

Voix et Vues Planétaires

by Henri Pousseur



Conway Hall
Red Lion Square
London, WC1
Saturday February 24th, 2007
7.00 pm

VOIX ET VUES PLANÉTAIRES

(PLANETARY VIEWS AND VOICES)

5 audiovisual landscapes by Henri POUSSEUR and Michel BUTOR (in collaboration with Denis Pousseur and Enrico Bagnoli).

- 0) SLAVOWALLOON BELLS (80 secs.)
- 1) ALASKAMAZONIA (6 min.)
- 2) CELTIBERIAN GAMELAN (20 min.)
- 3) CANADACATHAY (7 min.)
- 4) ASIATOCEANIC CARIBBEAN (29 min.)
- 5) VIETNAMIBIA (9 min.)

Movements 1 to 5 have two elements:

- (a) The reading of a prose poem by Michel Butor (ca. 2 min. each) followed by
- (b) The ethno-numerical landscape (durations in parentheses)

The five audiovisual landscapes (Movements 1 to 5) will be preceded by the epigram:
SLAVOWALLOON BELLS (Movement 0).

There will be no intermission; the entire presentation will last about 90 minutes.

Voix et Vues Planétaires will be diffused by: Henri Pousseur who will also give a short introduction to the whole work.

Michel Butor's prose poems will be read by: Edward Davis

This concert is supported with funds from the Lansdown Centre for Electronic Arts, Middlesex University (www.cea.mdx.ac.uk)

A MULTIMEDIAL MUSIC

VOIX ET VUES PLANÉTAIRES is an audiovisual version of 5 of the 16 PAYSAGES of the same name (1), which themselves, constitute the essential framework of the VILLAGE PLANÉTAIRE VU DE NIVELLES, a 16-hour programme designed to inhabit the inner courtyard of an architectural complex built by Philippe Samyn in the north of this Belgian city. As this longer programme is not yet installed (and may never be), a concise version has been prepared for use in other installations, entitled UN JOUR DU MONDE EN 280 MINUTES (A DAY ON EARTH IN 280 MINUTES), an allusive homage to Jules Verne's "Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingt jours"

The quasi-symphonic, audio-visual set in five movements was devised in order to facilitate concert performances of this ethno-electroacoustic music. It was also a reaction to my experience that merely listening to prerecorded music in a theatre without any visual stimulus often amounts to "too little" (a problem that is usually – and some times effectively - overcome by a more-or-less "spectacular" spatialisation of sound). Here, however, it seemed to me that the primarily "figurative" nature of the musical material itself if not required then at least permitted the addition of a visual dimension, preferably plastic, capable of enriching and replicating the oneiric sense of realism latent within these musical sequences. (It pleases me to say that the musical elements for this complete set of 16 pieces were produced by my son Denis in his personal studio, from my rather flexible designs and my choices of samples of traditional music, coming from the entire world. The quality, both materially and formally, of these sonic visions is in large part thanks to him, who is much more accustomed to and knowledgeable about digital sound than I am).

It was through taking these sound-recordings as unchanging canvases (excepting the possibility of making a spatial distribution of the two-track tapes in performance) that I was able to imagine visual extensions which would meet the eye in a way that was fully integrated phenomenologically. An initial version with 6 landscapes, rather clumsy and poorly-synchronised and with the somewhat disordered juxtaposition of

discontinuous digital images on two screens, was presented three years earlier at the University of Cologne, where the proceedings were viewed with marked indulgence and unwavering interest. After this unfulfilling experience, I decided to return to the drawing board and improve the visual elements and especially my equipment.

Armed with the very versatile Photoshop programme, as well as OpenMedia software by Enrico Bagnoli, which together allowed my hundreds of images to flow from one to another, I laboured for a year-and-a-half or so by honing my craft and adopting a visual language that I felt was seldom explored. I worked on 5 of my Paysages, little by little, the first versions of which were still flawed - but the later ones less than my first attempts. The chronology of the realisations is as follows: 3, 5, 2, 4, 1 (2). Then, not long ago, they were subjected to "cleaning up" - corrections, improvements, and even additions - which seemed indispensable for a public presentation.

In its present form, what one sees (and hears!) should amount to a complex state of synesthesia, capable of producing intense and specific pleasure - assuming that the ideal state of active engagement and memory recall, among other attentive conditions, is attained. This is what I envision, anyway.

Before going further, I must mention Michel Butor, who not only helped me to devise the titles of the 16 Paysages, each expressing the commonality of the evoked Earth's regions, especially those furthest apart, but also wrote a massive isomorphic poem of the same name. After hearing my musical fragments, he re-imagined the project in a most original manner: For each Landscape, 4 strophes, each with 8 heptameters, in which shared elements are easily uncovered, are simultaneously separated and linked together via 3 paragraphs of prose. At the first performances, Butor himself read the three prose fragments (reassembled) before their musical counterpart was heard.

I also integrated and adapted echoes of his prose in my "image flux", along with

some of his strophes - both in excerpt form and in their entirety - as well as his texts for other Paysages, the latter a practice which was required in a few specific contexts. This presence of the word aims not only to enhance the comprehension level of the music, by stimulating the creative reception of the images, but also to provide for additional semantic connotations. The eyes are likewise kept busy: lines of written words appear in different fields of view, traveling along a free and "open" trajectory. Variations in duration render this process either easy and relaxed, or possibly challenging, were only a short time available.

One is thus, if I have achieved my goal, in the presence of a multidimensional reality, one which at any moment may be considered from three different but interrelated perspectives.

(A) A sort of painting in continuous transformation, whose movements are principally perpendicular to the screen, that is to say that they develop along the eye-screen axis: gradual shifts in colour and texture, replacement of certain parts of the frame while retaining its overall structure, etc. However, the virtual lateral movements suggested by the images themselves (of a realist nature, such as birds in flight or the beating of drums, which the music brings to life, or more abstract forms such as wave undulations which come close to handwriting, while the opposite could also be true) establish a visual convention which the eye is capable of accepting as an half-real but plausible motion.

(B) A music in which all "realistic" aspects may be integrated to suit its general dynamic: not only that of the ethnic samples, but also of the "sound baths" in which they merge to become organic material. These "realistic" qualities are both clarified and lengthened along similar lines: the images must properly speak for themselves as ably as the written words (which, through deformations, may evolve in unexpected independant directions).

(C) Finally, a poetry which is put to good use amidst this rich optical-acoustic polyphony and whose words join with images both sonic and visual to make an

obvious state of interdependency - a hyper-post-Webernesque crossbreeding of sorts, with no need for strict parity. All of this unfolds like a waking dream (rather than a tinge of exoticism): the symbolic representation of cultures, initially distant, coming toward each other and melting, even if only temporarily. Perhaps these mixtures are a premonition of what could be, were there mutual understanding: a non-hierarchical interrelationship, a lively and inspirational peace. Alternatively, maybe it is a tableau of potential world beauty, these days still quite difficult, if not impossible, to see.

Henri Pousseur

Waterloo, 26th October 2004

(1) There is a 3-CD set containing the 16 Paysages along with an introductory “carillon brabançon”, based on the music of Nivelles' bell ringers. In addition to the music, the box contains an extensive booklet with the complete poetic structure of Michel Butor and two commentaries. It was released by ALGA MARGHEN in Milan in 2004 with the catalogue number plana-P 21NMN.051.

(2) The title of the fourth landscape in this version has been slightly modified from its original, CARAÏBES OURALOCÉANIENNES. The images of the present piece have alluded specifically to a rather southerly zone below the Ural region, not far from the Caspian Sea. In other words, not far from Central Asia and the Caucasus, or to go even further in these directions, towards Pakistan, Turkey or Egypt.

