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**A QUEER PROTOCOL OF HOMAGE  
*CHAMBRES DE TÉNÈBRES/TOMBEAU DE CLAUDE VIVIER*  
BY MARKO NIKODIJEVIĆ**

*After I had completed the composition, I found out that, ironically, just like me, Vivier was terrified of the dark.*

Marko Nikodijević

**Abstract:** The music of Canadian composer Claude Vivier (1948-1983) was used as a fractalized material for the creation of the composition *Chambres de ténèbres/tombeau de Claude Vivier* (2005) by Marko Nikodijević. Vivier's opus and his marginal queer acting were the pillars of Nikodijević's meticulous reading/deconstructing of Vivier's world through his own artistic dilemmas.

**Key words:** queer, homage, deconstruction

The biographical matrix of Canadian composer Claude Vivier (1948-1983) demolishes the stereotypes about the image of a composer. In addition to information about his education, the awards he had won and the names of the mentors during his graduate and advanced studies, the biographical writings about this composer also mention facts concerning the author's background, sexuality and death. It is underlined that the identity of Vivier's biological parents was unknown, that he had been adopted at the age of three, that he was a homosexual and that he was stabbed to death by a young male prostitute in Paris. It is also mentioned that he left behind 49 compositions and that a work in which he had forecast the details of his own tragic demise was found on his desk at the time of his death. Vivier's unusual life and brutal death make him a queer<sup>1</sup> icon of contemporary art music. The circumstances of the author's demise, as well as his obsession with death and decay, create a specific atmosphere for interpreting his art.

Vivier received his music education first in his hometown of Montreal, then at the Institute

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<sup>1</sup>Queer implies unconventional forms of sexual behaviour and activity – homosexuality, transsexualism, bisexuality, cross-dressing, transvestitism, etc. It points to the relativization and plurality of birth identities.

of Sonology in Utrecht, and finally with Karlheinz Stockhausen. He was interested in non-European music, particularly in the music of Bali.<sup>2</sup> The music of Claude Vivier draws on different musical idioms, albeit not through collaging and eclectic confrontation of contrasting music materials. His music presents subtle transitions from microtonality to tonality, from La Monte Youngian “drones” to the booming of Tibetan trumpets, from microtonal sounds of rituals of hidden origin to obsessive-repetitive incantations of forgotten rites, from unison sounds to organum fourth-fifth archaic chords, from sounds of harmonic tones on string instruments to the whistling of performers...

The technique of composing melodic lines in Vivier’s works is specific. They are very frequently developed from a single nucleus, not rarely from unison, and are conveyed by several voices in an obsessive, transfiguring dialogue in which the voices link up with each other through materials, oscillating between “snatching” the materials away from each other, and a mimicking relationship. The microtonal varying and deconstructing of the melody and its developmental potential is one of the striking characteristics of Vivier’s music (a typical example of such an attitude towards the construction of melody is his work *Paramirabo*). It is said that this method of melodic line formation was influenced by music from Bali, which Vivier came across during his trip in 1977. “While in Bali, Vivier became interested in the technique of *kotekan* or interlocking melodies. In Balinese music, two or more melodies, each consisting of a pattern of rests and attacks, occur simultaneously to create the effect of constant interlocking attacks. Although this is primarily a rhythmic device, Vivier was interested in its melodic applications.”<sup>3</sup>

The other specific characteristic of the majority of Vivier’s works is the dramaturgy of sound events. Vivier’s music situations are characterized by non-development. Vivier explained this technique: “My music is a paradox. Usually in music, you have some development, some direction, or some aim... which in my music happens less and less. I just have statements, musical statements, which somehow lead nowhere. Also, on the other hand, they lead somewhere but it’s on a much more subtle basis.”<sup>4</sup> This explanation is close to the definitions of the granular sound synthesis. In Vivier’s interpretation, the “statements” would be the “grains”, the “particles” of

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<sup>2</sup> Paradigmatic examples of this influence can be found in the works “Pulau Dewata” (1977) and “Paramirabo” (1978).

