
TOD MACHOVER: SPECTRES

Music for Large Ensemble and Computer Sounds

1 Nature's Breath (19:04)

for Chamber Ensemble

The Prism Orchestra • Robert Black, conductor

Jayn Rosentfeld, flute; Pamela Fipple, oboe; Laura Flax, clarinet; Peter Simmons, bassoon; William Purvis, French horn; Ronald Oakland, violin; Mineko Yajima, violin; Daniel Seidenberg, viola; Alvin McCall, cello; Gail Kravand, bass; Susan Jolles, harp; Daniel Druckman, percussion; James Baker, percussion

2 Spectres Parisiens (25:45)

for Chamber Orchestra and Computer Sounds

The ASKO Ensemble • Peter Eötvös, conductor

Soloists: Leonore Pameijer, flute; Jeff Hamburg, French horn; Ramco Kraamwinkle, French horn; Taco Koosstra, violoncello; Mart Benders, flute; Alayne Leslie, oboe; Arjan Ariens Kappers, clarinet; Louis van Nunen, bassoon; Toon van Ulsen, trombone; Ernestine Stoop, harp; René Eckhardt, piano; Renee Jonker, percussion; Peppie Wiersma, percussion; Jan-Erik van Regteren Altena, violin; Erik Kromhout, violin; Lesbeth Steffens, viola; Libia Hernandez, double bass; Tod Machover, sound director; Sebastiaan van Pinksteren, sound engineer

Notes by Tod Machover

My consistent and overriding artistic goal, ever since the earliest compositions of my student days, has been to create musical forms that suggest the search for spiritual unity beyond seemingly impenetrable veils of confusion and juxtaposition. That such unity exists - *must exist* - is one of my deepest convictions. That modern society presents an unprecedented network of complex parallel worlds, apparently so completely disconnected from each other, only amplifies my feeling that the search for deeper truths lies at the heart of our attempt to keep inter-personal and inter-cultural communication from breaking down and disappearing entirely.

Both compositions on this record represent musical searches for such unity, although the character of the search in each case is quite distinct. In fact, although the two pieces were composed "back to back" in 1984 (with only *Hidden Sparks* for solo violin between them) the differences between them will be more striking to the casual listener than the similarities. *Spectres Parisiens* uses a large ensemble with dense and intricate computer electronics, has a continuous formal development without independent movement divisions, and lives in a generally romantic atmosphere of struggle and resolution. *Nature's Breath* on the other hand uses a smaller chamber orchestra and no elec-

tronics, is divided rather neatly into clearly audible sections, and is more classical in its cool and delicate proportions.

Nature's Breath was composed during the Fall of 1984. The work was commissioned by the Serge Koussevitzky Foundation of the Library of Congress, and was premiered by the Ensemble InterContemporain at Paris' Theatre du Rond Point in March 1985.

This work is about unity between diverse materials, and approaches the question with a certain calm and patience, perhaps inspired by the text of Chuang Tzu, the Taoist sage, on which the piece is loosely based:

When great nature sighs, we hear
the winds,
Which, noiseless in themselves,
Awaken voices from other beings,
Blowing on them.

Nature's Breath is divided into three movements framed by a short introduction and coda. The piece is held together by one long, sinuous, unfolding melodic line which functions as a cantus firmus throughout the work. In a sense, the piece can be viewed as a set of variations on different aspects of this melody. After an introduction which delicately introduces all the elements of the piece, the first section explores many different harmonic relationships implied by the melody. Here the

music is warm though rapidly evolving, and moves through different emotional states. In the second section, this uneasy motion stops abruptly, and the melody is examined from a timbral point of view. What begins as an intricate interplay of nature-like sounds surrounding and amplifying this melody eventually turns into a static meditation on a complex composite spectrum played by all the instruments together. At the moment that the piece's forward motion has been halted almost completely, the harp, vibraphone and marimba announce the third section of very different character. Here the melody is displayed in its most angular rhythmic form and the section starts with an almost minimalist overlay of gradually de-phased melodic fragments. The layers of melodic material accumulate rapidly, and this section builds to a forceful climax with the whole ensemble playing the original material at breakneck speed in unison. *Nature's Breath* ends with a feeling of calm in its brief coda, which manages to re-unite all the major elements of the piece in a single gentle, but insistent, phrase.

Spectres Parisiens was composed between January and April 1984 as a *Commande d'Etat* from the French Culture Ministry. It was premiered by the Ensemble Itinéraire at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in May 1984, and is the last work that I completed before leaving IRCAM in the Fall of that year. The title of the piece is

somewhat of a pun, referring both to the rich timbral language found in the work (much of which was developed during my stay in Paris), and to the ghost or spectre of a Paris that I was about to leave, making the work a sort of farewell.

The piece is scored for three solo instruments (flute, french horn, and cello—all amplified), chamber orchestra, and computer-generated tape (realized at IRCAM on the 4X digital synthesizer). The work is a large-scale journey in which many diverse musical elements are accumulated and eventually unified. I have tried to create a complete cohesion between the instrumental writing and the electronic part, so that they both contribute together to a common texture and musical context. In fact, in listening to the piece it is often difficult to perceive which sounds emanate from the orchestra and which from the computer; the result, however, would clearly have been impossible to achieve with either force alone.

