

Extract from François-Xavier Féron's presentation of the work on 24.3.2012 at the C.D.M.C.

François-Bernard Mâche has written extensively about his music and, more generally on music and the arts. Many musicologists have studied his works, but information about *Iter memor* remains virtually non-existent. Yet this work is of great importance in François-Bernard Mâche's career, since, for the first time, he uses a sampled keyboard for the electroacoustic part.

François-Bernard Mâche, aware of the limited lifespan of the Kurzweil 250, had made a tape, but what I didn't know, was that the work had never been performed in this version.

In the course of the score, a number of mythological names appear, which the composer uses to describe electroacoustic sounds. I perceived concrete traces of an imaginary musical scenario. I was delighted with this discovery, which fitted in perfectly with the symposium, I made an appointment with

François-Bernard Mâche, even though, through our email exchanges he let me understand that he wouldn't have much to say to me about this work.

If, indeed, the existence of an imaginary scenario was more a matter of my imagination rather than the composer's, the interview was nonetheless extremely instructive.

First of all, with regard to the title and instrumentation, *Iter memor* evokes the dichotomy between remembering and forgetting already present in pieces such as *Rituel d'oubli* for ensemble and tape.

But here, the title, explains the composer, "has a sentimental, affective value. affective, not theoretical. The work was in fact written in memory of his father, who was a cellist.

Nevertheless, the title suggests the idea of a path, (*Iter*, a journey), but one on which, as the composer points out, there's no turning back.

As you will hear, the musical flow of the work is perfectly linear.

The entire electroacoustic part was conceived using the Kurzweil 250, the first prototype of which was used by Stevie Wonder in 1983, a year before its official release in 1984.

*Iter memor* dates from '85. The principle of this synthesizer is to build sounds from sampled instrumental tones, converted into digital data and stored in the synthesizer's memory.

It's an instrument widely used in variety and rock music. It was not predestined for use in so-called "art music". But, as François-Bernard Mâche reminded us yesterday technologies of all kinds are interesting working tools that can be used as you wish.

In 1964, he pioneered the use of spectral techniques by using the sonagraphe to analyze the sound of his voice. In 1985, he used a sampled keyboard to construct and broadcast electroacoustic material, which was to become standard practice for him, but also for many other composers such as Steve Reich, to name but one.

François-Bernard Mâche was quick to realize the value of such an instrument.

having worked with it as early as 1985, not in *Iter memor* but first in *La traversée de l'Afrique*, a stage music on tape, which he conceived mainly by improvising on the Kurzweil.

The instrument had been rented at his request by the Atelier lyrique du Rhin, which had commissioned the work. He took advantage of this to compose *Iter memor*, which was originally conceived not as a mixed work but as an instrumental duet for cello and Kurzweil keyboard.

What interested me," explains the composer, "was to use the instrumental side of the sounds of Kurzweil. It was their possibility to be transferred to a keyboard and played live, two years after the appearance of the first consumer sampler: the Mirage. I'd bought the Mirage back in '83, and then I started out on the idea that everything I'd written on tape, I was now going to transform it, transcribe it for live performance.

Let's take a look at the different sounds and how they are arranged within the musical discourse, in *Iter* memor.

Originally, François-Bernard Mâche had divided the tape into eight sections. In the CD he entrusted to me, there were eight sections. Together with the technician, we cleaned up a few small editing points and added subdivisions. We ended up with ten subsections.

On the score. The sounds of Kurzweil are written, for the most part, according to their instrumental source : percussion. But there are also four sound characters, to use François-Bernard's phrase : Aeolus master and ruler of the winds in Greek mythology, Amphitrite Poseidon's wife, Hades, brother of Zeus and Poseidon who reigns beneath the earth and, for this reason, often considered the master of the underworld. The fourth character does not come from Greek mythology, but is Caligula the third Roman emperor who reigned from 37 to 41. What can a Roman emperor do among these Greek deities?

Since Aeolus is linked to air, Amphitrite to water and Hades to earth, it seemed possible to me that Caligula, in one way or another is linked to fire. So, the four elements were at the heart of the imaginary scenario I'd invented for myself.

François-Bernard Mâche, whom I'd like to thank for his frankness, explained that these names were purely mnemonic, that numbers could as well have been used instead. Nevertheless, these names were not chosen at random.

There are some subjective analogies. Amphitrite refers to high, light sounds, reminiscent of water drops. Hades is a cavernous sound that seems to come from the bowels of the earth. Aeolus is a fairly rich resonant sound that evokes the breath of the wind. As for Caligula, the name was chosen for its consonant, perfectly regular rhythmic structure, four syllables, each composed of a consonant and a vowel.

The sounds forming the electroacoustic part were all constructed from the Kurzweil sound samples. Some are used as they are, such as the sounds of the horn, double bass and a large number of percussion sounds, while the others have been worked from the Kurzweil, with different settings.

Many are derived from guitar samples, from which François-Bernard Mâche constructed clusters of five sounds. These are built around a note originally played on the keyboard. This note produces a cluster with two semitones above it and two semitones below.

There are also pentaphonic chords, which are superpositions of fourths.

In the composer's mind, they belong to a pentatonic scale. Eole, too, comes from a guitar sound, although the guitar is completely unrecognizable because the attack has been cut off. Then François-Bernard Mâche played with the wheel of the Kurzweil to produce small glissandi.

François-Bernard Mâche also used piano samples. The Kurzweil was renowned for its ability to reproduce grand pianos.

And he also used the sinus, i.e. a pure sound, a bit like the one you hear when you pick up the phone.

And finally, the last two characters were built from percussive sounds, in this case a finger snap for Caligula. And from a cymbal that's extremely well manipulated for Hades, which expresses the depth of the earth.