

place ten years ago. A few intense months were thus moved to another place and time, and compressed in time to a few hours: a captivating way of situating soundscapes.

Also powerful was *Alif: split of the wall*, a spacious installation of clusters of red-liquid-filled tubes and screens designed by the Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota, surrounding and intertwined by the musicians of Zafraan Ensemble and singer/actress Salome Kammer, who displayed her broad performing skills. Over the course of five hours, the ensemble performed music by Samir Odeh-Tamimi, which was alternated with electronic music by Stefan Goldmann. There were some longwinded moments, for sure, but there were also occasions when being inside the installation, surrounded by the physical presence of the complete artwork, was truly overwhelming.

But the longer the concerts, the less artistic quality I found. Max Richter's project *SLEEP*, for example, has been over-hyped, which I suppose motivated the pricey tickets of almost €50. Like last year, the festival ended with a 36-hour extravaganza, 'The Long Now', in which chamber music took turns with electronica. Well, extravaganza might be an exaggeration; although there were some really nice performances, such as when a group of wind players filled the spaces of the vast Kraftwerk Mitte with the beautifully slowly pulsating sounds of John Cage's 58, the lion's share was regrettably reducible to the 'atmospheric' ambient music of DJ x, y and z.

For 'The Long Now' and *SLEEP*, MaerzMusik had partnered with Atonal, the more alternative techno-oriented festival. A few acquaintances from literary circles whom I met there had come along purely because of the Atonal connection, but told me that they thought it was not as good as the usual Atonal festival. This sort of partnering seeks a kind of synergy effect but how long-lasting can it hope to be? If connecting to audiences outside of the new music community is the aim, then the Rois/Bostridge/Lang *Winterreise* connection was intelligently done with artistic and curatorial integrity. I don't think 'club' projects will give any lasting credibility to MaerzMusik, or other new music festivals, for that matter. This is a pity of course but, on the other hand, the festival has a strong core. Good contemporary music festivals with integrity do attract large audiences: MaerzMusik has been proof of this before, and was so this year too.

Andreas Engström

Archipel Festival, Geneva 'Multifaceted Games'

From 10 to 20 March 2016, Geneva was transformed into a giant musical playground of sorts: the title of this year's Archipel Festival was 'Aires de jeux'. Over its 24 editions, the festival has been a showcase for musical creation and has promoted not contemporary music in a broad sense, but rather the music of our time. In a recent interview, the current festival director, Marc Texier, noted that a common misunderstanding is to 'consider contemporary music as beginning in the post-war period, 70 years ago. That's quite extraordinary! The music of 1945 doesn't have much in common with what is created today. For today's composers, works from 1945 belong to their grandparents or great-grandparent's generations'.

If the boundaries of artistic movements are often blurred, and unhelpfully and inaccurately anchored by labels, the primary objective of this internationally renowned event is clear, and its mission to enhance the music of our time has so far borne fruit. Since its creation in 1992, Archipel has certainly contributed to the promotion of the music of our time in Switzerland, and has become the country's foremost festival dedicated to contemporary forms of expression. Archipel has achieved this not only by inviting the great composers of our time but also by actively supporting the emergence of a young generation of composers through a scheme of commissions. The 2016 season was no exception, featuring prestigious collaborations, premieres by established and emerging composers, installations and performances.

This year's theme was inspired by Marc Texier's desire to provide the people of Geneva, as well as the broader Swiss and international public, with an experimental musical playground, an environment of 'Childhood, games, experimentation, daydreams, all common elements of creative inspiration, of imagination free of constraints'. This was the starting point of a programming that aims not only to be playful, as it would be easy to reduce such a theme, but especially initiatory and educational. Pulled out of the magician's hat, one could find toy pianos used as Japanese *pachinkos* answering to imaginary animals built from computer-operated household goods, but also the more familiar but equally rare sonorities of the glass harmonium or unbearably shrill megaphones. Sounds to open one's ears – or one's mind! This musical 'ping-pong' was at the heart of the festival's 2016 programme.

This festival-scale playground was also characterised by the diversity of installations, many of which included an important visual element. Such was the case with Bartholomäus Traubeck's wooden 'vinyl' records which, from the growth rings of a cross-section of a tree, sinuously drew forth rattling piano sounds to articulate a smooth and trendy aesthetic. Ondrej Adámek's air machine consisted of clusters of surgical gloves that came alive, twitching almost instinctively, and seemed to tickle out the sounds produced by irrigation pipes and electronics, like small volatile air-whistles. And Koko the Clown, a friend of Betty Boop, fascinated with his equally elegant and clumsy attitude, his movements translated into music by jazzmen Jean Bolcato and Guy Villerd.

