

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Cosmic work has a Sirius side

Voices program features composer on interplanetary mission

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Even by the sometimes loony standards of the 1960s avant-garde, Karlheinz Stockhausen was out there.

Official records had him born, in 1928, in a German village outside Cologne. But he claimed to be from a planet circling the star Sirius, and sent to Earth to spread cosmic music. His compositions include a *Helicopter Quartet*, for four players in separate airborne helicopters, their playing beamed down to earth via video and audio relays.

Plan your life

Voices of Change presents Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Stimmung* at 7:30 p.m. Sunday at Undermain Theatre, 3500 Main St. Adults \$25, students \$10. 214-378-8670. www.voicesofchange.org.

Asked if he had heard any Stockhausen, the sharp-tongued British conductor Sir Thomas Beecham reportedly sputtered, "No, but I believe I have trodden in some."

Ten months after his death, at age 79, the German (or Sirian) composer still prompts both awe and eye-rolling. But Dallasites will have a rare chance to make up their own minds Sunday evening, as the modern-music series Voices of Change presents Stockhausen's *Stimmung*, for six amplified singers.

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ELIZABETH M. CLAFFEY/Special Contributor

Members of Voices of Change (from left: Heidi Dietrich Klein, Tracey Dean and Tim Johnson) await a dress rehearsal of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Stimmung*.

Voices

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Coordinated by Joseph Klein, professor of composition at the University of North Texas, the singers will be sopranos Tracey Deen and Heidi Dietrich Klein, alto Katrina Bургграф Kledas, tenors Kevin Sutton and Ryan Lungwitz and bass Tim Johnson.

The title *Stimmung* is German for tuning, but figuratively it also can mean disposition, humor, mood or atmosphere.

The whole piece, typically about 70 minutes in performance, explores the natural overtones of the note B-flat. How it's all put together depends on the performers.

"There are only four notes sung in the whole piece: B-flat, F, D and A-flat," says Mr. Sutton, who's dreamed of doing *Stimmung* since he was a UNT graduate student 15 years ago.

"But they're sung in different octaves and registers.

"Each individual singer has a sheet of what are called models, a set of 51 episodes for different combinations of voices. They can go in any order. And Stockhausen asks for different mouth shapes in order to emphasize the natural overtones," a kind of wah-wah effect.

But the singers don't just sing prescribed pitch sequences to weird vowel sounds and elisions.

There are actual words: names of deities drawn from quite a range of world religions and intimate love poems by Stockhausen himself.

Along with fellow avant-gardists Pierre Boulez and Iannis Xenakis, Stockhausen was a protégée of the late French composer Olivier Messiaen.

(Voices of Change recently presented pianist Christopher Taylor in Messiaen's complete two-hour-plus cycle *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus*.)

Stockhausen became a pioneer in electronic music, spatialized music (performers spread over wide spaces) and aleatory music (giving performers considerable freedom in assembling prescribed "building blocks").

Stimmung represents only the last of these three tendencies.

"It's a really interesting encapsulation of Stockhausen's mindset at the time," Dr. Klein says.

"He was going through this self-exploration, and this sense that he wasn't from Earth, but came from the Sirius star.

"It's a little kooky on one hand, but it also has ties into the whole '60s thing with the Age of Aquarius and self-ex-

ploration. It was almost like he was exploring human culture and religion through acoustics."

