Sandeep Bhagwati

Racines Ephémères

for eight musicians, obbligato conductor with gongs, and mono sound treatment

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Nouvel Ensemble Moderne Montréal, dir. Lorraine Vaillancourt

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Racines Ephémeres

Instructions

I General Remarks

Racines Ephemeres is a work of 9 movements and 9 gong interludes, with an approximate duration of 80 min. It is performed by 8 musicians, one conductor (also plays gongs and crotales, and one computer musician playing a MAX/MSP-patch or equivalent. Musicians wander to 4 different positions in the hall, preferably around, within and above the audience.

I.1. Theme and Movements

The 9 movements consist of 8 sections of different duration each – all are, in some sense, variations on a musical and structural theme.

The theme are the first bars of Claude Vivier's apocryphal work "…et je reverrai cette ville etrange" (…and once again I will see this strange city).

The theme is used as a resource for all the modes used in the work, as well as for the proportions of the individual sections and, of course, as a resource for melodic lines and emotional invention.

I.2. Gong Interludes

The Gong Interludes have different kinds of scores – some only verbal, some conventionally notated, some mixed. They always play out a relationship between conductor, musicians and the space of the performance. They can be between 1-3 minutes long.

What is a Rasa ?

In Indian performing arts, a rasa (*sanskrit: juice, essence*) is an emotion inspired in an audience by a performer. They are described by Bharata Muni in the Nātyasāstra, an ancient work of dramatic theory. Rasas are created by Bhavas: the expressions of the actors. The Nātyasāstra carefully delineates the Bhavas used to create each rasa.

Natyasatra describes only eight rasas. The ninth rasa, Santham or tranquil, was suggested by Abhinavagupta on the grounds that actors may need this expression occasionally in their performances.

The nine principal rasas are called the navarasas.

* Śṛngāram (love or erotic)
* Hāsyam (comic)
* Karuṇam (pathetic/empathic)
* Raudram (furious)
* Vīram (heroic)
* Bhayānakam (horror)
* Bībhatsam (odious, disgusting)
* Adbhutam (wonder)
* Śāntam (tranquility)

In the context of Racines Ephemeres the Bhavas are defined as certain musical attitudes or improvisation models (rasa descriptions) that will produce a particular quality of rasa – these need to be studied and learnt most carefully - the quality of a performance depends on how well the musicians have incorporated the rasa instructions.

I.3 Score and Subscores

The score of Racines Ephemeres is not organized in a linear manner. It consists of a main score, 6 subscores, 8 musicians' parts, one list of Rasa descriptions, one page of drone models as well as this instruction booklet and a Max/MSP-Patch with documentation and instructions. Each of these contains important information for the interpretation and realization of this work. None of them, not even the main score, has all relevant information. The score, therefore, is more a collection of parts and reference sheets than a fully integrated overview score.

Thus, not every user will need all pages of the score. Here is the breakdown of what each user needs.

Conductor:
- conductor's score
- all 6 subscores
- instruction booklet.

Musician:
- your part
- subscores 1,3, 4, 5, 6
- your part from subscore 2
- drone modes sheet
- Rasa descriptions
- instruction booklet.

Computer musician:
- conductor's score
- all 6 subscores
- instruction booklet.
- Max/MSp patch and documentation

I.3.1. Conductor's Score

This score is a stylized overview on the entire work, for the benefit of the conductor. S/he can see the following:

- what is the tempo and time signature of each movement (both stay constant during a movement) ?
- when does a musician play rasa-improvisations ?
- which scale does a musician use ?
- when does a musician change her/his position ?
- what rasa does a musician play in ?
- what is the current drone pitch ?
- verbal scores for Gong Interludes II,III,IV, VI, VIII

Things the conductor cannot see in the main score are:

- which pitches, rhythms and dynamics does a musician play ?
- when does a musician play drone ?
- which instrument will a musician play next ?
- what happens in the subscores ?

More about this score in the CONDUCTOR section

I.3.2. SUB-SCORES

The sub-scores are sections that are notated in a more conventional manner. They are played in full whenever they are indicated in the conductor's score (or your part). After playing them, continue with the conductor's score (or your part).

