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**Mikrotöne:
Small is Beautiful
- VI -**

Edited by Águstin Castilla-Ávila

**International Symposium:
“Mikrotöne: Small is Beautiful”**

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Organized by the International Ekmelic Music Society

Prologue

The following articles are selected papers presented at the Symposium *Mikrotöne: Small is Beautiful* in Salzburg (Austria) between the 2nd and the 6th of July 2025, organized by the *International Ekemelic Music Society* in Salzburg in cooperation with the *Mozarteum University Salzburg* (Institut für Neue Musik), *KHG Salzburg* and *Roger Shapiro Fund for New Music*. This international symposium consisted of 39 lectures, lecture recitals, workshops and 5 concerts.

For further information please visit:

<http://www.ekmelic-music.org/en/event.php?n=202507020>

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLwWjbCk_Msalj2ogyOADtmxPVqkLTvAnq

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‘Wässriges System’ Evocative of Dichotomous Roughness-Finesse in Manfred Stahnke’s Musical ‘Woodcuts’

Navid Bargrizan

1 Introduction

In the visual arts—particularly in woodcut—the physical acts of cutting, carving, printing, and painting are not merely technical processes; they are transformative gestures. Each incision into the woodblock removes material, reducing complexity to essentials. Through this subtraction, artists abstract the chaos of natural phenomena into ordered visual language. A tree becomes a network of angular lines; a river, a rhythmic sequence of curves; a human face, a constellation of stark contrasts. Color and form no longer appear literal—they become symbols; carriers of meaning distilled from experience. This reduction fosters contemplation and reflection, inviting viewers to engage with essence rather than surface.

Music composers enact a parallel transformation through sound. Just as the woodcut artist carves away excess to reveal structure, the composer selects, organizes, and shapes sonic material—tones, timbres, rhythms—into patterns that transcend raw acoustics. A bird’s song, a rushing stream, or the hum of urban life may inspire musical ideas, but these phenomena often do not appear in music as direct imitations. Instead, they transform into intervals, textures, and harmonic fields, and composers abstract them into aural symbols. Through this process, composers create soundscapes that evoke nature’s vitality or human thought without replicating them literally, much like a woodcut evokes a forest through jagged lines rather than photographic detail.

Both arts share a common principle: material resistance as a catalyst for creativity. The hardness of wood demands decisive gestures; the fluidity of sound requires temporal structuring. In each case, the artist negotiates between freedom and constraint, crafting works that oscillate between representation and abstraction, immediacy and reflection. Where the woodcut’s stark black-and-white contrasts provoke visual tension, music achieves analogous effects through dissonance and consonance, density and silence. Ultimately, both forms invite the audience into a space of interpretation—a dialogue between the tangible and the imagined that Manfred Stahnke’s compositions embody.

Stahnke’s compositional output reflects what he terms a “*wässriges System*” (aqueous, fluid, pliable system), a non-dogmatic methodology that integrates microtonal scales, intonational practices, and tuning concepts often perceived as incompatible.¹ His works construct melo-harmonic structures that reject allegiance to a singular musical ideology, instead arising from objective engagement with a broad spectrum of global cultural traditions. The structural design of Stahnke’s music interlaces open, hybrid, horizontal-and-vertical microtonal fields without reliance on pre-established compositional formulas. His oeuvre merges geographically and culturally disparate systems—such as the quasi-equidistant scales of Malaita and Java—with just intonation, extended equal temperaments, and the Bohlen-Pierce scale. These systems interact with acoustical phenomena including harmonic and inharmonic partials and psychoacoustical principles such as difference tones and subharmonics.

Stahnke’s chamber works *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt* (asymmetrical woodcut, 2010) for violin and cello and *Holzschnitt* (woodcut, 2011) for violin, viola, cello, and two pianos exemplify his concept of *wässriges System*.² Both compositions interweave divergent conceptual frameworks and compositional principles. On an extramusical level, the title *Holzschnitt* invokes the tradition of North German wooden panel engravings that artists such as Emil Nolde (1867–

1956) and Ernst-Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938) practiced. These artists carved engravings simultaneously coarse and refined with expressive precision.

