



## NEW LIMINALITIES: BEAT FURRER AT 70

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'Liminal', from the Latin *limen*, denotes both thresholds and, curiously, the home. Since its original use by the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in 1909<sup>1</sup> to label the central stage in a transformational rite of passage, the term has been used in very many contexts: from writings concerning sociology within both local and global contexts to an internet aesthetic of eerie empty spaces, a sort of loose understanding of modern spiritualities and plenty of art gallery labels.

Liminality's generality is not a flaw. It draws together transitory and necessarily generative spaces, ones that might be psychological and intimate to an individual and essentially private, and those at a scale so large that they might never be sensed by an individual. Both are ephemeral and elusive. Perhaps, then, 'liminal' suggests how realms thought of as external might be internal and vice versa; liminality implies these ungraspable areas themselves, as well as a motion or relationship between them.

Such considerations are prevalent in Swiss-born Austrian composer Beat Furrer's work. Despite much recognition around mainland Europe, there has been no substantial writing about the composer in English beyond some very good programme and liner notes, particularly those on the Bärenreiter website,<sup>2</sup> and a lecture transcript from his former assistant Andreas Karl.<sup>3</sup> These texts are certainly informative but, due to their respective scopes, lack critical edge and depth. Indeed, they sit a bit too close to the composer for my musical tastes, and the same can be said for the several texts that exist in German: Daniel Ender's *Metamorphosen des Klanges*, an edition of *Musik Konzepte*, and Michael Kunkel's edited volume, *Metamorphosen: Beat Furrer an der Hochschule für Musik Basel; Schriften, Gespräche, Dokumente*, are rich in explanatory detail but often circle back to compositional process. So there is a lacuna for new ways of thinking about Furrer's music; as the composer turns 70 in 2024 this seems like as good a moment as any to investigate and celebrate his work so far.

Here we present four articles about Furrer's music. Although I did not try to prescribe aspects of his work for my contributors to write about, there is, nonetheless, an emergent theme. Whereas the literature about Furrer in German focuses on how musical material is transformed through time, the four articles that comprise this *TEMPO*

<sup>1</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 2nd edn (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), pp. 1–14.

<sup>2</sup> Marie Luise Maintz, 'The Drama of Listening: A Portrait of Beat Furrer', tr. Elizabeth Robinson, *Bärenreiter*, [www.baerenreiter.com/en/catalogue/20th21st-century-music/beat-furrer/more/essay/#content](http://www.baerenreiter.com/en/catalogue/20th21st-century-music/beat-furrer/more/essay/#content) (accessed 2 August 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Andreas Karl, 'Metamorphosis and Filters. An Introduction to the Composer Beat Furrer. Lecture Transcript', *Academia*, [www.academia.edu/44395000/Metamorphosis\\_and\\_filters\\_An\\_introduction\\_to\\_the\\_composer\\_Beat\\_Furrer](http://www.academia.edu/44395000/Metamorphosis_and_filters_An_introduction_to_the_composer_Beat_Furrer) (accessed 14 February 2022).

Furrer forum take the theme of liminalities, each offering its own, fresh lens. In truth, however, I feel we have done no more than map the edges of this fascinating musical territory.

We begin with Gabriel Jones' analysis of *nuun* (1995), for piano and ensemble. His discussion draws on narrative theory to understand the piece's temporalities alongside its possibilities for storytelling. In so doing, Jones provides a case study that calls for a reassessment of narrative theory in light of contemporary repertoire. My own contribution provides a close reading of one of Furrer's best known pieces, *Lotófagos* (2007). Drawing on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, I consider how a paradoxically persistent but elusive speaker in the text might be found in the music through modes of difference between performers' physical gestures and other sorts of ephemeral, corporeal liminalities. Such intimacies are continued in Lauren Redhead's article, in which she puts forward a model of 'listening intertextuality' to explore the internal worlds that hover through the narratives of three of Furrer's operas, *Begehren* (2001), *FAMA* (2004–05) and *Wüstenbuch* (2010). Finally, Christine Dysers' article considers Furrer's operatic work in relation to very different sorts of liminal spaces. Extensively referencing Timothy Morton's ideas around dark ecologies, she investigates the latent environmental dimensions of *Violetter Schnee* (2017–18) to argue that nothingness and oblivion are key to Furrer's work.

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