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Saturday
February 26
8 pm

CONCERT

Gérard Grisey:
Le Noir de l'Étoile
Les Percussions de Strasbourg

CURTIS R. PRIEM EXPERIMENTAL MEDIA AND PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

Le Noir l’Étoile

by Gérard Grisey

Introduction to *Le Noir de l’Étoile*

In 1967, a young astronomer detected in the heavens a rapidly varying radio signal, in the form of periodic impulses 1.3 seconds apart. The discovery caused a sensation. The impulses were so regular that for awhile they were taken to be signals coming from extraterrestrial civilizations. Then astrophysicists revealed a truth that was just as surprising: the signals were being emitted by a pulsar, the fantastic compact residue created by the supernova explosions that long ago disintegrated the massive stars. Pulsars have a radius of only 15 kilometers for a mass as great as that of the sun; they are made up of material so densely compressed that their atoms are crushed to form a solid mass of neutrons. A thimble of the material from one of these stars would weigh one hundred billion tons on Earth. Pulsars are giant magnetized spinning tops. Some of them rotate several tens of times per second, and their magnetic field is a thousand billion times bigger than the Earth’s. A pulsar’s magnetic lines of force channel the charged particles of the interstellar medium along its magnetic axis, which allows the emission of a beam of light that turns at the same time as the star, like a kind of cosmic lighthouse. With each rotation, the beam sweeps the Earth’s line of sight and astronomers record a light pulse. A part of this radiation is emitted within the field of radio waves. It can therefore be picked up using enormous telescopes. Radio telescopes are sophisticated radars designed to detect low intensity radio signals, such as those that come from faraway stars. They consist of large metal surfaces, smooth or in mesh form, upon which the radio waves are reflected. Antennae transform the waves into electrical signals. These signals can be amplified by the membrane of a loudspeaker. The human ear can then hear the murmuring of the pulsars.

In the electromagnetic tornado given out by a pulsar, the radio waves emitted represent only a whisper, and it is this that is picked up by the instruments. For an astronomer, it is like trying to understand the way a large machine in a factory works by listening merely to the few muffled noises that escape from it. The energy collected is infinitesimal... In 50 years of observations, all the energy gathered by all the radio telescopes in the world is less than that you need to turn a single page of your program. The first pulsar that you are going to hear has been recorded on magnetic tape, for it can only be observed in the Southern Hemisphere. It is the Vela pulsar, the residue from the explosion of a supernova that primitive men could no doubt see in daylight 12,000 years ago. It spins at a rate of 11 revolutions per second.

The other pulsar is picked up by the Nançay radio astronomy station in Sologne. It is named 0329+54 (the figures are its galactic coordinates: 3hr29min right ascension and +54° declination). It spins at a rate of 1.4 revolutions per second. The supernova which created it exploded 5 million years ago and its radio impulses take 7,500 years to reach Earth. They are being picked up at this very moment in Nançay, and are transmitted directly to the Concert Hall.

Like great lighthouses in the heavens, pulsars will guide our musical navigation. Let us listen to these cosmic clocks marking out their seconds. We have an appointment with the guardians of time. It is a date with a loved one. Let us open the window and await the precise time.

Jean-Pierre Luminet
Astrophysicist at the Meudon Observatory

A Utopia Born in the Stars

To imagine that stars can emit sound, and thus generate music, is that not a sweet utopia? Especially if we imagine that a composer, Gérard Grisey, has written music from it.

Played for the first time in March 1991 in Brussels, for the Ars Musica festival, this project is still as fresh as it was then.

Our society today is prey to many questions regarding its future, and this *Noir de l’Étoile* is perhaps one of the responses to a more universal world. These sounds coming from the stars, carrying in them the testimony of a past world, can be compared to a kind of voice of rediscovered wisdom, a proposal for a language that knows no barriers, whether they be cultural, religious or territorial.

In that respect, this work remains beautifully utopic. Very often it is also when a creator leaves us that we become aware of the universal nature of his language. His music finally appears as a body of work that has become classical because it cannot be overlooked in contemporary writing, and as a major percussion work, to be discovered or re-discovered.