From a hermeneutical perspective, this study interprets Stahnke’s “musical woodcuts” as sonic analogues to this visual dichotomy of roughness and finesse. Through intricately layered intonational schemata, Stahnke—himself a native of North Germany—renders this duality audible. Just intervals up to the 13th partial tone in both compositions introduce tonal purity, mirroring the delicacy of wooden panels. Conversely, two pianos tuned a quartertone apart in *Holzschnitt*, along with linear sixth-tone configurations in both works, evoke the raw, incisive gestures of the chisel.

Furthermore, intervallic and thematic characteristics associated with, among others, Persian Dastgāh music underscore Stahnke’s commitment to extending his aesthetic vision beyond European experimentalism. These heterogeneous elements coalesce into coherent sonic architectures that embody his inclusive, hybrid compositional ethos. To elucidate this further, the study first examines historical examples of German woodcuts to highlight their inherent roughness-finesse dichotomy. Subsequently, a theoretical analysis of Stahnke’s compositions demonstrates how these works encapsulate his core aesthetic and music-philosophical orientations while resonating with the expressive dichotomies of German woodcut art.

2 German Woodcuts: Historical, Cultural, and Musical Resonances

After contacting Stahnke regarding the possible connection between German woodcarving and his compositions *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt* and *Holzschnitt*, he responded on April 6, 2025: “North German woodcarvers, yes, you are absolutely right. I had a teacher at school named Manfred Holz, of all names! He still lives in Bad Segeberg, where I grew up. He cared deeply about the persecuted Jews in Bad Segeberg in the 1930s and 1940s and has carved, painted, and printed artworks.” This statement situates Stahnke’s artistic imagination within a deeply personal and regional context, linking his musical aesthetics to the tactile, visual, and symbolic qualities of woodcut art. The reference to Manfred Holz (born 1933) underscores the enduring influence of local craftsmanship and its ethical dimension—art as a witness to historical trauma and cultural memory.

Manfred Holz’s works exhibit meticulous craftsmanship and expressive force.³ His woodcuts depicting scenes from the northernmost German state of Schleswig-Holstein, a region steeped in cultural hybridity and historical complexity, reveal an interplay of intricate design and raw immediacy. Holz’s prints combine rough colors, angular lines, and stark shapes, creating a visual language that oscillates between precision and spontaneity. His thematic repertoire includes:

- Nature and Landscape; Evoking the serenity of forests, lakes, and rural expanses, these works reflect a romantic sensibility rooted in Northern Germany’s natural environment.
- Historical and Cultural Heritage; Depicting traditional customs, architectural motifs, and regional narratives, Holz emphasizes continuity and identity amid modernity’s disruptions.
- Human Figures and Portraits; His portraits convey psychological depth through controlled detail, while group scenes narrate communal life and existential struggle.
- Spiritual Themes; Symbolic elements—crosses, sacred trees, and archetypal figures—invite contemplation of transcendence and mortality.
- Social Commentary; Holz’s engagement with themes of persecution and injustice situates his art within a moral discourse, echoing the activist impulse of earlier German printmakers.

The German woodcut tradition spans over five centuries, evolving from late medieval devotional prints to modernist experiments. Its trajectory reflects broader cultural transformations:

- Renaissance Precision; Artists such as Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) elevated woodcut to a high art form, employing fine line work and complex iconography. His prints, like “The Four Horsemen” from *The Apocalypse* (1498), exemplify technical mastery and theological depth.⁴
- Reformation and Popularization; Woodcuts became vehicles for religious propaganda and vernacular storytelling, democratizing visual culture.
- Expressionist Radicalism; In the early-twentieth century, *Die Brücke* (The Bridge)-artists, for example, Kirchner and Nolde, embraced the medium’s raw potential. Their prints feature rough contours, stark contrasts, and visible chisel marks—qualities that reject academic polish in favor of primal energy.⁵
- Modern Abstraction; Figures like Lyonel Feininger (1871–1956) and Georg Baselitz (born 1938) pushed woodcut toward geometric fragmentation and conceptual rigor, somewhat aligning with Cubist and postwar avant-garde aesthetics.⁶

Their Recurring characteristics include:

- Detailed Line Work and Intricate Design; Hallmark of Renaissance masters.
- Bold, Simplified Patterns; Expressionist emphasis on immediacy and emotional intensity.
- Texture and Tool Traces; Visible chisel marks as expressive signifiers.
- Geometric and Abstract Forms; Modernist pursuit of structural clarity and ambiguity.

