

MICHAEL MANTLER

Sempre notte

LIVE SONGS

ANNIE BARBAZZA

JOHN GREAVES

THE NEW SONGS ENSEMBLE

music by

MICHAEL MANTLER

words by

SAMUEL BECKETT

ERNST MEISTER

GIUSEPPE UNCARETTI

HAROLD PINTER

MICHAEL MANTLER

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1. **SEMPRENOTTE**
(instrumental)

2. **INTOLERANCE** (*Mantler*)

power
a source of conflict and of war
of persecution and subjugation
of anguish and oppression
pain and suffering
of hatred
for those we're not

the others
they're different
and therefore bad and dangerous
and we feel threatened
we need to win
subdue and torture
and even kill

not much if anything
not much at all
we've learned from history

3. **WAR** (*Mantler*)

how is it possible?
we are used to war
we read about it
we've seen it on TV
but usually
it's not so close
but far away
so we don't care

but this, but now
it's happening right here
and doesn't stop
it's close, so close
how can it be?

that neighbors and friends
will fight and rape
torture, persecute and wound
torment, abuse and victimize
betray, forsake each other
how is it possible?

4. **BUSINESS** (*Mantler*)

arms, they come from everywhere
the new ones from the West
and old ones from the East

it really is no problem
there is no shortage
a war is good for business

it's like a supermarket,
you want to buy a jet?
it can be done
your choice of features
just bring the cash
and we deliver

some nice explosives maybe?
no color, no smell
quite undetectable, exportable,
a terrorist's delight

how about
some scrap uranium?
that's easy too

we have it all
just ask and pay
and fight your war
and we supply
the means of death

5. **WHAT ELSE TO SAY** (*Mantler*)

this is inhuman
dreadful
horrifying
hellish
disgusting
disgraceful
shocking
shameful
revolting
heartbreaking
tragic
what else to say
what to say
what to say
what else to say
what to say

6. **PSS** (*Beckett*)

there
the life late led
down there
all done unsaid

again gone
with what to tell
on again
retell

head on hands
hold me
unclasp
hold me

7. **DARKER THAN THE LIGHT**
(*Meister*)

In the end
one of the two
says:
I've gotten you
used to loneliness

In the end
the other
of the two says:
Look, all that's close
is so far
so far.

Life connects only to life
to nothing else.
The other is "there where
one thinks
nothing"
for ever.

Just as someone had thought,
to die:

To turn from one side of
experience to one of emptiness,
un-afraid,
a change of cheeks,
nothing more.

And what
does this sun
do to us

what jumps
out of the narrow gate
of those great embers?
I don't know
anything darker
than the light.

8. **SPEECHLESS** (*Meister*)

Mark, nothing
appears
now, yet
your hands
are not estranged
from each other,
they themselves
know nothing
of grasping
(the one
who is dead
had wondered about that).
But what is this
beyond
sleep?
Reason

strolls
through hot grasses,
god-less.

Everything seems edge
despite ("infinite")
depth,
decay clings to it
like mould.
I shudder.
In the mind
the eyelashes
appearing all white,
before the eyes
unregal purple.
In the region
one hears
a song without sound.

Many have no speech.
Had I not my
fill of misery,
I would not move
my tongue.

9. **ETERNO / STASERA / GIROVAGO** (*Ungaretti*)

ETERNO

Tra un fiore colto e l'altro
donato l'inesprimibile nulla

ETERNAL

*Between one flower gathered
and the other
given the inexpressible null*

STASERA

Balaustrata di brezza
per appoggiare stasera
la mia malinconia

THIS EVENING

*Balustrade of breeze
to prop my melancholia
this evening*

GIROVAGO

In nessuna
parte
di terra
mi posso
accasare
A ogni
nuovo
clima
che incontro
mi trovo
languente
che

VAGRANT

*In no
place
on earth
can I
settle down
Every time
I experience
a new climate
my longing
starts
again
because*

una volta
già gli ero stato
assuefatto
E me ne stacco sempre
straniero
Nascendo
tornato da epoche troppo
vissute
Godere un solo
minuto di vita
iniziale
Cerco un paese
innocente

*I have
already
grown accustomed
And I always leave
as a stranger
Reborn
returning from times
where life was too intense
To enjoy a single
moment of life
beginning
I search for an innocent
land*

10. **L'ILLUMINATA RUGIADA**
(*Ungaretti*)

La terra tremola
di piacere
sotto un sole
di violenze
gentili
S'incomincia per cantare
E si canta per finire

THE SUNSTRUCK DEW

*Earth quivers
with pleasure
beneath a sun
whose violence
is gentle
Beginning has us singing
And we sing to make an ending*

11. VANITÀ (*Ungaretti*)

D'improvviso
e alto
sulle macerie
il limpido
stupore
dell'immensità
E l'uomo
curvato
sull'acqua
sorpresa
dal sole
si rinviene
un'ombra
Cullata e
piano
franta

