

François Sarhan

Kyrielle du Sentiment des Choses

scenographic chamber opera

(2002-2003)

for five singers, piano
and electronics

text :
extracts from
Grande Kyrielle du Sentiment des Choses
by
Jacques Roubaud

- I. content
- II. general
- III. conventionnal signs
- IV. preparation of the piano
- V. text (libretto)
- VI. electronics and amplification
- VII. about this opera

I content

title	instrumentation	duration	page
first part			
1.1 Matières	tape, bass, bar, sop	5 mn 20	1
1.2 Neiges-nuages	tutti	5 mn 40	10
1.3 d'ombres	tenor, bar, bass, piano	4mn 30.	29
		tot : 16mn	
second part			
2.1 sablier	direct to disk	1 mn	35
2.2 vide	bar and piano	2 mn	36
2.3 duo en echo	sop, bar and piano	1 mn 20	40
2.4 l'ange de la mêmeté 1	4 voices	3 mn 30	43
2.5 l'ange de la mêmeté 2	direct to disk	3 mn	48
		tot : 15mn	
interlude	dirct to disk	2 mn	49
third part			
3.1 Madrigal 1	bass, bar, ten, mez, sop	4 mn	50
3.2 Madrigal 2	bass, bar, ten, mez,	3 mn 30	62
3.3 récit	sop and piano	2 mn	66
3.4 monologue	sop, piano and dir to d.	2 mn	69
3.5 cold song	mezzo and piano	1mn30	73
3.6 smoke	direct to disk	3 mn	76
3.7 Aria da lome	sop and piano	7 mn30	77
		tot: 22 mn	
fourth part			
4.1 une noire pierre dernière noire	tutti	7 mn	84
4.2 conclusion	tenor and electronics	5 mn 30	123
		tot : 13 mn	
		total duration : circa 70/75 minutes	

II. general

Kyrielle du Sentiment des Choses, text and music, was commissioned par T&M (Paris) and Festival d'Art Lyrique d'Aix-en-Provence.

The premiere was in theater Maynier d'Oppède, Aix-en-Provence, France, on 9th of July 2003.

The performers were :

members of Ring Ensemble (Finland) :

Suvi Lehto, soprano

Susanna Tollet, mezzo

Andrus Kallastu, tenor

Vikke Häkkinen, baritone

Matti Apajalahti, bass.

Vincent Leterme, piano.

The electronic part has been realized by the composer, assisted by Olivier Pasquet, in Ircam.

stage direction : Frédéric Fisbach.

all the parts are to be performed without pause, except between II and III.

total duration : 1 hour and 10 minutes.

III. conventional signs :

general :

accidentals only apply to one note, except if this note is immediately repeated.

sometimes courtesy naturals have been added. however, in case of doubt, the rule

should be applied : one accidental per note, except if this note is immediately

repeated without a silence and at the same octave. Cautionary accidentals have

been placed at beginnings of bars, even if the notes were immediately repeated.

vocal part :

When the notes don't have heads, they are whispered.

V : breath in with opened mouth. if alone (without pitch), the breath in must be hearable as such.

☐ breath out. same than breath in.

piano :

are indicated the pedals which have an influence on duration of notes, so they shouldn't be changed. but a lot must be added, in order to get a better musical effect.



trigger of an sound event with pedal by the pianist. see details about electronic part below.

the breaths parts are not sound vocal effects, but are some subjective feeling expressions, going on another layer than the sung parts. they are personal, whatever the context is (solo, duet or tutti), and should be done apart, in a different physical direction and energy than the rest.

IV. preparation of the piano

the piano is prepared with 4 different materials :

- rubber slices, 2 mm of width, free length
- bottle caps, like champaign or cider bottles, but not beer ones ! they have to be entirely made of metal.
- long (30 cm.) metal stick, or chain, or a dozen of metallic sticks or pencils.
- metal clips, to use for paper (office thing)

The piano is divided in four registers, each of them uses one type exclusively. All the notes are not prepared. Here are mentioned the prepared notes, the others must stay open.

In general, the preparation changes the colour, but doesn't affect the pitches, the harmony and the open notes stay perfectly pure.

