

## Chapter points

- 1 Avant-Propos
- 2 Vivaldi's *Primavera* (1 Mouvement)
- 3 Studio Montreal 1
- 4 The dog's barking
- 5 Studio Montreal 2
- 6 Debussy
- 7 Film & Sound
- 8 Water Music (*En cuerdas*)
- 9 Departure
- 10 Steps
- 11 Mont Royal
- 12 City Sounds
- 13 Pont St. Victoria
- 14 *Night Traffic*
- 15 Pont Jacques Cartier
- 16 Necker Cube
- 17 *Table's Clear* (Princeton, New Jersey)
- 18 *Idle Chatter Junior* (Princeton University)
- 19 University of Montreal
- 20 Conclusion
- 21 *Un autre Printemps*  
(Musique concrète composed by Francis Dhomont - 06.08 min.)
- 22 Credits

## Audio tracks

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| Francis Dhomont<br><i>En cuerdas</i> (Arturo Parra, guitar)                         | (11.27) |
| Paul Lansky<br><i>Night Traffic</i>   | (10.14) |
| Paul Lansky<br><i>Table's clear</i><br>(Jonah and Caleb Lansky, kitchen percussion) | (18.02) |
| Paul Lansky<br><i>Idle Chatter junior</i>   | (10.37) |

## Uli Aumüller:

Electroacoustic music or *musique concrète*, as it was conceived by Pierre Schaeffer, has no visual aspects as it usually only comes out of loudspeakers. At the same time most of the composers of *musique concrète* do not use sounds that are related to narrative structures. So you won't often hear sounds whose origins could easily be recognized, such as a bird singing, a bell ringing or wind whistling. Composers generally prefer the more abstract qualities of sounds, so that listeners will focus their attention on their musical aspects, rather than the stories they might tell.

When I decided to make a film about electroacoustic music, I was explicitly looking for composers who use sounds that are recognizable and refer to a visual reality. In my film I wanted to show the visual origin of a sound alongside its purely acoustical qualities, just as I have in my other films where one sees musicians playing their music.

One of the first composers I thought of was Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) who imitated natural sounds with classical instruments in a way that mediated the differences between their natural (referential) and musical (abstract) qualities. The famous barking dog in the second movement of Vivaldi's *Spring Concerto*, for instance, is more a musical figure – a basso continuo line – than a literal attempt to imitate an animal. Those who know may discover a dog within the viola line, but it's more a dog singing than a viola barking, even when the musicians try their best to imitate the natural sounds. The same applies to water murmuring, birds singing, thunder and so on...

From the very beginning of musical history, composers have played with the ambiguity of the abstract and the absolute. I was curious to know how a contemporary composer with modern technical equipment might handle the same sounds Vivaldi wrote about in the didactic poems which he attached to his scores.

After listening to a large pile of compact discs, my choice fell upon the work of Francis Dhomont, who was influenced by the Pierre Schaeffer school. Dhomont follows a dream-like aesthetic, where fragments of (acoustic) reality sometimes appear for a few seconds, only to dissolve and quickly vanish. He takes recorded sounds as raw materials and uses the vast possibilities of electronic manipulation to travel with them to unknown islands, where these materials were nothing other than starting points. But Dhomont also travels within the sounds, turning their insides out onto the surface.

Once Francis Dhomont not only agreed to compose "Another Spring", *Un Autre Printemps*, but also agreed to be filmed during his compositional process, I spent a couple of weeks in Canada looking for locations that might match the landscapes that Vivaldi had written about. I took nearly 1000 pictures of the beautiful Canadian landscape, searched in vain for goats and the dogs who accompany them (I found some sheep, but no shepherds), and discovered, more by chance than systematically, that the process of looking deeply inside a sound (where its qualities become

more abstractly musical) could be echoed photographically and extremely close to a given object. The closer I got, the more my attention was drawn to the object's mathematical proportions, the changes of light and shadow, the tiny differences of the surface and its colors. Here were the infinite variety of created forms and structures which one rarely takes notice of in everyday life. Those pictures suddenly appeared with an overwhelming beauty I'd never seen before, and I asked myself (and Francis Dhomont) just what it is that determines how one structure is beautiful and another is not. Was it my imagination, or was I following certain patterns I've always had in my brain, or learned in my childhood? Was the beauty created by my sense of fantasy? Or if not, was this beauty waiting for me, within a river or in the structure of a rock, or on the surface of a lake, for hundreds of years, until a pair of ears or eyes might have the joy of beholding it?

