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**Biennale *MUSICS ON STAGE (MUSIQUES EN SCENE)***

**Lyon, March 7-26, 2006**

“Today’s composer, spinning his craft, is no longer just a lonely man at the piano with a blank piece of paper before him. During the preceding decades, his profession had significantly extended its boundaries, leading him into practices that exceed the usual artistic framework”, reads the motivational slogan of the Centres for Creating Music in France. Behind it lies a simple yet innovative message: composers and music authors in general, aware of a crisis of production, a crisis of reception and audience, and aiming to prevent music from lagging behind other branches, assume the role of initiators of the new rapprochement, without neglecting to develop their own languages in accordance with technological timepieces.

Since the beginning of the 1990s to date, six Centres for Creating Music (four national and two regional) in Lyon, Nice, Marseille, Rheims, Albi (Corsica) and Alfortville (near Paris) have been developing and advancing the expanded concept of contemporary music production, ranging from laboratory sound and multimedia research to complex music-theatrical productions, to workshops and programs which establish communication with the most diverse levels of the public. The results are more than impressive: since 2001 alone, through continued annual actions, festivals, in research laboratories and electronic studios, as well as by forming and stimulating less accessible social groups, nearly 500 artists of different profiles and international provenance participated actively in the programs of the Centres for Creating Music, an equal number of contemporary works were presented, including 102 premieres and 50 commissions, while all these activities were followed by more than 50,000 listeners per year on the whole.

That this is another well thought-out initiative of the French cultural policy of local and global impact is witnessed by the fact that the founders and financiers of these national and regional centres are state institutions, such as the Ministry of Culture and Communications and its departments in various regions, cities and municipalities, followed by associations of citizens, including the Society of Authors, Composers and Music Publishers (SACEM), and large private corporations.

In this new artistic family, the National Centre for Creating Music in Lyon – *GRAME* is the most important in terms of its results, the most active in terms of its programs and the most innovative in terms of technology, since it boasts of a high-level laboratory and two studios used by regular and visiting groups of authors of different music and artistic orientations. Led by electronic music composer James Giroudon (1947), *GRAME* has been presenting its research and program concept through the multidisciplinary event *Musics on the Stage* during every month of March since 1992 and biennially since 2002. Even though during the first ten years its concept wavered between the individual and the collective, portraits of contemporary composers and individual large national presentations (for example, contemporary music scenes of China, North America, the Nordic countries, etc.), this festival from its very inception emphasized its multidisciplinary character – selecting the Museum of Contemporary Art in Lyon as its honored partner, and its music pluralism – insisting on the plural form of the term *music* in its name.

In less than three weeks, the last Biennale of *Musics on the Stage* 2006, which was original, heterogeneous and rich in terms of the program, stood out as a unique event which, through its own, imported, commissioned programs or co-productions, explicitly demonstrated the different possibilities of a correspondence between music and the stage, sound and gesture, primarily those based on the demarche of contemporary composers and also those who, even if they do go back to their own past, do so by way of an active and topicalizing dialogue with the present.

**Music and dance:** Two choreographies by Lucinda Childs (1940), performed by the Ballet of the National Opera of Rhine from Mulhouse, were particularly prominent among the initiatives whose first impulses remained in the domain of ‘the latter camp’.

*Dance* from 1979, to the music of Philip Glass and John Adams, would have remained the same old, passé work with repetitive, minimalist and geometric structures, if its new version, created at the initiative of the Biennale, had not opened up a new, more dynamic dimension. Thanks to the recording of an old premiere that was simultaneously projected onto a transparent screen in front of or behind the present (incidentally, superb) performers, the audience was given the opportunity to use obvious evidence during the performance to interactively establish relations between past and present standards of dance, esthetic criteria and the taste of epochs, and to follow their changes.

Unlike this classical music-stage program performed in the *House of Dance* in Lyon, the play *Shared Sensations*, performed in one of the University halls, proved to be an authentic collective work of choreographer Diana Tidswell, composer Jean-François Estage, percussionist Henri-Charles Caget, three professional dancers and three dancers in wheelchairs. Based on actual sound situations recorded during preliminary workshops with the disabled, the composer (a member of the GRAME team) and the percussionist created the music matrix for this performance in a digital studio. The British dancer and choreographer, who has been working in France for years, worked in parallel with professional and amateur dancers, combining the skill and coordination of the former and the uncontrollable movements of the latter and creating 'mixed' pairs and tightrope scenes in no less than completely professional, ideal technical conditions. In a highly expressive artistic result, in which there is no division into the authors and others, in which diversity manifests itself as an advantage and owing to which there is no hierarchy and losers but only winners, a new type of communication has been established which breaks stereotypes and creates possibilities of exchanging comparative physical advantages and disabilities.

