

Joseph Klein

Die Silbenreine

(The Syllable-Pure Woman)

character study after Elias Canetti

for solo glass harmonica

(2000)

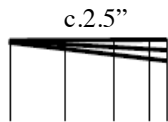
- for Thomas Bloch -

duration : c. 5'

Performance Notes

∅ *senza misura* , distinct break in sound ; sustained pause

(●) finger substitution ▭● Long fermata (approximate duration indicated)



accelerando for the duration indicated

- Accidentals apply only to the notes they immediately precede, with the exception of repeated pitches.
- Broken slurs delineate individual lines: pitches are to be sustained through to the next attack within each slurred group. Tied pitches are sustained to the end of each measure. There should be no more than four pitches sounding simultaneously at any point during the piece.
- Metered sections are to be played strictly in time, i.e., precisely and deliberately; by comparison, *senza misura* sections are to be realized in a freer, more impulsive manner.

Program Note

Die Silbenreine (*The Syllable-Pure Woman*) is the fifth in a series of short works for solo instrument based upon characters from *Der Ohrenzeuge: Fünfzig Charaktere* (*Earwitness: Fifty Characters*), written in 1974 by the Bulgarian-born British-Austrian novelist Elias Canetti (1905-1994). Canetti's distinctive studies incorporate poetic imagery, singular insights, and unabashed wordplay to create fifty ironic paradigms of human behavior. This collection of works, begun in 1997, was inspired by the vividly surreal depictions of Canetti's characters and includes works for contrabass, violin, bass flute, ocarina, contrabassoon, glass harmonica, trumpet, percussion, bass saxophone, piccolo, organ, bass horn, and violoncello, among others. In Canetti's depiction of this character, *The Syllable-pure Woman* "speaks so unshakably correct that others listen to her with open mouths. Perhaps they hope to swallow the words themselves and keep them for the right moment. Absurd thought! Words do not fit into every mouth, they bounce back from some like marbles."

Die Silbenreine was completed in April of 2000 and was composed for Thomas Bloch.

Die Silbenreine

(The Syllable-pure Woman)

The syllable-pure woman has a golden scale, she removes it from her bag and puts it aside. Then she takes a word from her mouth and quickly lays it on the scale. She knows its weight from before, but she has a fastidious conscience. She will not use the word before weighing it. She makes sure that every syllable pulls its own weight and she takes care that none is swallowed. When each syllable lies in its place, not too wide, not too narrow, clearly outlined and without airs, she nods and grants herself permission to read off the total weight of the word. It scarcely changes, but the confirmation decides. Words whose weight vacillates too much will not pass her lips.

The syllable-pure woman speaks so unshakably correct that others listen to her with open mouths. Perhaps they hope to swallow the words themselves and keep them for the right moment. Absurd hope! Words do not fit into every mouth, they bounce back from some like marbles. It is gratifying to know that they cannot be held where they do not feel suitable. Syllable-pure people are rare and can be counted on the fingers of one hand. A life of self-denial is required, and an incorruptable attitude. Such a person must know how to keep words unalloyed and never misuse them for selfish ends. It does not matter what one says, but it must be said purely. The safest thing is being content to say nothing with pure words.

The syllable-pure woman sometimes takes hold of a book merely to inspect it. If there are words that are not fully lost, she detaches them from their degenerate milieu and places them in a golden vat. There she cleanses them carefully with noble acids, and when all traces of their besmirchment are gone, she plucks them out with ice-cooled tweezers, carries them to a wellspring whose waters have been tested, and she lets them lie in the moonlight for seven nights. It has to be an out-of-the-way wellspring so that the process of purification will not be disturbed by nature freaks.

The syllable-pure woman has a mouth in which words do not fester. Supposedly, she never uses it for eating, so as not to endanger her protégés. She feeds on aromatic liquids, which are beneficial to them. Her life is virginal like that of a vestal. Yet this holy life is not difficult for her: she lives it in honor of speech as speech ought to be; and so long as the scale and the vat are golden, she remains undaunted and will not be thwarted by any gross corrupter.

– Elias Canetti, *Der Ohrenzeuge: Fünfzig Charaktere*
(translated by Joachim Neugroschel)

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Impulsive

p *mf* *p* *mf*

Deliberate ♩ = c.84

mp *p* *mf*

Deliberate ♩ = c.84

mp

Impulsive

p *mf*

10

p *mf* *p* *mf*

12 **Deliberate** ♩ = c.84

mp

15

18

21

24

26

29

31

34

37

40

43

45 **Impulsive**

p *mf* *p* *mf*