

Preface

As was the case with almost all my other cycles (*Lichtstudie*, string quartets and orchestral songs), this cycle of studies was also not initially conceived as such. The idea only developed during the compositional process of the work now known as *Étude II* when after an interval of several years I took up where I had left off with the exact final chord of the study now known as *Étude I* in order to continue with something which had apparently during this interval not so much been slumbering but more fermenting in my subconscious. To date, an approximately one-hour stream of music has been created, although – to take the term 'composition' literally – with vehemently disparate and heterogenic elements in its individual movements. The term 'Étude' has been literally interpreted as a compositional exercise within a strictly limited experimental field, but additionally as a violin study concentrating on specific aspects of playing techniques: *Étude III* is for example a study for the left-hand and *Étude IV* a study devoted to a wide range of pizzicato techniques.

The *Études I-III* are interrelated to a certain degree as are also the *Études IV-VI*. Although *Études IV* and *V* can be played separately like the other studies, these two particular movements in fact form a *single* tonal stream and *single* tonal unit despite their dividing double bar. *Étude V* – a study in tremolo – was actually conceived in homage to the 6th slow (!) Paganini Caprice which is perhaps one of the musically most profound and substantial of Paganini's 24 Caprices. During this compositional adventure, I was particularly astounded to realise that during the last pages of this composition a quasi sacred aura had materialised almost of its own volition and everything became magnetised towards the central note D – thereby almost involuntarily approaching the sphere of Bach's great D minor Chaconne. In *Étude VI*, a brief entity is initially presented which is somewhat inadequately termed as a "Theme" which is subsequently led through 24 variations. The double bar which in the previous studies only appeared at the end of each piece becomes a major formal principle in this final movement.

The underlying principle is retained throughout the entire cycle: at the end of each study, a specific timbre and particular aspect of technique have been achieved which in turn form the initial starting point of the next study. This gives each individual work its own unmistakable tonal physiognomy while simultaneously striving towards a tonal continuum as a quasi permanent transition. In a cyclical performance of the *Études IV-VI*, this ambivalence has been underlined by the change of location within the concert hall for the execution of each piece: an invisible beginning for number IV and its continuation at the side of the hall, onstage for number V and behind the audience in the gallery for number VI. Improvisational extensions of the movements are necessary during the transition between these (or comparable) locations: for number IV, an extension of the first arco passage is recommended and for number V, the four final bars.

The cycle has now come full circle. For the moment. What began in Witten in 2003 with the complete performance of my violin studies I-III, is now continued with the cyclical performance of the *Études IV-VI*. With an open end.

Jörg Widmann
(translated by Lindsay Chalmers-Gerbracht)