

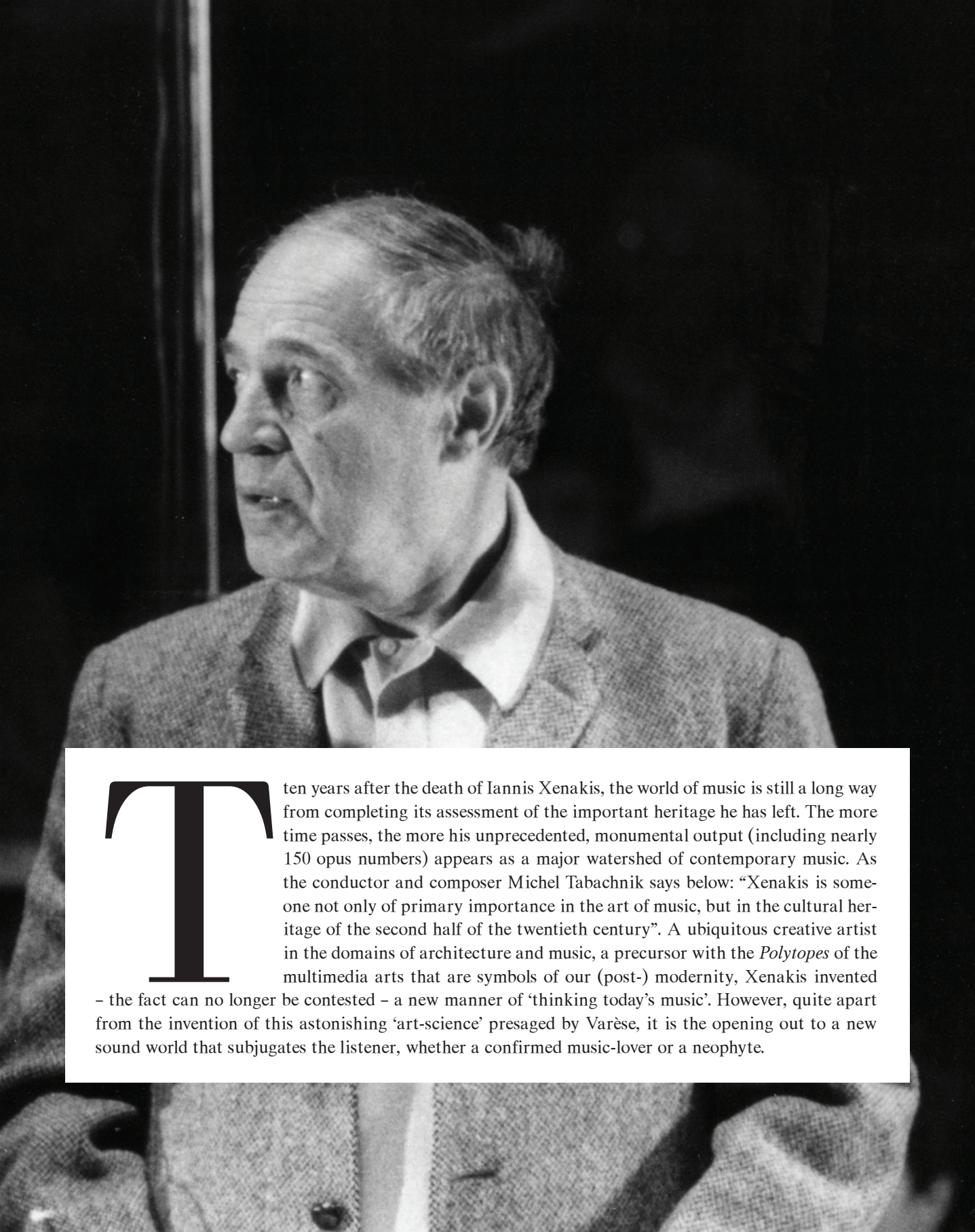
IT'S TIME FOR XENAKIS

Ten years after the death of Iannis Xenakis, the world of music is still a long way from completing its assessment of the important heritage he has left.





Iannis Xenakis
and Pierre Boulez



Ten years after the death of Iannis Xenakis, the world of music is still a long way from completing its assessment of the important heritage he has left. The more time passes, the more his unprecedented, monumental output (including nearly 150 opus numbers) appears as a major watershed of contemporary music. As the conductor and composer Michel Tabachnik says below: “Xenakis is someone not only of primary importance in the art of music, but in the cultural heritage of the second half of the twentieth century”. A ubiquitous creative artist in the domains of architecture and music, a precursor with the *Polytopes* of the multimedia arts that are symbols of our (post-) modernity, Xenakis invented – the fact can no longer be contested – a new manner of ‘thinking today’s music’. However, quite apart from the invention of this astonishing ‘art-science’ presaged by Varèse, it is the opening out to a new sound world that subjugates the listener, whether a confirmed music-lover or a neophyte.

New sonorities, and so new ways of producing them. Although in the electro-acoustic works, the latter arise directly from the composer's manipulation of the technical medium, in the instrumental works, by contrast, musicians have seen their playing habits singularly undermined. Their astonishment when faced with what is required of them corresponds to that of the listener discovering these unsuspected sonorities. However – and paradoxically, Xenakis's writing never requires the apprenticeship of specific musical rudiments with unusual graphics. All the musical symbols he uses are conventional; reading the music of Xenakis requires neither hermetics nor cryptanalysis. So what is so singular about it?

This question, filtered through different arguments, has been asked of around ten world-class performers into whose lives, expressly or by chance, Xenakis one day entered. From their replies, as different as their personalities, their careers, the specificity of their instrumental practice, a certain number of recurrent elements emerge, revealing the primordial importance of Xenakis for the writing of contemporary instrumental music. All have been struck by the aural opulence required of them, the surcharge of polyphonic writing (ten superimposed staves in the piano part of *Synaphai*), the extravagant playing speeds that are necessary. All have been faced with the necessity of finding individual solutions, of engaging their responsibilities as performers. Performing Xenakis

has led them radically to change their approach to the realisation of a work from a score: the aim is no longer to perform indications of a prescriptive score as meticulously as possible, but rather to evaluate the musical and physical means to be applied in order to attain an aural ideal that the composer has set down on paper. This approach implies a new kind of interaction between the listening process and the production of the sound during the work itself and the performance: it is the ear that continually guides and controls the instrumental gesture. Such a renewal of the conception of instrumental play clearly opens the gateways to the music that was to follow that of Xenakis, music that is even now being conceived; most astonishingly, it also opens gateways to an earlier repertoire – that of the earlier twentieth century – and also to the classical and romantic eras, to which he brought a new perspective, one of unsuspected modernity.

Quite apart from the incredible musical experience, for all these performers, playing Xenakis has been – and remains – an initiating approach to a knowledge and a surpassing of themselves, in the crucible of which they have fully felt that “art is anti-destiny” as André Malraux wrote.

The orchestra is without question the medium by which the ‘Xenakis revolution’ in sound has revealed itself in the most dazzling manner and *Jonchaies* is one of his most popular works. Composed and premiered in 1977, it requires a body of 109



Pascal Rophé

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musicians. The composer offers a virtuoso display of teeming, ever growing superimpositions of lines that echo each other. Out of phase metric strata gradually shift more and more out of alignment, producing a multiplication of temporal perception. Pascal Rophé, an international conductor acknowledged to be one of the finest performers of the twentieth-century repertory, many works of which he has premiered and recorded, gives us an in-depth view of the sound world of *Jonchaies*.

“ I started music very late, at the age of 14; I therefore discovered the history of music all at one go. My first contact with Xenakis

was at the Paris Conservatory in the analysis class of Betsy Jolas; she had invited Xenakis for a week of work on *Jonchaies*, for five six-hour sessions. I remember this as something extraordinary on account of his way of approaching the work of analysis: for two days he explained to us his processes, and then, on the third day, he told us: “And then I threw everything away because musically it was taking me where I didn’t want to go, and on the next page I did as I liked.” This proved pretty decisive for me in regard to a certain formalism; what pleased me, notably in *Jonchaies*, was that above all it was the musical idea and especially what the individual had within himself that had to emerge. The rest is the cuisine that

concerns nobody but the composer, it’s not an absolute value, it’s not a reference; the reference is humanity, that’s what is important, and it is this that touched me at that time. Later on I returned to Xenakis’s music, I think, on my debut at the Ensemble Intercontemporain, with *Eonta* in which, in addition to its spectacular aspect, I discovered this humanity, this desperate yet human energy that I had glimpsed in those sessions analysing *Jonchaies*.

