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Gunild Keetman – the woman in the background

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Gunild Keetman's artistic and pedagogical work is of great importance in the area of Elemental Music. Yet her name is almost unknown to the general public. And even in professional circles she is usually known as co-author of the Schulwerk and as a collaborator of Carl Orff - her actual merits as a composer and music pedagogue, however, remained and remain mostly hidden.

At this point I would therefore like to ask why the work of Gunild Keetman is never considered in isolation but is always placed in the context of the *Günther-Schule* or the Orff-Schulwerk. On the one hand, I would like to explain why her pedagogical and artistic activities so often remain in the background. On the other hand, I would like to encourage you all to take a closer look at the person Gunild Keetman, her very personal minimalist compositional style and her methodical-didactic work.

If one looks at Gunild Keetman's publications, one must first distinguish her two major creation periods.

One is her work as a composer during her teaching period at the *Günther-Schule*.

Keetman wrote the music for the great dance works of the Günther Dance Group. In the 1930s she developed her own minimalistic compositional style. Her great dance compositions have essential similarities with parameters of minimal music, her music is closely connected with movement and dance and originates almost exclusively from improvisational processes.

The second phase of her work begins with the publication of the series “Musik für Kinder – Music for Children” as from 1950. In this second phase, which is now primarily pedagogical, Keetman was principally responsible for the dissemination of the Schulwerk idea.

At least in her time as composer and director of the Günther Dance Group, Keetman was recognized as an independent artist in public discourse. Until the closure of the *Günther-Schule* in 1944, Keetman represented a career path that was unusual for women at the time. Although discovered and encouraged by Carl Orff, she quickly emancipated herself from her mentor and made a name for herself with her own compositions. She became a leading figure in the Elemental Aesthetics of Music and Dance. The high regard in which she was held can be seen, for example, in her performance at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin.

But the success Keetman enjoyed during her time as a dance group composer would not have been possible without the structure and organisation of the *Günther-Schule*. Her

compositions are closely connected with the dance group and are thus institutionalised and functionally linked. The way in which she combines music and movement in one composition with and for the dance group is not repeated in Keetman's later work. With the closure of the school and the dissolution of the dance group, Keetman's dance compositions now also lost significance and fall into oblivion. They were too specifically connected with the institution of the *Günther-Schule* and the individual composition of the dance group.

With the publication of "*Musik für Kinder*" from 1950 onwards, Keetman gave up her artistic independence in favour of the workshop idea of the Schulwerk. The joint authorship of Carl Orff and Gunild Keetman places her on the same level with Carl Orff, who by this time had already made a name for himself as a composer of major stage works such as *Carmina Burana*. On the other hand, however, she was no longer able to emancipate herself from the super-figure of Carl Orff. Especially since the Orff-Schulwerk explicitly bears his name. In public discourse, she remains Orff's collaborator and co-author of the Orff-Schulwerk. Keetman is the woman in the background, while Orff, as the eponym, represents the Schulwerk effectively to the public.

To answer the question of why Gunild Keetman has always remained the woman in the background, one must also consider several other aspects:

1. The highly sensitive, reserved and often self-doubting personality of Gunild Keetman,
2. Gunild Keetman's relationship with Carl Orff, who acted as her mentor throughout her life
3. The status and reputation of Carl Orff himself
4. The traditional role of women, which was still common in large parts of society at the time.

In the following, I will now go into the above points in detail and partly link them together:

It is not my aim to create a psychogramme about Gunild Keetman. However, after all those years studying her intermittently, I have been able to get a comprehensive picture of her. This picture shows a woman who rejects any form of self-representation. She was a very reserved person who, for example, was reluctant to make public appearances. She was insecure in dealing with people and had little self-confidence.

So, it seems only logical that Keetman did not place herself in the foreground by putting her person in the centre. Rather, she wanted to represent the Schulwerk by doing. She was a practitioner of the Orff-Schulwerk. Nevertheless, Keetman found it difficult to bear the fact that time and again only Orff is mentioned as the author of the Schulwerk. And it is precisely at this point that the relationship between Orff and Keetman now played a decisive role: for Orff remained a mentor for Keetman throughout his life, both encouraging and challenging. He also gave her tasks which Keetman would probably never have initiated or mastered of her own accord: whether it be the direction and

teaching of countless international Orff-Schulwerk courses or the publication of the introductory text "Elementaria" which is so important for the understanding of the Schulwerk. Orff gave Keetman the tools for her compositional training. She became Orff's most important partner and complemented his concepts musically and pedagogically. In this respect, he always bore a certain responsibility for her work. For Keetman remained in an internal relationship of dependence on Orff throughout her life. Nevertheless, Keetman was an equal partner for Orff and was indispensable for the realisation of his own music pedagogical and artistic ideas.

Her loyalty and admiration for Orff, together with her modest and reserved manner, are certainly decisive factors in why Keetman put her own person in the background in favour of the Orff-centred presentation and marketing. However, Keetman was not necessarily the victim, but rather profited from this constellation. Thus, she largely evaded public pressure, expectations and the fear of not being able to meet the requirements.

The fact that the Schulwerk was called Orff-Schulwerk and is thus still closely associated with the person of Carl Orff in particular, is primarily determined by a marketing strategy of his publisher Schott, which relied on the established reputation and name of Carl Orff. As Schott also publishes his complete stage works, they were primarily interested in the comprehensive promotion of the successful composer. By emphasising Orff's authorship, Schott positioned a complete product which they advertised with Orff as a seal of quality. Through the marketing strategy of the publishing house, the Schulwerk itself benefited first and foremost and subsequently the entire Schott publishing programme.

Last but not least, I would like to mention the understanding of the role of women in the first half of the 20th century. Keetman worked and lived in a time when two images of femininity competed with each other: the traditional image of the wife, housewife and mother, and the image of the modern, independent, emancipated woman. As a student and later a collaborator of the *Günther-Schule* in the 1920s and 30s, Keetman represented the type of the New Woman: she was young and independent, broke away from the old social norms and moral concepts, reflected cultural self-representation and a new female self-conception. Keetman's lack of self-esteem was in apparent contradiction to the new female need for expression lived at the *Günther-Schule*. But this was characterised more by shyness in dealing with people than by inadequate body perception or an awareness of a lack of talent. In the public positioning of Orff and Keetman we find again the old polar stereotypes of man and woman: Orff showed himself socially present, demonstrates activity and self-confidence. Keetman, on the other hand, remained in the shadows for the public, where she surrendered to her dependence on Orff. This attribution of roles is related to the sociological and social view of emancipation at the time. The nascent emancipatory currents are still constantly overlaid by traditional role clichés. Thus, Keetman's work was also subordinated to an

ideal of women, which continues to be based on gender stereotypes, although she herself lived a modern image of women.

Influenced in equal parts by the new female self-image and the traditional gender hierarchy, her work and socialisation project both emancipation and role stereotypes. Keetman also made a conscious decision to live in the background. Her receding into the background was a form of activity, as from this position she could be a decision-maker and opinion leader in both professional and human terms, without being exposed to the pressure of public opinion, to her own and society's expectations.

I will conclude at this point with the last sentences of my dissertation on Gunild Keetman:

"Keetman is the woman behind Carl Orff, the mother of the Schulwerk, an ingenious and progressive music pedagogue and composer, *a natural talent for movement and music alike*. She dedicated her life to music, opening up an invaluable musical cosmos in the process".

I would be delighted if my short lecture could help to move Keetman's person and work out of the background.

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