<sup>3</sup> According to: Janette Tilley, *Eternal Recurrence: Aspects of Melody in the Orchestral Music of Claude Vivier*, *Discourses in Music: Volume 2 Number 1* (Fall 2000), <http://www.discourses.ca/v2n1a3.html>

<sup>4</sup> According to: Janette Tilley, *Eternal Recurrence: Aspects of Melody in the Orchestral Music of Claude Vivier*, *Discourses in Music: Volume 2 Number 1* (Fall 2000), <http://www.discourses.ca/v2n1a3.html>  
Claude Vivier quoted in “Hommage à Claude Vivier 1948-1983” Almeida International Festival of Contemporary Music and Performance. June 8-July 8, 1985, Islington, London.

sound which generate the sound event whose microstructure depends on the interaction of parameters that determine the particles, while its macrostructure depends on changes of particle characteristics. Asymmetry of form is a common consequence of such a manner of structuring a music work. Accordingly, the endings of compositions are unexpected and even potentially “open”, “frozen”, like a still film frame that creates an impression of potential movement from the state of unexpected stillness. Endings of compositions seem also to include the silence that follows the sudden change of perception. Even Vivier’s opera *Dreams of a Marco Polo (Rêves d’un Marco Polo)* embodies the logic of construction based on granular synthesis. The “particles” that form this composition are Vivier’s earlier works – *Shiraz* (1977), *Lonely Child* (1980), *Zipangu* (1980), *Wo bist du, Licht* (1981).

It was necessary to summarize the characteristics of Vivier’s music language before beginning to analyze Nikodijević’s reference to Vivier’s poetics, since Claude Vivier’s music is the object of the work *chambres de ténèbres/tombeau de claudie vivier*,<sup>5</sup> (2005). Nikodijević’s composition unexpectedly brought to my theoretical memory two completely different art works – the suite *Le Tombeau de Couperin* by Maurice Ravel and the video installation *Godišnjica smrti (Death Anniversary)*<sup>6</sup> by the visual artist Vladimir Nikolić. Although seemingly different, these two evoked works are connected by the artists’ decisions to problematize the status of the artistic model whose heritage they themselves belong to. However, these works can also be linked by the queer identities of the artists “involved” – Maurice Ravel’s hidden and speculated homosexuality and Marcel Duchamp’s tendency to use Rose Sélavy as his female alter ego, which can also be detected as a cross-dressing play with identities. The decision to make the work an object of the discussion of Claude Vivier’s music and personality is Nikodijević’s statement. It puts in the limelight a queer artistic figure, an author who is on the fringes/margins of the map of the balance of power established in the field of contemporary art music. Consequently, it can be concluded that Nikodijević finds analogies between his own work and status and those of Vivier and that, by choosing his music as the object of his study, he is making a statement that the role/power of the Vivier’s work should be reexamined; of Vivier both as an author and as a member of a minority social group. This decision also indicates a need to explicitly confront the changes of his own music

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<sup>5</sup> The formulation *Tombeau de...* often denotes a work dedicated to someone’s memory, even though it literary means a grave or tomb. I would also like to note that the author insists that the titles of his composition should be written in the original, in lower case letters.

<sup>6</sup> In the video installation *Godišnjica smrti (Death Anniversary)* (2004), Vladimir Nikolić places a professional mourner at the grave of Marcel Duchamp in Rouen (France) where she laments the late artist, as well as art in general.

taste, personified in the work of the protagonist of the marginal history of music of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In doing so, Nikodijević creates both continuity and a shift with regard to his more recent works, where he also reexamined the positions of authors, but positions of “strong” musical individuals of the time – for example, György Ligeti, Igor Stravinsky, Olivier Messiaen (music box/selbstportrait mit ligeti und stravinsky /und messiaen ist auch dabei/, 2000 - 2001/2003, revision 2006), and Carlo Gesualdo da Venosa (gesualdo transcriptions I – objekt/raum, 2004, *gesualdo transcriptions III-o vos omnes*, 2005).

The composition *Chambres de ténèbres/tombeau de Claude Vivier* for an ensemble of 15 players<sup>7</sup> was written for the *Nouvel Ensemble Moderne*<sup>8</sup>. It lasts about ten minutes and consists of three movements. The first movement (Adagio, calmo e sostenuto, poco rubato) starts from unison, *in C*. Before long, the unison is abandoned and from it emerges an enticing chromatic motive that is obsessively exchanged by the clarinet and the flute, after which the fragments and logic of the motive development are gradually taken over by parts of the strings and especially articulated by the viola part of a Berioesque sonority, with the motive structure finally extending to the entire ensemble. This is, in fact, the aforementioned technique of constructing Vivier’s melodies which is simulated by this movement.

