

Letter dated 12/12/1997

Dear Laurence Bancaud,
Here is the analysis of *Paroles du Feu (Words of Fire)* (ballet music)

Prologue.

- I. Body. Physiology/embers. Fire as energy of the physical body
- II. Energy. Flame/light/sun/emotion - desire/intelligence
- III. Mental. Spirit- Action/non-action/ yin-yang. Spiritual energy
An attempt to join the cosmic Spirit.

Analysis of *Words of Fire* (1)

The work comprises 3 main parts and a prologue. In the prologue the Fire element and its components : good and evil, are presented. The violence of the all-destroying flame and gentleness of the heat that warms our lives. It is one of the 5 elements treated in the Y King, the Book of Mutations in Chinese philosophy. The five elements of Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth, with their correspondences (Fire produces Earth , Earth Metal, Metal Water, Water Wood and Wood Fire) as well as their opposites (Fire destroys Metal, Metal Wood, Wood Earth, Earth Water and Water Fire) - are the underlying principle of the way in which the universe evolves, according to this book.

The 5 elements also represent the directions (Metal-West, Wood-East, Water-North, Fire-South, Earth-Center) or sounds (Metal-G, Wood A, Water-D, Fire-C, Earth-F). The note C-Fire is the dominant note of the Prologue and will be the basic note of the work.

Prologue :

From the beginning of figure 55 on page 10 with the flute solo sequence (55-65) serving as a transition. The Fire-C note is not alone in the prologue, its opposite Water-D note lasts as far as the figure 11, to counterbalance its force. According to the theory (principle ?) of the 5 elements of Y King, Water destroys Fire, and at this point Water becomes incarnate with the soundtrack of water in figure 56. This element represents the North, winter and may be considered as fertility, the beginning of a cycle. The flute emerges (figure 52) to speak of *Words of Fire*.

I.- BODY

1st sequence : from 65 to 135, page 22.

The weighty chords at the beginning of this part are its foundation. Even when there are quick, agitated movements, the sequence retains the ponderous nature of the beginning.

2nd sequence : from 135 to the end of 206

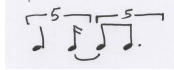
The music becomes lighter, more alert and more turbulent after the weighty character of the start. There are still chords on the strings, but fewer. In bar 143, page 2, or bars 145, 146, 147

on page 23, the percussion is most prominent. Then, along with the flute, the two instruments flute/percussion dominate this sequence.


On page 26, bar 166, the string chords recall the idea at the beginning of "Body". They pass this idea on to the bass drum from bar 167 onwards. The bass drum expresses weightiness in a more turbulent, irregular way like clumsy, uncoordinated gestures (uncoordinated in an orderly manner). This idea prevails as far as page 31, with inclusion of the strings (page 28, bars 182 to 205).

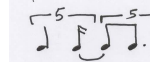
At the end of the 2nd sequence, lines 2 and 3 on page 31, a new 3-note rhythm element

appears to herald the following sequence :



3rd sequence : bar 207 on page 32 to bar 240 on page 37.

This sequence begins with the 3-note rhythm . This rhythm becomes more and more prominent then fades when the percussion comes in (bar 208). Yet, however faint it may be, this rhythm remains present throughout the whole sequence. It is a constant element. Above it, the flute and percussion play their musical part in great agitation and turbulence (page 33 from bar 216 and as far as page 36). On page 36, bar 224, the string

instruments take up the 3-note rhythm again . The rhythm gets stronger and stronger, from *P* to *FF*, and the strings retain *FF* until the end of the sequence (bar 239 on page 37). The sudden change in bar 240 marks the beginning of the 4th sequence.

4th sequence :

a) Bars 240 to 247

Here it is a dialogue between percussion and dance against the backdrop of a synthesiser. The synthesiser repeats the same musical sequence as though backing the dialogue. The duration of the dancers' (male and female) improvisations is open-ended, it is they who decide and make a sign to give way to the percussion. The strings join in on bar 247 to put an end to this dialogue and prepare a radical change on page 42, bar 270.

b) Bar 247 to the end of bar 269

The strings interrupt the dialogue between percussion and dance and represent the 3-note rhythm (example) one last time, with a slight difference.

5th sequence : from bar 270 to the end of this first part "Body" on page 46.

The flute solo is a reminder of that found in bar 57 at the beginning of "Body". The music of this sequence is lyrical, closer to the inner part of the human soul, it's a feeling proper to mankind. To this feeling can be added the intellectual aspect of man and this leads to part II.

II.- ENERGY

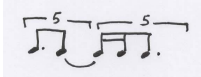
We move from the physical body of the first part, Body, to the Fire of intelligence. Intellectual energy. In this part the music becomes lighter. In bar 298, page 45 (end of the first part) the synthesiser makes a discreet appearance with repeated notes. The repetitive F is the bridge linking parts II and III.

1st sequence : from figure 300 to the end of 379 (pages 46 to 59)

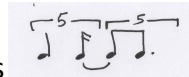
- a) 300 to 321. The beginning of the second part : a serene, very calm atmosphere. The beginning of "Energy" from 300 to 302 may be considered like a pause for the dancers, there is only the music. The dancing will begin at 302.
- b) From bar 321 to bar 343 and further : a repetitive music (strings) in a light mood, like floating particles.
- c) Bar 343 and further : a brief flute and bass marimba duo, still in light mood. Then a reference to the Prologue (352 to 366) : the C note (Fire) can be heard softly, followed by a crescendo from *P* to *FF* involving a series of violent, chaotic chords.
- d) Bar 367 to the end of 379 : back to the light mood of repetitive music. The C note (Fire) of the vibraphone in bar 371 announces the change in mood.

