

***Ruhe sanfte, sanfte ruh'*** (1974)

*Ruhe sanfte, sanfte ruh'* is Lumsdaine's second work for solo piano. Its title, too, is revealing, alluding to the final chorus of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. The piece opens with the first notes of Bach's chorus, transformed into monoliths upon which Lumsdaine's piece is built. In Bach's piece these notes are a fleeting part of a complex of commingling lines which descend in chromatic chains to create the effect of collective human suffering. Lumsdaine's transcription for solo piano immediately re-evaluates Bach's chorus, viewed, as it were, from one person's perspective. Though Bach's presence is palpable, so too is that of the 19th century virtuoso pianist. When Lumsdaine repeats the opening chords, we are reminded of the cycling in Bach's chorus. For all the movement in Bach's textures, the initial C-minor chord remains the point to which the music returns: a marker of the groundedness of those who have, in Bach's text, witnessed the death of Christ. It was the structural circling to which Lumsdaine initially responded:

[...] for some unknown reason, just before I embarked on the piece, I became obsessed with the final chorus of the *St Matthew Passion*. There was no way I could escape its harmony which refused to resolve at the cadences.

The structure Lumsdaine creates begins with a tight circle which immediately repeats the opening. There being no other material, and long held chords, the slow decay of the resonance becomes at least as important as the notes. Here we find the basis of Lumsdaine's first note of commentary, an Ab in the bass, forming a symmetrical expansion below the C, counterbalancing the Eb crucial to establishing Bach's chorus's tonality. The submediant key area is one to which Bach's chorus moves, but here there is no need to resolve back to C-minor; Lumsdaine construes the Ab as a possible resolution to C-minor.

Soon Lumsdaine's structural circle is expanded by a series of extraordinary helical arcs. Like Bach's chorus, each move returns to the opening sonority. The first arc presents a melody comprising bell-like sounds, which connect the piece with its place of composition:

Composing in my room overlooking the cathedral meant that I was always hearing my music through the bells of that great building. Late in 1974, the music department at Durham University bought a Bösendorfer concert grand piano, a gorgeous instrument which I had mostly to myself during the composition of *Ruhe sanfte*, and it was inevitable that I should explore bell-like attacks and resonances through the wide variety of tone and dynamics available on the instrument.

Bells and Bach suffuse this composition.

The opening of Lumsdaine's piece transforms the fluidity of the beginning of Bach's chorus into solid material. The second idea of Bach's chorus, which contrasts with its opening, is a kind of dance, set using saraband rhythms. *Ruhe sanfte* uses this material as well, and, like the opening, alters its meaning. Instead of the sense of rest induced by Bach's dance (which is itself a kind of paradox), Lumsdaine reorders the saraband rhythms to push the music forward into some of the piece's most highly active, dense music.

Both Bach and Lumsdaine end their pieces as they begin: Bach with a C-minor chord, indicating the inherent incompleteness of his drama; Lumsdaine with a C-minor chord, the resonance of which is altered by an Ab, now an octave lower, affirming Ab as both a resolution to C-minor, and its most pithy commentary.

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