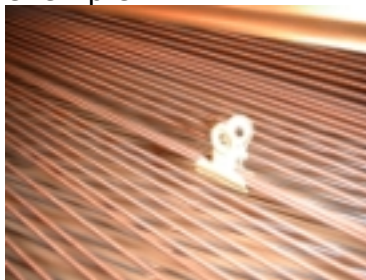
first register (low) :

metal clips

they pluck the two strings. the placement is free, with these constraints :

- the original pitch must be perfectly hearable.
- no metallic sound should appear, nor on this note, neither on others because of this first note.

exemple :

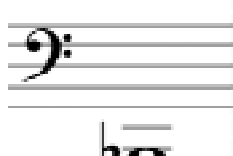
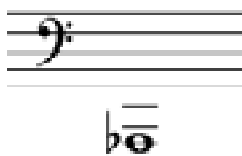


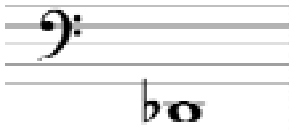
the top of the metal clip mustn't be in contact with the strings of other notes.

on these notes, exclusively. (the others are open).



plus rubber between the clip and the strings





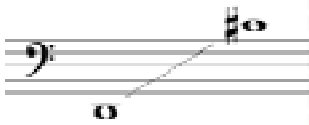
(add also rubber at the same place than in second register to get softer sound)

second register (medium low) :

rubber between the three strings, close to the keyboard. acts like a strong mute.



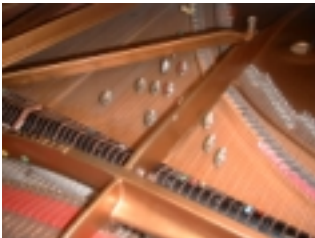
to be put chromatically on every note between these pitches (included) :



all must sound equally.

third register (medium treble) :

metal caps.

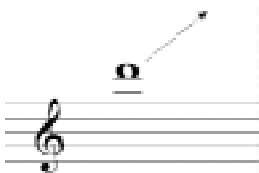


to be put between strings 1 & 2 in order to create a double pitch, the second one at the major third under the normal pitch, on these notes :



fourth register (treble) :

metal stick put on the strings. their movement produces an alteration of the sound. from this note (included) to the highest (included)



V.text :

The text is an extract from Grande Kyrielle du Sentiment des Choses, poem written by Jacques Roubaud, commissioned by T&M and Festival d'Art Lyrique d'Aix-en-Provence for this occasion. This text is mainly in french. However, some elements are in english, in italian or occitan ; those are notated in italic, to avoid pronunciation ambiguities except Cold Song (III. 5) which is entirely in english, and in plain characters.

The transition between II and III is filled up with a spoken text (either by a singer or on tape), written by me (FS), who should be translated in each language of the country where the opera is performed.

VI. electronics and amplification.

the electronic part is made to be played on six loudspeakers minimum. they should be disposed as follow :

L1	stage	L2
L6	audience	L3
L5		L4

The singers and the piano should be amplified. The piano can be on stage or frontstage, but should be amplified on L1-2-3-6, not on L4 and 5.

This amplification is not made to change the sound or the volume of the originals, but to balance the dynamics between the live and the tape part. At any time the voices and the piano should be distorted or altered by amplification. In the acoustic sections, it's probably better to give it up.

The electronic events are stocked on a hard disk, and triggered by a pedal used by the pianist. Most of the time one event is one sound, but sometimes it is a stop for a previous event.

The first version of the set was made by Olivier Pasquet in 2003 at Ircam, Paris, on MAX-MSP software, running on Macintosh hardware.

On the score is only notated the instrumental sources of the events, but not the colours, the type of sound, etc. All these elements can be reinterpreted.

VII about this as an opera

This opera is an attempt to give a partial description of a partial world. This description is mainly given by nouns of things, which in general excludes personal statements, or the expression of feelings.

In a traditional opera, the drama, the theatrical effect, the subject, the plot come from the characters and their relations (love, hatred, etc.). Here, on the contrary,

these have no effect : the hero of Kyrielle is the *scenography*. This scenography shows the things, which come from the vocabulary of the text.

Continuity is not given by psychological consistency or evolution, but by scenographic progression : light, various dimensions of space, slow destruction or appearance of objects, also smells if possible... the stage direction implies a scenographic plot, more than a psychological interpretation of the score.