Afterwards, of course, came the first time I conducted *Jonchaies*, when I again opened the score, this time as a conductor. I tackled the score in stages, from the most to the least general. You have to grasp the structure, the proportions, the form, the energies; I then get to

grips with it section by section, I see where I'm coming from and where I'm going, then I get down to the detail, I note the points on which I want to insist, the things I know should be emphasised, made clear, as for example the rhythmic layout: how do you play '11 for 13' or '15 for 13'? In practice, either you close your eyes, you indicate the beat, you wait for it to happen, and you pray the musicians don't get lost, or you try to give them some clues so they can understand the point of this rhythmic writing and especially so they can manage to give themselves the means to play while being confidently at ease! For this you have to establish a predetermined lapse of time by deciding on a certain number of notes, and not base yourself on a deliberate beat. In this way you obtain non-periodicity and you lose the notion

of support that is very strongly rooted in the musicians' culture; this process of writing enables you to find different support and reference points that are in no way left to chance. When you manage to enter into this process of grasping the metrics, you realise it's not as complicated as all that. I think that Xenakis's rhythmic writing is thoroughly practical if you play all these highly complex rhythms in a proportional manner.

For example, in *Jonchaies*, if you take from bar 85, the second violins have ten notes to play within a 4/4 bar, after a semiquaver rest; Xenakis has notated them as dotted semiquavers. This is not so complicated: when I come to this passage, I read it to them, I give them the speed of their semiquavers and insist on their regularity. In the preceding bar, the violas, cellos,

double basses are in groups of quadruplets on three quavers, 4 in the time of 3; I won't therefore give the second violins any reference points with regard to others; it is also the reflexes that the musicians must lose because they are used to see themselves in relation to others and here they are autonomous.

Moreover, with Xenakis, the harmonic language is both complex and simple: it operates by way of accumulation and compression; the intervals accumulate according to a principle of extreme densification of the harmonic texture, this being none other than the principle of the cluster. Given this, it must be admitted that you hear a shifting globality, but it is quite possible to miss some notes; as a consequence of this you have to maintain control of the thickness of the texture and especially of

Excerpt from the manuscript of *Jonchaies*

its evolution. It's true that at first, when you open the score, you say: "But how do I know if I've got all the right notes?" And in fact you very quickly understand that there is a strong musical idea and for that you must be able to realise if what you are hearing is not going where the composer wants to go. It's rather as if in a symphony in C major, you were constantly hearing an F sharp. Here you know the composer has predetermined a framework in which everything has to evolve, at least at that moment. I think it's the same thing with Xenakis's language: you have to be careful not to wander off in all directions and not to lose control of the overall aspect.

In the end what has struck me every time is that it is easier to set up than you might think and that is why, incidentally, it's a joy to make this music. I think this is the case because this score is so self-evident! *Jonchaies* is, from the French, indicating the disorder of a field of bulrushes, but it also refers to human disorder and you can see this so clearly that the musicians immediately get into it. Yet it is also such a tiring piece that you cannot rehearse it for hours on end: once you have settled a few places the musicians need pure energy to give themselves over entirely right throughout the piece.

You should not hesitate to start with the masterpieces, and for me, the absolute masterpiece is *Jonchaies*. I love conducting *Jonchaies* with, in the second part, *Amériques* by Varèse or *The Rite of Spring*.... It's a bit tiring for the orchestra, but it makes good sense musically. Xenakis goes well with

Xenakis, but not exclusively. It's true that when you have an orchestra of 109 musicians it's a pity not to take advantage of it, before or after. It's easy to say, but I also find that a piece by Dusapin always goes very well after some Xenakis."

A part from the orchestra, in the substance of which Xenakis opened new and fertile channels, Xenakis did not hesitate to 'get to grips' with the particularities of instruments about which one might think 'everything had been said'. Was it possible to write a new page in the history of the piano repertoire? Could violin technique be extended? All of Xenakis's works with piano, be they solo, chamber or concertante, bear the imprint of his instrumental inventivity, his ability to develop novel textures, aggregates that get progressively thicker or thinner in *Evryali*, or arborescences that defy the physical possibilities of a pianist's two hands in *Synaphai*. The two 'little' pieces called *Mikka* and *Mikka S* reach the quintessence of violin technique in that they explore its unique, intrinsic capacity for absolute legato.

The score of *Synaphai* never fails to astonish anyone who opens it. The piano part is in fact written like a tablature, with one stave per finger, giving a total of 10 staves, though the polyphony manages at times to superimpose 16 parts! Xenakis contrasts two sound ideas, one made of melodic lines that alternately converge and diverge (hence the title signifying 'connections'), the other building up a complex polyphony from a rhythmic

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palindrome superimposed on itself. The two ideas appear as much on the piano as in the orchestra.

Hiroaki Ooi, a self-taught pianist who has followed a career well off the beaten track, tells of his experience of this exceptional work:

“The solo part of Xenakis’ first piano concerto *Synaphai* is written on 10 staves with a maximum of 16 voices. The composer

mathematical background to count accurately the rhythmical structure of *Herma* and *Eonta*, while *Evryali* needs as much patience as for the “Hammerklavier” Sonata. An alpha calculator is helpful for fixing the irrational rhythms of *Mists*. The notes that Xenakis wrote down are much more interesting than your physiology, so just follow them. The days of accepting something as beautiful yet inaccurate have gone. Not being Srinivasa Ramanujan,

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says in the preface, “The pianist shall play all the lines, if he can”. Faced with this awesome score, you should never take into account any extraneous information, such as the performances by previous performers, opinions of musicologists or even of the composer himself. The staggering ability to create an imaginative score has nothing to do with the ability to check the correctness of performance. Before tackling *Synaphai*, it is necessary to go through his three solo piano pieces carefully. Any seven-year-old knows that three divided by two is one point five. If you are older than eight, you can see that six divided by five equals one point two. That’s enough of a

you should not hesitate to rewrite the 10-stave score of *Synaphai* on 5 staves, or even 3 or 2. It takes only three or four weeks. Laziness will not take you to the end point of the marathon! Needless to say, copying the score like a young Bach is the most effective way of studying the music. The more training you have, the more you may be frustrated that you cannot play the music at sight, and that it is far removed from the academic conservatory style. Don’t think of it as written for the modern piano but for the Hammered Dulcimer with its 88 strings, remember Busoni’s words: playing the piano, with the conviction that everything is possible with the piano.”



Hiroaki Ooi

The violinists Irvine Arditti and Hae-Sun Kang have both tackled, each in different circumstances, the diptych formed by the pieces *Mikka* and *Mikka S*. Composed respectively in 1971 and 1976, these two pieces for violin solo explore through almost uninterrupted glissandi the resources of absolute continuity presented by this instrument. These glissandi are created by models of aleatoric progression or Brownian motion that, in physics, describe the position of a particle that varies in proportion to its speed. In this case it is the position of the note in the scale of pitches that is constantly being modified. *Mikka S* ‘doubles’

the waver of *Mikka*, to the extent that the glissandi are used polyphonically, in superimposed lines.

Irvine Arditti, an untiring, eclectic ambassador of contemporary music for strings, speaks here with the authority of someone who has been intimate with creation for forty years:

“Long before the formation of the Arditti quartet, I had attended many contemporary music concerts and heard music by Messiaen, Stockhausen, Xenakis and many others.

Xenakis had interested me in particular because of his radical approach to string sound. He was introducing a new way to play and

listen to contemporary music.

In my late ‘teens, I visited him in Paris. I could not have realised what would follow and what an important influence this man and his music would have on me.

I had arranged a working session on *Mikka* for solo violin, a work I had not really prepared for performance yet, but somehow I needed guidance on how to work on it. I had been informed that the work was to be played with many glissandi between the written pitches, but had not fully taken in the fact that the pitches were just turning points for the glissandi. In fact the interest for Xenakis was not so much the notated pitches, but what happened between these notes, the intervallic



Irvine Arditti

steps from one pitch to another, giving the speed of glissando. In this session we worked to correct missing glissandi marks in the score. I believe the score was then on its first draft and what we discussed appeared in the 'final' edition.