Jean-Paul Bernard
Artistic Director, Les Percussions de Strasbourg

Credits

Les Percussions de Strasbourg

Jean-Paul Bernard
Claude Ferrier
Bernard Lesage
Keiko Nakamura
François Papier
Olaf Tzschoppe

Artistic Director

Jean-Paul Bernard

Stage Managers

Claude Mathia
David Raphael

Les Percussions de Strasbourg are supported by

Le Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication
Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles d’Alsace (DRAC)
La Région Alsace
Le Conseil Général du Bas-Rhin
Strasbourg, Ville de Culture
SACEM
SPEDIDAM

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FACE (The French-American Fund For Contemporary Music)
Institut Français

Bios

Gerard Grisey

Born in 1946, Gérard Grisey studied at the Trossingen School of Music in Germany and at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique in Paris, where he took lessons in composition with Olivier Messiaen. He also studied with Henri Dutilleul at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Musique and took classes in Darmstadt with Karlheinz Stockhausen, György Ligeti, and Iannis Xenakis. He learned the basics of electro-acoustics with Jean-Etienne Marie and acoustics with E. Leip at the Faculty of Science in Paris.

Grisey held a scholarship at the Villa Médicis in Rome from 1972 to 1974, and in 1980 he was at the IRCAM, then was a guest of the DAAD in Berlin. He attended numerous seminars on composition in Darmstadt, at the IRCAM, at the Scuola Civica in Milan, and in various American universities.

From 1982 to 1986, he taught composition at the University of California at Berkeley. From 1986 until his death in 1998, he was a professor at the Conservatoire Supérieur in Paris.

Jean-Pierre Luminet

Jean-Pierre Luminet is an astrophysicist at the Paris-Meudon Observatory. As research director of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), his scientific work on black holes and his “crumpled universe” models have earned him an international reputation. He has been the winner of numerous prizes and medals and is a member of several academies.

The scientific community has paid tribute to his work by giving the name “Luminet” to the small planet no. 5523, discovered in 1991 at Mount Palomar.

Alongside his purely scientific work, Luminet has always had a keen interest in reconciling the many forms of human invention. He has published over a dozen books and is co-author of several films and television documentaries. He is also very active in different artistic and literary fields. A writer and poet, he has published two novels that were well received by critics and translated into several languages, as well as collections of poetry. He is interested in the relationship between science and art and has worked with different artists on the creation of works inspired by scientific discoveries. Luminet is also an artist (exhibition “Deux dessinateurs de l’imaginaire,” the Trocadéro Library, 1982) and a musician.

Group Portrait of Les Percussions de Strasbourg

In Strasbourg in 1961, six classically trained young musicians—Bernard Balet, Jean Batigne, Lucien Droeller, Jean-Paul Finkbeiner, Claude Ricou and Georges Van Gucht—were members of the Municipal Orchestra (directed by Ernest Bour) and the ORTF Orchestra (directed by Charles Bruck).

Driven by the momentum that marked the music of the second half of the 20th century, the six percussionists shared a common dream: to found a percussion ensemble and establish a repertoire of chamber music written especially for it, in order to give these instruments, whatever their origin—Western, Eastern, or African—modern meaning. In 1962, the six musicians founded the “Groupe Instrumental à Percussion,” which would later become the “Percussions de Strasbourg,” and performed their first concert.

This quickly gave rise to a new repertoire of works, and composers like Messiaen, Serocki, Kabelac, Ohana, Xenakis, Mâche, and Dufourt, among others, have written especially for them.

François Papirer

François Papirer has been a soloist with Les Percussions de Strasbourg since 1996. He was born in 1970 in Mulhouse, France. He was awarded the gold medal, the Accessit First Prize, and the Regional award from the Mulhouse Conservatoire in 1990–1991. He obtained his diploma from the Freiburg School of Music in Breisgau, Germany in 1996, and taught percussion at the Delémont Conservatoire, Switzerland. He has a passion for Indian drums (tablas). In 2004, he was awarded the international program “Hors les Murs” from the Villa Médicis.

Keiko Nakamura

Keiko Nakamura has been a soloist with Les Percussions de Strasbourg since 1981. She was born in 1955 in Fukuoka, Japan, and graduated with a degree in piano and percussion from the Osaka Arts University, Japan in 1978. She was awarded first prize for percussion by the Strasbourg Conservatoire in 1979, won the bronze medal at the Geneva International Music Competition in 1981, and also received the silver medal, “International Public Incentive Award.” Nakamura ventured into African music, and was solo timpani player with the Strasbourg Philharmonic Orchestra from 1981 to 1982. She has performed solo recitals and played in various ensembles and orchestras, including Ensemble Modern and Ensemble Intercontemporain, among others. Nakamura has been director at Les Percussions de Strasbourg school since 2005.