I.3.2.1 SUB-SCORE 1 GONG I (PRELUDE)

In all Gong sub-scores, the bars are separate entities and need not be executed on a rigid timeline: they allow some rubato internally and there is a pause on every barline. These movements are really about the performance space and its acoustic exploration. The final sounds should always lead into the new movement.

I.3.2.2. SUB-SCORE 2 THEME (VIVIER)

This sub-score is a totally conventionally notated normal score for eight instruments and should be rehearsed and executed as such.

I.3.2.3 SUB-SCORE 3 GONG V

In all Gong subscores, the conductor will not be conducting the ensemble. Playing together should therefore be coordinated in a chamber music way, by nods etc. But it is clear that in most cases it will not be possible, even in principle, to make all members of the audience experience a simultaneous attack. So in this sub-score the only difference between the instructions "tight, together" and "individual rubato" is that in the first case you still try to be together, whereas in the second case the musicians just pursue their own rubato without looking at or listening to each other.

I.3.2.3. SUB-SCORE 4 SECTION E1

This sub-score is a skeleton version of the Theme. Only the main pitches are shown in their proper positions and should be coordinated. In between, each musicians creates a plausible transition to the next pitch in his assigned rasa. (see also the timeline above: round noteheads are together, cross noteheads mean individual rasa improv.)

I.3.2.5. SUB-SCORE 5 GONG VII

Here the barlines actually are just barlines, i.e. there is no pause on any of them. It is important that the antiphonal interventions of conductor and Ensemble always overlap ! Inside a bar, however, timing is fairly rubato.

I.3.2.6. SUB-SCORE 6 GONG IX

Although each bar is separated from the next by a short or long pause, each bar should have a rhythmic drive to it, the sub-ensembles should try to be as much together as is possible, and the whole Gong-Interlude should have a nice buildup and fadeout curve.

II CONDUCTOR

As a conductor you have two roles that both are not part of a conventional conductor's role (that is why you are called an obbligato conductor).

II. 1. TWO ROLES

The first role is to coordinate the movements, control tempo and timing, and have an ear on the density of the music. You have no conventional control of the music: You do not know what exactly the musicians play, and how they play. So as a conductor you need to react to their playing and give them feedback on how what they do fits into the overall sound: You can tell them to be louder or softer, play faster or slower, make them listen to another player, show them what emotionality you would like to hear, and sometimes just tell them to stop – and invite them to play when it is their turn. You do this by using a number of hand signs (see list of necessary hand signs below).

Your second task is to be a musician. In the Gong Interludes you will play Gong, Cymbal and Crotales. You should do this in a position where you do not see the other musicians, so that you react to their sounds only and cannot lead them. But in these interludes you are the soloist, and perform as one – the ensemble just is your resonance space.

In spite of all the unusual limitations to your role there also are new responsibilities – by using your hand signs wisely (see list below) you can control and co-compose the music more than you normally do.

II.2.YOUR SCORE

Each page of the your score shows one Gong interlude and one entire movement.

II.2.1.GONG INTERLUDES I-IX

The Gong interludes are executed according to the verbal score or the appropriate subscore. None of the tempo, time signature etc. indications applies to them.

II.2.2. MOVEMENTS A-H

II.2.2.1.TEMPO AND TIME SIGNATURE OF EACH MOVEMENT:
Both stay constant during a movement. They are indicated at the begin of the first section of each movement.

II.2.2.2. SECTIONS 1-8 (SECTION LABELS ARE: A1-A8, B1-B8 ETC.)
Each section consists of a certain number of measures in the overall time signature of the movement. The exact number is inscribed above the section label (7x = 7 measures). These measures are real musical measures (not as in the Gong subscores), i.e. you conduct them. It is probably advisable to invent hand signs to indicate the last measure of each section

and the number of the section that follows, so that the musicians playing in the next section can prepare.

II.2.2.3. When does a musician play rasa-improvisations ?