When confronted with three or four octave jumps (slides) I stopped and politely stated that I thought this was impossible. His reply was that I should try and find a way to do it, and overcome the limitations of traditional violin playing.

In fact *Mikka* is a perfect exercise for orientation on the fingerboard. As string players, we learn traditionally to relate to positions along the fingerboard. Although there are no frets or grooves to lock us in, we are very familiar with what a 3rd, 5th etc. position feels like.

Mikka teaches us to listen to pitches, even to micro-tones, and react by changing the direction of the glissandi at those points. Practising this piece gives us a far greater awareness of the fingerboard. There is nothing in the classical repertoire that could prepare us for this.

Mikka S is concerned with a similar glissando experience but this time in two parts, which often involve the violinist in solving the problems of contrary motion glissandi.

Both *Mikka* and *Mikka S* provide us with two excellent points of introduction to new music. Those wishing to delve further into Xenakis' string music need to find themselves a good pianist, as *Dikhthas* for violin and piano is a brilliant work, but has real virtuoso writing for both instruments that pushes the players to the

limits of possibility and beyond.

Reflecting on that first session with Xenakis, I am not sure I found 'honest' answers to all the problems in *Mikka*, but with inspiration, the graphic sketches for many orchestral works peering at me from the bookshelves, and through the wisdom of this man, I found many solutions to this and future problems I would have. In fact all meetings with Xenakis would prove a vital stimulus for my work in contemporary music."

It was as a soloist, notably as a member of the *Ensemble Intercontemporain*, that Hae-Sun Kang was to approach Xenakis's work. Moreover, as a teacher of the Paris Conservatory, she is also a crucial link in the chain of transmission.

“ I discovered the music of Xenakis with *Mikka* and *Mikka S* for a concert of chamber music when I was with the Ensemble Inter-contemporain. I had no knowledge of these pieces and when I saw them, I said to myself: “Goodness me!... How will I manage to play that?” It’s true, the writing is astonishing: it’s structured, yet at the same time, with all those glissandi, I almost took fright. And then I listened to the piece and started to work at it. Having lived in Korea under a military regime, it did not bring happy memories: sirens, violence, war... Neither was I used to playing glissandi like that, I was afraid I would ruin my fingers. Little by little, I tried to understand why he had written that and then, after having played it in concert, I realized that

exact opposite of what this music called for, by not necessarily giving so much energy, because I couldn’t see myself remaining tensed up like that for page after page; I thought of a different way of dealing with energy within time. I have always tried to make these pieces more readily accessible to the listener. In fact, what Xenakis has written is technically feasible, it contains nothing you have not already learned, yet you are disarmed by its way of organising things, for example, when there is a glissando line that is constantly moving and then another line is superimposed on it. There is a freedom in his writing you are not used to; having this freedom all of a sudden in fact unsettles you.

For any young violinist finishing his studies, I think they must



Hae-Sun Kang

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another musical world than the one I knew could exist. I was helped also by my colleagues Jeanne-Marie Conquer, Maryvonne Le Dizès and by Pierre Strauch. Gradually I found pleasure in playing these pieces, in particular *Mikka S* that has a rhythmic part I love and that contrasts with the rest of it.

To work at it, in fact, I did the

include in their repertory *Mikka* or *Mikka S*, which are truly representative pieces of Xenakis’s writing. I would advise such a violinist to work at it section by section, to invent a system of phrases, to sing. At any rate, you mustn’t freeze up, thinking “I’ll struggle”... as I did at first, you must avoid tensing up and especially you must be

ready mentally to make the piece your own. The initial reaction of my pupils at the Paris Conservatory is once of rejection, because it does not correspond to anything they have learned, they have the impression they will need a very long apprenticeship, which is not true. I ask them to accept this other technique, to assimilate it and, in general, they always succeed and take from it a lot of joy and something profound. But I think that, in order to understand this music, they have to find in their lives something personal that resonates with it. Subsequently,

If I had to construct a programme with Xenakis, I would include some Bach because it is at a polar opposite and at the same time not so different, but I would not include other contemporaries. I love to put the very classical alongside the contemporary. In between, I would perhaps add some Webern or some Schönberg.”

The cello was one of Xenakis’s favourite instruments and without question one of those whose idiomatic language he irrevocably

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once the motivation is there, it can become a passion. For example, personally, I love *Kottos* for cello: the first time I heard it played by Pierre Strauch, I was riveted to the spot! I found real joy in it. That said, young musicians are intrigued by the music of Xenakis; they come to see me to work on pieces they dare not tackle on their own and I try to manage things so they can find in it as much pleasure as possible. The quartet *Tetras* and the piece *Dikhthas* with piano are also works that young professionals can tackle.

affected, says cellist Pierre Strauch of the Ensemble Intercontemporain, who expresses his enthusiasm for *Nomos Alpha* and *Kottos*, two pieces for solo cello composed and respectively premiered in 1966 and 1977.

Nomos Alpha is a piece of high virtuosity, both instrumental and compositional: based on an extremely complex organisation of groups of permutations, it presents the performer with a kaleidoscope of unusual sounds that dissolve in the extraordinary concluding figures of this work. *Kottos*, a competition piece, nonetheless manages

to escape the conventional requirements of this genre and lay out a narrative path that, as in a certain number of Xenakis's pieces, starts from an indeterminate chaos of sound to reveal an organised, coherent sound world. Like the scenario developed in *Herma* or *Psappha*, this will gain in density and reach the limits of possibility with regard to performance speed.

“ My first contact as a cellist with the music of Xenakis was the Rostropovitch Competition in 1977; I was 19. It was the first Rostropovitch Competition, entitled 'For contemporary music', and it had commissioned a work from Iannis Xenakis called *Kottos*. For a while we were all terrified and extremely clumsy with his music, as most of us had no knowledge at all of it. I therefore threw myself into the work. I subsequently replayed it a lot because I liked the work: Xenakis fulfilled the competition requirements in admirable fashion, by including contrasting difficulties within the span of seven minutes' music, with a polyphonic dimension, a virtuoso dimension and a musical, a poetic dimension, especially at the start and at the very end of the piece where the performer has to go beyond his technical abilities and show a sense of form and contrast. It's a little masterpiece, even if I have always preferred *Nomos Alpha*, which is truly a great work, in my opinion, and one that was not commissioned, unlike *Kottos*. The requirements imposed upon *Kottos* somewhat limit this piece, but also make it accessible to many cellists who can thus cast an



Pierre Strauch

eye over his world.

Nomos Alpha truly sets the cat among the pigeons! In it you really discover Xenakis's world, one without any concessions, with a kind of extremely dilated time, then moments of very intense activity, highly concentrated, and then periods of waiting, silence, glissandos, madness from an instrumental

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point of view, things that go quite beyond what is normal in the lower register, in the high... like that celebrated utopian moment of the unplayable last line of the piece: it has two lines crossing in opposite directions, as though for two cellos. For myself I am never tired of playing this piece, as when I am able on occasion to see people in master-classes, in a teaching context and tell them: "Well there is of course Bach, later Haydn, Schumann, Dvorak, to move on very quickly, and then Kodály, Zimmermann, and then Xenakis". These are the composers who truly laid the foundations of writing for the cello, Zimmermann being the post-serial tradition, and Xenakis this kind of extraordinary free electron that we all love, I believe.

The writing is anything but idiomatic, and yet it has become so, because it has become inseparable also from the modern instrumental approach. The musical language is completely sublimated with regard to the instrument, and it therefore requires considerable effort, but, when you succeed, you feel as though you're flying, just like in dreams! His music provides a kind of total liberation from the relationship with the instrument, a return to something completely primeval. It is unbelievable to think that an extremely civilised wooden instrument, with three centuries of history, is to be used as a kind of motor saw, becoming a kind of raw material.

