

CD Trio Salzedo

TÔN THẬT TIẾT “Incarnations structurales”

Music for flute, cello and harp

(Premiers horizons, 2019. REF.070.173)

Incarnations structurales / Chu Ky III / The endless murmuring I / Le tombeau de Christian Lardé / Thúy Lâm Vô / Mémoire des sons

Born in 1933 in Hué - Vietnam's former imperial capital -Tôn Thất Tiêt studied composition in Paris with Jean Rivier and André Jolivet. Having learned European writing techniques at the beginning of the 1960s, he developed a personal style which altogether admits Webern's or Penderecki's influences, and finds its inspiration in his Vietnamese origins: colours and rhythms of traditional music, oriental philosophies, a different conception of time. Buddhism and Taoism permeate Tôn Thất Tiêt's life. Close in spirit with the Chinese thinkers and poets - Tchouang-tseu, Li Po, Wang Wei - he pursues his dream of a deep communion with Nature.

The range of works on this recording embraces 50 years of creativity (1967-2016), thus offering a portrait of the composer and of his most precious aspirations: his interest for Indian music, the spirituality of Hinduism and Buddhism, the Chinese philosophies and Five Element Theory - Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, Earth — and the importance of the ties forged with his friends composers and performers.

An early work for trio ***Incarnations structurales*** (1967) was inspired by ancient forms of Indian music, its title inviting precisely to “resuscitate” them.“The music of India gives me a metaphysical sensation, it takes us into another world” says Tôn-Thất Tiêt, acknowledging his enthusiasm for Alain Daniélou's works underlining how ragas and spiritual inspiration are indivisible. The four movements of the piece are almost identical in structure with a slow introduction followed by a faster (I and II), or denser (III and IV) part. A *quasi improvisazione* Prelude introduces the various elements to be developed later on: an atonal harmony mixing modal scales and large post-weberian dissonant intervals, an ornamentation made of glissandi and quarter tones, together with sophisticated rhythms. Each instrument in turn then takes up large lyrical phrases, with a percussive and coloured support from his partners as well as a continuum accompaniment of circular motives or repeated notes. All three players display their virtuosity in broad crescendos carried by a rhythmical and syncopated energy, but this exaltation may rapidly come back to silence through contrasts of textures and progressive dynamics. The last part - *Lento mistico* - is calm and sober. The pointillism of the harp between extreme low and high registers sounds as if opening the flute and cello's psalmody to the immensity of the universe while the sound loses any kind of materiality (harmonics, whistle tones on the harp, « bariolage » in the high register of the cello) and blends with the tinkling of triangles — an ultimate call for spirituality, towards infinity.

This trio is succeeded by two duos, the first one being ***The endless murmuring I*** (1991) for cello and harp. The work was composed in homage to Pierre Jamet, and also testifies to Tôn Thất Tiêt's commitment to the harp - an instrument he kept writing for. Slightest dynamics, subtle harmonics, a delicate approach of the bridge and fingerboard for the cellist, notes being produced like a breath...:this music lies on the edge of silence and invites us to a most careful listening "inside the sound". After a restless and brilliant central section vivified by vigorous and developed rhythmical sequences as well as vibrant motives of the cello, the harp reaches the extreme low register through descending lines and pedal glissandi. The *endless murmuring* introduced at the beginning - repeating low E flat on the harp - finally leads to a last interrogative phrase, close indeed to the one ending *Thuy Lâm...., Vô*.

The flute and harp piece ***Thuy Lâm...., Vô*** (1981- revised 1992) is dedicated to Christian Lardé and Marie-Claire Jamet. Its title consists of three key words of a poem by Vietnamese Prince Tung Thien Vuong (1819-1870) in which he evokes his own death. The words of the last verse "*Thuy lam huu nhan vô*" may be translated as follows: *thuy*, water, *lâm*, forest, *huu*, existence, *nhan*, man and *vô* "non-existence" A first rational interpretation would be: "The landscape (river, forest) will survive my death". But Tôn Thất Tiêt prefers a second and more mysterious one, following Buddhism according to which nothing is existing or non-existent:"Man exists and does not exist". This duality of man and soul is represented by the distinct sounds of both instruments which successive recitatives oppose: sensitivity of the flute through delicate effect in timbre or lyrical expression illustrating the sentiment of man with his emotions and desires, tumultuous and jerky harp solos, human anxiety about death on earth and the question of the afterlife. The flute line is structured around a series of eight notes, which serves as material for the whole piece, until the ultimate question asked in the silence of Nature.

Three solos - one for each instrument of the trio - also mark out the program. Written for solo flute, ***Le Tombeau de Christian Lardé*** (2013) repeats and extends the concluding phrase of *Thuy Lâm...., Vô*.The flutist is requested to sing the sound "ôm" into his instrument —thus representing the Zen monk meditating with his shakuhachi? A symbol of Buddhism for Tôn Thất Tiêt, the E flat is the heart of the piece and carries this meditative and contemplative song to accompany his friend towards the other shore.

Like a prayer, it is again an E flat, which opens and ends ***Mémoire des sons*** (2016) for cello, a tribute to Henri Dutilleux. "A long time ago, Mr Henri Dutilleux gave me and signed the book of his interviews with Claude Glayman, *Mystère et mémoire des sons* (Mystery and Memory of sounds). Memory of sounds and words, of our numerous discussions at his place, rue Saint-Louis en l'île. This street I was taking when coming to see him, then the joy and the pleasure of talking with him, are still in my mind when I think about him. Mr Dutilleux's words remain in me like sounds of spring, or colours of a garden full of flowers. The piece is based on the two notes D and A. D is the first letter of Dutilleux, and A is associated to the element Wood, to the East and to Spring in the Five Element Theory of Yi King – *Livre des Mutations* (Book of changes) in Chinese philosophy."

Chu Ky III for harp (1977) belongs to a large ensemble of seven pieces for various instrumental combinations. *Chu ky* means "cycle". According to Hinduism, the universe obeys a cyclic law, going through phases of development, then destruction and decline until a new cycle starts. "Human life,

seasons, solar system movements, stars and galaxies... the whole universe evolves in a cyclic form, everything obeys an invisible law, this same law which revives matter of which we, human beings, are part. I believe in this law and I try to express it in the seven *Chu ky*". The cycle features an ubiquitous note, as a polarity towards which all melodic motives converge: G. This note has a special meaning in the mind of the composer: for a Vietnamese, Hinduism and Buddhism are considered Western philosophies (coming from India, west of Vietnam) and in the Yi King system of correspondences, it is precisely the G note, which corresponds to the west. Symbolizing the pre-existence of spirit before anything else, the G rises imperceptibly from the harp's low register, remains at the centre of the various phases of the cycle - birth, development, destructive chaos, disappearance - and finally vanishes on a high trill which fades away and disappears: music "is lost in the void as through meditation, human spirit fades into cosmic spirit...." Tôn Thất Tiêt dedicated *Chu Ky III* to his wife Tâm-Quy.

The common denominator in all these works is the constant presence of a held note switching from one instrument to another, from a register or a pitch to another, but always underlying the musical discourse: does it symbolize the spirit which is present in everything? Suspended time? The quest of the soul through the sound... each work seeming to resonate in silence, questioning the inexpressible ...

"In music, silence is a space where the voice of the soul is free to resound. Then we forget the real world. We stand in front of a journey into a timeless and spaceless world, where our sole inner voice may be heard".

Laurence Bancaud