In *Spectres Parisiens* I have exploited the potential of computers to generate rich and complex sonorities that change gradually over long periods of time. In this work the computer part furnishes a very slow continuous timbral transition that defines the formal movement and continuity of the piece. This is the "ocean" in which the individual notes, phrases and sections find their mediator. There is, in fact, a rather striking contrast between the widely differ-

entiated playing styles and expressive attitudes of the instrumentalists, and the more objective, unperturbed overview heard in the electronics. The solo instruments give, in a sense, specific instances of each timbral state and are each prominent at one time or another. The orchestra mediates between the solo instruments and electronics, alternating between fused ensemble textures (approaching the dense spectra of the tape) and an intricate polyphony (mirroring or answering the soloists).

The form of *Spectres Parisiens* is symmetrical and circular, one of continuous transformation. The piece begins with a dramatic explosion, rhythmic although timbrally saturated. This abrupt opening becomes in a sense the goal of the work, and appears again at the climax of the piece, after its constituent parts have been reassembled. The first half of the piece is made up of three large sections, each presided over by one of the solo instruments. First flute, then horn and cello lead a series of mammoth timbral transitions where each stage is based on sonorities and musical material played by the soloists. In a sense, the process is one of increasing spectral simplicity, with a passage from the noisy complexity of the opening, to breathy delicate noise, to metallic inharmonicity, to a pseudo-harmonic series based on cello harmonics. This large-scale sonic fusion provides the basis for a melodic and harmonic canta-

bile section at the center of the piece. From this moment of calm, melodic expressiveness and timbral richness grow gradually. An intense section of elaborate embellishments and booming pedal tones leads to the climax of piece.

Discography of works by Tod Machover

- Light*. Ensemble InterContemporain; Peter Eötvös conducting, CRI SD 506.
Soft Morning, City! Jane Manning, soprano; Barry Guy, double bass; computer tape realized at IRCAM. CRI SD 506.
Hidden Sparks. Maryvonne Le Dizes-Richard, violin. NW 333.

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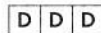
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The **PRISM Orchestra** under Music Director Robert Black has quickly established itself both for its virtuosity and its innovative programming. Its repertory ranges from Mozart and Schubert through Wagner, Strauss, and Britten, and it has presented first performances of works by many important American composers, as well as first American performances by such European masters as Jean Barraqué.

ROBERT BLACK, Music Director of the New Amsterdam Symphony Orchestra and the Bronx Symphony Orchestra, makes frequent guest conducting appearances throughout the United States and Canada. He is a member of the internationally-acclaimed Speculum Musicae and is Artistic Director of the New York New Music Ensemble. He has published poetry as well as essays on 20th-century performance practice. His recordings as both pianist and conductor include works of Beethoven (late sonatas) and Liszt (nominated for the Grand Prix du Disque by the Liszt Academy in Budapest).

The **ASKO Ensemble** is a group of approximately seventeen musicians which dedicates itself to the performance of twentieth-century music, with an accent on the latest developments in contemporary chamber music. It is the intention of the Asko Ensemble to strengthen the tie between musicians, composers, and bordering disciplines and to rally their resources. To this end, the Asko 'Werkplaats' was brought to life in 1981, as a gathering place for composers and the instrumentalists from the ensemble. The framework was to create an environment in which ideas could be exchanged and possibilities examined before a musical piece would assume its final shape. The ensemble has produced several impressive projects centered around such composers as Elliott Carter, Iannis Xenakis, and Edgard Varèse, as well as the IRCAM Institute in Paris.

Peter Eötvös, principal guest conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, London, was born at Székelyudvarhely, Hungary (now Rumania). He studied conducting and composition at the Budapest Music Academy, and since 1966 has collaborated with Karlheinz Stockhausen on numerous projects. Mr. Eötvös has been the musical director of the Ensemble InterContemporain (Paris) since 1979 and regularly conducts leading orchestras throughout Europe.



Producer: David Starobin

Engineers: David Hancock (Nature's Breath)
Adrian Verstijnen (Spectres Parisiens)

Nature's Breath recorded October 9, 1985
at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, New York

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Tod Machover (born 1953 in New York) has been widely recognized as one of the most interesting and innovative composers of his generation. He has been active in all forms of instrumental music well as state-of-the-art computer music research.

Since September 1985, Mr. Machover has been on the faculty of the new Media Laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This center is devoted to research and creation in various arts (music, film, video, computer graphics, etc.) in conjunction with the latest technology. Before moving to M.I.T., Mr. Machover became the first foreign recipient of the French Culture Ministry's "Bourse Annuelle de la Creation", which permitted him to take a composing sabbatical in Burgundy during the 1984/85 season. From 1978-1984, Mr. Machover worked at IRCAM (Paris), where he was Director of Musical Research from 1980 through 1984.

Mr. Machover has been the recipient of many prizes and awards, and his music has been widely performed throughout the United States and Europe. Besides fulfilling commissions for the New York New Music Ensemble and the Asko Ensemble of Amsterdam, he is currently working on a large-scale video opera commissioned by the Centre Georges Pompidou to celebrate its tenth anniversary. This work will be based on science fiction writer Philip K. Dick's masterpiece **Valis**, and will involve the use of highly sophisticated computer technology for sound and image.