The dynamic and articulatory components leave their mark on this thematic “dialoguing”, underlined by the perpetuated structure of the motive itself. The entire movement unfolds in nuances of *piano* dynamics, from the unison beginning in *pppp* towards the end, whose requested dynamics is *p*. With regard to the formal shaping of the movement, one cannot talk about establishing symmetry. The structure of the work is developmental and the author shows no tendency towards formal completeness. The movement’s specific sonority has been achieved through the use of playing techniques that reexamine the colours of the instruments of the strings; flautato, *sul tasto*, *molto sul tasto* (like the viola), *sul ponticello* (a harmonic tone with a clearly present fundamental), *molto sul ponticello* (an extreme harmonic tone with a barely present fundamental), a panpipe effect (on the violin and the viola it is played on the upper half of the fourth string *molto sul tasto*), Bartók’s *pizzicato*.

After the first movement of quite a chamber sonority, Nikodijević decides upon an extensive reexamination of the potential of the performing apparatus. What is fascinating in the second

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<sup>7</sup> Flute/piccolo, oboe, clarinet *in B flat*, bass clarinet *in B flat*, bassoon, horn *in F*, piccolo trumpet *in B flat*, tenor trombone, percussion instruments – one performer (two crotals, two triangles, two wood blocks, two cowbells, vibra slap, cymbalom, tambourine, conga, bass drum, piano, two violins, viola, violoncello, double bass).

movement – a deuxième: *moderato, maestoso e misurato, con fuoco* – is the effectiveness with which Nikodijević “crushes” the stereotypes of the symphonic apparatus by a fractal logic of exposing and superimposing music materials. Unexpectedly, in the 35<sup>th</sup> bar in the clarinet part, there appears a reminiscence of the chromatic thematic material of the first movement, which is, however, accompanied by impressive “cuts” of the strings that simulate the sonority of an ensemble performing music for a Far Eastern traditional music theatre.

The third movement – la troisième: *prestissimo, granulare* – is the only movement in which Nikodijević openly refers to one of Vivier’s works. The work in question is the composition *Zipangu* (1980) for 13 strings, which Nikodijević alludes to by the comment: *Zipangu, tempo di risonanza, poco rubato* – in the 93<sup>rd</sup> bar. The compositional logic in this movement is primarily based on the previously described logic of granular sound synthesis. Thematic materials are “crushed” into “grains” that establish diverse relationships – they alternate, superimpose, gain on one another at breakneck speed in the course of the movement. Both the thematic material and the compositional logic are of Vivieresque provenance, which means that this movement has brought the deconstruction of Vivier’s music to a virtuosic peak.

Nikodijević “announced” his homage to Vivier with the following words: “Strange, beautiful, excessive. Those are the words that come to my mind when thinking about Vivier. The three chambers are all filled with bits of Vivier’s music, like objects suspended in space, in fractal, holographic rooms recalling the computer music techniques on which my instrumental music is based. Stopped and inverted decays, frozen resonances, delays and echoes, processes recalling granular synthesis, all there to simulate an ever-changing room-size and spatial form, inter-cut with dance-club episodes.”<sup>9</sup> And indeed, through Vivier’s music language and its deconstruction, Nikodijević masterfully and yet unobtrusively demonstrated what the terms strange, beautiful and excessive mean to him in music. Thus, he himself joined one of the possible lines of marginal histories of the contemporary music scene. And not entirely unexpectedly, it is possible that this work has given Vivier a strong and insightful follower who will continue to reexamine queer identity in the world of music.

Translated by Jelena Nikezić

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<sup>8</sup> This composition received the award of the Forum of the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne.