Playing Xenakis really means getting your hands dirty, you have the impression of going in circles around the substance, like a potter kneading clay, and hence, at times, reactions of rejection, which is a great pity

as Xenakis brings us so much! For example, when I have gone back to play earlier works – because I think you should continue to tackle all the repertoires that enable you to master your instrument – I have been amazed to notice that I was playing Beethoven sonatas abandoned a few years earlier with ten times greater ease. Having known the extremes of accumulation or top speeds of the bow with Xenakis and Zimmermann, I felt my technique had been honed, rather as in the case of a competitive motorcyclist who is used to doing 120 round a bend; in city traffic he would be the safest of drivers.

In general his music is much less unplayable than has been thought over the years... I am sincerely convinced that at the present time people could tackle him much more easily than thirty or forty years ago and could put on *Nomos Alpha* in a few weeks. For a young cellist, I think that you can jump directly into this fascinating world without necessarily having played the great modern works. I recommend two things: first, make your own way through the score, and then, if you like, consult some of the grey beards who have worked at it a bit already! You have to take each sound as it is, not as colouring, but as a distinct object: for example, *Nomos Alpha* starts with a very rapidly repeated pizzicato that is a percussive gesture and that has nothing to do with what pizzicato has been in the history of the cello.

Xenakis is so different that in a concert programme you can put him alongside exact contemporaries or composers of the 1920s. If I give a solo recital, I can readily start off with a classical work, or



Alain Damiens

the Kodály *Sonata*, or sometimes I have fun playing some of Gabrieli's *Ricercare*, or, from Bach, the *Sixth Suite*, a Xenakis and then a contemporary, a first performance of a younger contemporary. It is no bother, either, if it is accompanied by some Boulez. I play for example on the cello – with the composer's authorisation – the first version of *Anthèmes* for acoustic violin. These are sound worlds that are so incredibly distinct that I believe it is not in the least troubling: Xenakis troubled Boulez a bit, but their music is no trouble together!"

It was also through the works for cello that clarinetist Alain Damiens, a soloist with the Ensemble Intercontemporain, discovered Xenakis' music. Even though the composer wrote only one work,

Charisma, in which this instrument appears as a soloist, the clarinet is omnipresent in his orchestral and instrumental ensemble music and constitutes a crucial component of the 'Xenakis sound'. *Charisma* for cello and clarinet was composed in memory of Jean-Pierre Guézec, a young composer who died prematurely and who had been a student of Xenakis at Tanglewood in 1963. In this work suspended outside time, a veritable, ancient, almost beatless threnody, the two instruments recount the loss of the dear one in a sound palette that presents so many modulations of sorrow.

“My first approach to Xenakis dates from the time when I was still studying at the Conservatory. I was 15 when I discovered him, by listening to some recordings

of cello works. What struck me right off was that I had the impression I was listening to several instruments, but also that there was a great discrepancy between what I was being taught and this deliberate transgression, this denial of what was called 'beautiful music', at a time when I was still testing 'unusual sounds' at the clarinet, quarter-tones...

Knowing that someone had followed through this approach to a conclusion had been an initial shock. This violent, bizarre aspect reassured me, I felt less alone.

It was later, in 1976, when I was part of the Ensemble Intercontemporain, that I played some Xenakis for the first time, performing *Phlegra*. I was very fascinated by the complexity of this piece, in the writing and in the rhythm. I then came across *Charisma* with Pierre Strauch. In working at it we noticed that Xenakis

managed to make a whole system of beats, those vibratos you hear when you play extremely lightly... you could feel an incredible sound vibration. Xenakis was present at the recording of *Phlegra*. He was a very polite person, expecting a lot from interpreters, but always with great respect. I remember that on this occasion we had spoken about *Charisma*, and notably the difficulties of the appoggiaturas and quarter tones in the extreme high register of the clarinet. I asked him if it was possible to try it out on the small clarinet.

hear what has to be realised. By searching and working you also make progress in playing other pieces. I am convinced that with the same instrument one should be able to move from Brahms to Xenakis: you always come across a problem to do with rhythm, intonation, phrasing, duration, tone-colour... At any rate, with Xenakis the performer makes great progress in connection with physical performance; one learns to seek out unsuspected resources that will then be used for other types of music. Just as he develops in his

of Lachenmann in the *Trio* for cello, piano and clarinet, *Pression* for solo cello and *Dal niente* for clarinet, and the poetry of Jarrell in *Aus Bebung* for clarinet and cello. I can easily see myself in a concert situation with these three composers."

There are also some instruments with a narrower repertory than those of the piano, the violin or the clarinet for which Xenakis has truly created an idiomatic style and



Christian Lindberg

He was not at all against the idea and so I did that, even in the concert. In this way you get closer to the score, but you can just as well do it as written.

To the young folks who are completing their training, one can say that practically all musicians can play Xenakis, it's a matter of willpower, of courage. There are some who very rapidly manage to produce a series of multiphonics of great violence as required by Xenakis and others who will need two or three months more. What is important is that through reading the score you

music an investigation into thirds of tone and quarter-tones as well as strength in the extreme registers, so he even more teaches performers how to work at a sound, how to find the centre of a semitone. With students I often tackle those composers who pose technical problems with, for example, what in 'free jazz' are called 'instrumental cries', a form of improvisation that enables one to cast off old playing habits.

For a concert performance, you could couple *Charisma* with Jarrell and Lachenmann, its hyper-forcefulness set alongside the innerness

notably enlarged its technical horizons. Take the trombone, that he treated as a soloist in three pieces: *Keren*, *Troorkh* and *Zythos*, but that he loved to use a lot in works for small ensemble such as *Linaia-Agon* or the mythical *Eonta*. The specificities of the instrument are well suited to Xenakis's aesthetic. Christian Lindberg, solo trombonist of international repute, has done a lot for the development of the contemporary repertory for his instrument. For him, Xenakis's trombone writing demands – and indeed enables – the development of

the instrumentalist's physical capabilities: for the anecdote, let us recall that at the premiere of *Eonta* at the Domaine Musical two brass quintets relayed each other to perform a work that nowadays can be entirely played by one ensemble. Christian Lindberg is mainly thinking here of *Troorkh*, Xenakis's concerto for trombone and large orchestra that he premiered in 1993.

In this work, written in 1991, the composer exploits the flexibility of the instrument with slide to weave mobile lines of glissandi comparable with those in *Mikka* for the violin, lines that he contrasts with the sound blocks of a very hieratic orchestra.

“My first encounter with Iannis Xenakis took place during a very short meeting (due to a much delayed train from Stockholm to Paris); he was already welcoming, and became all the more so after I sent him a recording I made of this solo piece *Keren*. With gratitude he accepted my proposal to find a commissioning body for a trombone concerto. The Swedish Radio commissioned it, and so I received, more than a year before the premiere, the score of *Troorkh*.

I knew that Iannis Xenakis had been fascinated by the way I had interpreted the very high notes in *Keren*; actually he went out of his way to put a lot of these very high notes in the concerto! Luckily enough, I had more than a year to study the piece. At first sight, the score looks extremely frightening. So you need this long preparation time. Two decisions were necessary and in the end they were the right

ones. First, I decided very quickly to build a completely new learning system in order to strengthen the endurance of my lips. Secondly, I took the decision to learn every single part of the score, orchestra parts included, by heart. You need to get the piece ‘into your bones’ in order to perform it correctly. So I performed the premiere by heart with Salonen conducting the Swedish Radio Orchestra.

Having performed this work about 20 times with many orchestras, among them – one of my favourite recordings – the Oslo Philharmonic with Peter Rundel conducting, I can assume that performing *Troorkh* is like breaking records. Due to the highness and loudness of many sounds, this fantastic work with its amazing power still requires ‘devotion’, even for a highly skilled young instrumentalist of today. Iannis Xenakis’ music is so far ahead of his time and so unique (as Beethoven was unique) that you still need to be a courageous musician and have a vision for yourself to embody his aesthetics. For instance, in the middle of the piece, you have to take care not to over-stretch your muscles; the pressure has been so great for so long that you risk feeling unable to continue. More than that, you also have to take care that your orchestral partners take the work (and the preparation time) as seriously and correctly as they usually do for the classical repertoire. Even in a case like *Troorkh*, in which the orchestral part is very much accompanimental and is as precisely written as in any concerto of the classical repertoire, the conductor has to be very supportive;

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for example by taking care to avoid any kind of vibrato, ensuring a continuous glissando playing, and balancing the dynamics.