VANITY

*Suddenly
steep
above the rubble heaps
the limpid
wonder
of immensity
And the man
bent
over the water
startled
by the sun
awakes
as shadow
Cradled and
slowly
shattered*

12. SENZA FIATO (*Ungaretti*)

È senza fiato, sera,
irrespirabile,
Se voi, miei morti,
e i pochi vivi che amo
Non mi venite in mente
Bene a portarmi quando
Per solitudine, capisco,
a sera

BREATHLESS

*It is motionless, the evening,
unbreathable,
if you my dead
and the few living beings I love
do not come to mind
and bear me affection when
through solitude, I comprehend,
at eventide*

13. NON GRIDATE PIÙ (*Ungaretti*)

Cessate d'uccidere i morti,
Non gridate più, non gridate
Se li volete ancora udire,
Se sperate di non perire
Hanno l'impercettibile sussurro,
Non fanno più rumore
Del crescere dell'erba,
Lieta dove non passa l'uomo

OUTCRY NO MORE

*Stop killing the dead,
Outcry no more, do not outcry
If you would hear them still,
If you would hope not to die
Their whisper is imperceptible,
They are no louder
Than the growing of the grass,
Happy where man does not pass*

14. **FOR INSTANCE** (*Pinter*)

for instance
those shapes in the trees
you'll find they're just birds
resting
after a long journey
I go up with the milk
the sky hits me
I walk in this wind
to collide with them waiting
there are two
they halt to laugh
and bellow in the yard
they dig and punch
and cackle where they stand
they turn to move
look round at me to grin
I turn my eyes from one
and from the other to him
from the young people's room
silence
sleep
tender love
it's of no importance
of no importance

15. **WHEN I RUN** (*Pinter*)

when I run
when I run
when I run
over the grass
she floats
under me floating
under me
I turn

I turn
I wheel
I glide
I wheel
in stunning light
the horizon moves
from the sun
I am crushed by the light

16. **WHAT'S LEFT TO SAY** (*Mantler*)

we've searched, examined
observed and scrutinized
studied and inquired
probed investigated
explored and analyzed
what have we learned
what do we know now
what do we think
understand and realize
what's going on
what is the point
what have we found
what do we ask
what says it all
what's to conclude
what's left to say
what is the word

17. **UNDERSTANDING** (*Mantler*)

understand
understand
understanding

what does it mean
many words to choose from
in many languages
but how to use them
how to make sense

people talking
from one country
they speak the same
have conversations
they hear the words
but do they really
understand each other

people talking
from different places
in many languages
they have studied
intelligence and learning
is that the answer
without speaking

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), Irish, went to Paris in the late Twenties, where he began writing both prose and poetry. Until 1945 he wrote in English, but thereafter directly in French, consciously choosing the estrangement of the second, adopted language to “write without style.” His literary output consists of novels, poetry, and plays, including his seminal “Waiting for Godot”, a classic of the contemporary theater. He is considered one of the most important writers of the 20th century, with an influence on contemporary literature as powerful as that of Joyce, Proust, and Kafka. In 1969 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Samuel Beckett's PSS used by permission, from New Departures (No.14)
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Ernst Meister (1911-1979), German, was recognized as one of Germany's greatest modern poets, in the line of Hölderlin, Trakl, and Celan, the latter of whom he discovered. He was awarded a number of literary awards, including the Petrarca-Preis, the Rilke-Preis, and from the German Academy for Languages and Literature, posthumously, the Büchner-Preis. Many of his poems, from his earliest publication in 1935 (“Ausstellung”) until his last and perhaps most achieved work (“Wandloser Raum”) in 1979, are meditations on death. He also published numerous other volumes of poetry and several radio plays.

Ernst Meister's poems, used by permission, are from Room Without Walls, Sage Vom Ganzen Den Satz, Zeichen Um Zeichen, published by The Red Hill Press and Hermann Luchterhand Verlag. Copyright © 1968, 1972, 1980. English translations by Georg Gugelberger, Tatjana M. Warren and Robert L. Crosson.

Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888 -1970), the first and one of the most important and influential of modern Italian poets. He was born in Alexandria, Egypt. He studied at the Sorbonne, and while in Paris he became a close friend of Guillaume Apollinaire's. He published his first volume of poetry in 1916, a definitive break with the late 19th-century conventions of Italian poetry.

After living in Italy for a number of years, he went to Brazil as a professor of Italian literature at the University of Sao Paulo. On his return he taught at the University of Rome. His work deals with the large themes of human existence: loneliness, love, loss, nature. But above all, his work is a long record of confrontation with death. T.S.Eliot ranked Ungaretti as “one of the few authentic poets” of the century. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969.

