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Listening to the River

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Annea Lockwood's "A Sound Map of the Danube" invites Vienna to encounter a familiar river through an unfamiliar perspective: sound. Presented by Wien Modern and the MAK, the multichannel installation, created between 2001 and 2005, offers a compelling alternative to the conventional concert. Its 167-minute duration proposes not a fleeting impression, but an extended encounter with listening itself.

From a contemporary-music perspective, the work's fascination begins with its title. A map normally promises visual orientation; Lockwood instead proposes an acoustic geography. The listener is encouraged to imagine place through duration, texture and spatial relationships rather than through boundaries on a page. This shift opens an illuminating question: can attentive listening reveal connections that familiar images conceal?

The multichannel format is particularly significant. Rather than locating musical attention exclusively on a stage, it makes space part of the artistic proposition. The installation format also changes the listener's role: attention becomes exploratory rather than governed by the visible gestures of performers. These possibilities distinguish sound installation from a traditional recital without diminishing its musical seriousness.

The Danube provides a resonant subject for Vienna. Yet the work's most intriguing promise is not picturesque illustration. It is the possibility of reconsidering what deserves sustained attention. Heard in this context, "sound map" suggests both an artistic structure and a practice of curiosity: an invitation to approach the seemingly familiar without assuming it is already understood.

Curated by Bernhard Günther, coordinated by Max Appel-Palma and produced jointly by Wien Modern and the MAK, the presentation situates Lockwood's work between contemporary music and museum experience. Its achievement, as an artistic proposition, is to make listening feel expansive: less a search for immediate conclusions than an opportunity to inhabit time, discover relationships and encounter a river anew.

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