Translation:

Henri Pousseur and Dan Albertson

The prose poems preceding Movements 1 to 5 of

‘Voix et Vues Planétaires’

by: **Michel BUTOR**

1. ALASKAMAZONIE

La mer, houles et replis, avec les cris des mouettes, grand large et marées, avec les chants des baleines au loin. Par les fenêtres du navire nous voyons défiler fjords et glaciers. Soudain des blocs se détachent et tombent dans les chenaux en éclaboussant. Voici des chasseurs qui rentrent avec viandes et fourrures.

Le fleuve grand comme la mer, méandres et rapides avec les cris des singes, embarcadères et jangadas avec les feulements des jaguars au loin. Par les fenêtres du navire nous voyons s’envoler les oiseaux éclatants parmi les lianes qui tombent des hautes branches des arbres immenses. Voici des archers qui rentrent avec élytres et plumes.

Le port entre la mer et le fleuve, grues et treuils avec les cris des manoeuvres, dragues et remorqueurs avec une mélodie au loin. Nous voyons s’exaspérer les machines dans les conserveries. Voici des matelots qui cherchent fortune. Le froid salue la chaleur; les rouages rêvent de solitudes; les latitudes se recouvrent dans la transe des danseurs. La mer; le fleuve.

1. ALASKAMAZONIA

The sea, swell and counterswell, seagulls crying, tides and open water with the singing of whales far away. Through the ship's window we see fjords and glaciers pass by. Suddenly, blocks of ice break free and fall into the channels with a splash. And here come hunters returning with meat and furs.

The river, vast as the sea, rapids and meanders with the cries of monkeys, jetties and jangadas with the growling of jaguars far away. Through the ship's window we see brilliant birds take flight amongst the lianas cascading from the topmost branches of huge trees. And here come archers returning with elytrons and feathers.

The port between the sea and the river, streets and winches with the shouts of labourers, dredgers and tugboats with a melody far away. We see machines in canning-factories toil and judder. And here come sailors seeking their fortunes. Cold greets heat: cogwheels dream of solitary places: latitudes fuse in the dancers' trance. The sea, the river.

2. GAMELANG CELTIBÈRE

Au-dessus des marais se découpe le faubourg industriel avec ses toits en dents de scie, ses cheminées avec panaches de noirceur, ses rangées de maisons, ses manifestations et ses descentes de police. Issus des déchirures entre les nuages, des rayons de plus en plus horizontaux éveillent des cuivres dans les vitres. Sous la pluie les cornemuses rêvent de soleil.

Les pays arides projettent leur sites sur l'écran des vapeurs. L'Australie succède à l'Espagne. Les oiseaux poursuivent leurs migrations. Les taureaux mugissent dans l'arène. Notre foule en traverse une autre. Des vignes andalouses aux tamis des chercheurs d'or, dans la torpeur, guitares et didjeridoos rêvent de rosée.

Des arcs-en-ciel passent d'île en île. Nous voyons très sérieusement une mosquée à la place d'une usine; les affiches s'animent en théâtre d'ombres. Sur le faubourg industriel, l'oeil de Vénus, dans une éclaircie, dirige les carillons vers la nuit.

2. CELTIBERIAN GAMELAN

Above the marshes the outline of the industrial suburb with its saw-tooth roofs, black-plumed chimneys, its rows of houses, demos and police-raids. Through rents in the clouds, ever more horizontal rays awaken copper in the window panes. Bagpipes dream of sunshine.

Dry lands project their sites on the mist-screen. Australia follows Spain. Birds carry on migrating. Bulls roar in the arena. The crowd of our people crosses over another. Andalusian vines with gold-prospectors' riddles, in the torpor, guitars and didgeridoos dream of dew.

Rainbows flit from island to island. We see very clearly a mosque instead of a factory: posters come to life in shadow-theatre. Over the industrial suburb, the eye of Venus, through a gap in the clouds, conducts peals of bells towards the night.

3. CANADCATHAY

Crépitements, explosions, souffles de forge, écroulements. Les flammes gagnent. Il ne restera bientôt plus rien de la prairie. Le bétail fuit. Toute la province est menacée, la nation, le continent même. Les Indiens survivants essaient d'opposer au sinistre ce dont ils se souviennent le leurs incantations de jadis, de le contenir par l'édification d'une sorte de muraille de Chine mentale.

Mais rien n'y fait; le tapis déroule ses langues acérées et sinueuses jusqu'aux rails, jusqu'à la gare où des exilés se hissent dans le train pour aller sauter dans l'avion d'où l'on regardera à peine le passage des archipels en attendant l'atterrissage et la découverte de la grande ville en transformation autour de sa cité qui n'est plus interdite, autour de son palais naguère impérial sous la montagne de charbon, avec ses opéras, céramiques, oriflammes et amères récapitulations, remontées de splendeurs et d'horreurs.

Pour s'en revenir enfin, chargés d'idéogrammes et de bronze, de l'autre côté de la mer où les flammes auront tout dévoré sur la prairie que recouvre maintenant miséricordieusement la neige sur laquelle les ombres des nuages improvisent leurs lavis.

3. CANADACATHAY

Cracklings, explosions, furnace-blasts, crashings down. The flames are gaining ground. Soon nothing will be left of the prairie. Herds flee. The entire province is under threat, the nation, the continent itself. The surviving Indians try to pit against the disaster what they remember of their age-old incantations, to contain it by building a kind of mental Great Wall of China.

But nothing works; the carpet unrolls its sinuous, sharp tongues right to the rails, to the station where exiles climb on to the train then jump into the aeroplane where they will scarcely glance at the archipelagos going by as they await the landing and the discovery of a huge conurbation in the midst of change, around its city which is no longer forbidden, its imperial palace beneath the mountain of coal, its operas, ceramics, banners and bitter reminders, buzzing with splendours and horrors.

To return at last. loaded with ideograms and bronze to the other side of the sea where the flames will have devoured everything on the prairie, now mercifully covered in snow, upon which cloud-shadows improvise with their colour washes.

4. CARAÏBES ASIATOCÉANIENNES

La steppe roule en grandes vagues que les chevaux dévalent comme des dauphins, se dépassant, caracolant, s'ébrouant dans l'écume de poussière. Chargeant depuis le second horizon qu'une pointe de gallop découvre derrière le premier, le vent apporte le refrain d'une mère apaisant son enfant.

Des tourbillons de fumée font virer les hautes herbes, apportant avec eux des échos d'outre-désert et d'outre-mer, d'outre-villes et d'outre-neige. Par ici on devine le Caucase, par là ce sont plutôt les Andes. Des lignes plus ou moins régulières relient les continents dont la dérive semble loin d'être achevée. Dans les étages des torrents, on observe des raz-de-marée miniature. Par ici on devine les Antilles, par là ce sont plutôt les Tonga. Les oiseaux répondent aux sirènes.

Les vagues de la steppe deviennent liquides et brassent les souvenirs que les cyclones ramènent de leurs tours du monde, les grandes villes d'Europe d'abord, avec leurs vacarmes et leurs concerts; et au milieu des eaux, la mère nullement dépaysée continue ses couplets pour réendormir son enfant réveillé par le passage d'un avion.

4. ASIATOCEANIC CARIBBEAN

The steppe undulates in great waves, down which hurtle horses, like dolphins, passing each other, rearing up, snorting and rolling in the dust-spume. Rushing in from the second horizon which a burst of galloping discovers behind the first, the wind carries the refrain of a mother soothing her child.

Eddies of smoke corkscrew the high grasses, bringing with them echoes from beyond the desert, beyond the sea, beyond the cities and beyond the snow. Here we glimpse the Caucasus, there more likely, the Andes. More or less regular lines link the continents, whose drift seems to be far from over. In the shelves of mountain-streams we see miniature tidal-waves. Here we glimpse the West Indies, there, more likely, the Tonga Islands. Birds answer sirens.

The waves of the steppe become liquid and toss around memories brought back by cyclones as they circle the world, first the great cities of Europe, with their rowdiness and their concerts; and in the midst of the waters the mother, who is not in the slightest at sea, continues her couplets to lull back to sleep her child, woken by a passing aeroplane.

5. VIETNAMIBIE

Volant, voletant, se posant parmi les roseaux, se berçant sur le hamac d'une branche pleureuse, se mouillant, baignant, secouant, s'ébourriffant; grandissant, les pattes devenant des jambes, les doigts se développant au bout des ailes, les plumes devenant poils et se dispersant dans la chaleur, le bec s'assouplissant et se divisant en nez et lèvres.

Alors, au vent de l'Atlantique, les chants s'articulent autrement; et si l'on est capable de saisir avec des mains et de fabriquer de merveilleux instruments de musique, une nostalgie vous prend au souvenir de l'expression naturelle que l'on était capable de moduler en mille façons selon les circonstances et les humeurs, au souvenir de cette liberté à laquelle on a renoncé pour parvenir à plus de puissance et sécurité.

Alors, au vent du Pacifique, si on a goûté à quelques fruits de l'arbre du savoir, et si certains ont semblé bien amers, et même s'il y en a tant d'autres à cueillir parmi lesquels il y en aura d'exaltants, quand vient le soir au monastère des phénix, on éprouve l'envie de se couvrir de polis qui redeviennent des plumes, de refermer ses mains pour que les bras retrouvent leur extension d'ailes, de réunir en bec ses lèvres et son nez, de serrer en pattes ses jambes pour mieux prendre son essor parmi les roseaux, depuis les savanes jusqu'aux rizières, retrouver le vol de jadis et chanter à perte de voix.

5. VIETNAMIBIA

Flying, fluttering, alighting on reeds, rocking in the hammock of a weeping branch, getting wet, bathing, puffing out its feathers; growing, its claws becoming legs, fingers developing at the ends of its wings, its feathers becoming hair and falling out in the heat, its beak softening and dividing into nose and lips.

But then, in the Atlantic wind, songs are sung differently; and if you are capable of taking into your hands and making marvellous instruments of music, you are seized with nostalgia at the memory of the natural expressions that you could modulate a thousand ways according to circumstance and mood, the memory of that freedom you gave up for more power and security.

But then in the Pacific wind, if you have tasted some fruits of the tree of knowledge, and if some of them seemed bitter indeed, and even if there are so many others to gather, and some will be amazing, when evening comes in the phoenix monastery, you feel the desire to cover yourself with hair that turns back into feathers, to close your hands, so that your arms extend into wings again, to fuse your lips and nose into a beak, so that you can more easily take off amongst the reeds, from the savannah to the rice-paddies, rediscover your ancient flight and sing until you're out of voice.

Translation:

Christine North, London, 2006

Henri Pousseur: Biography



Henri Pousseur was born in Malmédy in 1929, and was therefore imbued with Germanic culture almost as much as by his roots in Romance culture (from the beginning of the nineteenth century his Walloon home town was by turns annexed to France until the Vienna Congress, to Prussia for a whole century, to Belgium in 1919, to the Third Reich in 1940 and again to Belgium in 1945).

He studied music from 1947 to 1953 at the Liège and Brussels conservatoires where he met Pierre Froidebise and André Souris who introduced him to “avant-garde” music, in particular dodecaphonic music, and who put him in touch with Pierre Boulez in 1951. From this time he was actively involved in the most radical serial movement working closely with Karlheinz Stockhausen and Luciano Berio, and appearing regularly at Darmstadt, Donaueschingen, in the Domaine Musical and at the Studio di Fonologia in Milan.

After his marriage to Théa Schoonbrood in 1954, with whom he has four children: Isabelle (1957), Denis (1958), Marianne (1961) and Hélène (1965), he founded the Brussels studio and the association ‘Musiques nouvelles’, which gave rise to the instrumental ensemble bearing the same name (its first appearance, in 1962, was to give an adequate performance of his mobile work *Répons*, composed in the previous year). The ensemble was conducted by one of his most loyal friends and supporters, Pierre Bartholomé.

It was in 1960, as he entered into a professional partnership with Michel Butor, which is still ongoing, that he began to free himself from the shackles of an orthodoxy which had become too narrow for his taste, and devoted his energies to discover how to

reintegrate fully into music all the syntactical and stylistic elements which had been 'banned' by what is called by some people the 'generalised series' and which he renamed the 'restricted series'. Cultural history - with *Votre Faust* or *Dichterliebesreigentraum*, politics - with *Couleurs croisées* and *Modèle réduit*, popular musics of various types - with *Iles déchaînées*, *la Rose des Voix* or the *Paysages planétaires* are only some stages in a tireless and unending quest, on the sidelines of dominant trends, but crossing the paths of related though divergent innovators (such as Vinko Globokar, Jean-Yves Bousseur, Luis de Pablo, Frederic Rzewsky or Hans Zender to name only some).

He was also attracted to the question of teaching methods and taught at the Liège University and the Conservatoire (having also taught at Cologne, Basle and New York State University in Buffalo). He became director of this conservatoire in 1975, having already set up the Centre de Recherches musicales de Wallonie in the same town, with friends and colleagues such as Philippe Boesmans (thanks also to the help of Robert Wangermée who has supported him all along). His aim was to open up the teaching of music to all contemporary musics and to introduce a more lively, practical way of communicating them; after his departure this was continued, particularly in Jean-Pierre Peuvion and Garrett List's classes.

At the invitation of Maurice Fleuret, he was responsible, with Eric Sprogis, for the establishment of the Institut de Pédagogie musicale in the Parc de Villette in Paris, the first stage of the Cité de la Musique, and in this context and in the context of Midem (1985 and '86) he organized two international conferences (one on basic teaching methods, and the other on teaching methods for professional musicians) and founded the periodical *Marsyas*, which published some 40 issues.

He retired from his official duties in 1994, but nevertheless took on the post of 'composer in residence' at Leuven University (Flemish Louvain). He wrote five new works during this time, four to the memory of his predecessor Karel Goeyvaerts, arranged as a major cycle for piano and orchestra entitled *Aquarius-Memorial*, and *Don Juan à Gnide*, a poetico-musical chamber-play to celebrate Michel Butor's 70th birthday.

In 2000 he composed an electroacoustic ensemble for an architectural complex by Philippe Samyn with the help of, and in the studio belonging to, his son Denis, the main musical elements of which are the *Seize Paysages planétaires*. In 2002 he created digital pictures to accompany them. Thanks to Enrico Bagnoli's program 'Open Media' he is able to make them undergo continuous transformations creating what he calls 'multi-media music'. These *Voix et Vues Planétaires* were performed in Brussels at the end of November 2004, introduced by poetic prose-works by Michel Butor (taken from the group of poems which accompanied the release of the CD of 'Paysages') and again read by him.

Apart from almost two hundred scores of all sorts of lengths and for all sorts of performance modes, published by several European publishers (including purely electroacoustic recordings and mixed works), he has written numerous articles and several books. Honorary Doctorate at Lille and Metz Universities, Grand prix du disque 2004 at the Academie Charles Cros 'for the corpus of his works', his voluminous archives are already in good order and housed at the Sacher Foundation in Basle.

Trans. Christine North

London, 2005



This concert was made possible with funds from the Lansdown Centre for Electronic Arts, Middlesex University, Cat Hill, Barnet, Hertfordshire, EN4 8HT.

See: www.cea.mdx.ac.uk

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We are very grateful to Henri Pousseur for his support and for liaising between Christine North and Michel Butor during the process of translation. We would also like to thank Michel Butor for allowing us to reproduce his texts.

For more information on Henri Pousseur's music:

henripousseur.net

www.scambi.mdx.ac.uk

The images on the front cover, page 18 and page 20 are by Henri Pousseur.

With thanks to:

The Lansdown Centre for Electronic Arts Research Committee (Stephen Boyd Davis, Helen Bendon, Magnus Moar, John Dack).

Christine North

Peter Williams

Tom Sedgwick

Robin Fencott

Simon Harris