Across epochs, German woodcuts have mediated tensions between tradition and innovation, spirituality and materiality, individual and collective experience. Iconographic motifs—biblical scenes, mythological figures, rural landscapes—persist, yet their treatment adapts to shifting ideological climates. Franz Marc’s animal imagery, for instance, in his *Horses Resting* channels pantheistic vitality through simplified forms, while Käthe Kollwitz’s social realism, for example, *The Mothers*, transforms woodcut into a weapon of empathy and critique, foregrounding working-class suffering and maternal resilience.⁷ These thematic continuities underscore the medium’s capacity for both transcendence and protest—a duality mirrored in Stahnke’s music.

Stahnke’s compositions, notably *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt* and *Holzschnitt*, sonically emulate the formal and expressive traits of woodcut art:

- Textural Roughness and Precision; His music juxtaposes fragmented rhythmic profiles with intricate microtonal structures, akin to the interplay of coarse chisel marks and fine detailing in prints.
 - Dynamic Tension and Asymmetry; Like Expressionist woodcuts, Stahnke’s works oscillate between stability and disruption, symmetry and fragmentation.
 - Materiality and Gesture; The physicality of instrumental sound production parallels the tactile engagement of carving wood, foregrounding process as aesthetic.
 - Hybrid States; His music inhabits a liminal zone between rigor and playfulness, echoing the dialectic of roughness and refinement in North German woodcut tradition.
- In this sense, Stahnke’s oeuvre exemplifies a transmedial dialogue: sound as carving, notation as visual architecture, composition as cultural memory.

3 Music-Theoretical Analysis

“Composed in 2011 for the Mondrian Ensemble Basel, my quintet *Holzschnitt* is a woodcarving of rough and sensitive structures between strange, microtonal scales, harmonies, and anti-anonymous (!) rhythms,” states Stahnke.⁸ Here, the adjective “strange” points to two ideas: First, harmonies derived from complex harmonic proportions, their difference and sum tones, and the distortion thereof; Second, the concept of “strange intonation,” a term that Manfred Stahnke coined in his articles to describe textures in Harry Partch’s music that, although grounded in just intonation, often sound non-just, except, for instance, when Partch’s chromelodeon—his adopted pipe organ tuned in just intonation—resonates.⁹ The adjective “anti-anonymous” suggests rhythmic structures that, through written values and performer freedom, carve spaces beyond standardized rhythmic patterns in Western classical music—patterns that have become anonymized.

To expand the pitch and harmonic spectrum, *Holzschnitt* fuses just intonation with, and sometimes juxtaposes or superimposes, quarter-tone tuning and linear sixth-tone distortions, as well micro-intervals characteristic of Persian classical music, namely:

- Minor second: ca. 90 cents; slightly narrower than a half step.
- Small neutral-tone: ca. 135 cents; slightly narrower than half step plus quarter-tone.
- Large neutral-tone: ca. 160 cents; slightly larger than half step plus quarter-tone.
- Major second: ca. 240 cents; approximately whole step plus quarter-tone; or three-quarter-tone.
- Plus-tone: ca. 270 cents; approximately a major third minus a sixth tone; or whole step plus quartertone plus approximately a sixth tone.¹⁰

In addition to these microtones, pulsative rhythms and semi-improvisational elements further intensify *Holzschnitt*’s dynamism and unpredictability.

Regarding *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt*, Stahnke remarks: “This is one of my typical string pieces, which employ exotic scales all over the place, from all over the world and underworld, as well as a far-spread asymmetrical harmonic between well-known intervals and unforeseeable new ones.”¹¹ In this work, asymmetry in harmonic construction disrupts traditional Western ideals of balance and symmetry, generating tension and unpredictability that shape a novel auditory experience, see figure 1.

Both works, *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt* and *Holzschnitt*, integrate extended temperaments into Stahnke’s *wässriges System*. He begins with just intonation but then develops non-just-intonation ideas through linear thinking—for example, a sixth-tone gradation, theoretically each step about 33 cents. This approach momentarily abandons harmonic just intonation, constructing instead a linear framework based on extended temperament, ultimately merging with just intonation and non-Western melodic-thematic concepts. The result exemplifies Stahnke’s “hybrid” aesthetic.

