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PETR KOTIK & TALUJON "The plains of Gordium"

(2022)



The performance of *The Plains of Gordium* by the brilliant composer Petr Kotik by the percussion ensemble Talujon, released for Unseen Worlds Records, is an interstellar journey that combines experimentation with tradition and in which every single touch is shrouded in mystery and Kotik's labyrinthine vision of music emerges in all its majesty.

In explaining the choice of the title of *The Plains of Gordium* Petr Kotik unearthed a historical event of late classicism shrouded in legend. We are about to enter Hellenism: Alexander the Great triumphantly entered Phrygia Gordius, where an enigma awaits him that he manages to solve. Only a parable of this story survives, the famous legend of the Gordian knot. While, in 2004, he was sailing in turbulent waters, faced with a reality that seemed increasingly incomprehensible to him and a series of unsolvable and obscure difficulties, Kotik composes this work in the summer and dedicates it to Charlotte Kotik. In the meantime, coincidence wanted that a percussion ensemble (the Czech Dama Dama, who then could not perform it) asked him for a piece: it was the right conjuncture, and Kotik understood that it was time to finish the opera.

As Kotik himself explains in the notes to the opera, *The Plains of Gordium* - whose performance under consideration here, although published only a few months ago, dates back to May 2018 - belongs to a group of compositions he inaugurated in 1971 based on one "Steady pulse". Although each of these works - among which are *If I Told Him*, *Many Many Women* and many others - exists in a dimension of its own, all are in some way connected to each other in terms of style, sound research and the final result, so much so that, says Kotik, "parts of them can be mixed in a collage-like performance".

If the consistency that *The Plains of Gordium* exhibition with these sisters is evident and is confirmed by the author himself (who, indeed, provides us with a series of fundamental clues without which it would be even more complex to understand the essence and planning of the work), the internal cohesion is equally clear between the various moments of the piece, lazy lunar phases that follow one another and pile up, a stimulating and complex system of signs, and equally evident is the extraordinary commitment lavished by the Talujon ensemble, with crystalline value and talent.

The compositional methodology and the artistic project behind *The Plains of Gordium* and its sister works are complicated and multifaceted, based, to try to simplify and - unfortunately - trivialize the thing, on a potential *non-finiteness* of the work possible thanks to the approach that Kotik has adopted since the first compositions of this sort of cycle, a series of pieces that from the end of the Seventies to today has decided to deviate in this direction. To use his words, we are faced with an "endless continuous piece with changing instrumentation" which in some fashion has its roots on one of his compositions of more than forty years ago, *Drums*, which was based on a "differently tuned set of four drums, all locked into a steady pulse".

In his bombast that he knows suddenly becomes sincere fragility and that at times almost turns into a fear of breaking the mold and reaching a point of no return, *The Plains of Gordium* is a manifesto of extraordinary relevance within Kotik's curriculum, a work of great value and capable of fitting coherently and courageously into a type of artistic research and planning that the author has been conducting for decades and that in some way, like the piece itself, it never seems to run out. (Samuele Conficoni)

The Plains at Gordium (performed by Talujon)