Singers comment the scenography, have a resonating function, they are echos of verbal or visual appearance of things. (This relation can be clear or not). they don't have identity, no actions (although some might be necessary). They are extension of of the scenographic device.

They also don't have nor emotion motivated by each other, neither social behaviors. The number *Aria da Lome* is an exception : it's a song of lost love, coming from the trobador tradition, and expresses feminine love nostalgia. This attempt of human communication and socialized desire provokes the catastrophe of "une noire pierre dernière noire" which destroys the whole environment.

dramaturgical evolution, and comments on scenes :

There is a linear progression from I.1 to II.2, which goes from collective, non personal, a-sentimental, descriptive, non physical, non carnal sound, text and stage activity in I.1, to the exact contrary in II.2 : individual, personal, sentimental, introspective carnal music and stage activity.

I.2 is the step of mixing between live and pre-recorded voices, the live ones try to get out and find a more "human" sound. I.3, *d'ombres*, is a focus put on the end of I.2, or more precisely a more detailed continuation of the point reached at the end of I.2. II.2 represents an extrem in the personal and metaphysical pain cry, and provokes a first sentimental reaction from the soprano, (II.3) and then from the tutti (II.4). Yet, there shouldn't be any contact between the two of them. The fricassée can be seen as a comment on II.2, as well as a conclusion put on all the preceeding scenes and progression. The fricassée is an intimate (though everyone has the same feeling) comment about this inside/outside, metaphysical/natural drama. It is also, of course, a kind of Aleph point (in the sense of Borges's short story "Aleph") of the all work, since it contains fragments of everything, past and future. This point is a disappearance point, disappearance of the sound and of the bodies into breath.

II.5 is only prerecorded, with none on stage, showing an continuation of the disappearance. After this central point, the main dramaturgical "tools" and themes are installed: relation between individual/collectivity, sentimental expression/description (subjectivity/objectivity), external pressure (from unknown sources).

II.6 initiates a new direction : rising against the destruction process, against these internal and natural destructive forces (*choses noires*). The sung part should be mixed with stage sounds, like water, stones, crackings... This direction is interrupted (as fast and meaningless than a TV change of channel) by the interlude.

III.1 is a collective game, which goes from mechanical stupid activities to common commentaries and soloist interventions with no direction nor necessity. III.2 is much more contemplative and the nature/human positions comes back, through descriptive text, echoes in the ensemble relayed by pre-recorded interventions. III.3 begins to show the real sentimental preoccupation of soprano, through narration of old affective story. The following numbers oscillate between different levels of presence, personal/general expression (through Roubaud's voice). The second axis of the piece is *Aria da Lome*, direct expression of love nostalgia, which topic is taken from Jaufre Rudel's legend with Tripoli's comtess (the second part, when she tries to get in contact with her lover on the boat). It's also related to the Orpheus and Eurydice story, where the mistake comes from Orpheus. This love is highly symbolic and has no behavior nor social causes (it is better to let it been originated in a philter, like Tristan & Isolde). Here, the bass expresses his desire and the soprano answers at

the end. This answer is the cause of the following catastrophe. This catastrophe is a geological one, natural one. It's to be related with the Renaissance belief of a connection between personal feeling and natural phenomena, like the tempests in *King Lear*, by Shakespeare, for instance. (This is also to be applied to the whole *Kyrielle*) There is almost no trace of this drama in the sung text, because the singers don't have any understanding of this phenomenon. They are like the musicians on Titanic : although everything is seeking, they continue to play (or try) until the very end. This can be realized by stage effects like moving floor, falling walls and so on. IV.2 The tenor intervention at the end is the external description of this phenomenon, seen from a character who leaved it from the inside. It is the *monstration* of the special relation between internal and external events in the piece : the audience understands that some stage movements are inner phenomena of one character. It is also a Roubaud's voice image, because of the rather personal way the text puts its questionings.

There is no christian (nor muslim or buddhist) point of view at all in the whole work, except the quotation of anglican prayer : *boys and girls, all must go to nothing* (IV.2). Instead, the relation between humans and nature and things should be interpreted as a primitive conception of the world, which can be seen in animist religions, or pagan nordic beliefs, and also must be connected (in III.1 for instance) to to the so-called *Art Brut* artist's representation of the world conceptions.

François Sarhan, 24th of march, 2003.