

Việt Nam

MUSIC FROM HUÊ

Song of Huê and Court music (Maison des Cultures du Monde - INEDIT W 260073)

Why would a composer of contemporary music defend the traditional music of his country so passionately? I am frequently asked this question.

For me, there are several reasons, one of the most important of which is, because it is necessary. The traditional music of Việt Nam, like the music of every country, is a precious heritage to be protected and handed down in its authentic form. The music of a country, of a region is, in some ways, its identity. I think in particular of the music of Huê, both the scholarly and the popular traditions, which represent the soul of this city. Even today, one cannot think of Huê without evoking the songs of the boatwomen on the River of Perfumes (see Track 13): this music is such a part of this city, part of its charm, and what makes it unique.

For those of us who are composers, traditional music is also a source of inestimable enrichment. It helps us to develop a more personal musical language within the context of music which has today become universal, like all the other forms of artistic expression: painting, sculpture, architecture... But, without a deeply-rooted cultural tradition, it is easy to lose one's way in this universality. To give an example: the music of the court of Huê has enormously influenced the way I use percussion. In this connection, I think of the philosophical dimension of this music of the court, which is closely linked to the I Ching, and especially to the theory of the Five Elements; more ample studies of the music of the court of Huê should shed more light on this subject. But there is another reason which urges me to so passionately defend traditional Vietnamese music, and this is my own attachment to my native city. When I speak of Huê, the city of my childhood and youth, it is always with love. My works, especially in their orchestral coloration, are full of the light and colours of this city whose music has been with me since the cradle. Imagine a night bathed in moonlight on the River of Perfumes, far from the lights and noises of the city. Then all at once, in this transparent tranquility, the song of a boatwoman rises and melts into this world of unreal light... This is one image which has been kept intact in my memory since I was a child. This profound feeling which links me to Huê is of course sentimental - but it is also an irresistible force.

TÔN-THẬT TIẾT

(translated by Judith Crews)

