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Works of Music by Visual Artists

YVES KLEIN

Symphonie Monoton – Silence

1947 – 1961

Performance with 20 singers, 10 violins, 10 cellos
3 double basses, 3 flutes, 3 oboes and 3 horns

Introduction: Valerian Maly
with film and sound documents about »Symphonie Monoton«

Orchester GENERATION BERLIN and choir
Directed by Christian von Borries

November 25, 1999 • 8 p.m. • Historical Hall
Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof
Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin
Invalidenstraße 50-51 • 10557 Berlin Tiergarten

Yves Klein, who was born 1928 in Nice and died in 1962, developed a multidimensional life's work within a few short years. A central figure in the »nouveau réalistes« group, »Yves the phenomenon« (as he was often called) created a single musical work that, in light of recent music history, appears as a phenomenal creation indeed. »Symphonie Monoton – Silence« consists of a single sustained sound followed by an extended »absolute« silence.

In 1947, at a time when the consequences of Schönbergian compositional technique were still being heatedly debated and wrestled with in new music circles, the young man from Nice was thinking up a symphony that refrains from all development. It was composed of a single consonant sound – at rest in itself – that is sustained for twenty minutes, followed by a silence of equal length in which the sounding tone completely dissolves, leading beyond reverberations into the immateriality of sound space. Yves Klein himself saw the »Symphonie Monoton« as his central work, whose »subject is what I wanted to make of my life.« Everything that would characterize his future work is already apparent in this symphony. In the reduction to one sound and the following silence, Klein anticipates the effect of his monochromes, while the concept of the symphony points toward his aim of dematerializing art. From today's standpoint, one might be tempted to see Yves Klein's work as a precedent for the avant-garde formulations of the '60s. A great deal of what he introduced would have a later evolution, although much was developing synchronously.

But when the »Symphonie Monoton« was to be performed by the Krefeld Orchestra in 1961, it created a sensation even during rehearsals. After only a short time, the orchestra director is reported to have said: »This isn't music at all, this is the D major chord. Just go and play a D major chord!« The

Orchester GENERATION BERLIN under the direction of Christian von Borries will comply with this demand with pleasure and passion. For the first time, the symphony will be performed here in Berlin as Yves Klein conceived it, in the full version for two alternating choirs, ten violins, ten cellos, and three double basses, three flutes, three oboes and three horns.

Valerian Maly

Events in the series »Works of Music by Visual Artists«
are a co-production of Freunde Guter Musik Berlin e.V.,
Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart – Berlin
and Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn.

Concept:
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FREUNDE GUTER MUSIK BERLIN e.V.

The concert was made possible by Verein der Freunde der Nationalgalerie.
It was part of the program for the exhibition
»Das XX. Jahrhundert – Ein Jahrhundert Kunst in Deutschland«.