LESSONS OF ANATOMY

Book of harpsichord

Composing Commissions 2015-2016
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Main partner : Festival Audio Art / Artistic direction : Marek Choloniewski -
Harpsichord solo : Goska Isphording

Project presentation

In the development of my work, I have been considering the relationship with solo instruments as a very important part of my production. Main reason is probably that it enables me to dig quite deeply into a specific instrument universe aswell as developping some essential complicity with the musicians.
Another aspect of my work consists on focusing on the question of visual dimension of the concert including scenography, lightening and of course video. In many of my works, I was trying different approaches of this visual question ; sometimes by defining some polyphonic narrative elements : the video can exist more or less alone, independentely from the music ; sometimes by trying to make some specific links between musical actions and its incidences on the pictures : here what we could call a kind of counterpoint.

This piece should be the first one of a cycle based on this anatomic metaphor where the video is conceived around the instrument itself. Very simply, the aim is to "enter" as deep as possible inside of a specific instrument's world, in a way like a medical approach. Harpsichord is indeed a very complex and rich object in terms of manufacturing and the closest we look at it the more interesting phenomenons we can get. Quite recentely, I was attending to a contemporary art exhibition in Paris and I discovered the work of Yuri Ancarani, a young italian artist who was using, as a principal matter of his video, some medical footages done with microscopic cameras placed inside of human body. What was amazing in this work was the fact that we were able to be completely out of any empathy due to the abstract beauty of the pictures which were leading us far away from the subject itself (sickness).

The other question which is interesting for me in this project is the relation we maintain with classical instruments. I remember one lesson of Helmut Lachenmann who was explaining how hard it was sometimes to manage with specific techniques when the musicians were taking care maybe too much about the instruments themselves. Of course, a violin, a piano, an harp, are amazing and precious objects which are not supposed to be used in any kind of way. But on the other side, they represent a certain vision of classicism, untouchable area of music and some musicians are considering them as immortal relics ! On the contrary if we look at the rock instruments, bass guitar, guitar, drums, it is very common to observe some damages on them ; its indeed not rare to see musicians playing on vintage instruments which are, in a way, more valuable than new ones ! Even more, in the electronic music field, it has become normal for musicians to build their own instruments with raw materials, remains of any kind of objects and by adding some microphones and trasnformations to manage with very interesting sounds.

Therefore, the first step of this project is to acquire a cheap harpsichord in order to be able to consider it as a pure matter, without any restriction and in order to try any kind of manipulation on it. This experimentation will be the base of the visual part ; the scenario would simply follow some medical approach where a «sick harpsichord» would have to go to the hospital ! Such a situation has not to be considered on the first degree ; on the contrary it is obvious that there should be enough distance here to make it more or less becoming humoristic... Sometimes there is a strong contradiction in contemporary music : composers would like to achieve some crazy sounds with classical musicians who are not ready for this. And it such a case, the situation turns out to be quite funny and not serious at all. But to dig the sound matter, and achieve composition is exactely what composers do since ages. When Monteverdi invented tremolo on strings, probably it was curious enough to make few people laugh !

When we observe the complexity of an harpsichord mechanism, it is fascinating to see how many little pieces of matter are linked together in order to make it work in a proper way. Such as human body, there are thousands of interactions for a simple gesture. By placing a camera very close from those elements, aswell as microphones, some entire world can appear strongly different from the harpsichord in a concert situation. And the piece should also be constructed with this antagonism : a video showing some inside matter with unexpected results and, at the same time, the musician on stage performing in a classical way. I am expecting here a strong and meaninfull contrats in terms of point of view. Also, the idea would be to link those 2 reality of a same instrument by the music itself. I am planning to integrate in the score some actions (theatrical gestures) which would make the link between live performance and video. Also, the usage of a MIDI keyboard can help to control video streams and some of parameters such as speed, contrats, blur... in real time.

The piece will not tell a story or try to express something very precise. I prefer to focus on some strangeness which will allow us to focus also on the musical matter. If extreme things happen to the filmed harpsichord (such as damaging percussions, fire, unexpected liquids and so one...) it will be the result of some inner dramaturgy, some consequence of the architecture of the music. Other conclusions will be left to each !