We did not find an answer to that eternal question: 'Where does beauty come from?'. But we did discover that beauty might be found in almost any sound or object--depending on how long and in what manner one wanted to search for it, and to how open one's mind was to discovering it.

The other thing we found was a structure for our film (which was "our" film by then). It begins with "real" objects--landscapes, water, trees, villages, towns etc., and then the sounds and images move closer and closer, so that we might enter more deeply into the reality of existing things. Francis Dhomont took parts of Vivaldi's music, the sounds of nature and some selected viola sounds and made his music from them -- and I gave my footage and close-ups to the video artist Robert Darroll to make a *musique concrète visuelle* out of it. In the end, the film is about an audio-visual creative process.

The second living composer who entered the stage was Paul Lansky. Some of Lansky's works use the rhythmic framework of minimal music, though his use of random elements separates his music from easy predictability. When I heard Lansky's music for the first time (above all *Table's Clear* and *Idle Chatter*), I immediately had pictures in my head, his music evoking the inherent structure of the moving pictures of film or video.

Paul Lansky's composing methods are quite the opposite of those that are used by Francis Dhomont. Lansky layers his sounds on pre-existing musical structures, creating, for instance, a Gamelan orchestra with kitchen instruments, while Dhomont peers inside the structure of sound, and tries to find compositional form on the basis what the sound offers him.

I enjoyed observing that two composers so similar in one aspect of their work (balancing the narrative and abstract), could at the same time occupy such completely different worlds. I wanted them to explain to each other how they achieved such different results using virtually the same raw materials. If you listen carefully to the discussions of Lansky and Dhomont that are part of this film, you'll hear that they sometimes use the same words, but with slightly different meanings -- and I think that these differences explain more than a hundred books and analyses might.

Above all, I want to say thank you to Francis Dhomont and Paul Lansky--for their confidence and patience (and love)--without which a film like this could never have been made.

Berlin, June 26, 2001

## Francis Dhomont:

### About the works *Un Autre Printemps* and *En Cuerdas*

The film project of Uli Aumüller had a definite relationship with my own musical world. This mostly concerned the chosen morphological elements used in the film, as well as the film's visual objects and the sounds of my music. It was these common preoccupations that convinced me of the usefulness of a collaboration.

However, the composition of incidental music - in this case, to illustrate the image but mostly to bring new light on a new musical genre - had its own rules, different from the ones inherent in a personal work. I now had to respect the direction of a given theme, take into consideration various constraints on sounds (Vivaldi, viola, dog, running water, naturalism) as well as temporal limitations, make use of allusions and references, and so on. *Un Autre Printemps* (Another Spring) is of course the echo of Vivaldi's famous concerto, and in the film it is a thread which is transformed and recycled. The baroque work then becomes a simple but rich source of sounds, carrying cultural connotations which, metamorphosed and in association with other referential or metaphoric images, suggest a 'syn-ponia' in its first meaning. The importance given to the movements of water and its mutations, corresponds to the metaphor of the gushing of spring so very often quoted in the film. But here the sound of Nature questions the nature of sound; the figurative and referential elements at the beginning of the film progressively move into abstraction, and the music finds, progressively, its own character. Finally, the sound returns to its musical reality. The compositional process of *En Cuerdas*<sup>1</sup>, an earlier work from which a few moments are also used in the film, presents some similarities to *Un Autre Printemps*. Here again there is a 're-routing', where the sonorities of the guitar are mingled with other sounds belonging to the same type of morphologies, and are used to produce infinite material for these various developments. The sonic environment, nevertheless, remains one of strings that are plucked, rubbed and struck; but strings that have been made virtual, transformed by computer manipulations and multiplied by the electroacoustic composing process. Within this formal framework and the preliminary choices made with the software, I have allowed myself, as always, a great deal of room for improvised *séquences-jeux*, using the machines like a "sound body" brought to life with the mouse: its movement controls the musical gestures of the programmed sequences, the dynamics are worked out in real time, and so on. The moment of choice comes much later, when only the 'magic moments' are kept.

