

“everything that happens happens to someone ...”

# Hans Thomalla: Dark Spring

Song-Opera in Eleven Scenes after Frank Wedekind

**Premiere:** Nationaltheater Mannheim, 11 September 2020

Direction: Barbora Horáková Joly, Stage & Costumes: Annemarie Bulla

Libretto: Hans Thomalla, Song Lyrics by Joshua Clover

Language: English

Cast: Mezzo Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Countertenor and amplified ensemble (trumpet, saxophone, clarinet, guitar, piano, keyboard, 2 percussion, violoncello, double bass)

Duration: 90 min

Publisher: Edition Juliane Klein (Berlin/Germany)

[\[Video\]](#)  
(Link)

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(Link)

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*"IMPORTANT PREMIERE OF THE 20/21 SEASON" (OPERNWELT CRITICS' POLL)*

*"LONG LIST" GERMAN RECORD PRIZE, CATEGORY OPERA*

*NOMINATED FOR THE GERMAN MUSIC AUTHORS AWARD, CATEGORY MUSIC THEATER*



## Dark Spring

*Dark Spring* is an opera about four young people under extreme pressure: the pressure to overachieve academically, to “score” high in the popularity contests at school or at college, and to “perform” romantically or sexually. The pressure has become entirely internalized as parents or teachers are absent and the protagonists are left alone with late capitalism’s demands of permanent self-optimization. On the one hand the conflict between the expectation to succeed and the sense of powerlessness and unattainable self-determination in an era of constant stagnation on the other hand grows increasingly acute until it eventually flips into violence: into Melchior’s sexual aggression and Moritz’ suicide.

The opera focuses less on the narration of the four young protagonists’ story but rather on their attempt to articulate and understand the often contradictory feelings that come with it: Feelings of meaninglessness and alienation in a society that values only productivity and success but makes it unreachable for almost everyone; feelings of pain both as suffering and as sexual experience; feelings of love and kinship that briefly appear between the protagonists that nevertheless bring a sense of vulnerability. In a hyper-competitive world, the display of emotions is seen as a weakness and a liability. The longing to open up to someone else, to reveal and feel oneself and one another, and to find an expression for that longing seems unsettling and dangerous.

The four protagonists of *Dark Spring* sing songs. They articulate their feelings through the mask of the distancing formalization of rhyme, meter, stanza, and refrain. Under the surface of the objectified schemata of song an almost raw and undomesticated sound-world simmers, though, that breaks through at crucial points of the plot – a sound-world of noise, screams, and silence.

## Press Reviews

Maybe he's still dancing. To almost psychedelic sounds, Moritz swings his hips in slow motion, lets his arms circle and seems to be in a trance. Only while he is dead does he encounter the happiness of being what he is: a homosexual who tends to wear women's clothes. Pink glitter dresses. Blond mane. High heels. Lipstick. The rest: great depression. For Wendla, Ilse and Melchior, Moritz's friends, the horrific life continues: Superficiality, drugs, sex, violence and the desperate search to perhaps still feel something of the world out there, outside of the body. A bitter evening. Fascinating.

*(“Mannheimer Morgen”, 14.09.2020)*



“The cast’s performances are sterling, and the subtly wrought score, given a committed performance by the 11-piece Nationaltheater-Orchester Mannheim under Alan Pierson, mixes American song, gently propulsive minimalism, electronics and avant-garde extended techniques to effect.”

*(BBC Music Magazine)*

A contemporary tonality that attaches itself in a very broad sense to the diatonic vocal lines or also an exceedingly colorful, unusual instrumentation that would be inconceivable without the experience of new music, but also without a few decades of rock and pop history. Thomalla therefore achieves exceedingly touching moments especially in the songs.

*(Positionen 125, November 2020)*

With four soloists and ten instrumentalists, "Dark Spring" is the opera of the hour. Not only its low effort, but so its subject reflects the oppression that keeps the world in suspense.

*(Opernwelt 11/2020)*

“From the downbeat the mastery of orchestration that Thomalla wields is evident. The composition, execution, and performance are unparalleled.”

