

## *Forêt de Gargillesse*

7 harps

Have you ever walked down the main street of Gargillesse during the harp festival in August? Harpists from all walks of life take over the village, working on their workshop and concert programmes. It is warm, the windows are open, the street resounds with a multitude of crystalline sounds coming from all directions, like a forest of harps, singing and enchanting trees, enveloping the walker in his journey.

Such is the sound image that Tôn-Thât Tiêt remembers from his stays in Gargillesse, and it is around this initial idea that his piece for seven harps *Forêt de Gargillesse*, written as a tribute to Pierre Jamet, is woven.

A renowned harpist and teacher, Pierre Jamet (1893-1991) founded the Académie internationale de harpe and then the Festival in his village in 1964. Nestled in the hollow of George Sand's Berry, the village nestles in the green gorges of the Creuse and Gargillesse, whose beauty once made it the Valley of the Painters. For more than 50 years, it has been a meeting place for harpists from all over the world.

Tôn-Thât Tiêt met Pierre Jamet at the home of his daughter Marie-Claire Jamet. He stayed several times in Gargillesse where his works *Niêm* in 1973, *The Endless Murmuring I* in 1993, *Murmures de Gargillesse* in 2011 were premiered. *The Endless Murmuring I* was his first tribute to Pierre Jamet, and *Murmures de Gargillesse* was commissioned by Ghislaine Petit-Volta on behalf of the Académie. The numerous works featuring the harp in Tôn Thât Tiêt's catalogue bear witness to the composer's attachment to the instrument and to the harpists who have played his music so much.

Guest of honour at the Festival in 2018, Tôn-Thât Tiêt left Gargillesse with the desire to write a new tribute to this mythical musical event and its founder: the result is *Forêt de Gargillesse* for seven harps. The work is structured around a central trio made up of harps 3, 4 and 5, an independent trio entitled *Escapade*, here enveloped in a spatialized manner by four additional harps.

The piece is structured around two main notes, C and F, C being the central note of the trio and F that of the four other harps. In the Five Element Theory of Chinese

philosophy, C and F are in correspondence, with F being related to the element Earth and C to Fire.

F was also the structural note of *The Endless Murmuring I* and *Murmurs of Gargillesse*. In the Chinese system, F is also related to the Centre, and to the end of summer. F can be seen as the soul of Pierre Jamet and Gargillesse, the anchor of the harp-world.

The 4 harps draw a soundscape around the note F: quivering trills, flowing curves that intermingle, ascending movements converging on F, and a few characteristic motifs providing touches of colour.

In this calm, unchanging, static landscape, the trio enters the scene in a theatrical manner. Radiating around the note C, the fire of creative energy, the trio is alive, active, in motion. The writing is contrasted, in tum vertical in incisive, dancing and syncopated chords, and linear in unfolding arabesques, or concentrated on a regular pulse.

Harp 4, at the heart of the ensemble, remains centred on C. In the other two harps of the trio, 3 and 5, secondary notes appear. Here, a scale from a Hindu raga, repeated slowly by harp 5, descends 10 low G, a symbolic note that runs through all of Tòn-Thât Tiêt's work, a symbol of serenity. Here, the triplets repeated on the note A on harp 3 trigger a more spirited passage: A is the note associated with youth. Harp 5 concludes the last intervention of the trio on an F played in a regular pulse, like a heartbeat bringing us back to the anchor point, to the spirit of Gargillesse. The E flat of harp 3 echoes, the note of prayer in Tòn-Thât Tiêt, a last thought for Pierre Jamet.

The rustling around F gradually fades away, leaving harp 4 to play a final phrase from F to C in its resonance. The element Fire/C is also associated with speech in the Chinese system of classification: transmission, the richness of exchanges and sharing that have involved harp and music in Gargillesse ever since Pierre Jamet first brought them together.

Premiere performance of *Forêt de Gargillesse* on March 12th, 2022 at the 28th Festival de harpe en Avesnois.

Laurence Bancaud

translation : IMD