This way of looking for the inner beauty of a sound to be later organized into

structures, reminds me of a time when, to earn a living, I was sculpting wood following its natural forms. In both cases, I have tried to reconcile intention and chance, the perceived and the conceived, nature and artifice.

Now the film is finished. I watch and listen. Beyond its purely visual beauty, the film manages to capture in a simple way a complex musical journey, opening doors which are too often closed by scientific discourse. I am also reminded of a lovely adventure, with some hardships but also allowing for joyous meetings: with a charming colleague, Paul Lansky; with my old partners Christian Calon and Jean René; enjoying Robert Darroll's photography; the dedication of the production team and, of course, Uli Aumüller himself, and how he dealt with numerous difficulties and shared his unwavering passion.

<sup>1</sup>*Commissioned by Arturo Parra with the assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts. Premiered on May 15, 1998 at the Festival Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville (Québec). First Prize of the Concours international de musique électroacoustique 'EAR 99', Hungarian Radio, Budapest. The piece can also be found on the CDs 'Contemporanea '98' Vol.1, TauKay 107, Italy, and Sonic Circuit VIII, American Forum USA. It will soon be published by the Montreal label 'empreintes DIGITALEs'.*

### À propos d'*Un autre Printemps* et *En cuerdas*

Il existait entre le projet cinématographique de Uli Aumüller et mon propre univers musical une parenté certaine dans l'utilisation dynamique d'éléments morphologiques, objets visuels chez le cinéaste, sonores chez le compositeur. C'est cette commune préoccupation qui m'a convaincu de l'intérêt d'une collaboration.

Cependant, la composition d'une musique d'application - destinée, dans ce cas, à "illustrer l'image" mais surtout à éclairer un genre musical mal connu - comportait ses propres règles, différentes de celles d'une œuvre libre: respect d'une direction thématique donnée, contraintes matériologiques (Vivaldi, alto, chien, ruissellements, naturalisme) et temporelles, recours à des allusions et références, etc.

*Un autre Printemps* fait bien sûr écho au célèbre concerto de Vivaldi, véritable fil rouge du film, mais il le détourne, l'altère, le recycle. L'œuvre baroque devient alors une simple mais riche source sonore, porteuse de connotations culturelles qui, métamorphosées et associées à d'autres images référentielles ou métaphoriques, proposent une "syn-phonie" au sens premier. La place importante accordée aux mouvements de l'eau et à ses mutations correspond à la métaphore printanière du jaillissement, si présente à l'image. Mais ici le son de la Nature interroge la nature du son; les éléments figuratifs et référentiels du début glissent progressivement vers l'abstraction, grâce aux traitements qui en travestissent l'origine, et la musique retrouve son intégrité. Enfin, pour conclure, le son retournera au sens.

Le processus de composition de *En cuerdas*<sup>1</sup>, œuvre antérieure dont quelques moments figurent également dans le film, présente avec *Un autre Printemps* certaines similitudes. Il s'agit aussi d'un détournement, celui des sonorités d'une

guitare qui, alliée à d'autres morphologies de même type, vont générer des figures et textures multiples et donner lieu à divers développements. L'univers sonore de cette pièce demeure cependant celui des cordes pincées, frottées, frappées, mais de cordes virtuelles, métamorphosées par les traitements informatiques et multipliées par l'écriture électroacoustique.