Iannis Xenakis attended the first performance; he listened carefully to his interpreters' suggestions and was singularly glad to see me performing the piece by heart. Since then we came closer together and I helped find a commission for his work *Zythos* for trombone and 6 percussion players, a very introverted piece, completely different from his earlier

to bring my own contribution to it with the composition of a piece in his memory – for the Hessischer Rundfunk Big Band, due to be premiered in autumn 2011.”

Finally, percussion is, without question, the instrumental domain in which Xenakis' music marks a decisive watershed. Whether in solo works (*Psappha*, *Rebonds*), duets (*Komboï*, *Dmaathen*, *Oophaa*), a trio

PERCUSSION IS, WITHOUT QUESTION, THE INSTRUMENTAL DOMAIN IN WHICH XENAKIS' MUSIC MARKS A DECISIVE WATERSHED.

pieces for percussion sextet.

When performing *Troorkh* for contemporary audiences in the modern concert world my recommendation is to introduce the trombone player as a soloist: I usually perform Leopold Mozart's Trombone Concerto first, followed immediately by *Troorkh* – both works add up to around 30 minutes, a suitable length for the first part of a concert.

I don't doubt that Xenakis' music, particularly this work, will become mainstream in one or two generations – provided there are still symphonic orchestras and professional trombone players! Xenakis opened up a completely new chapter in music history, which won't close for a long time. Modestly I try

(*Okho*) or else the works composed for the sextet of the Percussions de Strasbourg (*Persephassa*, *Pléïades*), his percussion writing always has the same irrepressible significance for the listener who experiences them. In these works Xenakis returns to the raw, original sound, skins of indeterminate pitch or metals with hyper-saturated sonorities (the 'affolants' or 'scaries' of *Persephassa* or the sixxen of *Pléïades*) and sweeps us off to the boundaries of the immemorial, of the earliest experiments in sound. Yet this untamed sound, heavy with irrepressible violence, is deployed by him within a measured texture, organised but not enslaved by number: as he has written in the sketches of *Psappha*, “to launch a mechanism,



Pedro Carneiro

to let it be outlined, then to change it = pirouette”. Though he created a system consisting of regularity and periodicity, the aim was to deform it and in doing this, assert his creative freedom, and it is this freedom that makes the percussionists of *Psappha* and *Persephassa* dance.

A solo percussionist of international renown, Pedro Carneiro is also a conductor and composer. He recalls his relationship with Xenakis’s percussion works:

“ I was 12 years old and had just started playing percussion. Although I had been studying music from around age 3 (and switched from piano, to cello then to trumpet, until getting to percussion

as a pre-teen), percussion had always been the driving force of my music making: energy, contemplation, sound research, timbres, colours, instruments, instability. A friend from the conservatory in Lisbon had a tape of *Komboï* which I copied - I listened to this music so obsessively, over and over again, until the tape was nearly dead. This music really spoke to me: it had everything: energy, mystery, an unbelievable drive, an urgency. Like some of the Beethoven piano sonatas. It just sounded like it had to be written, as if there couldn’t be a world without it. Later on I became acquainted with *Naama*, *Pléïades* and so many other pieces. Later on I went to the Centre Acanthes and studied with Sylvio Gualda – it was

brief, but I will never forget how those intense weeks really made a mark on me forever. Gualda’s percussive stroke was the embodiment of the Xenakis sound: direct, raw, athletic, profound, meaningful and, ever mysterious. A kind of magic code, a beginning and an end, which is a beginning. Like Machaut: “My end is my beginning and my beginning is my end”.

The music of Iannis Xenakis was, in a sense, a guiding light throughout my formative years. It is still a wonderful mystery how I still marvel and buzz, when listening to *Komboï*: as Xenakis’ daughter said (in the documentary on my own recording of the composer’s percussion solos), his music could be understood by anyone, an Eskimo,



Jean-Paul Bernard

a native from a west African country, an Asian. And *Komboï* is an epitome of that universal force, that inspiration.

I think a young musician looking into a Xenakis solo or chamber piece should, first, listen to Bach, certainly Beethoven, as well as great ethnic music: why not some great African drumming from Ghana, or Indian classical music, or even traditional Greek music: the latter with such inventive force and drive. Xenakis' music is hard to categorise, and yet the mathematics surrounding it is nothing but a translation of a profound sense of impromptu, of intuition and mostly of speech. I find Xenakis' music so deeply connected to speech and the human voice (and the deep strands tied to it all): look at the amazing score of *Psappha*. The notation speaks to you, makes you – as a performer – speak back to it and engage in a dialogue in order to find your own discourse, your own sound, articulation and

rhetoric. It is the music of rhetoric, rather than the aesthetic.

I love to listen to Xenakis' music in contrast to older music: it's incredible how it actually sounds so new and, at the same time, so 'classical'. We are looking forward, at the Portuguese Chamber Orchestra (of which I am chief conductor and artistic director), to programming Xenakis during our Mozart inspired season in 2011/2012. I particularly look forward (with a secretive grin!) to the gigantic jolt we will be giving our audiences when opening the concert of Mozart's orchestral music with a piece such as *Thallein*.

I was saddened by Xenakis' death in 2001 – I never met him or worked with him. But, as Xenakis said to a friend of mine (who met the late composer, to discuss her thesis on his music): "Don't ask me about my old scores, you can read about that. I want to tell you about the future. About the works I am writing now".

Jean-Paul Bernard has been the artistic director of the Percussions de Strasbourg since 1998, having joined them in 1986, after having been the pupil of one of its founder members, Georges Van Gucht. He refers here to two works composed by Xenakis for his ensemble, *Persephassa* and *Pléïades*. Composed and premiered in 1969 by the Percussions de Strasbourg, *Persephassa*, in common with quasi-contemporary works such as *Terretektorh* and *Nomos Gamma*, seeks to be rid of the frontal relationship between musicians and audience. Here, the six percussionists are positioned in a regular circle around the listeners, a feature that enables the development of what Xenakis called ‘cinematic sound’, the final section of *Persephassa* constituting a dazzling example of this. By means of a process borrowed from electro-acoustics, Xenakis first of all gives the listener the illusion that the sounds are continuously circulating around him; then, by subjecting them to constant acceleration, he creates a vertiginous vortex of sound. *Pléïades*, composed in 1978 and first performed in May 1979 by the Percussions de Strasbourg during a performance of the Ballet of the Opéra du Rhin, consists of four distinct sections: *Métaux*, (with the celebrated sixxen), *Peaux*, *Claviers* and *Mélanges* that the performers can play in any desired order. These different parts all work on the diffraction of sound by playing on the shifting out of phase of the different temporal strata corresponding to each instrument.

“My first contact with Iannis Xenakis was in connection with the piece *Pléïades*, which is the second work composed for our ensemble and for which he had imagined a new instrument, the “sixxen” (from six, the number of musicians in our group and -xen, the first part of his name). It is almost the last element in the acoustic instrument making of this century – or rather of the preceding – and only prototypes exist. It is a metallophone comprising 19 blades that are not tuned in equal temperament, and that resemble a gamelan. This instrument (at any rate, the version we possess) is absolutely fantastic, because it is of unprecedented variety: you can play *pppp* or *ffff*, it never saturates and for me, it is important to emphasise this as, sometimes, this is confused with a certain brutalism, whereas in fact we are dealing with exceptional material and tone-colour.

I always have the impression that, even though it’s a work that has been performed for years now, on each occasion, Xenakis rediscovered his work, in part because of this instrumental prototype.

Subsequently I played *Persephassa*, which dates from before *Pléïades*. For my part, this is truly the first spatialised work, even if Serocki’s *Continuum* is slightly earlier. Today, many composers work on space, but *Persephassa* was ahead of its time. The layout of the six musicians around the public created problems for performance that had to be resolved: how to play together, to control the ‘parallel tempi’... This laid the foundations for the future, for other composers.

