

# WIRE

## Soundcheck: The Boomerang

August 2020

By Bill Meyer

Catherine Christer Hennix – *Unbegrenzt*

*Unbegrenzt (Unlimited)* is the second of 15 texts that make up Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Aus Den Sieben Tagen (From The Seven Days)*, a piece that strove to draw intuitive responses from its performers. The titular seven days refer to 7–13 May 1968, which is when he wrote the texts while undergoing a time of personal distress. Bill Dietz, in his sleeve notes for this edition, shares an anecdote suggesting that what sent the composer around the bend was not the seismic events preoccupying the rest of Europe, but romantic disappointment. Stockhausen recorded the piece with the nine-piece Ensemble Musique Vivante in 1969; five years later Catherine Christer Hennix recorded her own version, which is released here for the first time.

Dietz's notes are quite critical of Stockhausen's self-aggrandisement in general, and particularly his refusal to credit improvisation's validity even as he cannibalised its methods to make *Aus Den Sieben Tagen*. He observes that while Hennix ultimately dismissed Stockhausen's notion that intuition involved the absence of thought, at the time that she realised *Unbegrenzt*, she intended no criticism. One wishes that he had spoken to Hennix about what she thinks of this version now.

This edition of *Unbegrenzt* differs significantly from Stockhausen's, since it jettisons most of that performance's conventional instrumentation in favour of the resources of just two musicians; Hennix recites texts, plays percussion, and supplies taped electronic sounds, and Hans Isgren plays gong. Despite being played by fewer people, this performance feels vast due to a cavernous acoustic that sets voices, reverberant metal, and squealing feedback bobbing within a tidal flow of echoes that obscure the stop-start cadence of Stockhausen's more instrumentally endowed version. It's easy to forget that one is supposed to be hearing intuitive responses to a score; this sounds much more industrial, like snatches of a lecture escaping from a hall at the far end of a machine shop.

The Wire, Issue 438, p. 70-71