



COMMENT C'EST

ECM 2537

music and words by Michael Mantler

with Himiko Paganotti (voice)
Michael Mantler (trumpet)

and the Max Brand Ensemble
conducted by Christoph Cech

recorded April - July 2016, Vienna, Austria and Pernes-Les-Fontaines, France

TITLES

Aujourd'hui / Intolérance / Guerre / Commerce / Hiver / Saans Fin / Folie / Pourquoi / Après / Que dire de plus

THE ENSEMBLE

Annegret Bauerle (flute)
Peter Tavernaro (oboe)
Gregor Narnhofer (clarinet)
Eberhard Reiter (bass clarinet)
Balduin Wetter (French horn)
Tobias Ennemoser (tuba)
Joanna Lewis (violin)
Simon Frick (violin)
Simon Schellnegger (viola)
Arne Kircher (cello)
Tibor Kövesdi (bass)
Sun Yi (vibraphone, marimba)

and (guest)
David Helbock (piano)

ABOUT COMMENT C'EST

Comment c'est (How it is) is a song cycle for female voice and chamber orchestra. Wanting to use French, a language that so beautifully lends itself to be sung, I had long been thinking of using a certain type of voice from French popular music in a totally different and serious context. When the project finally came to be realized I luckily found a very interesting French electro-pop/jazz singer, Himiko Paganotti.

She turned out to be the perfect choice, having a tremendous range, both musically and emotionally. Introduced to me by John Greaves, an old cohort of mine, she had worked with him and in many different contexts, including the French cult rock-jazz band *Magma*. Our first occasion to work together was at a concert in Paris during 2014 with the *Chaos Orchestra* of composers Daniel Yvinec and Arnaud Petit. This collaboration resulted in a lengthy work entitled *Oiseaux de Guerre (Birds of War)*, which dealt with atrocities of the Iraq war. Continuing from there, wanting to explore the voice and the general theme further, I worked on creating *Comment c'est*. It was premiered with two concerts at Porgy & Bess in Vienna during September 2016.

I have always kept my musical life as abstract as possible, never directly related to programmatic influences or themes, such as world politics, news items or personal life events. In hindsight, that was only partially successful. After all, I participated in the early *Liberation Music Orchestra* projects with Charlie Haden. For me, however, it was more the musical experience that counted, rather than the expression of political views. Of course, at the time, one marched on Washington, demonstrated against Vietnam and, in general, behaved anti-government, anti-business and anti-establishment.

Certain critical political-sociological world-views eventually began to appear from time to time in my work, such as in *Cerco Un Paese Innocente* (I search for an innocent land - another song cycle, this one in Italian), and especially in the extended sort-of-an-opera *The School of Understanding*, with some of its songs resurfacing, extensively revised, in this current project.

No longer able to ignore outrageous recent world events, it had simply become impossible to continue creating music without reacting to this overwhelming and pervasive environment of hatred, greed and corruption. *Comment c'est* therefore concerns itself quite specifically with a range of serious subjects, such as war, terrorism, hostages, migration, poverty, fear and the generally sorry state of our contemporary world.

I have always wanted to simply create music that is beautiful and that perhaps reveals something that might be deep within us all. Yet, with this music, in particular, I hope not only to touch those elusive feelings but also to more concretely tell *How It Is*.

- Michael Mantler



Photos: Rainer Rygalek