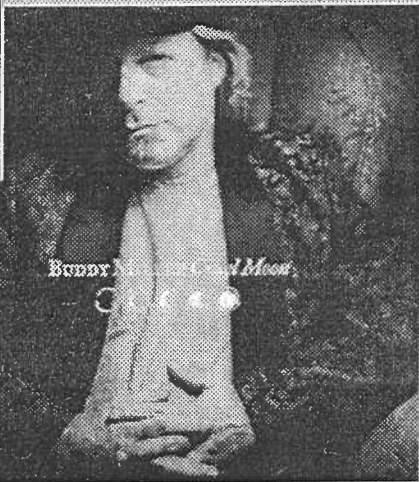


Miller

**Julie Miller**  
Broken Things

**\$11.99** CD



Miller are appearing at  
e on Friday, March 3rd!

Effective Thru 03/07/00

ORDER TOLL FREE  
24 HOURS A DAY,  
7 DAYS A WEEK

**1-800-221-8180**  
**www.jandr.com**

All Major Credit Cards Accepted

9AM - 7PM, THURS: 9AM - 7:30PM, FRI & SAT: 9AM - 7:00PM

BY THE FOLK IMPLOSION



featuring  
"The To Go"  
and  
"Ritual"

2ND @ THE KNITTING FACTORY!

www.othermusic.com

1ST & 4TH ST.  
B & LAFAYETTE  
422.8150

MUSIC



MICHAEL SCHWELING

LUCY SHELTON SINGS THE FAREWELL SONGS.

Do we need another Great German Composer? Is he it?

**RIHM, ON THE OTHER HAND**

BY KYLE GANN

ENSEMBLE SOSPEO  
PLAYING WOLFGANG RIHM

Miller Theater  
February 19

For years I've been both repelled and fascinated by the music of Wolfgang Rihm. On one hand, he became, in his early twenties, the appointed heir to Karlheinz Stockhausen's legacy at Darmstadt, sort of making him the presumed Next Great German in the Bach-to-Schoenberg line. And who needs that: another intimidating, future Dead White European Male to make obeisance to. On the other hand, while Stockhausen's music was megalomaniacal in its theoretical pretensions (enough so to make even admirers doubt his sanity in recent years), Rihm's is 180 degrees antithetical to it: introverted, modestly subjective, scrupulously intuitive.

But that makes Rihm an avowed Romantic, attached to an old-fashioned concept of music, even prone to name Schumann as a seminal influence. Still, he's not a slick imitator like the American New Romantics: He avoids the sonorities and clichés of 19th-century music, and borrows only Romanticism's fluidly emotive spirit. But that means that sonically his music largely continues the tired old Darmstadt tradition of fragmented splotches of dissonance. Yet he's also not afraid to mix in tonal harmonies for expressive purposes, and his timbral imagination, combining disparate instruments into rough-hewn chords, is quite original.

So this intuitive omnivorousness gives his music a sort of thorny, non-pretty accessibility; you don't need a doctorate in music theory to understand what he's saying, as has often seemed true of Darmstadt composers. On the other hand, in lieu of technical data, Rihm surrounds his music with—and it seems to invite—Heavy Existentialist Statements that make the music seem ponderous and important but that don't, when examined, mean much. He tells interviewers things like "Freedom must be seized," and even Joshua Cody, who wrote the program notes for the Ensemble Sospeso concert, said little about Rihm and wrote instead about an "art-historical paradigm" that would "view resultant 'historical' forms as affects divorced from intention." Not his fault; try to write about Rihm on his own terms and you end up

sounding like someone who read too much Sartre in college and never got over it.

So what do we do with this music, so brilliant yet irrelevant, so urgent yet anachronistic in the 21st century? The Ensemble Sospeso played American premieres of three works, two from the 1990s and one from 1975. *Pol-Kolchis-Nucleus*, as its title suggests, was a group of three instrumental fragments, only 15 minutes long altogether. Boulezian flurries of marimba and piano buzzed past sustained background chords, harp and pizzicato strings hovered around certain pitches with Scelsi-like obstinacy, and the precise performance under Jeffrey Milarsky's baton made the timbral grittiness seem all the more purposeful. *O Notte*, the older work, opened with ultrachromatic chords as lush as early Schoenberg. Andre Solomon-Glover sang the text, a Michelangelo sonnet, with a gorgeously rich baritone, though the vocal part, drawn into a long, thin line, left little room for expressive word interpretation.

The *Abschiedsstücke* (Farewell Songs), splendidly sung by Lucy Shelton, were most emblematic, based as they were on two poems, strikingly contemporary in style, by Wolf Wondratschek. Yet despite lines like (in translation) "she lifted her skirt, knelt over him, and pissed herself empty," the music hewed close to Viennese expressionism, wandering at one point into a long, rather fetching waltz passage. The setting of the second poem, about someone watching his lover's plane take off, ended with a few jazzy cocktail-piano chords as its one concession to a post-WWII aesthetic. The music feels trapped in indecision between Boulez and Mahler, brilliantly orchestrated yet deliberately ugly, heterogeneous in its references, yet achingly nostalgic for a more unified, less problematic German past.

This indecision is easier to take than the cult of personality that has been drawn around Rihm, apparently with his complicity. In an interview in the program, he describes how Stockhausen made him realize "I should not heed the opinion of others but rather take the risk of embarking on my own path." Well, good for him. Does Rihm ever bump his head on a light fixture and laugh at himself? Or is his every waking moment pervaded by consciousness of the terrible freedom that is the precondition of artistic creation? Lighten up, Wolfgang. You're a talented guy, you're only 48 years old, and the 21st century is young. □