Giuseppe Ungaretti's poems, used by permission of Anna Maria Ungaretti Lafragola and reprinted by permission of the publisher, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, are from Vita d'un uomo: Tutte le poesie, by Giuseppe Ungaretti, Copyright © 1992, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore S.p.A., Milan. English translations by Allen Mandelbaum and Frederic J. Jones

Harold Pinter (1930-2008), was a British playwright, screenwriter, director and actor. A Nobel Prize winner (2005 - “who in his plays uncovers the precipice under everyday prattle and forces entry into oppression's closed rooms”), Pinter was one of the most influential modern British dramatists. His best-known plays include “The Birthday Party”, “The Homecoming” and “Betrayal”.

Harold Pinter's texts are from his play Silence, used by permission, published by Grove Press, Inc., Copyright © 1969 H. Pinter, Ltd.

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BACKGROUND

Michael Mantler was once described in a major daily newspaper as “the least known famous Austrian musician and composer.” A description which, given the musical innovations of the aforementioned, is an *esprit de l’escalier* in jazz history. I know from encounters with musicians such as Pharoah Sanders or Larry Coryell how highly Mantler’s musical visions and ideas are respected by his colleagues. The Swiss composer and long-time director of the Vienna Art Orchestra, Mathias Rüegg, noted that Mantler, along with Joe Zawinul and some others, is one of the few musical personalities from Austria who have not only succeeded in international jazz, but have also left lasting footprints. Despite this professional recognition and appreciation within the music scene, Mantler was rarely granted the opportunity to be adequately presented artistically in Vienna, the city of his birth. No promoter, no festival, no major venue, no renowned organization brought the music of this great son of this city to a national capital stage –that is, with the exception of our Jazz & Music Club Porgy & Bess. This collaboration has now lasted almost two decades and I would like to point out in this context that all the projects we have realized - such as his three-day portrait in 2006, the spectacular “update” of the legendary “Jazz Composer’s Orchestra” from 1968 in the year of our 20th anniversary celebrations (2013), the song cycle “Comment c’est” (2016), the performances of

“For Two” (2011), “Orchestra Suites” (2019) and “Concertos” (2021), a year later followed by “Songs” with Gareth Davis, and most recently “The New Songs Ensemble,” which was presented in 2023 - are among the highlights of my life as an organizer, which has now lasted a few decades. This is mainly because Michael Mantler has succeeded in developing his very own musical language, which puts him in an extraordinary and unique position in the music world.

Michael Mantler once said in an interview that his older sister had asked him to listen to a broadcast at the occasion of Charlie Parker’s death in 1955 – which turned out to have been an experience that, notwithstanding his background in European classical music, awakened his interest in jazz. However, it was not the master saxophonist himself that particularly fascinated him, his interest was in exploring the roots of this music, and so he first went “back to the source” – to New Orleans, ragtime, swing, and onwards from there. Eventually he studied briefly at the Academy of Music in Vienna before continuing at the Berklee School of Music in Boston in 1962, but quickly dropping out of conventional and, to his tastes, rigid musical education. Even before moving there in 1964, Mantler used every free minute to visit the Mecca of jazz, New York. It was a newly-found friend, the legendary singer Sheila Jordan who occasionally made a room in her apartment available to Mi-

chael for visiting purposes, and it was also Jordan who introduced him to like-minded musicians such as George Russell and Gil Evans.

Once in New York, Mantler almost immediately became involved in the so-called free-jazz movement as a founding member of the Jazz Composer's Guild, a self-help, anti-establishment organization created as the logical consequence of the "October Revolution in Jazz," a four-day festival organized by Bill Dixon, that presented many avant-garde musicians, such as Archie Shepp, John Tchicai, Roswell Rudd, Carla & Paul Bley, Jimmy Giuffre, Cecil Taylor, Steve Lacy, and Sun Ra, among others. In an interview, he modestly describes his role at the time as having been "in the right place at the right time."

After the demise of the short-lived Jazz Composer's Guild, Mantler released his first album "Communication" in 1966, and took the initiative to continue by establishing the non-profit Jazz Composer's Orchestra Association and JCOA Records, which was to serve in the development of new forms of artistic expression, specifically on an orchestral basis, and carrying out efforts to improve working conditions for creative musicians in general. Distribution problems with JCOA Records led him to establish the New Music Distribution Service in 1972, an effort that eventually supported a multitude of independent record labels for many

years. In 1974, together with Carla Bley, he founded their own WATT Works, which included a record label, a recording studio and a music publishing company.

Mantler had been a member Cecil Taylor's Unit and of Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra and of course of Carla Bley's various groups, but since 1973 he increasingly began to explore the interface between language and music, writing compositions with texts by such illustrious contemporaries as Samuel Beckett, Philippe Soupault, Harold Pinter, Edward Gorey, Paul Auster, Ernst Meister and Giuseppe Ungaretti, for a wide variety of formations, from small groups on up to symphony orchestras.

