

Jean-Claude Éloy (1938): Overview of Writings

Jean-Claude Éloy occupies a singular place in the landscape of new French music; once considered one of the most promising figures of the generation that followed Boulez, Stockhausen, and Berio, he soon found himself marginalized by the institutions of the “official avant-garde” for the aesthetic choices that had set him apart from the dominant trends of the time and its inherited watchwords, serialism in particular.

Deliberately removed from the preoccupations of his generation, Éloy found himself obliged to set up his own publishing house, “Hors territoires” (followed by the website www.hors-territoires.com), to promote his music through texts and recordings. As he wrote in a recent letter:

“I made the effort to publish first and foremost for the benefit of students, teachers who were faced with the silence or organized misinformation regarding my music that came from the circles with which I had always been in contact: the circles of so-called ‘contemporary’ music, increasingly institutionalized and rigid, in France and in Europe alike. Apart from Stockhausen, a very loyal friend, who explained he was a victim of the same prejudices, and proved to me, in the early 1990s, that he too was obliged to transition to self-production by relying on his own strengths. But he had already acquired a major place in music history, and for that reason remained of central importance, despite the various official critics that opposed him! For me, this problem was infinitely more difficult to solve... Stockhausen, who had just managed to help me receive a commission from the WDR studio (*Erkos*), didn't hesitate to tell me at his home in 1991 that he was worried about my future: ‘You'll see... The opposition is considerable... you won't find anything to do, anywhere!’ I still had the DAAD fellowship in Berlin for 1992, and thought maybe Stockhausen was wrong... I later had to admit he was right!

Beginning in 2004 new ties spontaneously began to form with a much younger generation (in France with Kasper Töplitz and others, like Zbigniew Karkowski; in Germany and Italy, with the musicologist Leopoldo Siano and a few others; in China, with my former student from Taipei, Dajun Yao, etc.). All these young people encouraged me to publish my own work. It was a huge effort. Especially as I had to do practically everything myself (images, texts, sound matters) to reduce costs. But in that sense modern technology a great help.”

In 2006, Éloy began to compile his writings in bilingual volumes (French and English) that bring together archival documents, photographs, and program notes for the works they present, as well as technical descriptions, listening guides, information based on the structural properties of each work and, in each case, his interviews with Avaera.

The first volume, [*Between concrete and abstract*](#), focuses on *Gaku-no-Michi* (the paths of music), composed in 1978. It touches upon Éloy's very personal use of electro-acoustic resources—one combining electronic and *concrète* material—that he elaborated in the studio of the NHK in Tokyo.

The next volume is devoted to *Yo-In* (Reverberations) (1980) and is titled [*Of the literal and the oral*](#). *Yo-In* went through three successive versions, the third dating to 2007. Each is analyzed extensively.

Another volume, [*The Path towards the Clear Voice or Recognition of Acoustic Identities*](#), principally concerns two works, *Approaching the Meditative Flames* (1983, revised in 1999) and *Anâhata* (1986, revised in 1999). Éloy explains how he incorporated the voices of Buddhist monks using the Shômyô vocal technique, as well as traditional Japanese instruments.

Published in 2012, the book, *Collective Normalizations and Individuation Process*, deals with a number of works with female vocal soloists, *Chants pour l'autre moitié du ciel*, (Songs for the other half of heaven), specifically *Butsumyôe* (1989), *Sappho ikêtis* (1989), *Erkos* (1990–91), *Galaxies* (1989–94), *Gaia-Songs* (1992, revised in 2015). Éloy's vocal scores show an exceptional understanding of his performers. Their highly unusual musical qualities—those of Fatima Miranda and Yumi Nara in particular—were decisive in the conception of his works.

In addition to these texts, Éloy has published various articles. Two of these, both directly related to his friendship with Stockhausen, offer a particularly interesting perspective on both composers. In 1969, Éloy interviewed Stockhausen for the *Cahiers du cinéma* in the company of Jacques Aumon, a professor of visual aesthetics, the filmmaker Jacques Rivette, and Mary Bauermeister, a visual artist, and the composer's second wife. Apart from his thoughts on several of his works from the period and their difference from his earlier creations, Stockhausen speaks about his relation to visual art and cinema, before embarking on a broader reflection concerning the spiritual nature of his work (at the time he was particularly receptive to the theories of Sri Aurobindo) and the attitude that he had come to adopt regarding the artistic creation as a phenomenon. In the article, "Stockhausen ou les métamorphoses de la vitalité créatrice", written in 1987 at the request of the journal *Silence*, Éloy offers a succinct review of Stockhausen's creative development, emphasizing the dialectical nature of his creative process. Punctuated with remarks from his meetings and exchanges with Stockhausen, Éloy's text develops profound reflections on questions relating to temporality and orality, as well as to the sharp contrasts between Western and Far-Eastern civilizations.

More recently, in *Uni-modernity versus Pluri-Modernities* (2005), which notably includes an interview presented and commented by Avaera and Makiko, the composer takes stock of his situation in France, a country still dominated by paralyzing cultural centralism. Beyond any polemical stance, Éloy returns to what has been written about him by Jean-Noël von der Weid in *La musique du XX^e siècle*, by Célestin Deliège in *Cinquante ans de modernité musicale : de Darmstadt à l'Ircam*, and by Marie-Claire Mussat in *Trajectoires de la musique au XX^e siècle*, decrying, as he does, the narrow, unidirectional, and dogmatic vision, unidirectional vision of certain musicologists who tend to manipulate information and use overly restrictive schemas to represent the complex reality in which today's musical creations unfold, one confronted in particular by the development of new technologies. For his part, the composer advocates a plural, multicultural approach that reflects the necessary contributions and interactions of civilizations other than his own.

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