GERARD GRISEY
Upon completing his studies at the Paris Conservatory in 1972, having studied with composers Olivier Messiaen and Henri Dutilleux, Gérard Grisey (1946-1998) won the coveted Prix de Rome and founded, with fellow composers Tristan Murail, Michel Lévinas, Hugues Dufourt, and Roger Tellier, a contemporary music ensemble known as l'Itinéraire. This ensemble, and the composers associated with it, became the driving force behind the establishment of an attitude towards composition that has come to be known as spectral music.

Any vibration, according to the work of French mathematician and physicist Joseph Fourier, may be analyzed as the interaction of a number of individual sinusoidal frequencies. In music, this property is evident in the phenomenon of overtones or partials that combine in particular ways to create a sense of timbre. Groups of overtones and their relationships (specifically their relative frequencies and intensities) are known as spectra, and translating these spectra into musical sonorities provides composers with tools for the isolation and manipulation of timbre as the basis for the interaction of musical forces. Spectral composers use these “spectra” along with the refined capabilities of sonic analysis available through modern technology to construct compositional models that are grounded in the innate properties of sound.

Due primarily to the use of spectra as compositional models, the term “spectral” has come to be the standard label associated with this music. However, most of its founders have abandoned this term as an overly reductive characterization of a broad aesthetic preoccupation with exploring how the innate properties of sound may be translated into musical processes. Grisey was at the forefront of this opposition, proposing instead the term “liminal” as a more appropriate label for this attitude towards composition.

Liminality, in the sense of the threshold between two perceptual phenomena, can be seen on every level of a spectral composition. Through its mimetic nature, spectral music in general, and the music of Gérard Grisey in particular, explores the regions between the conception and perception of one-dimensional timbre and multi-dimensional harmony, exact frequency and approximate pitch, precise duration and rhythmic subdivision, and the gradual evolution of musical processes and the precise articulation of musical form.

In order to refine and develop his particular attitude towards composition, Grisey pursued studies in acoustics with Emile Leipp at the Paris VI University in 1974 and further training in acoustic research at IRCAM in 1980. In 1982, Grisey accepted a position at the University of California, Berkeley as a professor of music, theory and composition. In 1986, he left Berkeley to teach composition at the Paris Conservatory, a post he held until his death on November 11th, 1998 at the age of 52.

—Christopher Gainey
Ensemble Concert
Dec. 8, 2013, 7:30 p.m. RIVERSIDE RECTORAL HALL

PROGRAM

Abiogenesis (2013)
Emilie Duncan, flute
Allison Osterman, oboe
Thiago Ancelmo de Souza, clarinet
Fabio Benites Felipe da Silva, bassoon
Jose A. Zayas-Caban, baritone saxophone
Russ Lenth, horn
Dee Bierschenk, trumpet
Nathaniel Lee, trombone
Adam Stevens, tuba
Andrew Thierauf & Tyler Swick, percussion
Casey Rafin, piano
Andrew Gentzsch & Rebecca Malina, violins
Manuel Tabora Deras, viola
Tom Maples, violoncello
Michael White, double bass
Zachary Stanton, conductor

Rebonds A pour percussion solo (1987-89)
Iannis Xenakis
(1922-2001)
Andrew Thierauf, percussion

Time’s Vestiges (2013)
Emilie Duncan, flute
Thiago Ancelmo de Souza, clarinet
Fabio Benites Felipe da Silva, bassoon
Kestin Thelandez, horn
Casey Rafin, piano
Andrew Gentzsch & Rebecca Malina, violins
Manuel Tabora Deras, viola
Tom Maples, violoncello
Michael White, double bass
David Gompper, conductor

INTERMISSION

For the consideration of our performers and guests, please take a moment to turn off your cell phone. Thank You.
IANNIS XENAKIS (1922-2001), a Greek composer and architect, had a tragic yet inspiring early life. His mother died when he was only five and his father was distant. During the late 1930s he fought with the Greek Resistance against German and Italian forces until its demise in 1944. At that point he enrolled in the Athens Polytechnic Institute and received his degree as an engineer. He joined the famous 'Internationale' movement and was eventually forced to leave Greece in 1947. He fled to Paris where he found employment under the famous architect Le Corbusier. During his time in Paris he began studying composition, specifically under Messiaen and later joined the Groupe de Recherches de Musique Concrète - one of the first studios dedicated to electronic music. He left Le Corbusier's studio in 1959 and supported himself on composing, teaching, and writing about music. His architecture and music are highly influenced by the Golden Mean, the ratio at which two parts of the whole are in the same proportion as the larger part is to the whole. He uses the Golden Mean in both form and rhythm, giving his works a unique blend of mathematics and music.

TIME'S VESTIGES

"We find no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end."

With this famous conclusion drawn by James Hutton in 1788, modern geology took a decisive break from a linear narrative, and human history became disentangled from the geological record. Uniformitarian processes that have always existed will continue to do so, forming an unending chain of cyclical time. To paraphrase the opening lines of Eliot's Four Quartets, past and future are always present — in the present.

