

# **WIM HENDERICKX - RAGA I II III (Megadisc-MDC 7833)**

*by Yves Knockaert (1998)*

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra of Flanders

conducted by Grant Liewellyn

Gert François, percussion, Leo De Neve, viola

1.raga I (1994-96) FOR PERCUSSION AND ORCHESTRA

PART ONE 9'15"

PART TWO 8'50"

2.raga II (1995) FOR ORCHESTRA

PART ONE 9'25"

PART TWO 11'54"

3.raga III (1995) FOR VIOLA AND ORCHESTRA

PART ONE 9'49"

PART TWO 11'57"

Total playing time 61'10"

## **ALAPA**

Wim Henderickx's psychological, compositional and perceptual approach to music is based upon the oriental atmosphere he derives from an occidental point of view . When we browse through his output, we find that the oriental influence make the first appearance in 1989-1990 . Since that time, most of his compositions have been imbued with this oriental influence . Even before 1990, the oriental point of departure has received - literally - its permanent "orientation" . The terminology the composer uses, to describe his music, is still western : the climaxes are systematically designated as "furioso"-passages, while the thruth of the orient resurfaces as "mysterioso", often combined with "lontano", in the distance . Two compositions in particular constitute textbook examples of Henderickx oriental inspiration : *Le Visioni di Paura* for orchestra and *Mysterium* for wind instruments .

*Mysterium* is the composer's synopsis of human existence and consists of three parts : Creation, Earth and Eternity . *Le Visioni di Paura* or the "Visions of Fear" is moulded on the triptych *Inferno* by Hiëronymus Bosch . The beholder must not let the title goad him into looking for "fear" of Bosch in music : "One should surrender intuitively to the atmosphere created by the composer and allow oneself to be swept away by the sound of the composition and by its structure ."

Henderickx himself achieves this by distancing himself from his source of inspiration while committing the notes to paper . He regards "writing" as the final phase of the compositional process : it cannot commence until all ideas have been fully reatred . "Bosch' triptych was merely a source of inspiration that put me on the right track" . In other words, when Henderickx marks quite a few of his pieces with the word "meditation", he is merely describing a means to an end . It is neither the aim of the composition nor a description of the atmosphere the composer seeks to evoke . Henderickx uses music in order to achieve a Western form of meditation . Music constitutes both the means and the catalyst, it is never the expression, the representation or the evocation of the inspiration or the working title . The musical atmosphere is not an oriental pseudo-imitation but a Western version of and an elaboration on an oriental idea . The composer resorts to the oriental mentality in order to find the correct expression (elaboration and articulation) .

## **JHALLA**

Henderickx also points to other role models . His inspiration for new music arose from a confrontation with Stravinski's *Le Sacre du Printemps* . Bartok gave him his sense of solid construction (e.g. with *Variations*) . Henderickx possesses a percussionist's sense of construction and he has refined this ability through his confrontation with Xenakis' constructive mathematical method . Messiaen cast his gaze east and the overall atmosphere of meditation which his music evokes, combined with his accute sense of colouring, greatly appeals to Henderickx .

Ligeti subtly transforms this colouring into perfectly balanced drifting clouds of sound, a *modus operandi* which also applies to the pinpoint precision of the numerous "mechanically" conceived, rhythmical passages . Nevertheless, Henderickx forgets about all his sources of inspiration during the compositional process and keeps his distance where these role models are concerned .

Consequently, they do not have a speculative or directive influence upon the composer, although they did show him the way to his "mysterium" .

Without specifically mentioning the Orient, "the translated concept" is nevertheless present in many other pieces, e.g. in Rondolen ("Roaming") for solo bassoon . Maya for solo clarinet is based upon the logical development of a germ cell . The title is Sanskrit for "illusion" . Om for string quartet presents another variation . This repeated monotonic vocal expression inspires repentance, it purges the soul and produces extasy; it is the typical primal sound featured in various Indian prayers . Dawn for mezzo-soprano, female choir and instrumental ensemble is one of the composer's few vocal compositions . The singing voices recite Kahlil Gibran's texts (Song of the Rain, Song of the Flower and Song of Love) in a "dreamy" fashion against an instrumental background of recumbent and fluctuating notes and colourful arabesques .

## **GATA**

During the last few years Wim Henderickx has spent a great amount of time composing a number of Raga's . The first Raga is a concerto for percussion instruments and orchestra, the second was written for orchestra and the third is a viola concerto . All three Raga's consist of a slow opening that gradually develops into an allegro through a number of accelartions . In other words, the structure is analogous to that of the traditional Indian raga . The use of structure as a carrier of his music is absolutely imperative to Henderickx; his compositions do not exhibit the improvisational freedom so typical of the Indian raga . The structure of his compositions is transparent and obvious and is derived from the following growth principle : a clearly delineated point of departure gradually develops into a moment of culmination that functions as a temporary finishing point .

Consequently, a new evelotinary phase begins and develops at a slightly increasing rate . In a certain sense, this elaboration and its inherent acceleration mirror the progress of the Indian raga where the participants expand the piece through the interaction between tala and raga (the rhythmical and melodic basic theme) . The Alapa investigates the chosen "raga", in the Jod and the Jhalla the rhythm section of the tabla's makes its entry with the chosen tala . The Gata is quickening and inflaming, rhythmic in its improvised dialogue between the participants, ever increasing in intensity until the furious heights of the climax are reached .