The boxes in the musicians' lines indicate when they are playing. They should ideally start playing on the first beat of the new section. You can steer the playing musician with indications for dynamics.

After a box is over, the musicians are not required to stop immediately.

When a musician's part only shows a straight line, 4 modes of playing are possible:

- tacet (often)
- the musician plays a drone on her/his standard instrument (often) (cf. the passage on drones below)
- the musician plays another instrument of his/her own choice (sometimes) (cf. the relevant passage in the musicians' chapter.)
- the musician plays on one of the percussion instruments (rarely)

You as the conductor cannot know when a musician does what. However, if you are unhappy with the musician's contribution you can give him a hand sign to fade out quickly into drone or into tacet.

II.2.2.4. Which scale does a musician use ?

Each musician improvises in a certain scale. In the musicians part you can see a triangle pointing up or down. This indicates the upper or lower of the two scales that are valid in this section. The scales appear in the next to last line of your score. A scale stays valid until the next scale is indicated.

II.2.2.5.What rasa does a musician play in ?

Each musician also plays a certain rasa. You should be familiar with the different rasa models.

II.2.2.6. When does a musician walk to the next position?

Each musician will play from 4 positions. They are indicated in the score by numbers within diamond-shaped boxes. Dashed lines and arrows show when one musician is moving, sometimes while s/he is playing.

II.2.2.7. What does the bottom stave called "drone" show ?

This is the central pitch around which all scales revolve. The musicians use it as the basis for their drone models (see musicians' section. The drone pitch changes only slowly; even when the pitch changes within a section (as e.g. in B2) it always changes at the beginning of a bar.

II.2.3. Movement I

This last movement is very different from the others. In it, the dominant sound source will be a mono loudspeaker projecting an soundscape made automatically (see Live Electronics below) from the material the ensemble played before. While this soundscape plays, the musicians play drone models on the pitches in their score, reacting only with the way they play the drone to the soundscape. When they do not have a pitched stave, they DO NOT PLAY at all, remain tacet. Your task as a conductor is to keep them quiet so that their sound blends optimally with the sound from the speaker.

List of Necessary Hand-signs

The conductor must establish

unmistakable hand-signs

for:

1 only you (one or more players) / tutti

2 Play louder/softer

3 Play "hotter"/"cooler"

4 Play faster / slower (in the same pulse)

5 Listen to another Player

6 Start playing (drone and rasa)

7 Fade out to drone / to Tacet

8 Last measure of this section

III Musicians

III.1. General remarks

Your role in this work is much more elaborate in scope than that of a traditional musician who plays a fully notated part. You need to play notes, remember a mood, communicate in your own way with other musicians. In a very real sense, you as an ensemble are the co-creators of this work – the score you have before you is not much more than an architecture, an empty building – which your ideas, your emotions and your memories fill with life and warmth.

Because of this changed role you have, the requirements of this score are probably quite different from the ones you usually perform.

For those of you who come from notated music making, this score demands a lot more openness and mental preparation than others. This piece is not about how correctly your fingers and your mouth move, but about what you want to say. You must practice moods, define your own melodies before you improvise on them, improvise with, not against the others etc.

For those of you coming from improvised music, this score is a lot more restrictive than you are used to. Whether in adhering to the modes (no changes allowed) or in playing only when you are allowed, to playing in a pre-defined mood with pre-defined ways of articulating and shaping music, whether following a conductor strictly without using your improv momentum – you need to prepare in a different way than you would for any other gig.

Therefore, a large part of this text is devoted to preparation.

III.2. Roles

As a musician in this piece you need to perform several tasks.

- You must improvise music according to the rules laid out below.
- You must support your colleagues in playing drones or being silent.
- You must play percussion in the Gong Interludes.
- You must play one other portable instrument (your choice).
- You must play while walking a set distance in determined time.

III.3. Your Individual Part

It consists of several different documents, as listed below:

- your individual part (9 pages)
- sub-scores 1,3, 4, 5, 6
- your individual part from sub-score 2
- drone modes sheet
- rasa descriptions
- instruction booklet.

III.3.1. Your individual part

Each page of your part corresponds to one Gong-Interlude followed by one entire movement.

