

The HELLMUNDT Lithophone

The first materials that humans used thousands of years ago to make sounds or musical instruments were natural ones: wood, animal skins and guts, metal and stone. We still use these natural materials today. In cultures of the far east stone, as well as metals, were important materials for making musical sounds. Lithophones (stone instruments) are especially found in China.

In 1994 an array of six large stone squares was discovered in West Sumatra. It seemed to be an ancient musical instrument - perhaps used for ritual purposes – which made sounds like a bell or gong.

Because of our current “back to nature” ideals and the stronger desire to use natural materials, I have been experimenting with stone instruments that can bring back these warm natural sounds and re-introduce them into the modern musical repertoire.

(foto)

Lithophone made of suspended stone slabs, National Museum, Beijing

Dr. Rüdiger Pfeiffer-Rupp, Professor and scientist for church-bells in Cologne, gave the following description of the HELLMUNDT Lithophone (March 2001): “Hellmundt has introduced the Lithophone into the taxonomy of musical instruments, where it can be ranked as an idiophone.

It is made up of a series of tuned polished stone slabs, which all have to be of the same material ... His instrument is hit percussively, which causes a slab to vibrate similar to a bell. Unlike a bell, the resulting sound is very free from overtones ... resembling somewhat the sounds of a muted bell, which are a bit like a wooden marimba.

(foto)

In the Natursteinwerk Neuruppin: the slabs are sliced from this granite plate.

Building a Lithophone with a significant tonal range takes a great deal of time and material, which is the case with the HELLMUNDT Lithophone. In principle, it resembles other slab percussion instruments, but has much bigger dimensions:

- The instrument is chromatically tuned and has a range of three octaves (c – c''')
- Each sound slab is cut from a 30 mm thick plate of black Swedish granite
- Because of their weight, the slabs for each octave are mounted on a separate sturdy wooden stand, which can be moved on casters. The resulting three heavy carts can be arranged either in one row (to be played by several players) or in a U-shape around a single player.
- The HELLMUNDT Lithophone is 4.5 m (14'7") in overall length, and its width varies between 1.25 m (4'1") and 0.75 m (2'5"). The height is 0.85 m (2'9") and is not adjustable.

The instrument has never been weighed, but a mechanical lift is needed to transport it!

If producers are interested in discussing a performance of this new addition to the musical instrument repertoire, please contact the inventor and manufacturer:

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