

Maurice Ravel (geb. Ciboure, 7. März 1875 - gest. Paris, 28. Dezember 1937)

Concerto pour la main gauche für Klavier (linke Hand) und Orchester (1929/30)

Vorwort

Zu den kleineren unbesungenen Helden der Musik des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts gehört zweifellos der einarmige Wiener Pianist Paul Wittgenstein (1887-1961), der nicht nur die Spielweise und zugleich die Literatur der seltenen Gattung der einhändigen Klaviermusik von Grund auf umgestaltete, sondern auch als Erbe eines der größten europäischen Familienvermögens Kompositions-aufträge für diese Gattung an einige den größten Komponisten seiner Zeit vergab. Der ältere Bruder des berühmten Philosophen Ludwig Wittgenstein musste 1915 während des russischen Angriffs auf Polen wegen einer Verwundung seinen rechten Arm amputieren lassen. Aus diesem Schicksalsschlag wußte er jedoch Vorteil zu ziehen, indem er eine erstaunliche Breite von Spieltechniken für die linke Hand erarbeitete, die sämtlich in seiner bemerkenswerten dreibändigen Schule für die linke Hand (London 1957) bestaunt werden können. Auch seine Familienerbschaft machte er künstlerisch nutzbar, indem er insgesamt 44 neue Kompositionen in Auftrag gab, darunter nicht weniger als 20 Klavierkonzerte, die alle mit der linken Hand alleine zu bewältigen sind. Dieser musikalisch konservative und herrische Mensch betrachtete alle seine Auftragswerke als Privateigentum, das er nach Belieben aufführen und veröffentlichen konnte – oder eben auch nicht. Die Liste der dadurch entstandenen Werke für Klavier und Orchester enthält unter anderem das spritzige Vierte Klavierkonzert op. 53 (1931) von Sergej Prokofjew, das eigentümliche Parergon zur Sinfonia Domestica op. 73 (1924) von Richard Strauss, die beschwingten Diversions (1940) des damals kaum bekannten Benjamin Britten, der sich gerade im selbstauferlegten amerikanischen Exil befand (hier zeigte der nach Amerika ausgewanderte Wittgenstein eine besondere Weitsicht), sowie die gewollt avantgardistische Klaviermusik mit Orchester op. 29 (1923) von Paul Hindemith. Von diesen Werken weigerte sich Wittgenstein, die Prokofiev- und Hindemith-Stücke aufzuführen, die folglich erst posthum aus der Taufe gehoben werden konnten, das Hindemith-Konzert sogar erst 2004. Anders verhielt es sich jedoch mit dem größten Werk, das den mäzenatischen Tätigkeiten Wittgensteins entsproß: das Concerto pour la main gauche von Maurice Ravel. Das Auftragsschreiben Wittgensteins erreichte Ravel zu einem Zeitpunkt, als der große Franzose nach dem überraschenden – und für ihn etwas bedrückenden – Welterfolg des Boléro (1928) einen lähmenden schöpferischen Stillstand erleben mußte. Die Zeit vertrieb er sich unter anderem mit der Bearbeitung dieses satzmäßig schlichten Orchesterwerks für zwei Klaviere sowie mit einer weiteren für Klavier zu vier Händen – sicherlich eine geistig kaum anregende Beschäftigung – und mit der langsamen Genese des späteren Klavierkonzerts G-Dur. Inmitten seiner Arbeiten am G-Dur-Konzert traf die Anfrage Wittgensteins ein, die die Phantasie des Komponisten sogleich entflamnte. Von der Herausforderung fasziniert, einen virtuosen Klaviersatz für eine einzige Hand zu schreiben, vertiefte er sich in die bereits existierende Literatur zu dieser recht beschränkten Gattung: die Übungshefte op. 399 und op. 718 von Carl Czerny, die Six Études von Camille Saint-Saëns, die Étude op. 76 Nr. 1 von Valentin Alkan, die Paraphrasen der Etüden Chopins durch Leopold Godowsky sowie die bisher einzigen vollwertigen Kompositionen dieser Gattung (statt bloßer Technikstudien): die Prélude und Nocturne op. 9 von Alexander Skrjabin. Ravel war sich durchaus bewußt, daß eine Klaviermusik für die linke Hand auf keinen Fall weniger klangvoll ausfallen darf als die für beide Hände:

„In einem derartigen Werk“ – so schrieb der Komponist 1931 an seinen Freund Calvocorressi zur Veröffentlichung in der englischen Presse – „ist es unentbehrlich, den Eindruck eines Klaviersatzes zu vermitteln, der keineswegs dünner wirkt als eine Klavierstimme für zwei Hände.“ In diesem Sinne machte er sich daran, jene außergewöhnlichen Klanggewebe und Figurationen zu erfinden, denen das Concerto pour la main gauche seine einzigartige Stellung

im Konzertrepertoire verdankt. Für den stets peniblen Ravel verliefen die Kompositionsarbeiten ungewöhnlich rasch, und binnen neun Monaten war das neue Konzert fertig. Sofort organisierte er ein Probevorspiel des Konzerts für dessen Eigentümer und Widmungsträger Wittgenstein. (Da Ravel den Solopart unmöglich mit der linken Hand alleine spielen konnte, benutze er beide Hände). Die Wirkung auf Wittgenstein war jedoch alles andere als umwerfend:

“[Ravel] war kein hervorragender Pianist, und von der Komposition selber war ich nicht gerade überwältigt. Bei mir dauert es immer eine Weile, bis ich mich in ein schwieriges Werk hineinfinde. Ravel war vermutlich enttäuscht, und es tat mir schon leid, allein ich habe nie gelernt, Gefühle vorzutäuschen. Erst viel später, nachdem ich das Konzert monatelang einstudiert hatte, schlug es mich in seinen Bann, und mir wurde bewußt, um was für ein großartiges Werk es sich handelt.“

Es war der zögerliche Anfang einer bald schwer belasteten Beziehung zwischen dem Komponisten und seinem Mäzenen.

Einige Monate danach, als Wittgenstein den Solopart bereits in den Griff bekommen hatte, sorgte er für einen passenden Anlaß in seinem Wiener Palais, um das Werk dem Komponisten vorzuspielen. Das Ergebnis stellte einen der seltenen Augenblicke dar, in denen der sonst gleichmütige und vorurteilslose Ravel stark verärgert wurde. Seine enge Freundin und Interpretin Marguerite Long, die ihm bei diesem Wienbesuch begleitete, liefert einen Augenzeugenbericht des ganzen Geschehens:

“Wir wurden zu einem vornehmen Diner eingeladen, gefolgt von einer Abendgesellschaft, bei der der Gastgeber [Wittgenstein] das Konzert mit Begleitung auf einem zweiten Klavier zum besten geben wollte, damit Ravel sein Werk endlich hören durfte.

Mir war etwas angst und bange, denn während ich beim Diner zur Rechten Wittgensteins saß, vertraute er mir an, er habe einige ‚Bearbeitungen‘ am Werk vorgenommen. Innerlich habe ich ihn in der Annahme entschuldigt, seine körperliche Behinderung wäre an solchen Freiheiten Schuld, und ich riet ihm, Ravel vorher darüber zu informieren. Gerade dies tat er jedoch nicht.

Während der Aufführung verfolgte ich die Musik in den Noten, die mir damals unbekannt waren, ich konnte aber erkennen, wie sich Ravels Gesicht wegen der Missetaten unseres Gastgebers zunehmend verfinsterte. Kaum war alles vorbei, versuchte ich einen Zwischenfall zu vermeiden, indem ich ein ‚Ablenkungsmanöver‘ mit dem Botschafter Clauzel unternahm. Aber ach! Ravel ging langsam auf Wittgenstein zu und sagte: ‚So ist es aber überhaupt nicht!‘

Zur eigenen Rechtfertigung sagte dann Wittgenstein: ‘Ich bin als Pianist ein alter Hase, und das, was Sie geschrieben haben, klingt nicht richtig.’ Ausgerechnet das hätte er nicht sagen sollen!

‚Und ich bin in der Kunst der Instrumentation ein alter Hase, und richtig klingt es doch!‘, so Ravels Erwiderung. Die Verlegenheit läßt sich nur allzu leicht vorstellen!“

Nach diesem hitzigen Meinungs austausch versuchte Ravel sich von Wittgenstein tunlichst zu distanzieren, der die Uraufführung am 27. November 1931 im Wiener Musikvereinsaal unter der Leitung von Robert Heger bereits bestritten hatte. Die maßgebende Pariser Erstaufführung fand erst wesentlich später am 17. Januar 1933 statt, als sich Wittgenstein erneut den Solopart vornahm, während Ravel das Orchestre Symphonique de Paris leitete. Publikum und Presse waren gleichermaßen stark beeindruckt, nicht nur durch den Kontrastreichtum und die große stilistische Bandbreite des neuen Werks – vom Ravel der 1920er Jahre war dies nicht anders zu erwarten –, sondern vor allem auch durch dessen düstere Grundstimmung und außerordentliche Gewaltausbrüche. Der führende Musikkritiker Henri Prunières vertrat die Ansicht, daß es sich

hierbei – anders als bei so vielen neuerlichen Kompositionen Ravels – um eine Musik handelte, die aus dem Herzen quoll:

„Gleich von den ersten Takten an werden wir in eine Welt hineingestürzt, in die uns Ravel bisher nur selten eingeführt hat.“ Es war die gleiche Welt, die er etwa 1912 in *Daphnis et Chloë* erschlossen hatte – oder noch deutlicher in *La Valse*, jenem 1920 vollendeten Trauergesang auf den verschwundenen Glanz der Belle Époque. Ravel, der mittlerweile immer mehr unter den Nachwirkungen eines Autounfalls von 1932 litt, an denen er schließlich sterben sollte, war dennoch von der Wiedergabe Wittgensteins noch nicht überzeugt, und so besorgte er eine weitere Aufführung, um die Wittgenstein'schen Änderungen rückgängig zu machen. Dieses Ereignis, das er als „eigentliche Uraufführung“ bezeichnete, fand am 19. März 1937 in Paris unter der Leitung von Charles Munch statt, wobei Jacques Février den Solopart bestritt. Bis dahin hatte sich das *Concerto pour la main gauche* jedoch im Konzertrepertoire bereits durchgesetzt. Schon 1931 erschien die gedruckte Partiturausgabe beim Pariser Verlag Durand, der auch 1937 Ravels eigene Bearbeitung für zwei Klaviere veröffentlichte. Das Werk erklang 1933 in Monte Carlo, 1934 bei der IGNM in Florenz. Auch an frühen Plattenaufnahmen hat es nicht gemangelt: Wittgenstein selber machte 1937 eine Einspielung mit dem Amsterdamer Concertgebouw-Orchester unter Bruno Walter, Jacqueline Blancard 1938 und der große Alfred Cortot 1939 mit Charles Munch, und schließlich der Pianist der „eigentlichen Uraufführung“ Jacques Février 1942 eine weitere ebenfalls mit Munch. Im Jahr der Wiener Uraufführung und der Pariser Erstausgabe erschien auf Initiative Wittgensteins auch eine Wiener „Gegenveröffentlichung“, indem der Mäzen das Komponisten-manuskript durch die Konzertagentur Georg Kugel ablichten und vertreiben ließ, wobei das Werk auf der Titelseite stolz als „ausschließliches Eigentum von Herrn Paul Wittgenstein“ bezeichnet wird. Letztere Ausgabe dieses seltsam erschütternden Meisterwerks, das vier Konzertsätze innerhalb eines einzigen Satzes vereint und das sowohl eine überlegene Antwort auf Gershwins *Rhapsody in Blue* als auch einen Trauergesang auf das todgeweihte Zeitalter des Jazz darstellt, bildet die Vorlage der vorliegenden Manus-kriptveröffentlichung.

Bradford Robinson, 2008

Wegen Aufführungsmaterial wenden Sie sich bitte an Durand, Paris.

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*Concerto pour la main gauche* for piano (left hand) and orchestra (1929-30)

Preface

One of the lesser unsung heroes of twentieth-century music was undoubtedly Paul Wittgenstein (1887-1961), a one-armed Viennese pianist who not only revolutionized the playing (and the literature) of piano music for the left hand alone, but, as the heir to one of the largest fortunes in Europe, commissioned new works for this unusual genre from some of the greatest composers of his age. Wittgenstein, the slightly older brother of the great philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, lost his right arm in 1915 during the Russian invasion of Poland in World War One, when he was wounded, captured, and had his right arm amputated in Russian captivity. Turning this adversity into an advantage, he worked out an astonishingly varied range of techniques for playing with only one hand, all of which can be admired in his remarkable three-volume *School for the Left Hand* (London, 1957). Capitalizing on his family fortune, he also commissioned a total of forty-four new compositions, including twenty piano concertos, all written to be played with the left hand alone. Being conservative in his musical tastes and overbearing in his manner, he regarded these works as his private property and reserved the right to perform and publish them as, or if, he wished. The list of works for piano left-hand and

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"[Ravel] was not an outstanding pianist, and I wasn't overwhelmed by the composition. It always takes me a while to grow into a difficult work. I suppose Ravel was disappointed, and I was sorry, but I had never learned to pretend. Only much later, after I'd studied the concerto for months, did I become fascinated by it and realize what a great work it was."

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A few months later Wittgenstein had mastered the solo part and arranged to play the work at his home for Ravel's benefit, with the orchestral part taken by a second piano. The result was one of the few instances in which the level-headed and fair-minded Ravel was goaded to anger. His good friend Marguerite Long, who accompanied him to Vienna, provided an eye-witness account:

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"In his own defence Wittgenstein said: 'I am an old hand as pianist and what you wrote does not sound right.' It was exactly the thing not to say!

"'I am an old hand at orchestration and it does sound right,' was Ravel's answer. One can imagine the embarrassment!"

After this testy exchange Ravel went to some lengths to distance himself from Wittgenstein, who by that time had already given the première of the piece in Vienna's Grosser Musikvereinssaal on 27 November 1931, with the orchestra conducted by Robert Heger. The all-important Paris première took place much later, on 17 January 1933, with Wittgenstein again playing the solo part and Ravel conducting the Orchestre Symphonique de Paris. Audiences and critics alike were instantaneously impressed, not only by work's rich contrasts and variety - they had come to expect that of Ravel in the 1920s - but by its dark undertones and extraordinary violence. The leading critic Henri Prunières opined that, unlike so much of Ravel, this was music written from the heart: "From the opening measures, we are plunged into a world in which Ravel has but rarely introduced us." It was the world he had explored in *Daphnis et Chloë* or, still more, in that threnody to the vanished glory of the Belle Époque, *La Valse*. Ravel, however, now suffering from the after-effects of the automobile accident which he had suffered in 1932 and which would eventually kill him, was still unconvinced by Wittgenstein's reading of the work, and he arranged for another performance, this time undoing the alterations Wittgenstein had made to the score. The event, which he called the "actual world première," took place in Paris on 19 March 1937, with Jacques Février as soloist and Charles Munch conducting the orchestra.

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