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For myself, coming from jazz and rock as a drummer, when I play Xenakis, there's the same physical energy. Each time we play *Persephassa*, at the moment it starts, there is something extraordinary, that I scarcely find in any other work, it's as though each time we're giving the first performance of the work. *Persephassa* remains for me the most important work he wrote for percussion. It's the first and it has everything; there is everything that will make the future of percussion. In this domain, what is certain is that Xenakis is unavoidable. There is the form, that pure energy, the organically substantive tone-

of the work in order to make certain choices: for example, in the final climax, Xenakis at times superimposes several instrumental layers with crescendo rolls and, to achieve good sound quality, we decided not to play on two instruments at the same time, but on one. I think it is the case that there are other groups that try to do it differently, we however have taken the option of doing it like this and it works very, very well. One of the difficulties in this climax is that you have to start off very, very slowly and then you have to take into account the acoustics of each venue. Rather than using a click it

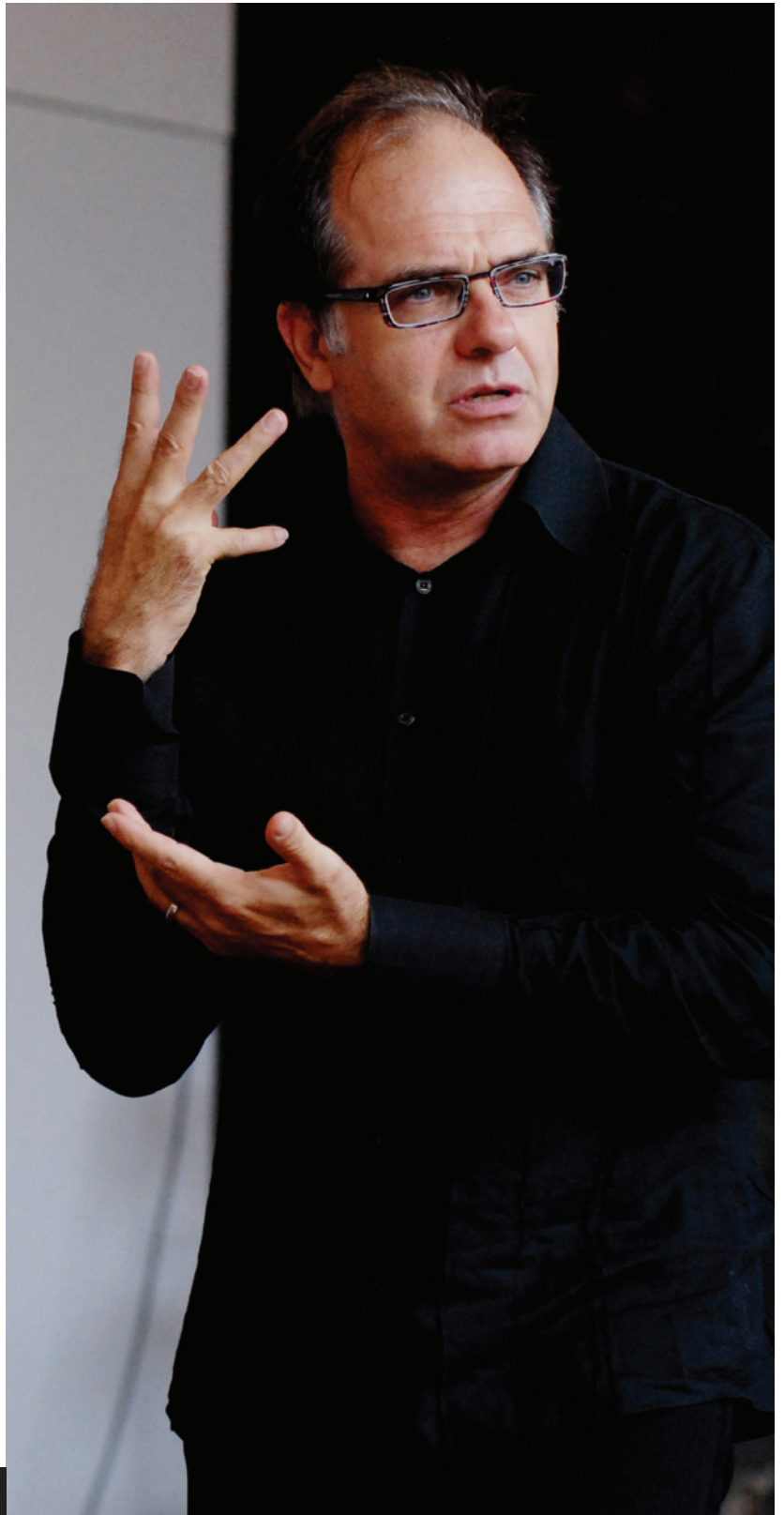
PERSEPHASSA REMAINS FOR ME THE MOST IMPORTANT WORK HE WROTE FOR PERCUSSION.... THERE IS EVERYTHING THAT WILL MAKE THE FUTURE OF PERCUSSION.

colour and then, there is the way in which you start off from one point to arrive at another, those progressive shifts that you later find in a work like *Le Noir de l'Étoile* by Gérard Grisey.

For young players completing their training, the two works provide complementary elements, but in *Persephassa* - which requires real ensemble work, although the parts are not as complex as all that to learn - you have to deal with the visual and with the aural. There must also be a true understanding

is better to let yourself be guided by your ears and eyes, otherwise it is too mechanical. In fact, for young percussionists, I think it is important to work with those who premiered the work because there are things to be transmitted that are not in the score.

Even if it very rarely happens, I very much like to play *Pléiades* and *Persephassa* in the same evening. Otherwise, I like to find works that exploit space, such as *Tempus ex Machina* by Grisey and *On Space* by Juan Pampin, composers



Steven Schick

who deal with spatialisation in a complementary way. *Pléiades* has sometimes been programmed with works of François-Bernard Mâche and that works very well.

Though there are a certain number of important works that have marked out the path of the Percussions de Strasbourg, it is true that Xenakis remains today one of the emblematic and indispensable composers for modern percussion.”

The destiny of Xenakis’s works for percussion across the Atlantic owes much to Steven Schick, a breathtaking percussionist, conductor and teacher who has spoken of this equally astonishing work that is *Psappha* and that he has performed no less than 800 times!

In this “work of pure rhythm”, Iannis Xenakis has reduced his writing to the essentials: a grid on which the impacts are represented by dots; specific instruments are not indicated, only sound types (skin, wood, metal) as well as registers (high, medium, low); accents also can be realised in different ways. Performers can thus fully appropriate the sound world offered by this grid.

“My first experience with Xenakis was with a recording at first, as was the case with many people. Lewis Nielson, a very fine composer played for me the Percussions de Strasbourg recording of *Persephassa*. And I was just “extraordinarized” by it... Before discovering Xenakis, it was a little unclear how I could make a life in percussion but Xenakis’ music

showed a way that I could actually really live in music.

My first experience of hearing the music live was a Carnegie Hall performance of *Psappha* in the autumn of 1976. I came from a small town in Iowa to New-York to hear Xenakis, and it was fantastic... When I listened to *Psappha* performed in Carnegie Hall, I thought, “All right, I have to play this piece!”. A kind of brutal reality emerged. But it was so direct, it was such confrontational music that I thought: “Will my teachers like it? Will people think I’m crazy? Am I capable of playing it?” So then quite quickly after those first ideas I got the score and did my first performance in spring of 1977; it was my graduation recital, so there was additional pressure. It took me about six months to learn the piece, working five to eight hours a day, but my teachers were very supportive. I played it once from the score although I essentially had it memorized. I think it was the only time I played it from the score and that I’ve played it from memory since then. So it was really a process, kind of physically learning the piece, of including it in the musculature, and making it an intense corporeal as well as emotional experience. Playing *Psappha* the very first time was such an overwhelming experience. I mean it’s like meeting the person you fall in love with: you have no distance there, at that moment at all, you can’t make a judgment, you can’t reflect upon it because you are simply in the mists of an enormous storm, something which I realized then would change my life, hoping to survive it. But, with the experience and some distance, I

can say that *Psappha* has been with me at every stage of my life from good times to bad.

Twelve years later in April of 1990, Xenakis went to San Diego to hear the American première of *Rebonds*. It was the first time I played *Psappha* to him. We've talked about the piece and he told me he didn't like the fact that I had wooden instruments, although they were explicitly allowed by the score for a very long time before we had this conversation. It was at around 6:30 in the evening just before an 8pm concert. So there was no real way to change instrumentation.

