

"Video opera "Three Tales" by Beryl Korot and Steve Reich at Theater Erfurt"

By Joachim Lange

(nmz) - What do the explosion of the giant airship "Hindenburg", the atomic bomb attempts by the Americans over the Bikini Atoll and the clone sheep Dolly have in common? All human work - one could answer in general. In concrete terms, they form the subject of three acts of a video opera. The guru of minimal music, Steve Reich (82), and his wife, the video artist Beryl Korot, call their 65-minute commissioned work for the Wiener Festwochen "Three Tales" from 2002 that way.



And this is completely independent of the more or less excessive use of videos in almost every production, which has almost become an aesthetic standard or at least a marker for the degree of "modernity". The name of the genre is by no means ironic here, but rather matter of fact seriously. The video does not act as an addition (or competition) to the stage, costumes and directing. It is the sole acting main thing. As in conventional opera, the orchestra plays live. Not quite so: the singers. They are also there live, but behind their music stands. In this case, a director is not required.

It is funny that the form in which this opera is realized reflects its content and breaks it ironically. The conductor has a button in his ear that technically extends him as a person. The necessary synchronicity of sound and image sequences keeps him on a short leash for a change. In the film track, which is completed with German surtitles, precisely this topic is negotiated from various aspects.

When man grows beyond himself

All three episodes deal with the dangers associated with growing beyond oneself. Like the sorcerer's apprentice at Goethe, who sets something in motion and everything under water. And who alone does not know the command that stops the catastrophe. The explosion of the Hindenburg upon landing in New Jersey, which was filmed randomly (really randomly - like the planes that flew into the World Trade Center?) Made the catastrophe a symbol that the development of this type of airship actually ended but got rid of the possible competition from the aircraft. It begins with the end, the images of the burning airship. In the sequences that show the construction of the device with a room volume to the extent of the Titanic, With the varying quotation of the Nibelungen hammers from the "Rheingold", Richard of all places makes Richard Wagner, as it were, the progenitor of minimal music. If one takes the swastikas on the zeppelin over the skyscrapers of Manhattan as metaphorically as the explosion itself, these diabolical images, viewed in retrospect, take on an almost prophetic dimension.

Image memory of humanity

The mushroom cloud, the childish carelessness of its uniformed observers and the apocalyptic effect of its waves of propagation on the ground have long been burned into the image memory of mankind. You no longer have to show it yourself. The middle episode deals with the cynicism in words and pictures with which the atoll residents were resettled. If the sheep and pigs are then loaded, on which the effect of the bomb on meat is to be “measured”, the picture collage ark noah dimension wins. However, as part of a creation story in reverse.

The third episode finally deals with what is existing in the existing creation, i.e. playing with God or manipulating DNA and cloning creatures. Let the old gentleman and evolution go by and lend a hand. Not only what is, but also what will be, should be. Here's the question of how far you go, the crucial and the undecided. Short but concisely sober and controversial statements by 20 prominent scientists keep you spellbound. With this part as homework to think and weigh the viewer is dismissed.

First of all to take a breath to free yourself from the suggestive spell of music that Peter Leipold and the 16 Erfurt musicians have built up and kept. In order to then weigh up the pros and cons of human interventions in the blueprints of nature or creation. If you don't want to commit yourself, you still have to consider the degree of intervention. So the one between scientifically justifiable and manipulatively dangerous.

The performance in the studio stage at the Erfurt Theater has been rehearsed with great care and is well balanced by the string quartet, two pianists, two vibraphones and four musicians on the percussion instruments and implemented with verve. The two soprano Leonor Amaral and Marisca Mulder as well as the tenors Tobias Schäfer, Andreas Karasiak and Paul Sutton contribute their chanting singing live, unobtrusively from the side. The fact that Erfurt is only the second opera house after Wuppertal where “Three Tales” comes on stage outside of festivals (and is shown eight times in total) speaks for the house, which is exemplary with its programmatic commitment to the new anyway.

Next performance: February 23, March 3, March 24, April 7 20.4. 2019

On March 3, following the performance, there will also be a follow-up discussion with the theologian, social ethicist and member of the German Ethics Council, Professor Andreas Lob-Hüdepohl.