space in the middle, towards which seven angelic choirs, singing in several languages, will slowly converge. Like the parliament scene earlier, this work requires virtuosity and versatility, but on a grander scale. Two conductors guide Cappella Amsterdam as they chant, hum, patter and click their tongues and fingers. You can feel the air quiver with their sustained chords. Probably to focus attention on the singing, they are dressed plainly, in surgical caps and raincoats. For me this get-up has the opposite effect, calling up specific associations with protective clothing in hazardous waste areas. I'd have preferred neutral black costumes, like those worn by the earthly voices of the student choir from Leiden. I'm not alone in deciding to listen with my eyes closed. In darkness, the moving sonic structures and their electronic shadows really do untether you from the earth. This, then, was *aus LICHT* – outrageous, touching, amusing, irritating, transfixing, baffling, transcendent.