# Staged Music
# GUEST OF THE MONTH

By Aliénor Dauchez, on the 18/05/2022



In May, our guest of the month is someone the *Ensemble Intercontemporain* is already familiar with — the director and visual artist Aliénor Dauchez, who, for them, produced the entire set design of the *In Between Narcisse* evening in September 2021. As an experienced and curious music-lover, she considers music an important part of her art.

In all respects, music is at the heart of my work. Maybe this is because I played the cello, very humbly, as a hobby? At any rate, my first steps as a director have consisted of putting music into space, that is to say, working on the relationship that music has with physical space.
As I link together sounds and visual elements that are spatially distributed (sets, accessories, bodies and musicians…), I try to make the musical discourse visible, and thus to make what's at stake in music more seizable. In a way, my work process mirrors that of a composer producing a graphic music sheet…
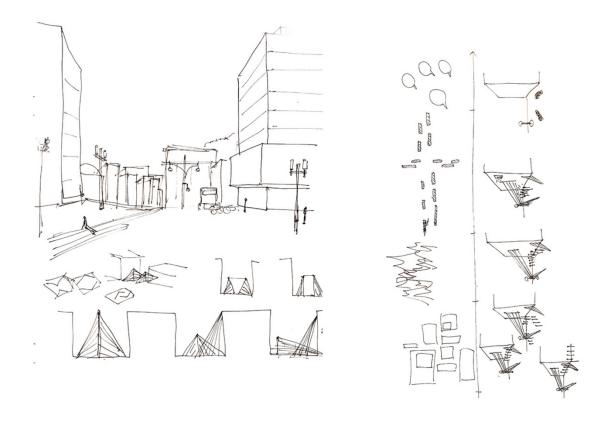
## "Hardcore"

In fact, drawing is often part of my creation process for shows. I draw up visual scores of every work I direct. Simply put, I draw music: every section of a play is turned into a 2D or 3D model. For my first show, in 2007, called "Hardcore" (see photo above), my first idea was to set up an oval in which the public would be sat, with the musicians surrounding them. From there, with the help of musical director Michael Rauter, I put together a musical program made of works that — at least in my opinion — reflect that form, such as James Tenney's infinity spiral.

## "XI — ein Polytop für Iannis Xenakis"

Sometimes, the score is already graphic! That's true for many pieces by Iannis Xenakis, whose work has always been very important to me. In 2008, the *Solistensenmble Kaleidoskop* asked me to work on his music, which I accepted immediately. His primitivity is mind-blowing; it's absolutely genius music. Even in scores that are not, strictly speaking, graphic, his thoughts are. So are his clouds of sound, or his crescendos crossing each others.

For this performance, we created a collage based on several of his pieces, which I re-wrote in visual form. I painted my choreography underneath it, drawing from the structure of the composition to deduce the performers' movements in space. This became the show called "XI — ein Polytop for Iannis Xenakis", which had structures made of elastics stretched in the public space…

## "Démesure"

Sometimes, the stage setup is not a transposition of the musical composition into space, but rather that of the underlying idea of the music. For my show "Démesure" (see photo below), the first to be produced by my company La Cage, my starting point was Raphaël Cendo's piece *Tract* (2007), which, when I first heard it, gave me the impression of a sound that wanted to break free. When I talked about it with Raphaël, he confirmed this feeling by giving me the image of a sound that would be 'round' when of a normal intensity, but 'square' as soon as it started being too loud and saturating the mic.

And so, I imagined a tent stretched over the musicians in the centre of the stage. As the show progresses, the public is invited inside the tent, then rain falls in it and covers the floor, dry ground quickly shrinking to nearly nothing. The public, at first distributed around the entire room, are slowly pushed to join the musicians on a square island, where everyone ends up pressed together, against each other.

This process is a reference to Chloé's room in *Froth on the Daydream* by Boris Vian, which shrinks with time as her illness weakens her. I also wanted to play with the proximity of bodies in a crowd, as an echo to a text by Elias Canetti which claims that "there is nothing that man fears more than the touch of the unknown. It is only in a crowd that man can become free of this fear of being touched". There is a natural distance between bodies — about an arm's length — beyond which we don't feel threatened by the other. On the other hand, when we're pressed together in crowds, there's also a feeling of safety — danger resides in the middle ground. This brings us back to the idea that the saturation of music, or saturation in space, can paradoxically create comfort. This is how I translated what Raphaël's music made me feel into a three dimensional space. Soon, that music found a response in many others, music by Franck Bedrossian (who also plays with saturation), by Christophe Bertrand, by Alexander Schubert (on the augmented body), by Johannes Kreidler (who is working on the saturation of sound information), by Sara Nemtzov and by Martin Grütter.

## "Narcisse"

I proceeded in a similar way when I worked on the show "Narcisse" (see photo above) for the *Ensemble intercontemporain*. I went to meet the composers, and they told me all about how they developed their pieces. Diagrammatically speaking, Yves Chauris had thought his music through as a circle — with the piano in the centre —, Brice Pauset had built his piece's structure with sound mirrors, and Yann Robin had worked around the idea of the double and the shadow. All of these new works had therefore already been thought of in an architectural way, and I organised the spatial aspect of the concert accordingly.

Pierre Boulez's *Dialogue de l'ombre double* gave me a bit of a harder time — I'll admit I didn't truly understand it before I got to hear it in the auditorium. Before that, I had an understanding of the idea, but it remained very abstract; I didn't fully grasp the strength of the piece — perhaps because Boulez himself conceived it with a physical space in mind. In any case, as soon as I heard it live, it all became clear.

## "L'errance"

Even when I don't directly work with music, my work often takes sound into account. For instance, for an exhibition in the La Tourette convent by Le Corbusier (where I reconvened with Xenakis, who was responsible for the façades), I designed an installation/performance called "L'errance" (see photo below). It was a small anechoic chamber (a wooden box covered in acoustic foam) into which I settled down. For three hours, I opened and closed it, suggesting that the public joined me inside, and I continuously recited passages from Samuel Beckett's *L'Errance*. That's his last piece of writing in prose. In it, he talks about his own death — not as a tragic event, but rather, as a fascinating loss of his senses.

The La Tourette convent's acoustics are excessively resonant, and opening and closing the anechoic chamber had a striking effect.

## "Le bruissement des feuilles"

There's another object, originally created for a show, that became a sculpture in its own right. A small shrub is perched on a platform mounted on pneumatic cylinders, which are programmed to randomly shake the tree around. The platform starts vibrating with no forewarning, making the tree swing and the whole structure move. So it's a visual work, but it also involves sound, and music, it's a way of writing time that even goes further than what we'd imagine at first, because the tree grows, and it must be looked after — something gallery institutions are not always used to doing!

## "La Mer"

As for my exhibitions, they are also journeys through time, articulating several works together in the space they share. My last personal exhibition thus presented a sound collage made out of three years of phone messages left by my mum on my answering machine. Her messages systematically begin by the same sentence. But the tone varies — and it betrays what she has to say to me. From that collage, I created a *beat*, a pulsation, a rhythm, which I installed in a tiny pin hole pierced into the wall. This beat finds a response in another piece, one I based on a cry that was captured when my daughter was born…

Today, I work with drawings a lot. A simple drawing, to me, is already a music score: it has its plenums and its vacuums, its fortes and its pianos. To me, the arrangement of lines in a square amounts to musical composition. Because it, too, is a way of writing time.

Interview by Jérémie Szpirglas