I'd like to think of this piece as representing some of the ways in which metaphors drawn from geologi- cal 'deep time' and cycles of time can be made clear. There are never strict processes, and they do not repeat. Moments of directionality are followed by stasis, only to start up again. This is especially so in the first section, which gradually transforms a static structure with elements of 'ceaseless motion' bubbling under the surface into a more active foreground texture. The final section of the piece is another slow transformation, in which the strings literally erode their tunings into new, strange forms. Anthony Cheung, March 2013

ANTHONY CHEUNG (born San Francisco) is a composer and pianist. As a performer and advocate for new music, Cheung is Artistic Director of the Tale Ensemble, which he co-founded in 2007. His music has been commissioned by the Ensemble Modern, Ensemble Intercontemporain, New York Philharmonic, Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, Schaarum Ensemble Berlin, and also performed by Le Neuf Ensemble Moderne, Linea, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Minnesota Orchestra, and the French National Orchestras of Lille and Lorraine, among others.

He has received awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and ASCAP, and first prize in the Sixth International Duruflé Competition, as well as a Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome. His music has been programmed at festivals such as Ultraschall (Berlin), Creem (Frankfurt), Witten Tage, Helsinki Festival and Musica Nova Helsinki, Centre Acanthes, Musica (Strasbourg), and Nuova Consonanza (Rome).

As a writer and scholar, he has completed a dissertation on György Ligeti (for the Humbart Concerto, 2010), as well as articles on contemporary music for both specialists and a general reader. His musical interests include notational aesthetics, jazz improvisation and transcription, microtonal and alternate tunings, rhythmic polyphony, and temporal perception, and his music also engages poetic imagery, syntax and rhetoric, natural phenomena, and the visual arts.

Anthony received a BA in Music and History from Harvard and a doctorate from Columbia University, where he taught and also served as assistant conductor of the Columbia Symphony Orchestra for fourteen years. He was a Junior Fellow at the Society of Fellows, and is currently an Assistant Professor of Music at the University of Chicago. [cheungmusic.com]

VORTEX TEMPOUR

The title Vortex Temporum indicates the beginning of the system of rotation, repeated arpeggios and their metamorphosis in various transient passages. The problem here is to enter the depths of my recent research on the use of the same system at different times. The three basic elements - a sinuosoidal wave - and two continuous events, an attack with or without resonance as well as a sound held with or without crescendo. There are three various spectra: harmonics, 'stretched disharmonies' and 'compressed disharmonies'; their different tempo; basic, more or less expanded, and more or less contracted. These are the archetypes that guide Vortex Temporum.

In addition to the initial introductory vibration formula taken directly from Daphnis et Chloé, 'Vortex' suggested to me harmonic writings focused around the four tones of the diminished seventh chord, a rotational chord par excellence. Treating each of these tones as leading ones, we obtain the possibility of multiple modulations. Of course, we aren't dealing here with the tonal system but rather with considerations of what might still be relevant and innovative in this system. The chord about which I'm speaking is thus a common product of the three previously written spectra and determines other displacements.

The piano used in the work is tuned a quarter tone lower, which changes the sound of the instrument, at the same time facilitating the integration within microintervals, which are essential in this work. In Vortex Temporum the three archetypes described above revolve around one fragment and the other in temporal intervals, differing among themselves as among people (the tempo of speech and breathing, the spectral time of sleeping rhythms), and birds or insects (extremely contracted time, whose contours become obliterated). Thanks to this imagined microscope, the notes become sound, a chord becomes a spectral complex, and rhythm transforms into a wave of unexpected duration.

The three portions of the first part, dedicated to Gérard Zinsstag, develop three aspects of the original wave, well known to acoustic engineer the sinusoidal wave (vibration formula), the square wave (dotted rhythm) and the jagged wave (piano solo). They develop the tempo, which can be defined as "joyful", the tempo of articulation, rhythm of human breathing. The isolated piano section reaches the boundaries of virtuosity.

The second part, dedicated to Salvatore Sciarrino, approaches the same material in expanded time. Initial Gestalt appears here only once, spreading throughout the entire piece. I tried here to create the feeling of the confused speed inside the slow tempo.

Part three, dedicated to Helmut Lachenmann, introduces a long process allowing the creation of inter- polation, which appears between the various sequences. Contingency gradually establishes, and expands, finally becoming a kind of widely conceived projection of the events from the first part. The spectra originally developed in the harmonic discourse of part two expand here to an extent degree, enabling the listener to detect the structure and entrance into other time dimension.

Short interludes are planned between the parts of Vortex Temporum. A few breaths, noises and discrete noises colour the awkward silence, and even the discomfort of the musicians and listeners, who hear their own breathing between he parts. Treating waiting time this way, linking the time of the audience with the time of the work, refers to some of my earlier works, for example Dérives, Patrics or Jour, Contrejour. Here, of course, these tiny noises are allied with the morphology of Vortex Temporum.

Overthrowing the material in favor of pure endurance is a dream, which I have been carrying out for many years. Vortex Temporum is perhaps only a history of the arpeggio in time and space - from the point of view of our ears.

Vortex Temporum was commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture, Ministerium für Kunst Baden-Württemberg und the Westdeutsche Rundfunk Köln, at the special request of 'Ensemble Recherche'.

— Gérard Grisyé

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