

# MY IMAGE AND I

How public figures see themselves

# King of the tinklybonk

**A** SCETIC eccentric who served as a stretcher bearer during the war and has written more than 200 musical works. Long haired, energetic, darling of the avant-garde with a maverick intelligence and six children.

Mystic, wit and wizard of electronic music who designed his house with sloping ceilings and hexagonal rooms, all lit from the outside. Whither Karlheinz Stockhausen, the composer-visionary and media star of the swinging Sixties?

There are four of us listening to my interview with the 62-year-old King Tinklybonk: his two girlfriends (vegetarians and thirty-something), myself and his guardian angel. He's also taping us—wanting to turn it into music later.

"I haven't yet given my angel a name. I like that kind of secret relationship," says the man who likes his ladies to call him Garuda, his favourite bird and the carrier of the gods. "I might have been an eagle in a previous existence. I fly so well in dreams." He looks down and shrugs, pouting and characteristically gesturing with his hand as if he were conducting.

Huma—a Persian bird and his other pet name—is wearing a purple scarf (to combat fierce air conditioning), training shoes and a white shirt. Can he describe what he is wearing? "No." What do his clothes say about him? "I never think about that."

He has, however, been wearing this Mexican wedding shirt since 1968. "The lady in the village where I live is able to copy it. So it's my shirt. I have 25 of the same." Why does he always wear the same shirt? "Because"—he looks at me and his eyes light up, as they do periodically, and one wonders whether he's taking the piss—"I like it."

He very rarely looks in the mirror. "Just to comb my hair in the morning." He has always worn it long. "It's not a statement—there was a time when it was longer. It was uncomfortable and I had it cut." He speaks in a voice that is resonant and guttural; one that he bears in terms of low frequencies and a certain spectrum.

His face is moulded of thick features—there's something Soviet about it—big ears, a receding hairline and overgrown, distracted grey hair. He is also portly and strong looking.

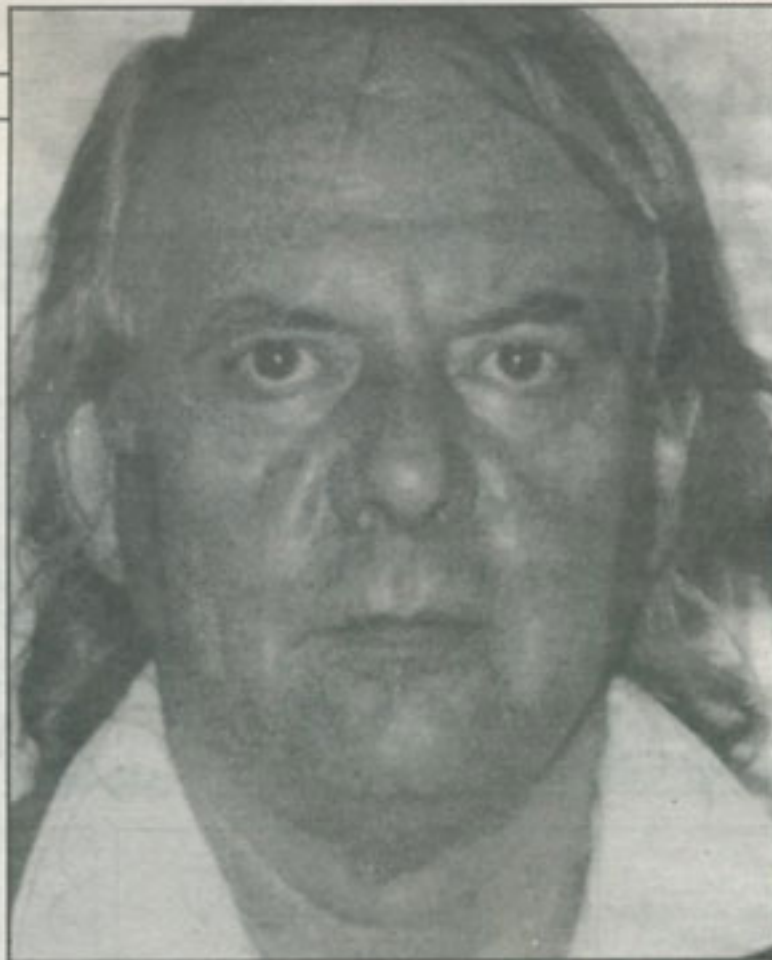
What does he think when he sees his reflection? "Nothing, nothing. Just I recognise myself... no I'm not so much interested in my body. Just fortunately it is healthy because my ancestors were farmers." So how would he describe himself physically? "I wouldn't."

