

behind the slightly faster-moving wind quintet. This gradually winds down to much slower, sustained music. As activity resumes, the horn begins to inject a sequence of arpeggio-like phrases, ascending the natural harmonic series on various fundamentals. This gesture—by now a commonplace of Vivier's language—has a clearly symbolic meaning: an image of purity, here in the midst of turbulent surroundings. Its effect, as these figures continue through the last section of *Samarkand*, is first to counterpoint, and eventually to calm, the reenergized music surging around it, prefiguring the work's uneasy close on a spectral harmony over an E-flat fundamental.

With *Samarkand* complete, another commission was waiting, this time a new piece for Toronto's Array for a concert in February. Vivier's collaboration with Array had become as satisfying as that with any of the ensembles in Canada. At home in Montreal his main champion was now Lorraine Vaillancourt, who had conducted the premieres of two of his most recent major works, and would soon conduct a third; in a sense she had taken over the role played in his life by Serge Garant and the SMCQ during his first years back in Quebec after his studies in Europe. Array, a small ensemble, was flexible in instrumentation. They had already performed *Love Songs*, *Pulau Dewata*, and *Paranirabo*, so the idea of a new work specially for them was only natural.

However, the work Vivier produced that October—*Et je reverrai cette ville étrange*, for piano, viola, cello, double bass, trumpet, and percussion—is unique in his output for not really being new but a recasting of parts of the earlier, unperformed *Learning*, from 1976. Whereas this might conceivably have resulted from panic, from lack of time to devise a new work by a deadline, this explanation seems unconvincing: first, because Vivier had previously produced plenty of pieces in short amounts of time; and second, with more than three and a half months between completion of the score and the premiere, time pressure would not seem to be an obvious factor. We may wonder, then, about other explanations: was he suffering a creative block? Or were there perhaps external pressures in his life sapping his ability to concentrate on creative work?

By the autumn of 1981, there were nearly a dozen works in Vivier's catalog, out of a total of about forty-five, that had not yet had public performances. This seems a rather high percentage. But if we discount early student works (pre-*Chants*), the several small-scale Tremplin-commissioned pieces that had not yet been done in concert, and recent works whose premiere had simply not yet happened, that leaves only two: the orchestral work *Siddhartha* and the chamber work *Learning*. In the case of *Learning*,

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it may be that he had simply given up hope of this difficult piece being performed anytime in the near future, and found the music too good to allow it to languish in the bottom drawer. If so, no special explanation for the concept of *Et je reverrai cette ville étrange* is necessary; music history is full of similar examples of composers recycling earlier works.

And that is precisely what Vivier has done here. The piece is cast in six parts, with the last a reprise of the first, each part being one of the "melodies" from *Learning*. Some of the music has been remeasured to make it more easily readable, and Vivier specifies how the melodies should be distributed among the ensemble (mostly a matter of choice of octave register); otherwise, he has resisted the temptation to change or revise any of the material, for example by using some of the spectral techniques of his most recent works. The piece therefore is not truly representative of the 1981 Vivier, but a curious flashback to an earlier stage of his creative development. Overall, the new piece plays for fifteen minutes, less than half the length of *Learning*; many of the melodies that he has not chosen to reuse are those that are most idiomatic to the original scoring for violins.

For all that, *Et je reverrai cette ville étrange* has a special flavor and a coherence that raises it far above the level of a simple makeweight in Vivier's output. The sheer sonority of the work is beguiling and original, with the trumpet set alongside a trio of low strings (viola, cello, double bass) and an attractive mini-gamelan of piano (doubling celesta) and percussion (tuned and untuned). The determined concentration on unaccompanied melody has an element of courage, as though Vivier is showing us just how little artifice he needs in order to make music. However, the critics and some of his friends were not so convinced. The premiere, in Toronto's Trinity United Church on February 12, 1982, drew a negative review in the *Sunday Star*: "Claude Vivier's *Et je reverrai cette ville étrange* reasserts the importance of one of the least exploited elements in contemporary composition, good old-fashioned melody. Indeed, the piece is very nearly pure melody, the players—trumpet, viola, cello, bass, piano, celesta and Indonesian nipple gongs—spending most of their time in unison, with lingering gong strokes interrupting their linear progress. The music seems to aspire to hypnosis and in its place achieves dullness by virtue of holding to the same dynamic level and purposely restricting its expressive means. Less isn't always more."²⁵ Thérèse Desjardins, hearing a tape of the performance back in Montreal, told him in no uncertain terms that this was not the sort of music he should be producing and that he needed to get out of Montreal to revitalize his creative energies.²⁶