*(Music City Review)*

Thomalla's score is always on the move to the next sound world, to the next stylistic costume change; and yet the basic beat running through the 90-minute evening is an insistently lamenting, English spoken-singing ductus, which also allows for astonishing Puccini lyricism. Director Horáková Joly and video artist Sergio Verde succeed in creating strong, coherent visual worlds; the direction of the characters is tight and maintains a high level of internal tension despite the artificiality of the setting and the permanent distance. [...] All in all, a compact, aptly composed and confidently staged evening that is also musically convincing. And in its entire facon is it certainly the piece of the hour.

*("Die Deutsche Bühne" online, 12.09.2020)*

Thomalla radicalizes this material. His music leads purposefully into the inner world of insecure souls. She gives nothing to the listener, makes pressure, which does not let up even in the songs, which are embedded in the through-composed sequence. In the premiere at the Mannheim National Theater, which was received with great applause, Alan Pierson provides the perfect organization of this sound material.

*(Darmstädter Echo, 09/14/2020)*

Hans Thomalla's eloquent musical language, meticulously polished down to the smallest detail, focuses on the travails of growing up.

*(Die Rheinpfalz, 09/14/2020)*

Refined ballads with hints of Broadway mixed up by Thomalla's reference to new electronic and minimal music, but sufficiently effective to ensnare the opera audience in sonorous ballads.

*(Badische Neueste Nachrichten, Sept. 14, 2020)*

**In November 2021 “Dark Spring” will be released on CD by the label "OEHMS CLASSIC"!**

Albrecht Puhmann, director of opera at the National Theater Mannheim: "As the opera director, it has always been important to me to commission compositions and to promote contemporary music. As grandiose as the opera repertoire is, it is also important to give it the opportunity to develop further. It is, of course, wonderful when a commission like the one for "Dark Spring" meets with such a positive response and is noticed not only regionally, but also nationally and internationally. It is reason enough to release this great composition on CD and make it accessible beyond the theater performance."

**In January 2022, the CD was placed on the "Longlist" of the "Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik"!**



## Biographies



**Hans Thomalla**, born 1975 in Bonn, is a German-American composer. He has written chamber music as well as orchestral works. A particular focus of his activity lies in composing for the stage. His opera *Fremd* was produced by the Staatsoper Stuttgart in 2011. His second opera *Kaspar Hauser* was produced in 2016 as a co-production of Theater Freiburg and Theater Augsburg. His new opera, *Dark Spring*, commissioned by the Nationaltheater Mannheim, was produced in September 2020.

Thomalla is Professor of Music Composition at Northwestern University, Chicago, where he founded and directs the Institute for New Music. He has taught at June in Buffalo and the Freiburg Matrix Academy, and has served on the faculty of the Darmstadt Ferienkurse for several years.

Thomalla has been awarded numerous awards and fellowships, including the Kranichsteiner Musikpreis, the Composer Prize of the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung, the Christoph-Delz Prize, a Fromm Commission, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. During the academic year 2014/15 he was a fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin.



**Joshua Clover**, born 1962 in California, received his BA in English literature from Boston University and his MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. He is the author of three books of poems: *Red Epic* (2015), *The Totality for Kids* (2006), and *Madonna anno domini* (1997), which was chosen by Jorie Graham to receive the 1996 Walt Whitman Award. He is the recipient of two Pushcart Prizes, the University of Iowa's James Michener/Paul Engle Fellowship, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship.

Clover is also a widely published critic and journalist; he's written for publications such as *Film Quarterly*, *The Nation*, *The New York Times Sunday Book Review*, and *the Village Voice*. His most recent book of cultural theory is *Of Riot* (Verso, 2016).

Clover is a professor of English literature and critical theory at the University of California, Davis.

We would be glad to send you further material (full score, recording ...) or arrange contact to the composer. You can reach us at +49 30 44045164 or at [info@editionjulianeklein.de](mailto:info@editionjulianeklein.de).



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PICTURES OF "DARK SPRING": © NATIONALTHEATER MANNHEIM

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MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HANS THOMALLA AND HIS MUSIC UNDER [WWW.HANS-THOMALLA.COM](http://www.hans-thomalla.com) OR [WWW.EDITIONJULIANEKLEIN.DE/THOMALLA](http://www.editionjulianeklein.de/thomalla)