

Ying Wang, Andreas Karl

## Some thoughts on *Lorry 39*

Premiere, Freiburg theater, Oct. 9, 2022

*Why Lorry 39 is a piece of music theater.* *Lorry 39* is an artistic exploration of the dismay and anger left by the news of the tragic event of October 22 and 23, 2019. The incomprehensible agony in the dark, blazing hot container; the lies and compulsions that led to this journey in the first place; the fatal consequences of small omissions, coincidences and mistakes; the angry disappointment that after Parndorf something like this could happen again. In the face of this, even the language of protocols fails - the music takes over and music theater emerges. There, anger, disappointment and speechlessness become a kind of tension, of artistic discrepancy, which becomes the motor of the music theater, and which offers the possibility of awareness and discourse without having to struggle for answers.

*The facts.* 39 people lost their lives in a cold storage lorry truck parked in Essex during the night hours between October 22 and 23, 2019. The causes of death were suffocation and overheating. It is believed that among them some were victims of human trafficking, while others had paid smugglers to get to the UK.

*The situation.* What is happening outside the container remains in the dark. No signal penetrates the thermally insulated metal walls. The smartphone is only a flashlight, an offline witness. The journey is erratic. Traffickers do not use a direct route. Human life as cargo.

*The form.* By closing the container doors, begins a continuous change in sound, language and breathing that continues into the final curtain. Island-like arias oppose the flow. Metallic, distant echoing pop music creates rare moments of peace in the trembling, exhausted sound world of the container.

*The libretto.* The libretto is more music than text. It was developed along small melodic and rhythmic figures of speech. All dialogues revolve around themselves. Every question already knows the answer. One speaks for the sake of speaking. One speaks in order to be human. The language is short and colloquial. It limps and has errors. It has references without resolution. It is borrowed from English and seeks proximity to pop.

*The music.* The music takes over the language of the text, intersperses it contrapuntally or lets its impulses ebb into the void. It gives body and expression to the skeleton of the text. Glissandi sliding into abysses, flutes dripping through the metal wall, casual smartphone beats, zoomed-in breathing sounds, half-remembered pop melodies and Morse code-like hammering dissolve the boundaries between direct mimesis and musical development. The expression of voice and music meanders between cold protocol and desperate struggle for air. The music is full of spontaneous decisions. Expression overturns narrative and compositional ratio. Seemingly wrong sounds in the wrong place reveal the hopelessness of a situation. By exposing oneself to the music, the music physically deciphers itself. The music of *Lorry 39* knows no metaphors or symbols that could be misunderstood.

*The silence* in the boats, containers and trucks of Lampedusa, Parndorf, Calais, Essex, Melilla, and Kittsee.

*What music theater means to us.* Music theater does not know spoiler warnings. On the contrary, one usually reads the plot before it begins. In *Lorry 39*, it resembles a one-way street whose end is clearly in sight - no unannounced *deus ex machina* will turn the outcome of the tragedy. The attraction of music theater lies not in the anticipation of a plot, but in its ability to create a psychogram – that of the composer, the singer, the stage characters and the listener at the same time. Music makes this possible. Music can contradict and embrace itself in the most natural way, tell a life story in just one sound, register the most subtle emotions or make us euphoric within only a few moments. Music's drama and energy arise from transformation and contrast, between stylization and immediate mimesis. It is through music that music theater acquires its narrative logic, its expression, and its specific temporality. By the means of music, music theater can be experienced - analytically, associatively or physically. The principle of music as a movement of contrast, approach, tension and relaxation becomes the principle of music theater: music theater takes place where text, music and scene complement or even duplicate each other, but especially where its components diverge, where something is apparently not 'right'. To perceive this productive incongruity as such means to truly experience the music theater. This also includes drifting off into the music, the nervous knee trembling of the person sitting next to you, the brief emptiness after the final curtain, the inner reverberation of a sound on the way home.

Today, music theater can draw from almost any material it is given. However, there is no longer a formula for how to do this. The compulsion of music theater to reinvent itself with every material is both – risk and music theater's life sign. Music theater is not a reproducible cultural commodity. It oscillates around several axes at the same time, difficult to control. Its path is not straight. By trying to make music theater work, it starts to embrace its material, possible paths and problems - *Lorry 39* tries to do so.

premiere: 09.10.2022, 19:00

further performances: 15.10.2022, 20:00; 22.10.2022, 20:00; 30.10.2022, 20:00

Theater Freiburg

Composer: Ying Wang

Libretto: Andreas Karl

Director: Thomas Fiedler

Stage design: Christian Wiehle

Conductor: Detlef Heusinger

Video: Stefan Bischoff

Dramaturgy: Annika Hertwig

Cooperation with SWR Experimentalstudio and Theater Freiburg.

In context: 09.10, 17:00 Kommunales Kino in Freiburg, Ying Wang, Wolfgang Lehmann - *RE:Wilding* – Musicfilm

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