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Desjardins's reaction to *Et je reverrai cette ville étrange*, while apparently extreme, was perhaps fueled by the unprecedented situation in which Vivier found himself by the winter months of 1982: he was suffering from a prolonged creative dry spell, the most extreme of his whole adult life. Between early September 1981, when he completed *Samarikand*, and his departure for Paris the following June, he produced almost no new music at all (if we discount *Et je reverrai cette ville étrange*). Nor do we have any knowledge of abandoned or unfinished music in progress through all those months. The only exception is a tiny choral piece, *A Little Joke*, dated December 2 and dedicated to Sylvaine Martin. But this is no more than a *feuilleton album* that could have been produced in one sitting, not the product of substantial compositional effort.

It is of course quite possible that he was suffering from a form of creative burnout. The twenty-one months from the time of beginning work on *Lonely Child* to the completion of *Samarikand* had seen the composition of seven outstanding works, most of them large-scale, playing for more than two hours in total. It is hardly surprising that some sort of a break would have been welcome. But his Montreal lifestyle, with its ever-expanding range of social activities and friendships, may have played its part. Sophie Hébert is convinced that his relationship with Dino Oliveri had simply become too demanding: "Claude couldn't write at one point. He was very concerned about Dino. He said I *think* I love Dino. I'm not sure he didn't leave Montreal for all of that. I think it helped him to make that decision. The relationship was no longer anything positive in his life. And, you know, they had strange parties in the apartment on Saint-Catherine. Something was preparing itself somehow in the scheme of things."²⁷

The end of 1981 was marked by the writing of words, rather than of notes. On December 24, he finished a little text titled "Pour Gödel," which was published in the new year in a new journal titled *Trajfcs*. Ostensibly inspired by a reading of Douglas R. Hofstadter's book *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, which John Rea had recommended to him, and Thérèse Desjardins had given him as a present, the article describes itself as "an article about time," and begins with the declaration: "Time is the most important parameter in music, without it music would not exist." He describes time as the main subject in his two most recent compositions (without naming them), citing the enormous decelerando in what must surely be *Samarikand*, and the "forgetting any division of time," leaving only "empty spaces of time

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surrounded by melody," in what must be *Et je reverrai cette ville étrange*. Observing the human fixation upon "directional linearity," the discussion itself then takes a decidedly nonlinear turn:

The plane geometry of human space allows me to think of sound as the point of non-contact between melancholy and hope (the past and the future).

Melancholy is all that is no longer, but which still exists in the form of a memory, of traces left in the heart of a woman and a man, which allows the being to understand, because melancholy allows us to look at the past with a tenderness that objectivizes events and brings them back to a single point: memory. Melancholy, among human beings, is often confused with sadness. Sadness is an image of the past that lives on and would like to become eternal in the mirror of the future.

Hope is an imaginary space where everything is possible, where dreams exist. Often, alas, this dream is conceived and organized not by creative forces but by political forces. That is what I call a politicized imagination. The point of non-contact is called despair.

Early terminology having alas already classified the three results of despair as submission, suicide, and the imaginative (creation), I propose the fourth solution: revolution.

And I imagine that the point of contact, which would reestablish the continuum of space-time, could be called melancholy hope, referred to by some as love and by others as death.²⁸

It is astonishing how easily Vivier shifts gears from what was shaping up to be a discussion of the role of time in music to these extremely personal reflections, almost as though he were desperate to have his position understood in all its illogicality. The three results of despair, he says, are submission, suicide, and the creative imagination: the fourth is revolution. Surely the personal voice behind this strange utterance is clear. Having evidently himself chosen to follow the creative imagination as an alternative to suicide or submission—and the text "Imagine," discussed earlier, had stated a similar position—now he is contemplating a new path: revolution. What can he mean?

One possible interpretation, the reality of which was not yet certain at the time he wrote these words, is that he is talking about revolution in the form of physical escape: not only from Montreal, or from Canada, but from the very life he was by then leading. In October he applied to the Canada Council for their Arts Grant "A," for the year June 1982 to May 1983, asking for a total of \$19,000 plus \$1,000 for travel ("Montréal-Paris-Cologne"). He wrote: