

François-Bernard Mâche: Between the Observatory and the Workshop [Entre l'observatoire et l'atelier] (1998)

Published in 1998, this volume is the first of four volumes of texts that François-Bernard Mâche has progressively assembled over a period of twenty years (with the most recent published from 2018). In this first collection, he draws together unpublished or rare texts written between 1959 and 1996. As indicated by its title, the book alternates between observations regarding the landscape of forty years' worth of musical composition on one hand, and on the other, glimpses into Mâche's own compositional workshop. Mâche's initial intention was to divide his publication project into four categories of writings split across two volumes: "dialogues" (interviews), "reflections" (aesthetic opinions), "études" (musicological studies), and "chronicles" (observations). However, the second volume never saw the light of day; thus, only "dialogues" and "reflections" are presented here. Two years later, Mâche would publish another collection titled, *Half a century of music... and still contemporary* [[*Un demi-siècle de musique... et toujours contemporaine*](#)], which shares two texts in comment with *Between the Observatory and the Workshop*: "On John Cage", and "The Rule of the Game".

The idea behind Mâche's selection of texts was "to stimulate discussion and aesthetic debates, which have become rather too rare today, and yet so vital to music" (p. 7). The texts consist mainly of strongly written position papers staking out his position in the debates that took place among the avant-garde in the early 1960s, following serialism's predominance; they broach questions of indeterminacy and the open work, the function of music notation, the relationship between structuralism and music, and so forth. Mâche never shies away from polemic, and even provocation—as for example the provocation unleashed toward Gilbert Amy in 1964 in his article, "Le son et la musique" ["Sound and Music"]; or, that same year, in "La crise de la musique sérielle" ["The Crisis of Serial Music"], (rather astoundingly taking up the title of a famous article by Xenakis, published in July 1955 in the inaugural issue of *Gravesaner Blätter*), which *Le Mercure de France* refused to publish, replacing it with an article by Pierre Boulez.

While he is uncompromising in his views on musical evolution and on the relationship between music and the public (to whom he believes music yields excessively), Mâche sometimes singles out individual composers, and in particular Xenakis, to whom he devotes several unusual and highly interesting texts: "texte pour l'album Xenakis" ("Text for the Xenakis Album"), on the occasion of the release by Erato of a box set of 5 LPs in 1969; "À propos de Xenakis" (1969); and "De *Nekuia* à *Dox-Orkh*", on Xenakis's development in the 1980s, from a program for the Musica Festival in 1991.

As regards his own compositional workshop, Mâche exposes his ideas on the place of language and of nature in his compositional processes. If these ideas would later be integrated into a more global theorization in *Musique, mythe, nature* (*Music, myth, nature*), here we witness their genesis and development over several consecutive texts.

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Summary:

"Avant-propos" (p. 7) ; Dialogues : "Entretien avec Édith Walter" (p. 11) ; "Le plaisir du son" (p. 17) ; "L'âge freudien de la musique" (p. 23) ; "Entretien avec Élytis" (p. 27) ; "Témoignage sur Bartók" (p. 33) ; "La musique égale du mythe" (p. 39) ; "Entretien avec S. Dunkelman" (p. 45) ; "Entretien avec P. Szendy" (p. 57) ; Réflexions : "Le réalisme en musique" (p. 69) ; "Le sons et la musique" (p. 85) ; "Polémique avec G. Amy" (p. 89) ; "La crise de la musique sérielle" (p. 97) ; "Langage et musique" (p. 103) ; "Répliques " (p. 109) ; "Texte pour l'album Xenakis" (p. 113) ; "À propos de Xenakis" (p. 117) ; "À propos de J. Cage" (p. 123) ; "Un clavecin au zoo" (p. 129) ; "La création musicale aujourd'hui" (p. 133) ; "Pourquoi nos filles sont-elles muettes?" (p. 143) ; "La paperasserie musicale" (p. 145) ; "Culture et culte" (p. 149) ; "La musique théâtrale" (p. 153) ; "La musique, vingt ans après" (p. 157) ; "Derrière les notes et au-delà des mots" (p. 163) ; "Le symbolisme en musique" (p. 169) ; "Archéologie et musique" (p. 175) ; "De *Nekuia* à *Dox-Orkh*" (p. 183) ; "Le post-progressisme" (p. 189) ; "A propos de Scelsi" (p. 195) ; "L'illusion est-elle féconde...?" (p. 197) ; "La contemporanéité" (p. 205) ; "La règle du jeu" (p. 209).

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