À l'intérieur d'un cadre formel assez strict et de choix préalables opérés sur les programmes, j'ai réservé, comme toujours, une place importante aux séquences-jeux improvisées: utilisation des machines comme des corps sonores que la main vient animer «à la souris», primauté du geste sur la séquence programmée, travail en temps réel sur les dynamiques, etc. Plus tard intervient le choix des "instants magiques" qui seuls figurent dans l'œuvre.

Cette façon de chercher dans le son la beauté qu'il contient pour l'organiser en structures me rappelle l'époque où, pour gagner ma vie, je sculptais le bois en m'inspirant de ses formes naturelles. Dans les deux cas j'ai tenté de réconcilier la volonté et le hasard, le perçu et le conçu, la nature et l'artifice.

Maintenant le film est terminé. Je regarde et j'écoute. En plus de sa beauté plastique, il me semble résumer avec beaucoup de simplicité une évolution musicale très complexe, ouvrant ainsi des portes qui restent souvent fermées à de plus savants discours. Et je me souviens aussi d'une belle aventure, pleine de difficultés mais aussi d'heureuses rencontres: celle d'un charmant collègue, Paul Lansky, celle de mes vieux complices Christian Calon et Jean René, celle des images de Robert Darroll, celle d'une équipe de production très impliquée et, bien sûr, celle de Uli Aumüller lui-même, de ses nombreux problèmes et de sa passion inébranlable et communicative.

<sup>1</sup>*Commande du guitariste colombien Arturo Parra. En cuerdas a reçu l'aide du Conseil des Arts du Canada et a été créée le 15 mai 1998 au "Festival Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville" (Québec). Premier Prix au Concours international de musique électroacoustique "EAR '99" de la Radio hongroise à Budapest. Cette pièce figure sur le CD «Contemporanea '98» Vol.1, TauKay 107, Italie, sur le CD Sonic Circuit VIII, American Composers Forum, USA et doit paraître prochainement sous l'étiquette montréalaise empreintes DIGITALEs.*

### Paul Lansky:

*Night Traffic*, *Table's Clear* and *Idle Chatter Junior* all explore ways to transform familiar sounds into musical sounds.

*Night Traffic* employs the sound of cars passing back and forth on a four-lane highway, a noise that is now a familiar part of urban and suburban life, and embeds it in a musical texture that adds harmony and creates musical phrases from the random passing of the cars and their Doppler shifts. The implicit violence and aggressiveness of the traffic sounds leads to the construction of a texture that is theatrical and almost operatic.

We've all had the experience of tapping our forks and knives on dinnerware, noticing their pleasing sounds and feeling frustrated that we couldn't turn them into real music. *Table's Clear* uses these same sounds to create a kind of fantasy realiza-

tion of that wish. In 1990 I set my two young sons, Jonah and Caleb, loose in the kitchen to make all the noise they could. I then used these recorded noises to explore this sound domain. Initially in the piece the noises we hear are familiar, and could easily be done in real-time at the dinner table. But, as the piece evolves these sounds become part of a super-human virtuoso texture that has some striking resemblances to Gamelan music. As the piece winds down, we wake, as if from a dream, and notice that we're still trying awkwardly to coax music from kitchenware.

*Idle Chatter Junior* is the fourth in a series of pieces that makes music from the fragmented sounds of speech. The speech is chopped up into tiny bits, tossed around and thrown out onto the sonic canvas to form a rhythmic texture against a slowly evolving harmonic background.

These three pieces have some interesting relations to cinema in the extent to which they encourage the listener to visually imagine the creators of the sound sources and to individually construct a kind of virtual reality that will accommodate this vision. The cars have voices, a super-human percussionist plays the dishes, and the chatterers at a cocktail party are somehow managing to make music, despite their best intentions. In other words the pieces attempt to create their own kind of inner 'cinematic' world. These pieces are also influenced by film's ability to find poetry in mundane things: an urban landscape becomes a painting, disembodied voices evoke song, and so on. Finally, I am very pleased with the way that Uli Aumüller has used this music in his film. Sound and image each manage to maintain their integrity and autonomy, yet work together well.

