



Review: Xenakis's Diatope of Bonn

Nouritza Matossian

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Schigolch's part in Act II is another rescue of a character and music that one has always endured rather than enjoyed in Acts I and II. He now becomes important in the plot (for disposing of the Athlete), and interesting in himself, with his touching little begging-scene for his 'not very youthful' girlfriend and his efficacious comfort for the distracted Lulu. Above all the revelation that he is not her father but yet another lover lends a different sense to his scenes earlier in the opera. Moreover his creepy wheezing music really comes into its own here for the first time.

And finally, actual newnesses. The three ensembles in the Paris scene are outstanding among the music never heard before (though an aspect of them is familiar since they are built on the animal-trainer music in the Prologue to Act I—the music of bars 9-16 of I returns exactly as bars 1-12 of III, now barred in $2/4$ not $3/4$). The ostinato-building is unlike anything in the first two acts (the Film-music resembles it only in technical description, not in actual sound); and the combination of the resulting slowed—down harmonic rate with regular rhythmic definition of a kind hardly used elsewhere in the opera produces a forward momentum new in Berg. The first ensemble is only 25 bars; the second, at a slower speed, lasts about 65 bars; while the third and fastest achieves a vertical take-off that makes its 110-odd bars one of the most exciting passages in the work, and certainly the most vivid and unexpected stretch of hitherto unheard music. No one can speak of Berg's 'habitual languor' after this.

More remarkable still is the earlier *Pantomime* (which comes between the second attempt—the Athlete's—at blackmailing Lulu, and the scene with Schigolch by which she extricates herself from both). The whole company moves around the room, not singing (thank goodness), their movement choreographed by their various motives, linked and superimposed in a sort of composition-by-free-association. This is the masterly fluidity of Berg's latest manner, absolutely liberated from note-watching or bar-counting, and extraordinarily beautiful. How one wishes there were more works in which such passages could flower! They seem to me to reveal him as the century's most richly-endowed natural composer.

Xenakis's Diatope of Bonn

Nouritza Matossian

THE 'Polytope', a genre first created by Xenakis in Montreal at the Expo of 1967, may be described as the articulation of space and time by sound and light in movement (*poly/many, tope/place*). On the first occasion, nuns were seen crossing themselves and clutching rosaries as lights flashed and music roared. This rage of splendour has not abated in Persepolis, Cluny, Mycenae, or Bonn: with each successive Polytope Xenakis controls more and more aspects of the physical environment until the latest one, for which he designed a soft structure, even defies its location. Dismantled from the square of the Centre Pompidou (which first commissioned it) and moved lock, stock and barrel to the Bahnhof-platz in Bonn, it was reassembled in 3 months.

Xenakis has fashioned the ingredients of his electrical storm from electronic tape music and a computer programme choreographing 1610 strobe lights, four laser beams, 400 mirrors, with computer hardware to synchronize and to control

the programme. The digital tape on which the information is stored operates a complete renewal of state 25 times a second, a sampling rate which allows the eye to perceive a sensation of movement as in film. From his design of the Philips Pavilion of 1958 he has retained the steeply rising regular surfaces, curving and fanning out over a rigid frame in a shiny red textile, almost 30 feet high, 40 by 60 feet across. The 45-minute Light and Sound spectacle takes place inside this tent, whose upper surfaces are hung with a network of steel cables lining the structure itself. The strobe lights are attached to the cable net in a regular grid while the lasers are installed below the glass-tile floor. Several columns, some of them sheathed in glass, support mirrors which permit the laser beams to be reflected in complex configurations across the space (*dia*/through, across).

The programme is highly structured: a soft sparse beginning with a few flashes from the strobos and very high steely pitches becoming louder and more compelling; gradually different elements are displayed alone, then alternate; static configurations of green lasers meet and cross precise straight lines and sharp angles; figures described by a quick succession of strobos bound across the surface overhead in prescribed paths; more pointillistic textures in the music are driven by a powerful whirring pulse, spinning around with the lights while the laser beams begin to draw on the black surface like luminous coloured crayons—spirals, arcs, like a giant doodling across the sky. Lights and music coincide in a climax as the strobos increase in density and also in speed, until the space is illuminated and vision sliced sharply at each repeated onslaught of light and darkness. Laser beams shine and intersect in ever-increasing complexes while the glass floor and columns assume a translucent green, leaving the spectators seemingly suspended in mid-air. Percussive particles are washed by resonances of concrete sounds, there is a minor climax of lights with an *accelerando* and the piece recedes quietly, as it began.

At a time when so many composers, including some of the youngest, seem to be looking over their shoulder for reassurance from the past, Xenakis's ability to step ahead, with his own vision, into forms which he forges with the latest technological means, is encouraging. He uses materials seemingly recalcitrant to human expression, which he succeeds in moulding elegantly and organizing into an astonishingly dramatic act. Drawing on a Greek cultural background and modern scientific concepts as part of his frame of reference, he offers an experience which is emotional, brutal, cathartic and, at the same time, courageous in its commitment to the future.

This is not a show for those who want a soft option but for anyone willing to take a chance it could be an exhilarating mind-bender. For several months three showings a day will take place at 3, 5, and 7 p.m. The *Diatope* cannot be overlooked across the street from the railway station in Bonn.

Recent Tavener

Roger Wright

It is interesting to note the way in which John Tavener's music has developed