

Chu Ky III

Encounter with Tôn-Thất Tiêt

« Chu Ky means cycle. It's the cycle of life as well as being that of the universe: all things spring from nothingness and come back to it »; it's the eternal path to the universe which contains the circular strength of all things.

In the Chu Ky series I am influenced by Indian music. Such music begins with a very slow, calm tempo: the musician presents the raga and creates a mood before improvising. While presenting the raga he meditates, and little by little the music takes shape... that is what *Chu Ky* consists in: you meditate. Not on the raga itself but on the void: then the notes are gradually perceived: the music becomes form and energy becomes matter.

In order to enter this state of meditation you need to forget the notion of time. You must only feel and only be aware on the emotional level: breathe. To do this you must become part of the score to the point of forgetting what is written. At the beginning of the music the writing is relative and therefore flexible. The resonance of a note will differ according to the way you have played it, the impact will be different. The duration of the sounds and your tempo will depend on your attack. Just let yourself be carried away by the idea of the piece in order to create the right atmosphere.

Only then can matter emerge: it comes out of nothing. In Oriental philosophy nothingness engenders the primal spirit, that is in fact the cosmic spirit which animates matter. The G note symbolizes this energy.

All the *Chu Ky* revolve around the G; this note is fundamental, inhabits the whole works.

Thus, at the beginning, the G produced with the rubber comes from afar, from elsewhere as it were; it contains the whole universe; it is the incarnation of the cosmic spirit. If you are able to have it resound with this inspiration, it is magnificent !... I know, however, that this sound is rarely audible during a concert; the sound is lost in the concert-hall. That's the reason for my having to add subsequent taps with the stick. Such taps must resound in the same spirit as those created with a rubber: an echo coming from afar in space and time.

According to the theory of the five elements of Yi King in Chinese philosophy, each cardinal point is represented by a note. G represents the West. And in Far-East Buddhism the West evokes the country of Buddha, of illumination and nirvana. All of this is contained in G. *Chu Ky III* is an invitation to be imbued with the inner spirit. Music is only one means to express and to experience this inner spirit.

Part B of *Chu Ky* is much more formal, particularly on the rhythmic level. The link to writing is therefore different. In this part you can do nothing else but follow what is written down. The G note is embedded in an infinite repetition - in a circular rhythm, triplets and quavers, a constant reminder of the cyclic notion. The regularity of the repetition is set against the unrhythmic melody (played with the left hand) and written like an improvisation. I sometimes had to suppress the regular note in order to write the group of notes, but if I had written for two instruments, I could have had one of them repeat the G continually while the other played the melody. It's the impression of incessant repetition that has to be conveyed - until the dislocation of the rhythm in bar 17. And even when the G is disarticulated, its recurrence needs to be present.

In this part the use of nuances is particularly structural. It's less a question of following them literally than making use of them to highlight the various superposed voices. You can exaggerate the nuances a little as long as you are able to draw attention to the pattern of each of the voices, piano is reserved to the G note, the other one, mezzo-piano, with quick groups of notes, is the continuity of the improvised melody and the last voice, mezzo-forte, is in the bass notes and reminds us of the beginning of the piece.

Play this B part with the *agitato* in bar 35. Now channel your energy in order to unfetter your ardour and passion: do not hold back! At the end of the *agitato* let things vibrate and move on quickly. The oncoming hits must be played with the fist so that the notes of the chords can be heard.

When you get to bar 43, the violence is even more powerful and more stark than during the *agitato*. This crystallisation of matter, achieved by the harsh chords, leads towards the end of the piece and of the cycle. Feel then, and take pleasure therein, all the physical and spiritual relaxation brought about by the ascending trait, the unstressed C. The space is no longer the same...

This last part is a reflection of the beginning. Music, matter, returns to the void. The tempo needs to be slower and more calm than what is indicated. But maintain a coherent link, on one hand with the tempo at the beginning, and on the other hand with the resonance of each event. If the silence between events is too long, it loses its bounce and is no longer alive. Pay all your attention to this silence and the way it affects space... in this piece the silences are measured, the person listening must feel the living beat rebounding in the silence.

Often when silence comes we don't quite know what to do. But nothing needs to be done, just listened to and held. Listen to what the notes have yielded now they have transformed, indeed sculpted space, displaced the energy... In fact, the notes lead to silence. And it's up to the interpreter to lead the onlooker to silence. In order to achieve this the silence needs to be played like a note.

We can see this aspect of energy through Chinese painting: there's a vast void, with something very compressed in a corner. This way of inhabiting space creates a harmony between plenitude and void, which then blend together. In order to integrate this interaction the interpreter has to play as if it were his own composition: each time a new piece is performed. Absorb the score until every performance is a perpetual discovery, a perpetual creation.

Interview by H el ene Breschand

Translation : Lilian and Jean Rossi