The event 'Mécaniques immobiles' kicked off the game on 10 March. The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande with soloist Renaud Capuçon gave the Swiss premiere of *Mar'eh*, a violin concerto composed by Matthias Pintscher which illustrated his fascination with the physical qualities of sound. 'In *Mar'eh*, the violin is this sound prism. It carries all these images that can irradiate and shine in all directions at once', he explains.¹ Another celebrity, the octogenarian Helmut Lachenmann was present for the successful interpretation of his *Concertini*, given by the Lemanic Modern Ensemble under the baton of William Blank. Included as part of a series of concerts entitled 'Spectres concrets' this work revealed the need of the composer to go beyond the obvious possibilities of disparate instruments' sounds and modes of production to illustrate some highly complex approaches. By 'spectrum' we might also understand extent, magnitude, distance, incline, range, swing, reach, variation . . . a list of synonyms which reveals in itself the rich compositional and interpretative possibilities of this *Klang Komposition* master. Simon Steen-Andersen's *On and off and to and fro* (2008), performed by the Nouvel Ensemble Contemporain (NEC) conducted by the promising young chief Elena Schwarz, explores the boundaries between the inaudible and the comfortable, travelling beyond pleasant and controlled sounds.

Torturous sounds became something of a theme: classical references – Mozart, Haydn – juxtaposing a collection of world premieres for the enigmatic and crystalline glass harmonium.

Heinz Holliger's *Sons d'or pour Aurèle* electrified the audience. This work, which was composed in tribute to his friend and flautist Aurèle Nicolet who died in January 2016, is the expression of that loss of a loved one. Performed by the Swiss Chamber Soloists, the compositional frame of this work seems to get tangled up in a disturbing loneliness, emphasised by the contrast between a visceral bass flute and the cold presence of the high-pitched glass harmonium. A passage evokes the opening bars of Mozart's dissonance quartet K465, but freed from its obstinate rhythmic pulse. Incisive, harsh and throbbing, Holliger's 'golden sounds' carry us through the complex awkwardness of pain. In the same concert, we heard Genevan composer Xavier Dayer's new score *Come Heavy Sleep*, based on John Dowland's melody of the same name. The work, full of imagery, relates without excessive pathos a story with oriental tastes: this is the tale of The Thousand and One Sounds. Delicate and determined, the piece revealed the subtle intelligence of its creator.

Surprises sometimes came from associations, analogous or opposing, such as the pairing of soprano Hélène Fauchère and double bass player Uli Fusseneger who performed a section of Beat Furrer's opera *Wüstenbuch*. Also for these performers, and grouped around the theme of 'Des rives, des rêves' (river banks, dreams), were several new works: *L'Oracle de Nicosia* by Evis Sammoutis (Cyprus), *šir* for soprano with tuned glasses and double bass by the Swiss-Italian composer Carlo Ciceri, *Femme 100 têtes* by Vito Zuraj (Slovenia) and *Palabras deshabitadas* by Alberto Posadas (Spain).

Sammoutis's work sings of his island's heart-break and takes an interest in the shades of difference of words but reveals itself to be somewhat diaphanous and often leaning towards caricature. *Femme 100 têtes* by Zuraj does not deny the past, nor Richard Strauss: inspired by the impossible dialogue between Salome and the head of Saint John the Baptist, the work sets a premonition of the tragedy. The soprano part, highly anchored in lyrical tradition, is disturbed by the double bass sound effects; the dissimilarity of the two instruments prompts an appropriate awkwardness and false seduction. Both *šir* and *Palabras deshabitadas* deal brilliantly with incommunicability. Inspired by Foucault's reading of the Homeric tale of the encounter between Ulysses and the sirens, Ciceri has created a long, sensitive and seductive variation of their call, a monologue-at-a-distance (the instruments becoming one) about the embarrassment of impossible contact and the melancholy of

¹ Ensemble intercontemporain season brochure, 2015–16: <https://issuu.com/ensembleinter/docs/eic-bs-15-16-web>, p. 77 (accessed 2 April 2016).

unanswered questions. Similarly, *Palabras deshabitadas* exploited this determined and intimate lament of 'two instruments apparently very far from each other, trying to express themselves becoming at times a unity, replay or a shadow' (in the words of Posadas). These two works were powerfully sensitive and embodied.