Holzschnitt embodies a genuinely hybrid concept. For the strings, Stahnke layers just intonation, asking performers to realize, for example, just sevenths. He marks these with small arrows that indicate deviations of 31 cents from the tempered minor seventh—almost a sixth-tone shift. This notation demonstrates how harmonic just sevenths can merge into the linear sixth-tone tempered scale. The piece also includes two pianos, one tuned a quartertone lower. Although Stahnke seldom employs quartertone tuning, he introduced it here because the program featured works of the twentieth-century Russian microtonalist Ivan Wyschnegradsky (1893–1979), see Figure 2 (page 22).

13

wieder sehr schnell
♩ = 500

285

Teufelskanon: reine und unreine Intervalle: reine Terzen und Sexten sind erlaubt!
weich
♩ = 80

292

alles rein auf C
hier also -e tiefer
als Vc (etc.rein)

300

305

309

Figure 1: *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt*, “Teufelskanon”; Asymmetry and unpredictability caused by synthesis of pure and distorted intervals

Stahnke often explores complex numerical relationships within a difference-tone space. Consider an interval such as 19/16 from the overtone series on C—a just minor third above C—where E-flat and C remain close to temperament—Stahnke, in fact, uses temperament as a reference for his notation in *Holzschnitt*, largely because of the two pianos. The quadratic difference tone of this interval yields the third partial: $19 - 16 = 3$. The cubic difference tone

cantus infirmus
♩ = 75

quasi legato
e. e norm.

7/4

5/4 zu V
c⁺

5/4 zu V
b⁺

pppp f

pppp f

pppp pp mf pp

pppp pp mf pp

|||
meno, poco libre sempre
den Intervallen lauschen
♩ = 60

7/4 f⁺ fis- 7/4

5/4 zu V1

5/4 zu V
h-

5/4 jeweils
f⁺ des⁺⁺

7/4

4/3 zu V
cis-

5/4 zu V
c⁺

cis-

pp f ff

mf pp mf

mf pp mf

Figure 2: *Holzschmitt*, “Cantus infirmus”; Interplay of pure and distorted intervals in the strings and two pianos tuned quartertone apart.

produces partials 13, 10, 7, and so forth, forming an undertone cascade that Stahnke transforms into chords.

Such overtone chords demand precise notation to guide performers. Composers cannot simply write, “play the twenty-second or twenty-fifth overtone”; few performers would know how to proceed. Stahnke, therefore, adopts the tempered space and adds arrows to the twelve tones and conventional accidentals, signaling his sixth-tone resolution. He applies the same principle in the quartertone space for the two pianos. In *Holzschmitt*, this hybrid approach juxtaposes sixth-tone resolution with quartertone tuning: the pianos consistently resolve in quar-

tertones, while the strings primarily operate in sixth tones, occasionally realizing just thirds to approximate just intonation.

In *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt*, the formal structure of the piece—divided into the following eleven sections—provides a frame for the juxtaposition of metaphorical “rough” and “delicate” elements: the latter mainly in the sense of just-intonation intervals and harmonies plus intervals predominant in Persian classical music; the former in terms of distortion of just intonation through primarily sixth- and quartertone configurations.

- Section A (mm. 1–17): Introduction; projecting roughness before arriving at section B.
- Section B (mm. 17–47): A combination of roughness and delicateness prevails.
- Section C (mm. 47–70): Delicateness increases through flageolets that overtones, though rough distortion persists.
- Section D (mm. 70–131): Titled “wie ein fremdes Land” (like a foreign country); Extensive just-intonation construction grants the music a delicate character.
- Section E (mm. 131–185): “Hoquestus infernalis” (infernal hoquet) reflects a combination of rough and delicate components, with just intonation only partially dominant.
- Section F (mm. 185–218): Exhibits almost exclusively rough structures.
- Section G (mm. 218–294): Returns to merged rough and delicate elements, where Persian music characteristics stand out.
- Section H (mm. 294–346): “Teufelskanon” (devil’s canon) demonstrates imitative polyphony; here, due to partly just-intoned construction delicateness supersedes roughness.
- Section I (mm. 364–367): “Glissando-Symphonie” juxtaposes frequent, slow sliding gestures (glissandi) and just-intonation intervals, projecting roughness and delicateness—the latter more than the former. These glissandi allow listeners to experience sliding from an unceasing variety of non-beating just intonation harmonies through beating, just ones.
- Section J (mm. 367–406): “Volle Freude” (full of joy) follows a similar dual character—rough and delicate. Persian intervals appear again, though distorted, rough components take precedence.
- Section K (mm. 406–end): “wie ein Epilog” (like an epilogue) concludes with a primarily rough aura.

