

COLLECTION
BBVA FOUNDATION - NEOS

Wolfgang Rihm
Vigilia

WOLFGANG RIHM:

As a child he wanted to become a priest. Not to proclaim the word of God, but because he liked the rituals of the church: the High Mass, the music, the incense, the entire 'mise en scène'. "I already felt my first theatrical twitches."

And when Wolfgang Rihm says he is a "theatrical animal," the words stand not only for his penchant for subtle witticisms but for his creative handling of language. Readers of his interviews receive a bit of sound advice – namely, to cast a more critical eye at clichéd concepts. Indeed, much of what Rihm says, whether in music or in verbal speech, goads us to reflect. Typical of his sense of language is his response to the question of whether he feels he is "fighting a losing battle": "The losing battle is the one we first begin to fight. Our life's work is to turn it into a winning battle."

And anyone who believes that an intelligent and educated man like Rihm favors intellectual asceticism ("Avoid fun!") has no inkling of the man. He is not a cerebral tinker of sounds, but a musician to the core who handles forms and colors with playful delight – who lets inimitable music 'arise' rather than ambitiously willing it into being. His music is memorable; it sticks in the mind. That is why the 'New Simplicity' tag is too simple for him: anyone who takes up Rihm is in for complexity and ambivalence, for things he has turned into sound but avoids capturing in words. He can not imagine explaining his music in advance in program notes or CD booklets: to him, the perception of music comes first, followed by its impact and 'exegesis,' not vice versa. And he is convinced that "the best introduction to art still remains art itself. Confronting it frequently will do more to sharpen the senses than eavesdropping on the artist's explanatory verbiage."

Thomas Voigt

Translation from the German: J. Bradford Robinson