III.3.1.1 Gong Interludes

The Gong-Interludes have either their own verbal score printed in a box in your part or they are elaborated in a sub-score.

III.3.1.2. Movements A-H

In each movement, you see three staves at the top, and several melodies without any stems or other indications at the bottom of the page.

III.3.1.2.1. Playing a box (rasa)

The top stave tells you when to play a rasa (boxes). There is a separate melodic score at the bottom of the page for each box – use the melodies as a reservoir and inspiration for your improvisation, coming back to them a lot. When you play a rasa, you must try

- to follow it's rasa description as closely as possible, while
- watching the conductor for hand signs (see the box on page 3 of this instruction document) and
- listening to the other musicians, trying to create interesting dialogues and collaborations with them.
- keep to the scale (stave 2) that is valid at this moment.

Find A Signature Tune For Each Single Rasa Box !

It is strongly recommended to practice each box (!) in the entire piece ***separately***, trying to find melodic fragments that adhere to the required rasa but still work for you personally. In preparation for the performance you should best create a signature melody (a "chalan") in the proper rasa from the melodic material for each box, using it extensively in your improvisation. With such a "chalan" (that you could even fully notate and paste onto your part) it will be much easier for you to switch from other playing tasks into the new rasa during the performance – and concentrate more on the ensemble than on yourself.

III.3.1.2.2. Playing a line (drone etc.)

The top stave has also lines where you do not play the melodic improvisations demanded in the boxed sections. During these sections you have four options

- you remain silent tacet (often)
- you play a drone on your standard instrument (often) (cf. the passage on drones below)
- you play another pitched instrument of your own choice (sometimes) (cf. below)
- you play one of the percussion instruments (rarely)

III.3.1.2.2.1. Playing a drone

You have one sheet with 8 options on how to play a drone – the notations there are self-explanatory. Please learn all drone variants by heart, as you cannot put this sheet on your music stand while performing.

III.3.1.2.2.2 Playing another instrument

You are requested to bring one other portable pitched instrument to the piece, preferably one that you feel comfortable playing, even if you are no virtuoso on it. Instruments that are not standard classical orchestra instruments are preferable: all kinds of non-western instruments, or common handheld instruments such as the okarina, the harmonica, the melodica, the jew's harp, the lotos flute etc.

At certain points in the piece you can intervene with your instrument according to its own character, but trying to stay within the currently valid scale. Remember you are still in the "drone" section, so you mostly play only one pitch, with some embellishments, or a very slow glissando or a slow melody or a fitting rhythm. The guideline is that you must not strive for a solo with this instrument – let it colour, ornament, enhance or float serenely above the music, but do not use it to disrupt things.

You should play on this instrument not more than 4 times during the performance, so time it well. Do not tell anyone when you will play this instrument.

III.3.1.2.2.3. Playing a percussion instrument

Not more than 3 times in the performance can you also use claves, tibetan cymbal or triangle to create a steady pulsation (either with the conductor or in an odd-numbered (triplets, quintuplets etc.) ratio to her/his pulse). This pulsation must start at the beginning of a new section, go on at least for one entire section and slowly fade out in the ultimate measure of a section.

White Noteheads – Black Noteheads

Both in the scales and in the rasa melodies you will see white and black notes. They mean different things in both cases. In no case do they dsignate longer or shorter notes – in the entire composition, rhythm is not notated at all.

In the scales (stave 2) the white note is the central pitch of this section. It is the note to which all your improvisations can return. Please note that this pitch may be exactly the drone pitch or be a note approx. a third lower – depending on whether you play an "upper' or a "lower" scale.

In the rasa melodies, white notes show where a melodic phrase can start and where it can end: they are break-points of the rasa melodies, pitches where you can loop, jump forward or back, stop etc. You can also use them as repeated notes, as accented notes – but you need not to. The accented note can be a black note in the middle between two white notes, the longest note in the phrase can be any note. But- if you start a phrase you start it on a white note and if you end a phrase, likewise.

Montréal, Oct 9, 2008