To conclude, 'L'invitation au mauvais voyage' (Invitation to a bad trip), a scenographic concert, addressed the relationship between the festival's audience and its programme as a whole. Saturation, density ... the public emerged exhausted, but not empty, inspired by a climate of experimentation that reflects current concerns and deviations. The impressive collective RepertorioZero interpreted *Krummholz* and *Yagé Howl* – both composed in 2014 by Giovanni Verrando and Ricardo Nova respectively – alternating with episodes from Fausto Romitelli's trilogy *Professor Bad Trip*. The latter, unfolding around a shining chrysalis on stage, bears witness to a fractured *mise en abîme*, giving the impression of a rather violent inversion of convention that leaves the listener stunned by its density. Imagine a musical Jackson Pollock with liquefied contours, contorted, unpredictable, marked. This piece responds to Henri Michaux's *Light through Darkness*, which reveals something of its substance: 'A vast redistribution of sensitivity takes place, making everything bizarre, a continual complex redistribution of sensation. You sense less here, and more there. Here and there where? In dozens of 'heres' and dozens of 'wheres' that you didn't know, that you didn't recognise'.²

We discovered these ten or so 'heres', 'theres', 'elsewheres', and things we didn't know before, at Festival Archipel 2016.

Orane Dourde

Kaija Saariaho *Only the Sound Remains*, Dutch National Opera, Muziektheater, Amsterdam

Only the Sound Remains consists of two stories of supernatural encounters. A monk, praying for the soul of a deceased general, meets the latter's ghost, attracted by the sounds of the lute used in the monk's ritual. A fisherman finds the feather mantle belonging to a Tennin, an angelic spirit, who pleads with him to return the item, which he only does after she performs a celestial

dance; thus, the chorus tells us, 'was the dance of pleasure, Suruga dancing, brought to the sacred east'. Both encounters are evanescent: the ghost of the general is visited by memories of terrible battles and disappears back into the spirit world; the Tennin's dance is an announcement of spring, as the Tennin herself disperses into the mists that obscure Mount Fuji. In both stories, the spiritual is a manifestation of something virtual, relating artistic forms to worlds not of, yet touching on, the everyday. The sounds of the lute, which used to belong to the general, are a conduit to deep memory; the dance taught by the Tennin connects humans to the inhuman workings of nature.

Premiered by the Dutch National Opera in March 2016, Kaija Saariaho's twin opera, after Ezra Pound's translations of two Noh plays, is scored for small forces: apart from bass Davone Tines as priest/fisherman and countertenor Philippe Jaroussky as ghost/Tennin, there is a dancer (Nora Kimball-Mentzos as the dancing body of the Tennin), a four-voice choir and an orchestra consisting of string quartet, flute, percussion and kantele, all supplemented by electronic sounds. Peter Sellars's staging is similarly modest, making effective use of a simple set design by painter Julie Mehretu, whose complex abstract graphics on a large sheet (one design per opera) form a semi-transparent curtain, with the main characters variously positioning themselves in front of it, to the side of it, or (as supernatural beings) behind it. The sheets show themselves in constantly transforming ways as they are lit differently throughout the performance. During the final dance, the sheet is lifted, revealing the depth of the theatre space with a second, identical sheet in the distance, suggesting the vastness of Nature as represented by the Tennin's dancing.

Saariaho's musical idiom is grounded in harmony and texture, and she makes adept use of the limited forces at her disposal to generate a variety of atmospheres. Instrumental writing largely is in the service of texture, and as a result its lines tend towards the ornamental. By contrast, there is at times some very beautiful, relatively uncomplicated writing for the solo voices, especially in the otherworldly countertenor part, wonderfully performed by Jaroussky. The most important element of the musical discourse, however, may well be the use of electronics, a counterpart to the opera's dramatic subject: the encounter with the spiritual or the virtual.

In the first place, electronics help to amplify the modest ensemble so that it can hold its own in spaces devoted to grand, nineteenth-century opera. This makes the chamber group

² An extract from Henri Michaux *Light through Darkness* is quoted as an epigraph to Romitelli's *Professor Bad Trip*, here in translation by George van Dam and Mike Lynch.