The performance *The Smell of the Moon* – a project lasting a full twelve hours in one of the halls of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Lyon, as a joint synesthetic undertaking of two Japanese and six French composers, pianist Thierry Ravissard, buto dancer Masami Yurabe and photographer Blaise Adilon on the theme of Japanese seasons and haiku expression, is the most transparent and, at the same time, the most refined message of the creators of this year's Biennale *Musics on the Stage*. The Festival commissioned eight haiku works for the piano from authors such as Gilbert Amy, Pascal

Dusapin and Philippe Hersant, which were performed, as an incentive for the dancer, every half an hour cyclically for twelve hours, by a pianist in a setting of Japanese gardens, photographed in their most incredible phases. This was an interactive exchange of rituals, temporally condensed on the micro-level and half-a-day-long on the macro-level, between the Western and the Far Eastern worlds before an also multicultural audience.

**Opera:** One of the most productive and most interesting French composers of the middle generation, Dusapin (1955), whom Iannis Xenakis considered his only disciple and who does not hide his literary ambitions, premiered at the Biennale his opera written to his own libretto *Faustus, the Last Night* in the production of the Lyon Opera. On the level of the text written in English based on Christopher Marlowe's work, wrestling with 'the greatest European parable' and trying 'not to retell it', from the start Dusapin slips into familiar metaphors of contemporary civilization and spins around in circles till the very end with Faustus as 'the farcical narcissist and megalomaniac who has infinitive faith in knowledge and enlightenment'. Despite very striking fragments, the extrovert and 'chatty' music overburdened with digitally transformed sound during the entire flow of the work, seems like an hour-long imposing superstructure on a foundationless basis. That general impression of collapsing is further confirmed by the luxurious, effective stage design and direction by Peter Mussbach, by exploiting the slanted stage across which the excellent protagonists (Georg Nigl and Urban Malmberg) physically slide and fall while singing rising melodies and recitations. Announced as one of the emblems of this year's Biennale, this big and expensive project ended up on the margins of the festival, with the organizers treating it more as a contribution of the Lyon Opera to this year's event than as a choice. There was an impression that many of Dusapin's chamber and orchestral works possessed a more intense level of internal theatricalization, and often of spatialization as well, than this ambitious and, in the upshot, non-provocative opera.

Italian composer Claudio Ambrosini compensated for the lack of subversiveness with an opera whose title and subtitle, which require no translation, announce the type of work: *Il canto della Pelle/Sex unlimited*, melodrama giocosa in due parti e un labirinto.

This is followed by a warning that viewing is not recommended to persons under 16 years of age. This contemporary opera for four soloists, an actress, a dancer, an instrumental ensemble, a video and electronics, confronting us, humorously and grotesquely in turns with the physical signs of time, sex and illness, is the first co-production between the Biennale and foreign (Italian) partners, whose further existing on French and Italian stages was guaranteed in advance.

**Video and new technologies:** The Biennale *Musics on the Stage* also encourages traditional ensembles to reach out for the scene. Successful scenic concerts included the vocal ensemble *Lyon Soloists* under the direction of Bernard Tétu owing to their perfectly performed and coordinated program of contemporary sacred music and iconography entitled *Voices of the Sacred (Les voix du sacré)*.

A specific stage event was also presented by Philippe Manoury, opera composer *par excellence*, who entrusted his early composition about fire and water from the 1970s, *On Iron* for chamber choir, piano and percussions, to the *Accentus* choir under the direction of Laurence Equilbey, to theatre director Yannis Kokkos and video artist Éric Duranteau. In contact with a new reading by currently the best French vocal ensemble and with new technologies that have amplified the voices and visualized the ancient debate on fire and water to science-fiction cinematographic proportions, Manoury's complex, densely written and, from today's point of view, hermetic cantata-philosophical essay was reduced to its cinematic, perforce simpler version, without even the slightest change to the original score.

Nonetheless, these were all tame, expected and one-off festival music-stage dialogues compared to *Light Music* (meaning 'weightless and bright' music) of Belgian author Thierry De Mey. The 21<sup>st</sup>-century work for a conductor/soloist, projections equipment and interactive systems, placed on the stage percussionist Jean Geoffroy, one of the best members of the old setting of *Percussionist from Strasbourg*. Turned towards the auditorium and connected to a machine that responds to movement with sound, this 'percussionist without percussions' with fluorescent hands, forms the choreographed movements of a conductor towards the auditorium and leaves both sound and light trails that transcend the cosmic dimension of art. After auditory-visual experiences of this kind,

De Mey's insistence on Nietzsche does not sound pretentious and the chaotic world offered to us opens up new meanings.

'One must have chaos in oneself in order to give birth to a dancing star.'  
(Nietzsche).

Or has the image of the lonely composer at the piano from the beginning of the text been replaced by an even lonelier performer without an instrument, whose only accomplice is high technology?!

Translated by Jelena Nikezić