### **Robert Darroll:**

We often speak of "Visual Music" but the thin dividing line between visual music and music illustration is not always clear. If the visual composition follows the tonal composition too closely (or vice versa), we tend to get the same information on both levels simultaneously. This is often the case when a particular musical gesture, like an ascending arpeggio, is echoed by a sequence of ascending forms. So a very close match between both dimensions is not always desirable. The other extreme, meaning the absolute autonomy of both dimensions without any compositional relationship at all, results in a meaningless random effect. Somewhere in between these two extremes lies a satisfactory solution. And with each film or musical composition it will be different. We have occasionally had cases where the film needed a highly synchronized sound track in order to be comprehensible - at other times, we have opted for a loose, occasional synchronicity where the tonal dimension contributes mainly to the subjective mood of each visual sequence. In this specific case, *Un autre Printemps*, the form of the visual composition was dictated by Francis Dhomont's tonal work. I did not find the composition very gestural. It was dominated by textures of varying intensity, most of which seemed to be derived from sounds of water, which suited my purposes very well. Water as a connecting, flowing, ever-present element. Even as we go over the bridge, somewhere below water is flowing, even if

out of sight. The source of all my video material was the documentation which recorded Francis Dhomont collecting sound-material and reworking it for *Un autre Printemps*, and which included not only natural elements such as flora and water, but also man-made elements such as the construction of the bridge. These constructional elements form a stark contrast to the flowing natural elements.

Visual Music is abstract painting in time. Even when the aural dimension "quotes" the barking of Vivaldi's dog, I was averse to illustrating this with a real dog, more interested in the tonal characteristics with which the real music instrument imitated the real dog. I was interested in the jagged surface of horsehair scraping over the string. As the musical composition is highly "artificial" in that it consists largely of synthesized or highly modified tonal events which only obliquely refer to Vivaldi's themes, I was not bound to illustrate those themes visually. The visual product is as artificial as the tonal source of its composition. I also did not feel the necessity to repeat anything which had already been stated in Uli Aumüller's film although, throughout the composition, recognizable fragments of footage previously seen in the main body of the film, are re-used, mostly in a modified form. I felt it was rather more important to create a visual language which, although born out of that film material, would arrive at an unexpected and formally diverse effect, flowing parallel to Francis Dhomont's tonal composition.

**Mein Kino für die Ohren**

Die musique concrète von Francis Dhomont und Paul Lansky

**Mon cinéma pour l'oreille**

La musique concrète de Francis Dhomont et Paul Lansky

**My cinema for the ears**

The musique concrète of Francis Dhomont and Paul Lansky

**Ein Film von/Un film de/A film by Uli Aumüller****mit/avec/with**

Francis Dhomont

Paul Lansky

Christian Calon, Klangkünstler/Artiste audio/Sound Artist

Robert Laberge, Landwirt/Agriculteur/Farmer

Jean René, Bratsche/Alto/Viola

**Musik/Musique/Music**

Antonio Vivaldi:

*La Primavera* (RV 269)

Camerata Bern, Thomas Zehetmair, Violine/Violon/Violin

Berlin Classics 001164BC

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**Francis Dhomont***Un autre Printemps*

Original composition for the film

merci à Jean René, Bratsche/Alto/Viola

*En cuerdas*

merci à Arturo Parra, Gitarre/Guitare/Guitar

disques empreintes DIGITALEs Montréal

**Paul Lansky***Night Traffic, Table's Clear, Idle Chatter Junior*

from BRIDGE 9035 and BRIDGE 9103

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Uli Aumüller

*dedicated to my son***Dank an/Remerciements à/With thanks to**

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