

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE LAST ACT OF REVOLUTION, a Chamber Opera in One Act

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The Last Act of Revolution is a one-act chamber opera scored for two sopranos, tenor, baritone, and piano. The libretto, written by Lucas Richmond, is based on historical events surrounding the suicide of Ulrike Meinhof, a key member of the militant Red Army Faction, also known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang. The opera takes place during the final hours of Meinhof's life and explores the psychological dimensions of political violence. The setting is the high security wing of Stammheim prison where the leadership of the RAF are being held during trial. Their specialized "prison within the prison" consists of several cells, all connected to a common room where they may meet for certain hours of the day to plan their defense. Only the common room and Ulrike's cell are represented. The time is the afternoon and evening of May 8th, 1976.

When looking for musical inspiration for *The Last Act of Revolution* I turned to the Bertolt Brecht's play *Die Maßnahme*, which the members of the RAF quoted with some frequency. Hanns Eisler wrote several songs and incidental music for the play; a number of these songs are quoted throughout the opera and partially form the basis of its leitmotivic structure. The quoted songs (and the measures of their first appearance in the opera) are as follows: "Andere die Welt, sie braucht es" (mm. 83-

85, 150-151) “Lob der illegalen Arbeit” (mm. 118-122), and “Solidaritätslied” (mm. 169-170). The leitmotif associated with Ulrike is derived from “Andere die Welt, sie braucht es.” Transformations of this motif can be tracked in the Appendix II, which includes a near-quotation of the original song (mm. 877-879). Appendix II also illustrates first instances of other significant leitmotifs; “Solidarity,” is a modified quotation of the Brecht-Eisler “Solidaritätslied,” as well as comprising the genesis of “Lighting the Way.” “Andreas/Swine” and “Ulrike’s Disgust” are original melodies. “Vile Acts” is an additional quotation from “Andere die Welt, sie braucht es.”

The harmonic content of the music is linked to characters and actions in the drama. Much of the harmonic material is derived from aspects of the hexatonic collection. The pc set (01245789) in the opening passage of the piece (mm. 1-32, typically associated with Andreas) is a hexatonic superset. Discussion of the hijacking plot is often accompanied by pure hexatonic passages (mm. 211-212), as well as a pitch field comprised of two hexatonic sets (mm. 229-243). The motif “Lighting the Way” when sung by Ulrike, occurs in the key of A major. This motif appears in Ulrike’s Scene III aria “The revolution falters” which, when compared with the prevailing F minor harmony of the aria, produces a hexatonic relationship. The “Solidarity” motif is often accompanied by an A/Eb harmony that forms an octatonic collection (mm. 287-290); this particular harmony/collection (often absent the “solidarity” motif) accompanies discussions of solidarity and the revolution.

THE LAST ACT OF REVOLUTION, a Chamber Opera in One Act

By

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CAST OF CHARACTERS AND PERFORMANCE NOTES

CHARACTERS

Andreas Baader (Baritone): Leader of the Red Army Faction

Gudrun Ensslin (Soprano): Baader's girlfriend and second in command

Ulrike Meinhof (Soprano): Writer of the RAF's manifesto and public statements

A Lawyer (Tenor)

PERFORMANCE NOTES

1. Singers should take some freedom with the rhythms. The text should be declaimed in a natural, speech-like manner.

2. Sprechstimme is indicated by "x" note-heads. The singer should produce the indicated pitch, then quickly fall away from it.

The pitch should not be sustained for its printed duration. Sprechstimme is also modified with the directions "nearly spoken" and "spoken."

3. Accidentals carry through the measure, but do not carry across octaves.

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