He returned to Europe in 1991 and has lived and worked in Copenhagen and the South of France ever since. He once mentioned to me that his oeuvre was relatively small in comparison with that of other colleagues - an assessment which, apart from the fact that it is about quality and not just quantity, must also be objectively rejected. Performances and recordings with London Symphony Orchestra, Danish Radio Concert Orchestra and Big Band, WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne, Radio Symphony Orchestra Frankfurt, Kammerensemble Neue Musik Berlin, NÖ Tonkünstler Orchestra, Nouvelle Cuisine Big Band, Max Brand

Ensemble, NDR Big Band Hamburg, as well as with his own Chamber Music and Songs Ensemble are just a few examples demonstrating his continuous industriousness.

However, no longer wanting to actually compose anything new, Michael Mantler recently stated *“I have exploited my own universe as much as I consider desirable or necessary. I think I’ve said what I had to say, which doesn’t necessarily mean it shouldn’t be said more often than in the past. There is a wealth of material that has only been performed once in public. More performances would certainly be possible and interesting. Apart from a few exceptions, my projects have always been initiated and completed by myself, but at the moment I have neither the need nor the will to do it again.”*

He logically described his (supposedly) final musical statement in this regard as “Coda” (released on ECM in 2021). But as we all painfully experience, times have indeed changed radically, and as indicated in the following quote, preparing “new” performances after all, the music with words that Michael Mantler had been working on for decades developed a frighteningly new topicality, which led to a rethink and the desire to rearrange his past literary works: *“Being overwhelmed by the relentless assault of news of an atrocious war close by, I looked back*

to relevant texts I had used in the past, choosing appropriate segments – abstract, in the case of the work of Samuel Beckett and Ernst Meister (previously used in my ‘Many Have No Speech’ album), as well as of Giuseppe Ungaretti (from ‘Cerco un Paese Innocente’), and finally (not at all abstract, but very specifically related to the evils of war and the ever so sorry human condition in general), some of my own words from ‘Comment c’est.’ Although not exactly ‘new’ compositions, they will certainly be different than their original versions.”

In the search for the “right” voices for this, he drew on his pool of old friends such as the great John Greaves, whom he knew from his Henry Cow days and having worked with him on his legendary “Kew.Rhone.” album (1976). Greaves in turn suggested his musical partner Annie Barbazza, a particularly good choice since a significant part of the program consists of songs with Italian lyrics by Giuseppe Ungaretti. The Swedish guitarist Bjarne Roupé, Mantler’s first choice since returning to Europe, has participated in almost every one of his projects, and Mantler has also, already for over a decade now, collaborated with Austrian pianist David Helbock, whom he considers a much valued contributor with an exceptional understanding of his music. And last but not least, the versatile bass clarinetist Gareth Davis, who was responsible for initiating the original “Songs” project and continues to tirelessly

attempt to present this music. The singers and soloists were supported by four string players in the form of the radio.string.quartet, one of the outstanding formations in the field of contemporary music and jazz, which has also been involved in several of his projects in the past.

“A Song recital for humanism” is the title of music critic Hannes Schweiger’s review of the Michael Mantler New Songs Ensemble’s concert on September 26, 2023, before concluding: *“Once again, it is remarkable how Mantler has pulled the ensemble together into a concentrated, interlocking organism, conveying a relaxed, eloquent precision. Furthermore, the songs contain another revaluation of Weill/Eisler’s achievements for the art song. The tonality, often chromaticized, is stretched to the limit. With an unwieldy romantic elegance that resembles a plaintive pensiveness. But not a disillusioning, resigned one. Rather an impetus for socio-political rethinking ... Mantler stages songs for mutual understanding.”*

As it so happened, that concert did not only serve as a celebration of Porgy’s 30-year existence, as well as of Mantler’s 80th birthday, but was also the occasion for his being awarded the Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art, First Class – a very special evening indeed!

The recording of that concert is characterized by an almost magical drawing into the material the longer you listen. Similar to a “black hole,” there is no escape while listening. The 17 songs fit together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and form a stringent overall picture with a dark, atmospheric urgency. A sound-tone-word epic that on the one hand illuminates the composer’s entire musical spectrum, but on the other also provides many delicate insights into the darker regions of human existence and actions. A magnificent synthesis of the arts that challenges and rewards. An “update” that almost cries out for a sequel!

Christoph Huber (Artistic Director, Porgy & Bess), Vienna, April 2024.

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SEMPRE NOTTE

(Ungaretti)

La mia squallida
vita si estende
più spaventata di sé

In un
infinito
che mi calca e mi
preme col suo
fievole tatto

ALWAYS NIGHT

*My squalid life
stretches out
more fearful of itself*

*In an
infinity
which oppresses me and
weighs heavy upon me through its
light touch*