Olaf Tzschoppe

Olaf Tzschoppe has been a soloist with Les Percussions de Strasbourg since 1992. He was born in 1962 in Kiel, Germany. He obtained his diploma from the Freiburg School of Music in Breisgau, and was a DAAD bursary student at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor-USA). He is a member of SurPlus (contemporary music ensemble) in Freiburg and gives solo recitals in Germany and elsewhere. He is a percussionist with various ensembles, including Ensemble Modern and musikFabrik Ensemble. He taught percussion at the Freiburg School of Music from 1991 to 1995 and since 2005, he has been teaching at the Hochschule für Künste Bremen in Germany.

Bernard Lesage

Bernard Lesage has been a soloist with Les Percussions de Strasbourg since 1992. He was born in 1968 in Saint-Maur-des-Fossés, France. He began percussion with Alain Jaquet. He obtained his diploma in percussion in 1989 and graduated from the Lyon Conservatoire in 1990, having studied with Georges Van Gucht and François Dupin. He has also studied the piano. Lesage was a soloist with the Percussions Claviers de Lyon from 1989 to 1992 and performed in various national orchestras before coming to Les Percussions de Strasbourg. He has taught percussion at Les Percussions de Strasbourg school since 1996.

Claude Ferrier

Claude Ferrier has been a soloist with Les Percussions de Strasbourg since 1992. He was born in 1964 in Avignon, France. He was a self-taught musician before receiving the gold medal for percussion from the Avignon Academy of Music in 1983. He graduated from the Lyon Conservatoire in 1989 (a student of Georges Van Gucht and François Dupin) with a diploma in percussion in 1989, and obtained

his percussion teaching diploma in 2003. He was an extra percussionist with various national orchestras (Paris Orchestra, Lyon Opera, etc.) from 1987 to 1994, and has been a part of various chamber music ensembles (involving instrumentalists and actors). Since 2005, he has taught at the Mulhouse Conservatoire.

Jean-Paul Bernard

Jean-Paul Bernard is the artistic director of Les Percussions de Strasbourg. He was born in 1957 in Toulon, France. He first trained as a trumpet player, then he played the drums in a rock band from 1978 to 1982. He was awarded first prize for percussion and chamber music by the Toulon Conservatoire in 1985, having studied with Georges Van Gucht. He attended jazz drum master classes with Daniel Humair and studied the zarb with Djamchid Chemirani. He was a regular performer with Musicatreize ensemble from 1985 to 1996, and performed with other various ensembles, as well. He is a percussion teacher at the CFMI musician training center in Sêlestat, and teaches master classes in France and elsewhere. He has been part of several national and international juries.

Claude Mathia & David Raphael: Stage Managers for Les Percussions

Yves Kayser: Sound Engineer

Mike Telin: Tour Manager

Latitude 45: Artist Manager

Les Percussions de Strasbourg sont soutenues avec constance et fidélité par:

LE MINISTÈRE DE LA CULTURE ET DE LA COMMUNICATION

DIRECTION RÉGIONALE DES AFFAIRES CULTURELLES D'ALSACE (DRAC)

LA RÉGION ALSACE

LE CONSEIL GÉNÉRAL DU BAS-RHIN

STRASBOURG, VILLE DE CULTURE

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UPCOMING EVENTS

TALK + DINNER: OBSERVER EFFECTS

Jean-Pierre Luminet

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 6PM

A discussion of the relationship between aesthetics and the cosmos through the work of artists, philosophers, and scientists.

FREE

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE SHOWING

Down The Rabbit-Hole

MONDAY, MARCH 7, 7PM

Down The Rabbit-Hole is a performance for toy piano, music boxes, live electronics, live and edited video, and amplified objects, inspired by Lewis Carroll's Alice stories.

FREE + OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

CONCERT

Steve Reich: Music for 18 Musicians + Double Sextet

Signal

SATURDAY, MARCH 12, 8PM

Minimalist masterpieces by Steve Reich performed by Signal, the virtuoso New York ensemble.

\$15/10/5