

FAMILIE MIT PFIFF—Theme and Variations (1976)
2 audio channels

by Hildegard Westerkamp

Familie mit Pfiff was composed for the occasion of a large reunion of my family in 1976. It is based on a tune that family members used to whistle to each other (and on rare occasions still do), as a greeting or a call. The signal comes from a theme in the third movement of Franz Schubert's Symphony No. 9 in C major, D. 944, known as the Great (German scholars sometimes number it as symphony No. 7, the most recent version of the Deutsch catalogue is listing it as No. 8!). In this composition I have combined the whistle (generously whistled by Norbert Ruebsaat) and the Schubert tune to make up the main theme of the piece, and it is then taken through variations—variations of the main theme itself and of the soundscape in which the whistle tune might occur.

The piece celebrates and at the same time questions the survival possibilities of this signal in the environment of contemporary urban society.

The title of the piece was chosen because of its inherent pun in the German language: literally translated it means "family with a whistle tune", but figuratively it means "family with zest".