

Fake Music Re-Anticipations

Alfred Schnittke – Schnittke's Gravestone

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[We are excited to present FMR's first guest contributor, William C. White, a composer and conductor based in Portland, OR. The following words are his. -Eds.]

The Soviet composer Alfred Schnittke lived from 1934 to 1998. He was buried in Moscow; upon his grave sits a simple stone with a peculiar marking: a whole rest topped by a *fermata*, marked *fff*.

The rest indicates silence, the absence of sound, a pause. This particular rest is a whole rest; it descends from the fourth line of the staff, and it indicates a silence for the duration of the entire musical unit. The crescent-enclosed dot above the staff is a *fermata*, Italian for "stop." A *fermata* above a note indicates that that particular note should be held for an indeterminate length (in an orchestral, the players would watch the conductor for an indication to cut off the given note). And a whole rest with a *fermata* indicates a lengthy silence of indeterminate length: the never-ending sleep of the dead rendered in standard Western musical notation.

The third element of this marking offers a contradiction, however: the three *f*'s below the whole rest stand for the Italian *fortississimo*, or very, very strong. This is the loudest dynamic marking regularly used in classical music.

Two possible readings: 1) That the absence of Alfred Schnittke leaves an excruciatingly loud silence in our world; the loss of his music is a painful maw. 2) In spite of his corporeal disintegration, his spirit remains ever present, roaring, and emphatic through his music.

Because this musical marking indicates a ceaseless stream of silence, and because Alfred Schnittke cannot return to the realm of the living (the only event that could put an end to his own silence), Fake Music chooses not to reissue the work so as not to define the parameters of his—or his orchestra's—rest.

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