## **RAGA I**

The solo percussionist in RAGA I has an immense number of instruments at his disposal, the components of which originate from all over the world : the dobachi (Japanese temple bell), the hyoshigi (Japanese log with a very high sound), Indian bells, Pekinese gongs, finger cymbals and crotales; these Asian instruments are often combined with African drums (a.o. Djembé) and classical European percussion . The opening note betrays the expert touch of a true connoisseur : two Chinese cymbals are brought together, after which one of them performs a slow circular motion, creating the distinct impression that the opening note "moves" . One morning raga is connected with an evening raga : one scale consisting of seven notes is in tune with seven gongs and an equal number of crotales . The composition begins with the horizontal raga-keynote, which is doubled by the

superimposed percussion instruments . This motif, however, immediately turns into a fluctuation produced by a combination of the dobachi with timpani glissandi that develop into trills and narrow chromatic clusters on the one hand, and the exploration of the raga notes on the other hand . The fluctuating tone may remind the listener of the sound of the sitar, where the actual pitch the player intends to use carries the same weight as the fluctuation around that note : lapsing deviations travel back and forth in an endless variety of pitch fluctuations . Various improvising Indian bells and carillons are another reference to the "alapa" . Rhythmic tala's and virtuoso tabla skills are an "inciting" example for the solo part . Henderickx has the presence of mind to punctuate the "alapa" with sharp, rhythmic grace notes and short, rhythmic figures . The pace at which this music evolves combined with the immediate introduction of the rhythmic cadence, constitute irrefutable evidence of the composer's Western origins . Subsequently, certain phenomena, such as acceleration, increasing complexity and fierceness of expression come to the force . Several sound sources join forces in order to obtain this effect, creating an exciting dialogue between soloist and orchestra which is typical of the "gata" .

The conclusion of Raga I is performed at a frantic pace, testing the skills of the soloist to the limit .

## **RAGA II**

Subtitled Tombeau ("Tomb"), Raga II is the most symmetrical of the three Raga's . The Raga-structure receives a more improvising interpretation . The slowly performed initial part, with the morning raga "Todi" as point of departure, evokes an atmosphere of the the utmost gravity and sadness .

A freely composed metric dialogue between two solo violins functions as a kind of intermezzo and constitutes the transition to the rhythmic second part . This second part climaxes with a huge outburst and consequently tapers off into a slow ethereal coda that is submerged in the tenuous and insubstantial atmosphere of the opening . The paramount consideration with this piece is the exact reproduction of the unique feeling conjured by the "Todi"-raga . "Raga is what colours the mind (the soul)" . This composition voices feelings of jubilation, sorrow and reverence . Characteristic of Raga II would be the solo performances (both on a virtuoso as on a colour level) by the various instruments of the orchestra . Several frequently complicated structures are elaborated simultaneously .

## **RAGA III**

Raga III - based upon a "Shri"-raga (a midday raga) - is characterized by an atmosphere of despondence and spirituality . The viola in this Raga is marked by Indian melodic configuration in its use of micro-intervals and quarter tone trills, that hint at the division of the Indian scales in shruti (22 micro-intervals of varying length within one octave, completely different from our division in twelve semitones of equal length) . The capriciousness of the ornaments alternates with sustained notes that form the keynotes of the lyrically carried melody . The viola clearly symbolizes the Indian sarangi (Indian violin), while the orchestra fulfils a double function . It will imitate and intensify the atmosphere created by the viola but it also symbolizes the rhythmic tabla with its comprehensive percussion section . Henderickx draws upon his impressive percussion repertoire and selects several mutually diverging cymbals, tubular bells, Japanese temple bells, Tahi-gongs and tuned roto-toms .

The atmosphere of this composition is determined by the phrases added to the score . The piece progresses from a mysterious "half awake" to a "sad but spiritual"-passage . Shortly thereafter the pace picks up in order to sound "lively with inner joy" in the swift allegro . In this part, the viola produces a rhythmically pulsing melody, with repeated trills that remind us of the quarter tones trill of the languid part . The slow coda is entitled "an evening prayer" which, in its turn, refers directly to the raga, as the latter is committed to a specific time of day .

The languid conclusions of Raga II and Raga III may well be inspired by a typically Western sense of symmetry . This also indicates that Henderickx does not imitate Indian music, but is rather a Westerner who resorts to oriental inspiration . With these three Raga's, Henderickx establishes himself as a unique orchestrator : all instruments participate in the development and he produces unlikely combinations of sound . The Indian modi are arranged in vertically placed harmonic layers and "distributed" among the various instruments of the orchestra : they guarantee the creation of a unit within all the diversity .

Even more than from the music itself, Wim Henderickx draws his inspiration from the oriental way of thinking . The verbal notes added to the score bear witness to this fact . He studies oriental philosophies and great Indian legends and uses them as a point of departure for his efforts as a composer . His personal "inner joy" consists of losing himself in oriental philosophy while simultaneously drawing upon his Western level-headedness to filter it down to enthralling occidental music . It is "West meets East", with both feet firmly planted on the ground . Over and over again, it is the Westerner who composes the music, the Westerner with a keen ear for oriental music, the Westerner who is not an imitator but rather an "interpreter" .