## Summary

### **A QUEER PROTOCOL OF HOMAGE *CHAMBRES DE TÉNÈBRES/TOMBEAU DE CLAUDE VIVIER* BY MARKO NIKODIJEVIĆ**

The music of Canadian composer Claude Vivier (1948-1983) was used as a fractalized material for the composition *Chambres de ténèbres/tombeau de Claude Vivier* (2005) by Marko Nikodijević. Vivier's opus, together with his marginal queer acting, were pillars of Nikodijević's reading/deconstructing Vivier's world through Nikodijević's own artistic dilemmas.

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<sup>9</sup> From the programme note for the composition, author M. Nikodijević.

**Example 1: Marko Nikodijević, *Chambres de ténèbres/Tombeau de Claude Vivier, Adagio, calmo e sostenuto, poco rubato, bars 1-10***

*adagio, calmo e sostenuto, poco rubato* ♩ = 56 *la première*

The score is for a 4/4 piece in G major. The tempo is *adagio, calmo e sostenuto, poco rubato* with a metronome marking of ♩ = 56. The first movement is titled *la première*. The instrumentation includes flute, oboe, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, horn, piccolo trumpet, trombone, percussion, piano, violin I, violin II, viola, violoncello, and double bass. The flute part begins with a *vibr. lento* instruction and features dynamics of *n.*, *pp*, *n.*, *pp*, and *n.*. The clarinet part starts with *pppp* and includes *p*, *n.*, *n.*, *p*, and *pp* dynamics, with a *cantando* instruction. The bass clarinet and bassoon parts have *ppp* dynamics. The violin I part is marked *with mute* and *pppp*. The violin II part has *with mute*, *pppp*, and *vibr. lento* markings. The viola part is marked *with mute* and *pppp*. The violoncello part is marked *with mute* and *pppp*. The double bass part is marked *S.P.* and features dynamics of *n.<*, *n.<*, *n.<*, *n.<*, *n.<*, and *n.<*.

7

fl. *p*

ob.

cl. *p*

b. cl. *ppp*

bsn.

hn.

tpt.

tbn.

perc.

pno.

vn. I *S.P., flaut., nervoso e meccanicamente, spiccato* *ppp* *S.T., ord.* *pp*

vn. II *S.P., col legno battuto* *p* *arco, S.T.* *pp*

vla. *IV, M.S.T., pan flute effect* *p*

vc. *S.P.* *n.*

d.b. *n.* *pp* *n.* *pp* *n.*

Detailed description: This page of a musical score covers measures 7, 8, and 9. The woodwind section includes flute (fl.), oboe (ob.), clarinet (cl.), bass clarinet (b. cl.), and bassoon (bsn.). The string section includes violin I (vn. I), violin II (vn. II), viola (vla.), violoncello (vc.), and double bass (d.b.). Percussion (perc.) and piano (pno.) are also present. Measure 7 features a flute entry with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a clarinet entry with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The bass clarinet plays a very soft (*ppp*) line. Measures 8 and 9 show the violin I and II parts with various dynamics and articulations, including *ppp*, *p*, and *pp*. The viola part has a *p* dynamic and a 7:6 ratio. The double bass part has a *pp* dynamic and includes accents (*n.*) and slurs.

Example 2 – Marko Nikodijević, *Chambres de ténèbres/Tombeau de Claude Vivier, Moderato, maestoso e misurato, con fuoco, bars 35-37*

32

fl. *breath-tone*  
*pp* *n.*

ob.

cl.

b. cl.

bsn.

hn.

tpt.

tbn.

perc.

pno.

vn. I *S.P., flaut., nervoso e meccanicamente, spiccato*

vn. II *S.P., col legno battuto*  
*p*

vla. *IV., M.S.T., pan flute effect*  
*p* *n.*

vc. *ord.*  
*ppp* *n.*

d.b.

36 *sostenutissimo* ♩ = 48 *rit.* *a tempo*

fl. - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8

ob. - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8

cl. *pp* - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8

b. cl. *pp* - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8

bsn. - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8

hn. - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8

tpt. - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8

tbn. - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8

perc. - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8

pno. - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8

vn. I *IV, M.S.T., pan flute effect*  
*n. mf* - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8

vn. II *ord., a punta d'arco*  
*n.* - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8

vla. *ord., a punta d'arco*  
*n.* - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8

vc. *S.P., flaut.*  
*n.* - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8

d.b. *S.P., flaut.*  
*n.* - - - 3/4 - - 2/4 - 3:2/8