Xenakis was not the kind of person you could ask: "Are these triples right?. He wouldn't answer it. All that he was interested in were structural issues, like the way you could imagine an engineer or an architect thinking of music. You know, "is this moment strong enough to support this part of the piece?" "Is this loud enough compared to that?" Really almost solely the design issues with the piece. And his interesting comments come back to me every time I work momentum, or strength, or other things like that.

If I have to play a recital of solo percussion pieces, there are just *Rebonds* and *Psappha* by Xenakis, so I always have to mix them with pieces by other composers. But the question is: what works? In one way, you could say almost nothing works because Xenakis speaks such a unique language, and on the other hand, almost everything works! I sometimes play American composers like John Adams or Alvin Lucier. They work to varying degrees with the music of Xenakis. With my

ensemble Red Fish Blue Fish, we did nearly all of the percussion music by Xenakis in New York in a two-and-a-half hour concert. The all-Xenakis program has a great internal logic, but one of the interesting problems is the affect Xenakis has immediately on the listener. How abrupt he can seem in the context of "more polite" music? Playing an all-Xenakis programme, you can lose the impact by hearing the constant explosion, that extremely high playing: how to differentiate different kinds of loudness, different kinds of intensity, different kind of strength? It's important not to lose the impact by not using all that qualities too quickly.

Certainly the younger generation is very interested in Xenakis: I must get about one or three emails every months from young musicians from all over the world, seeking advice for how to play *Psappha* or *Rebonds*, that are two pieces easily in the best five pieces that percussionists have to play. And so one of the pieces of advice I have for young players is to learn *Psappha* not for a concert but for a lifetime because you will want to have contact with this music. I think that to play Xenakis, you have to engage in an intense relationship with someone who now of course has been gone for nearly 10 years. But you still are involved in a personal relationship with him when you play his music. You are involved in a kind of intensity, both personal and emotional.

The goal, as a tribute to Xenakis, is to be fully engaged to the music. Another thing is to realize that Xenakis intervened in the musical DNA of musical dialogue on a very basic and fundamental level. In fact to live with Xenakis as an

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interpreter, you are also really examining your instrument, you are examining your art because it's not a piece you're learning, or it's not only a piece, it's a process and an experience which requires much more of a person than simply executing notes on time. In fact I wrote a book about contemporary percussion music. And for a while I thought about having an appendix where I diagrammed my set up for *Psappha*, and made practical recommendations. Eventually I abandoned that idea because I thought that the worst thing would

really not a shortcut but it is such a magical thing to be immersed in this music for a lifetime.”

To conclude, two conductors, one choral, Roland Hayrabedian and the other orchestral, Michel Tabachnik, discuss what is, in their opinions, the essential, human dimension that permeates Xenakis's work. Though it relates to that of great predecessors – one thinks of course of Beethoven, the humanism of Xenakis has this particularity for

... THE HUMANISM OF XENAKIS HAS THIS PARTICULARITY FOR A PERFORMER IN THAT IT CONSTRAINS HIM...TO COMMIT ALL THE RESOURCES OF HIS BEING ...

be that they would take my advice and miss the good part, the early part, of the process! I think the only way to play Xenakis is to have the courage to stand in the middle of a large space, feeling alone, and realize that you have to make the journey from the beginning. It took me six months working 5 to 8 hours a day to learn those pieces. It's a process that requires a lot of time (how much, I can quite tell), but to somebody who would tell me that they don't have the time, I would say: “what else are you going to do? Are you going to learn 16 pieces that you will forget?”. So there's

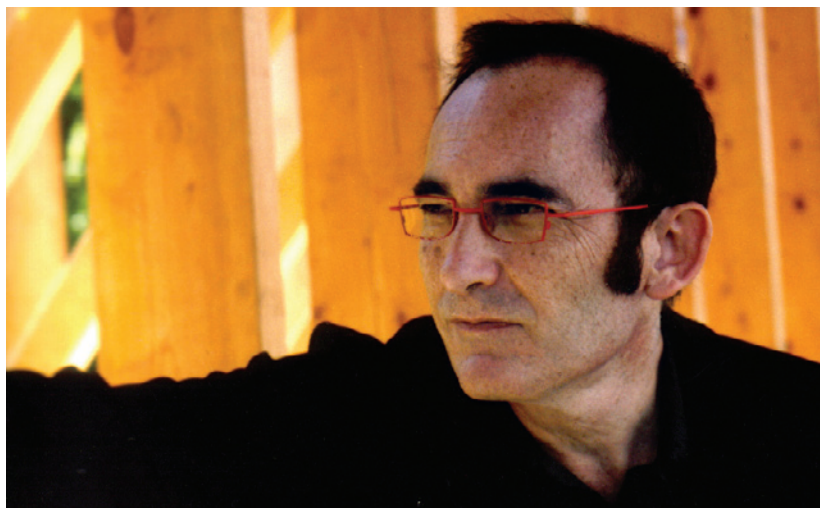
a performer that it constrains him in some sense to commit all the resources of his being, sometimes to their limits, in order to reach a dimension that goes beyond the merely musical reality of what is being performed. For a conductor, one of the difficulties of the task – perhaps the most important – lies in the interactive play that has to be set up with the musicians to make them take on this commitment.

Roland Hayrabedian, founder and director of Musicatreize, a leading vocal ensemble for musical creation, refers to this in connection with *Nuits*. This work, for twelve

mixed *a cappella* voices written and first performed in 1968 at the Royan Festival, is dedicated to the political prisoners of various military regimes then in power in Europe: Greek, Spanish and Portuguese. To phonemes that never actually make up words, interweaving, arborescent lines alternate with passages marked by beats, micro-glissandi and an impressive vocal percussion section.

“ My first fee as a professional musician was for some music by Xenakis. Xenakis had come to the Centre Acanthes in Aix and had asked the University of Aix where I was studying to stage the *Orestie* with the chorus, and Christine Prost, who was in charge of this project, had asked me to assist her. It was a formidable experience: we put on the concert in Aix, then left in August for Greece to take part in the *Polytope de Mycènes* with *Oresteïa* and *À Colone*. I therefore met Xenakis right at the start of my career.

When I first began to set up ensembles, they were amateur groups; as my aim was to make so-called contemporary music, I imagined it would be easy enough to do *À Hélène* and *À Colone*, something I have done fairly regularly. And then, when Musicatreize arrived, I got down to *Nuits*, a work that had scared me when I looked at it for the first time. In fact, like all young conductors getting to grips with it, I approached it too cautiously. Nowadays my attitude is quite different, as I have great confidence in what the singers do at the moment of the concert. It's a piece that is tiring vocally, and,



Roland Hayrabedian

at first, I tried to make sure nothing was side-lined, that everyone was in the right place. It takes an incredible amount of time and at the end of the day you're not sure of getting a better result. I think especially that you have to understand what the gesture is, the vocal gesture. If you haven't understood it you are not able to give what is necessary to make the work blossom, and that is when, in my opinion, you get side-lined.

The difficulty you have in working on this piece has more to do with the psychology of the professional singers, who protect themselves a great deal. You must therefore reassure them and not have them rehearse twenty times in a row to reassure yourself, as then you exhaust them vocally and nothing will function. On the other hand, if it works the once, if you are able to build up an atmosphere of confidence, then the singers will give their all during the concert!

There are two things that go against what I customarily encounter as a choral conductor. On the



Michel Tabachnik and Iannis Xenakis

one hand, there is no absolute pitch: the pitches are, most of the time, glissandi... The voice is always on the move and so pitch reference points are very complicated. I also think this work has an issue with the registers: they are either very high or very low with dynamics that change very quickly. It has to be done in a semicircle as the spatialisation is very important. But what is formidable is what drives the piece: it's like a kind of ritual, and what I particularly like in this work is that the musicians on stage commit themselves to something that goes beyond the notes, and that for me is absolutely indispensable.

To young conductors starting their careers I would say what I say

to my students: first you must hear in advance what it is the composer wanted, and understand that this difficulty is not there for the sake of being difficult, but quite simply because no other way of writing it had been found. Working on this piece is useful for Beethoven, for Mozart, as it's the same energy that you have to summon up, but in this case it's an excessively tonic energy you have to find, that you have to transmit. It's the energy of an Oriental, not that of someone worrying about the future.