The following chart (Figure 3) summarizes the formal structure and the dichotomous, micro-tonal fabric of *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt*.

A	m. 1			Rough
B	m. 17		Persian	Rough and delicate
C	m. 47		Partly flageolets	Delicate and rough
D	m. 70	<i>wie ein fremdes Land</i>	Just intonation	Delicate
E	m. 131	<i>Hoquetus infernalis</i>	Partly just intonation	Delicate and rough
F	m. 185			Rough
G	m. 218		Persian	Rough and delicate
H	m. 294	<i>Teufelskanon</i>	Partly just intonation	Delicate and rough
I	m. 346	<i>Glissando-Symphonie</i>	Just and “unjust”	Delicate and rough
J	m. 367	<i>Volle Freude</i>	Persian	Rough and delicate
K	m. 406	<i>wie ein Epilog</i>		Rough

Figure 3: Manfred Stahnke, *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt*, formal structure and references for dichotomy of roughness-delicateness.

Within this framework, the textual instructions provided by Stahnke in the legend serve to familiarize performers with the uncommon indications and accidentals found in the score, thereby enabling them to realize the microtonal subtleties of the work:

- Accidentals with arrows indicate deviations from twelve-tone equal temperament by approximately one-sixth of a tone (33 cents).
- Starting at measure 72: *e (rein zu VC)* (“E pure to violoncello”) instructs performers to lower the pitch of E slightly so that it sounds pure and harmonically aligned with a lower tone.

Figure 4 presents additional notational and textual indications that appear in the score but not in the legend—some referring to rough, distorted sounds, others to delicate, pure sounds.

5/4 zu V	Just major third in relation to violin
f+, c+, b+, h-, des++, cis-, g+, gis-, des++, cisis-	F+, C+, Bb+, B-, Db++, C#++, G+, G#+, Cx-(plus and minor signs indicate microtonal raising and lowering these tones.)
rein zu Vc, e höher als vorher	Pure in relation to violoncello, E higher than earlier.
7/4 „Natursept“	Septimal minor seventh
Schwebt gegen Vc	Oscillates (beats) against violoncello
4/3 zu V	Just perfect fourths in relation to violin
gis- (minimal höher als vorher)	G#- (minimally higher than earlier)
8/5 kleine Sext	Natural (just, pure) minor sixth
des-93 (fast „c“)	Db-93 cents (almost like C)
es-62	Eb-62 cents
f-31	F-31 cents
c+ (höher als des vorher)	C+ (higher than Db earlier)
fis+31	F#+31 cents
gis+62	G#+62 cents
h- (tiefer als ais vorher)	B- (higher than A# earlier)
as-62	Ab-62 cents
ges-93	Gb-93 cents
ais+93	A#+93 cents
Schwebungsfrei	Beat-free (pure, just)
Schwebt!	Oscillates (beats)
Vorbild: 13. Naturton auf D	Example: thirteenth natural tone above D
wie 13. Ton	Like the thirteenth tone
wie 11. Ton	Like the eleventh tone
Vorbild: 11. Naturton auf D	Example: eleventh natural tone above D
alles rein auf C, D	All tone pure (just) above C and D
reine und unreine Intervalle	Pure and impure Intervalls
Terzen und Sexten sind erlaubt!	Thirds and sixths are allowed.
es+ rein 8/5	E+, natural (just, pure) minor sixth
8/7	Supermajor second
9/7	Supermajor third
rein 8/5	Pure (just) minor sixth
rein 5/3	Pure (just) major sixth
16/15	Just minor second
Schwebungsfreiheit erreichen	Achieve a non-beating (pure) sound
Fund. as, es, etc.	Fundamental tones: Ab, Eb, etc.
„11 Naturtone,“ 11/8	Eleventh natural tone, undecimal major fourth
Keine Stabile Fund. Töne	No stable fundamental tones

Figure 4: Manfred Stahnke, *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt*; left columns: uncommon textual and notational indication in the score; right columns: English translations and, if necessary, explanations.

