

Society for Minimalist Music Abstract 2013

The Music of Michael Torke: ‘Practically Defined Post-minimalism’?

The work of American composer Michael Torke (b. 1961) has been described by scholars and critics as being post-minimal and even Torke himself has claimed this distinction. However, the term ‘post-minimal’ is one that is highly resistant to definition. Despite its well-defined and common usage within the visual arts, in relation to the scholarly study of music it is still lacking any precise definition, with discrepancies over the spelling of the term serving to add to this confusion. Using a selection of works from the composer’s oeuvre, this paper will seek to explore the notion of post-minimalism in order to further our understanding of it, and to put forward one example of what post-minimalism in music may be. Torke’s *Ecstatic Orange* (1985) will be the first of three pieces to be examined here, as not only is it one of his first and most successful works, but to quote the composer himself, it is (alongside *Yellow Pages* (1985)) one of the pieces he considers to have ‘practically defined post-minimalism’. This suggestive statement is worth investigation in itself, and a brief stylistic analysis of the work will identify its post-minimal features. Similarly, the works *Telephone Book* (1995) (of which *Yellow Pages* is the first movement) and *Tahiti* (2009) will provide a point of comparison to the former, against which we can trace the development of these features over a broad chronological period. By looking at these three works, I will aim to highlight the key aspects of Torke’s music that have led to him being labelled as post-minimal, and seek to appreciate the composer’s own understanding of this term, and his relationship with it. Although post-minimalism may not be defined by one composer alone, this investigation will offer a point against which further narratives may be developed: Michael Torke’s music may well be considered as post-minimalist, but can it be considered as a definition of post-minimalism?

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