It's an extraordinary work, for me it's his masterpiece, at any rate for the voice. I did it again at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence which is a fairly traditional festival and the work brought the house down.

I tell myself that the thirty or forty years that this piece has now aged mean that one is not only apt for tackling this piece, but also for listening to it.”

Michel Tabachnik, has been, from the start of his career, one of the most ardent ambassadors of Xenakis’ music, a symbolic role in which one might say he succeeded Hermann Scherchen, who died in 1966, two months after the first performance of *Terretektorh*.

“Xenakis is someone who is quite simply indispensable to music, and so you cannot avoid dealing with the music of Xenakis as a conductor. One can be pretty much certain that Xenakis is a composer who will count in the future, in that he is someone who is multiple and whose thought goes beyond just the art of music. If one talks of Beethoven it’s because he was a composer but also because he was someone who was committed. Xenakis is a commitment that is much greater than that of Beethoven because it is the commitment of a new humanism, because his music is a quintessence of spiritual and intellectual ingredients as well as knowledge. He was fascinated by the world in itself. With Xenakis, man is no longer at the centre and human feeling is a particular case of all that happens in the world, it’s another vision of the world.

One of the reproaches that has been, and continues to be made against Xenakis, is that you don’t hear the detail in his music. The

detail is written but we can’t hear it. If the 12th viola or the 14th violin plays wrong, I tell you frankly, I won’t hear it! It’s impossible. Now that, for a musician, is truly blameworthy because when you play the music of Beethoven, of Stravinsky or of Boulez (my examples deliberately show the absolute opposition that exists) you have to hear – and it’s the *sine qua non* – every one of the notes that has a precise role and function in the harmony or in the counterpoint, and these cannot be taken away. With Xenakis, pretty much, if you take away the 12th viola in *Terretektorh*, there will be no fundamental difference! Yet just what interested him was not this particular point, it was this globality that implies thinking about life, the cultural heritage of the second half of the twentieth century. I have had students who did not like Beethoven. I told them “That’s not Beethoven’s problem any more, it’s really yours!”. So perhaps it can be cured, but that’s a specific, personal matter. For Xenakis, I would give the same reply. “If you’re not a partisan of Xenakis’ music, it’s that there is a moment when it is you who are not a partisan, but it’s not the music that is called into question.”

Because of this impossibility of perceiving each sound, the conductor loses a certain control, and so few conductors have the courage to tackle it, knowing they will lose their authority! Another card has to be played then. I often give the musician the rain as an example. I told them “A rain drop has no importance. But if you start changing the drops, the sound of the rain will change and, little by little, if you change 10, 20, 30 drops,



Michel Tabachnik

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suddenly the rain will modify its density, its strength and the sound will change. Thus, each of you counts, each of the played parts is essential.”

When I conduct *Terretektorh*, there are 88 musicians, each of whom has his own part. The musi-

in the end it's much easier than Beethoven! Not even “in the end”! It is easier than Beethoven! However, for the musician to commit himself, for him not to be bewildered by a manner of playing that is different though not more difficult, you have to involve him in

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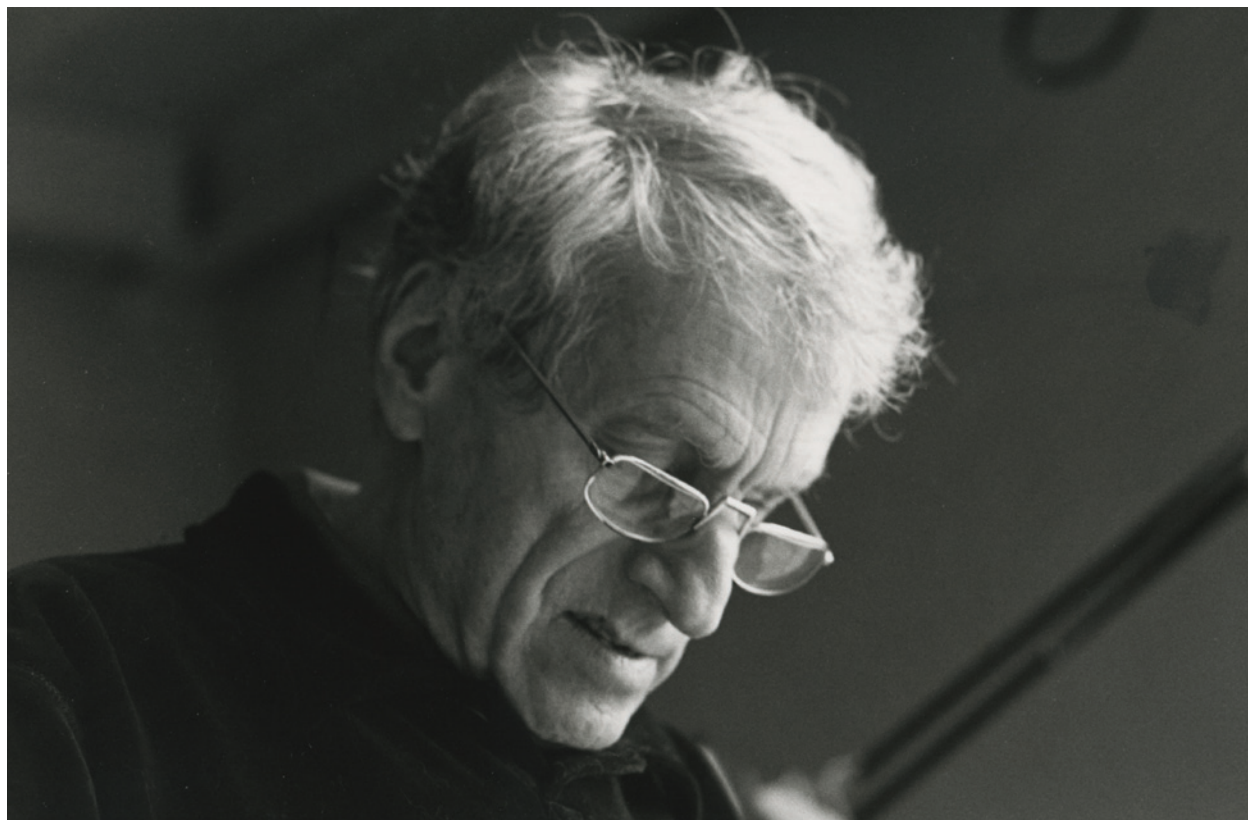
cians must know that the conductor has complete confidence in them and that the music is a globality that goes beyond the mere translation of a human feeling. Xenakis has established a true philosophy of music, in which man is no more than a particular instance of the globality of the world.

This is difficult for musicians because they are not used to playing as soloists. You must therefore encourage them to commit themselves, make them understand that the message to be conveyed, is their own, individually. There are also the technical matters, the purely technical you have to discuss with them, but the priority in a rehearsal is the commitment. Everyone can manage to play Xenakis:

this global approach of Xenakis, it's indispensable.

For the conductor, if you take *Synaphai*, *Erikhthon* or *Jonchaies*, the writing is relatively traditional, grouped by family. You never have complex colours, even if the orchestra is divided in incredible ways, as compared with Boulez or Stockhausen who never divided the orchestra as much as that.

For programming Xenakis in a concert there are two possibilities: either you look for a certain unity, or else you have a zigzag concert in which you exploit oppositions. I very much like Xenakis with Bartók as they have a lot in common: studying the golden section, Nature, that attempt to go beyond man and, finally, a new idea of time, a



Iannis Xenakis

thickening of time, as in the first movement of the Music for strings, percussion and celesta. And then, paradoxically, there are two composers one has to play with Xenakis: Brahms, who has the same attitudes (for example, the opening of the *First Symphony* already presents a kind of time that gets heavier, that is stretched out), and – a huge paradox – Tchaikovsky, whom Xenakis adored. Tchaikovsky is overflowing romanticism, and, at bottom, Xenakis was a great romantic in his general conception of existence, even if he has been much thought of as a pure mathematician, which is completely false, mathematics having been for him merely the instrument, the composer's pen, nothing more.” ■

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