In *Holzschnitt*, Stahnke’s textual instructions for performers in the legend closely parallel those in *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt*. The unusual indications in the score of *Holzschnitt* likewise resemble those of *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt*, although certain markings, such as the following, remain unique to *Holzschnitt* and do not appear in *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt*:

- Rein unter gedacht-E: Untertöne (“pure under an imaginary tone E: undertones”)
- Rein zu C, stets Konflikte mit Vc - nicht ausgleichen (“pure to C, always in conflict with violoncello—do not balance this conflict”).

The first indication reflects the idea of adopting tones from the undertone (subharmonic) series, the mirrored inversion of the overtone (harmonic) series, which the composer employs in the work. The second instruction directs performers not to correct the distortion, or conflict, arising from just intonation when a tone that stands pure in relation to C creates tension with the violoncello. This situation exemplifies a moment in which the composer vertically superimposes delicateness (purity) and roughness (distortion)—a juxtaposition, and often a synthesis, that these indications collectively aim to achieve in both works, see figure 3.

The image shows a page of a musical score for 'Teufelskanon' from the work 'Holzschnitt'. The score is arranged in three systems, each with four staves: Violin (V.), Viola (Va.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Piano (PI). The first system (measures 381-385) features a Violin part with notes marked 'e-', 'fis-49', 'as+41', and 'h-'. The Viola and Violoncello parts have notes marked 'rein auf D' and 'cis-'. The second system (measures 386-390) shows the Violin part with notes marked 'rein auf C' and 'e-'. The Viola part has notes marked 'f' and 'rein unter d: Untertöne'. The Violoncello part has notes marked 'f' and 'ff', with 'rein auf D' and 'fis-' also indicated. The third system (measures 391-395) shows the Violin part with notes marked 'h-' and 'rein unter gedacht-E: Untertöne gis-41'. The Viola part has notes marked 'f+'. The Violoncello part has notes marked 'p' and 'pp'. The Piano part has notes marked 'mf'. The score includes various dynamic markings (mf, f, ff, p, pp) and specific pitch notations (e-, fis-49, as+41, h-, b+, gis-41). The score is divided into systems by double bar lines.

Figure 5: *Holzschnitt*, “Teufelskanon”; *Rein zu C, stets Konflikte mit Vc - nicht ausgleichen*; Vertical superimposition of delicateness (purity) and roughness (distortion).

Holzschnitt not only employs a larger ensemble but also intensifies the synthesized roughness–fineness dichotomy, a contrast facilitated by the inclusion of viola and two pianos tuned a quartertone apart. Appropriately, the work unfolds over a considerably longer span. Although it comprises the same number of sections—eleven—as *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt*, each section in *Holzschnitt* markedly extends in length: 711 measures in total, compared to 406 in its counterpart. This expansion enables a comprehensive articulation of the underlying harmonic and character dichotomy, presenting it in a broadly integrated manner. Consequently, *Holzschnitt* tends toward synthesis, whereas *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt* privileges juxtaposition and superimposition despite displaying synthesis as well. The chart in Figure 6 captures the formal architecture and the microtonal, dichotomous fabric of *Holzschnitt*.

A	m. 1		Persian, scratch tones, piano	Rough and delicate
B	m. 99	<i>Cantus Infirmus</i>	Persian, just intonation	Delicate and rough
C	m. 159	<i>Hoquetus infernalis</i>	Partly just intonation	Rough and delicate
D	m. 217		Persian, etc.	Delicate and rough
E	m. 271		Persian, etc.	Delicate and rough
F	m. 365	<i>Teufelskanon</i>	Just and “unjust”	Rough and delicate
G	m. 442		Partly just intonation, partly piano distortions	Rough and delicate
H	m. 470		Partly just intonation, partly piano distortions	Rough and delicate
I	m. 511		Predominantly piano distortions	Very rough
J	m. 616		Predominantly piano distortions	Very rough
K	m. 711		Partly just intonation	Rough and delicate

Figure 6: Manfred Stahnke, *Holzschnitt*; formal structure and references for dichotomy of roughness–delicateness

4 Conclusion

Hybridity in artistic practice resists closure. It grows through sustained encounters with difference—through the friction of contrasting materials, ideas, and traditions. Stahnke does not treat hybridity as a stylistic ornament; he cultivates it as a compositional ethos. His engagement with Slendro from Indonesia, the modal systems of the High Andes, and Persian Dastgāh music exemplifies a deliberate strategy of cultural listening. He does not appropriate these traditions superficially; he interrogates their structural logic and integrates their principles into a fluid, non-dogmatic framework. This approach transforms hybridity into an ethical stance: a refusal of purity, a commitment to dialogue, and an insistence on multiplicity as a condition of artistic truth.

