



Glass Harmonica, The

UdSSR 1966

„A long time ago, a craftsman created a magical instrument and named it a ‚glass harmonica.‘ The sound of this instrument inspired noble thoughts and beautiful things. One day the craftsman arrived in a city whose inhabitants were enslaved by a yellow devil.“

In his animated film THE GLASS HARMONICA (USSR, 1966) the Soviet director Andrei Khrjanovsky created a world of cold, grey architecture, with facades and harsh shadows based on the surrealistic style of Giorgio de Chirico. A musician enters this world and begins to play his glass harmonica, yet his music cannot get through to the inhabitants: They are under the power of a man dressed in black – similar to Magritte’s „Man in the Bowler Hat“– who awakens their lust for wealth and power, undercutting the glass harmonica and bringing forth faceless thugs. Their love for money has distorted them physically, rendering them beasts who squander their cultural legacy and hunt each other down. Yet the glass harmonic returns and reveals that art can bring spiritual awakening. Their hideous grimaces are transformed into masterpieces of the early modern period: Hieronymus Bosch, Pintoricchio, Albrecht Dürer and Quentin Massys are quoted and the sad world can once again bloom.

THE GLASS HARMONICA is a collage of various styles and a tribute to European painting. The film was not allowed to be shown in the former USSR due to its controversial portrayal of the relationship between governmental authority and the artist, becoming the only Soviet animated film that was made available to the public after the political turn of 1989/1990.

The music: „The glass harmonica is the embodiment of purity. It is capable of banishing fear and peril. But it is also an extremely fragile instrument. Alfred Schnittke generates the glass sound with help from a celeste, harp and prepared piano. Exotic sounds such as the yowling theremin (a contactless electronic instrument that responds to movement of the hands above its surface) and the ekwodin (a form of Russian keyboard) give voice to the opponents of the glass harmonica. Percussion, electric organ (ionika), accordion and guitar transform baroque-like organ music into a creepy black requiem. Whimpering violins, chuckling woodwinds, raucous brass, and rattling percussion paint a ghostly atmosphere. The symphonic dimensions emerge only to be torn apart, shredded and unraveled. Many solos move like shadows through the absurd backdrop. Empty fifths function as a motive – hollow, foolish, lonely, undecided whether they are major or minor. Even the tuning of the orchestra is affected.

Alfred Schnittke’s music, composed in 1968 for Andrei Khrjanovsky’s animated film THE GLASS HARMONICA, distances itself thoroughly from film music clichés: The score is neither superficial nor catchy, rather it pushes sound to disturbing limits, demanding extreme range and technique from the instruments. And the music plays throughout the entire length of the film. In the final stretch, Alfred Schnittke has the glass harmonica quote the famous B-A-C-H motif. Yet a sad awakening follows the avowal of traditional values. The genre of surrealist film had no chance in the Soviet Union. Khrjanovsky nevertheless preserved it for posterity. Alfred Schnittke supported five more animated films with his music.“ (Steffen Georgi)

Compositions:

Alfred Schnittke 1968
large orchestra (from 46 Musicians)
stafflist



Director: Andrej Chrschanowski
Music: Alfred Schnittke (1968)

2+pic.2.2+piccl. asax+tsax+barsax.2+cbsn – 4.3.3.1 – timp.perc – pno/cel – 2hp – strings – theremin.ekwodin.ionika. e-accordion.e-gtr
Duration
21