He just wants to think about music and his rehearsals, circuits, connections and speakers. He mostly talks looking ahead, staring into the middle distance. He doesn't engage. And it is difficult to read him. There is the feeling of being in the presence either of a great man or someone who is not a full box of chocolates.

**D**OES he regard himself as eccentric or mad? "I know it's not true. So I feel nothing about being described like this." And does he think he's brilliant? "Nooooo. I could be better, more brilliant. I wish to see longer ahead of time, to look into the future at least three or four hundred years for musical reasons... and I wish I could make better contact with the spirits that are invisible. Then I would be more brilliant."

He frequently makes contact with his guardian angel, God and his cosmic creator, St Michael. "Real brilliance would be to master completely the limitations of my

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Picture by Ken Thomson

human body. I wish I could travel more quickly from this side of existence to the other side. I just leave my body—certainly I can do that and you can too." He motions his hand in more-volume-from-the-trumpet type gesture.

He describes himself in terms of his habits: "I work all the time and sleep regularly, my food is very simple and *ahhaaha*," he says, noisily. "I like very much to live in the forest and plant and watch the bushes and trees."

But what of his character traits? "I pray a lot and I practise yoga every morning." And his personality characteristics? No? Well, what is his most important attribute? "To be spiritual, to pray, and be 100 per cent a musician." If there is one thing he could change, it would be "to answer less mail".

He doesn't think of himself as a visionary. "But I have read many times that other people do." Certainly he is regarded as controversial. "I have never understood what they mean. Just because my works contradict each other and people can't fix me into a box or frame."

One can imagine him being fierce. "Yes. If I encounter someone saying the untruth or behaving like a coward, I get on fire." He also comes across as if he lives in his own world, in his head. "No. I'm very observant," he says, inexplicably

adding, "for instance today I almost got run over by a car because they come from a different direction." The girlfriends burst out laughing.

At home he cuts himself off from the outside world. "To create music I can't have distractions. I don't have papers, TV or radio. I get all my world news from the cleaning lady who's so dumb that she always gets the place and number killed wrong." He smiles. "I only get a newspaper when I fly because I can't withstand the temptation to get a paper for nothing." He's frequently very amusing and, when we leave, is enormously affable and friendly to everyone. Certainly he's a fascinating man

**H**E has been described as reclusive. "I don't live a life of almost total seclusion, nooooo, unfortunately it is not yet possible. I live lots in tiny noise rooms, with the horrible noise of the loudspeakers in the breakfast rooms.

"Sometimes I wish I had more time alone. I like the silence. But I'm always living together with very close friends, people I love." And how does he see himself sexually? There is silence from the live part of his audience. "Normal. As I said before, I'm happy that I don't

need a doctor or to go to hospital." So is his an ascetic lifestyle? "No, I eat meat and everything." And is love important to him? "Yes, extremely. I am completely in love."

His mother was killed in a mental asylum, his father died in the war, and he was treated in a "less than noble" way as a child; but he says he doesn't suffer inner turmoil or unhappiness. "I have never fear, never turmoil." He says there is no grief in him. "I have always found out, even during the sad events, that it was good for me—because I jumped forward. All the things that I have lost have set me free."

He came close to suicide once, in 1968. His wife had gone to the US and was refusing to come home on request. "I just sent a telegram that I didn't want to eat any more. For seven days I didn't eat—and after three I became very happy inside and didn't care about her any more."

He's a Leo, *dum dum dum*, he sings, from a piece he has composed about the zodiac. "He loves the arts, the love, he's fiery and he loves (he goes into German to sing this bit) the sun. *Leo do do dum* is a very happy person."

Stockhausen launches *Brave New World, The Rebellious Generation*, tonight at the Royal Festival Hall.

Caroline Phillips