In *Asymmetrischer Holzschnitt* and *Holzschnitt*, this ethos becomes audible. These works do not merely juxtapose microtonal fields; they weave them into architectures that oscillate between rigor and spontaneity. Their sonic fabric mirrors the paradoxes of human existence—roughness and delicacy, fragmentation and coherence, immediacy and reflection. Stahnke’s music does not seek resolution; it dramatizes tension as a generative force. Every interval, every timbral inflection participates in a dialectic that resists simplification, inviting listeners to inhabit complexity rather than escape it.

German woodcut offers a historical and conceptual analogue. From Dürer’s Renaissance engravings to Expressionist manifestos and Manfred Holz’s regionalist prints, the tradition enacts a similar negotiation between permanence and flux, materiality and transcendence. Its aesthetic vocabulary—contrast, asymmetry, incision—echoes through Stahnke’s sonic gestures.

Both arts transform resistance into creativity: the hardness of wood demands decisive cuts; the fluidity of sound demands temporal articulation. In this shared struggle, form emerges not as a static container but as a dynamic process—a choreography of constraints and freedoms.

This paper does not intend to propose a simple equivalence between woodcut and music; rather, it illuminates a deeper affinity. Both arts articulate an impulse that remains vital: the pursuit of expressive intensity through structural clarity and the embrace of contradiction as a source of meaning. Stahnke's oeuvre situates itself within this lineage, not by imitating visual forms, but by translating their philosophical underpinnings into sound. His *wässriges System* embodies a vision of art as an open field—a space where traditions intersect, where systems dissolve into fluid networks, where hybridity becomes a principle of life.

In an era increasingly dominated by algorithmic uniformity and cultural homogenization, Stahnke's music asserts the value of heterogeneity. It reminds us that art thrives not in purity but in diversity, not in certainty but in risk. Like the jagged lines of a woodcut, his compositions carve out spaces of resistance—against dogma, against reduction, against the illusion of total clarity. They invite us to listen differently, to perceive complexity as beauty, and to recognize in the interplay of roughness and finesse a mirror of our own fractured yet luminous condition.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Navid, Bargrivan, "Aspekte mikrotonaler Komposition," Master's Thesis, University of Hamburg, 2012, 104.
- ² The scores and sample recordings of both compositions are published on and accessible via <https://www.babelscores.com/ManfredStahnke> (accessed 30.11.2025).
- ³ "Manfred Holz," <http://www.rmholz.de/werke/manfred-holz> (accessed 30.11.2025).
- ⁴ "The Four Horsemen" from *The Apocalypse*, (accessed 30.11.2025). <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/336215>.
- ⁵ "Die Brücke (The Bridge)," <https://www.moma.org/collection/terms/die-brucke-the-bridge> (accessed 30.11.2025).
- ⁶ "Lyonel Feiniger," <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/71324> and "Georg Baselitz," <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/59579> (both accessed 30.11.2025).
- ⁷ "Franz Marc," <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/68728> and "Käthe Kollwitz," <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/69687> (both accessed 30.11.2025).

- ⁸ “Manfred Stahnke,” <https://www.babelscores.com/catalogs/instrumental/chamber-ensemble/holzschnitt> (accessed 30.11.2025).
- ⁹ In my interviews with Stahnke (summer 2015), he used the term “strange intonation” to refer to Partch’s music repeatedly.
- ¹⁰ Hormoz Farhat, *The Dastgah Concept in Persian Music*, Cambridge University press, 1990, 16–17.
- ¹¹ “Manfred Stahnke,” <https://www.babelscores.com/catalogs/instrumental/2416-asymmetrischer-holzschnitt> (accessed 30.11.2025).