2nd sequence : from bar 380 to the end of 432 (pages 60 to 69)

Here the music becomes agitated and violent. Fire as the flame which burns and destroys, yet creates. High-note chords ascending like flames. From bar 396 voices scan the rhythm



which is a variant of the 3 notes



of the first 'Body.

In this "chaos" the G of the flute (bar 416) appears like a ray of light. This G, with the vibraphone and the synthétiser, form a perfect C major chord. This chord resonates like the sun piercing the cloud in order to shed its light over the world (from 420 to 432), bringing us to a passage of traditional Vietnamese music, the Ca Trù.

3rd sequence : end of 432 to 435 : Ca Trù music (about 4.10 minutes)

Song accompanied by a lute and a percussion. Formerly this music was reserved for persons of letters. They, as well as poets, composed poems according to the precise rules of this music, which were then given to singers to be sung at friendly encounters. It was a form of intellectual entertainment. Here, the music is intended to transport us to a distant place, another place and another time. We leave this world for an imaginary journey. Imagination too is "intellectual Energy"

4th sequence: Bar 435 to end of 485 (pages 68-71)

A brief spell of calm strings leads us little by little to our own period, our own reality : man with emotion-desire. The solo viola passage (from bar 450) expresses man's feeling of this. Lyrical, emotional music.

5th sequence : Bars 486 to 520 (pages 72 to 76)

Back to repetitive, light-hearted music as was heard at the beginning of the second part. In bar 505, the gong plays the F note repeatedly in regular beats, the element at the beginning (figure 300). This repeated F announces the idea of the third part - Mental - along with the G of the flute. The C (fire) appears one more time, more discreetly (viola and cello, bars 510 to 514).

6th sequence : From 520 to 523

Like the end of the 1st part, the flute solo harks back to the flute solo at the end of the prologue. At the end of the first part, the flute solo harks back to the flute solo at the end of the prologue. The 2nd part "Energy" ends on G on the flute, crotales and synthétiser. This G

note will be the main note of the 3rd part : MENTAL. G represents the Cosmos, the first Spirit.

III.- MENTAL

The mood of this part is spiritual ; here everything has become abstract. All the movements are a kind of search to merge with the universe, to attain the Awakening. The human spirit joins the cosmic Spirit ; this search takes the form of an invitation to meditation.

1st sequence : Bars 524 to 55 (page 78 – 81)

Static music. From the sustained G to the high notes of the synthétiser the strings produce the C note (Fire). Here Fire is an element of purification. From bar 549 to 552 the sounds of the bell and the bass drum resonate as if beckoning to meditation.

2nd sequence : From 554 to 770. A movement of meditation.

The G announcing the 3rd part is heard in bar 618, evoking the Cosmos, the spirit of the Cosmos. We can see that the regular repetition of notes heard at the beginning of part 2 are often to be found in part 3. This pattern becomes an element of meditation, like that often seen in Buddhist prayers. In spite of internal changes, this second part remains consistently static. From 630 to 648 (pages 88- 89) : there is return to the mood of the beginning (bar 525) culminating in yet another G passage covering 3 octaves.

The bass flute (682- 719) is like an interior voice rising to the G note.

3rd sequence : from 720 to 763 : of a ritual character.

This sequence ends with a passage of unaccompanied dance, without music (figure 763). The static character remains.

4th sequence. Bar 764 to end of 805.

The voices return a 2nd time. This sequence is just a repetition or reprise of the first appearance of voices. In the third part there are several sequence repetitions with the same characteristics. All of this gives the impression that the music isn't advancing and accentuates the overall static character of the "MENTAL" part.

5th sequence. From bar 809 to the end of the work.

The piece ends with a sequence of very calm flute solo against a background of violin and viola. Here C is dominant, the focus of attention. The phrase begins with C, moves away from it then returns to the note. This voice disappears into the immenseness of the universe as described by the low F and high G.

To sum up : in the first part "BODY" the structure is clear. It is composed of different types of characters, and the change of sequences can be easily distinguished. In the 2nd part, "ENERGY" the structure is hazy, and the mood changes in each sequence are hidden. The music unfurls and is transformed progressively, like a cloud in the sky. There are no, or only very few, precise changes.

At the start of the 3rd part "MENTAL", the music has no structure at all. The notion of time, linear time, must be discarded. The C (Fire) has returned to the end to conclude *Words of*

Fire, leaving "MENTAL" with no conclusion. We may or may not have reached the Cosmic Spirit, it's up to each one of us to reply.

One detail about the rôle of the flute. In this work, the flute plays 2 different roles : instrument as part of the ensemble and also as story-teller.

For example, in the Prologue, from the beginning up to figure 55, the flute is completely absent, only appearing from 57 on. Here I imagined a flute player walking across the scene in the midst of the dancers as if to announce the show to come. The story-teller flute returns at the end of each part to conclude and announce the following part.

January 1977

Tôn- Thât Tiêt

This is the long version of the analysis. There is a slightly shorter second version.

Translation : Lilian and Jean Rossi