

OSTSEE-ZEITUNG

Rostock, Germany

10.30.09

Östliche Altstadt. From time to time the Hochschule for Music and Theatre (HMT) injects absolutely exotic colors into the musical life of the city, tone colors that only the conservatory has in its palette. What other musical institution can call upon a force of nine equally capable guitarists to premier a new composition for nine guitars? This only the HMT can do, because Thomas Offermann, director of the guitar department, ensures an extremely high level of training, in part through his commitment to invite top guitarists for master classes. This time it was the New Yorker, guitarist Benjamin Verdery (54), Professor of Guitar at Yale University.

In the concluding concert of the master class last night in the *Kammermusiksaal* of the HMT there was a very special premier: "Give" for nine guitars, composed by Benjamin Verdery specifically for Thumas Offermann and the guitar ensemble of the HMT, and dedicated to the memory of US Senator Edward Kennedy, who passed away in August. The piece develops material from "Peace Love and Guitars" that Verdery wrote for the duo of classical guitarist John Williams and jazz guitarist John Etheridge.

Verdery's compositional style is both relaxed and refreshing, with influences derived from classical, pop, and other musical genres. And thus played the young guitarists under the direction of Thumas Offermann: with astonishing technical ability, rhythmic precision, impact of sound, and humor, but also with emotion. Though before even hearing these nine, it was clear where all of these things came from, namely, the *Meister* himself, who first delivered a masterful performance. Verdery played a varied program, drawing elements from the classical canon and the contemporary, and featuring compositions ranging from Albeniz and Janacek to Elvis and Jimi Hendrix in refined arrangements – played with virtuosity and stylistically interpreted. Verdery's willingness to experiment is highly successful.

Then the students played alone, one after another, eleven etudes composed by Verdery. Short virtuoso character pieces, each with a particular technical challenge, gave each student the opportunity to learn a particular artistic element from Verdery, which could then be applied together in the finale, "Give," which was so successfully presented. "Brilliance on 54 strings!"

Heinz-Jürgen Staszak



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