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An Online Classical Music Journal for Central North Carolina

My Cinema for the Ears

A Film by Uli Aumüller

59 min + ca. 50 min of audio tracks

Bridge 9117 DVD

Copyright 2000, release 05/21/2002

\$16.95

This is a fascinating documentary about two composers, French Canadian Francis Dhomont (who lives in Montréal and is affiliated with l'Université de Montréal) and American Paul Lansky (who lives in Princeton, NJ, and is affiliated with Princeton University), and the type of music they write, "musique concrète," or "electroacoustic/électroacoustique," although they do not approach it in the same way or produce the same types of compositions. Music played on instruments can reference a sound in nature, thereby evoking a visual image; these composers use the real sounds, which they collect on site and treat electronically to make recorded musical compositions. They manipulate sounds on tape or in digital files in a studio in the same way that a filmmaker manipulates images on film in the editing room, seeking "to hear the music in the sound." The narrative portion of the program includes interviews with the composers, shots of them working in the field and in their home and university studios, conversations between them, and demonstrations.

A complete six-minute composition, "Un autre Printemps," by Dhomont, inspired by the poem that Vivaldi places at the beginning of the score for his "Primavera," is included at the end, as the soundtrack for a video montage by Robert Darroll that uses photographic elements from nature and computer-generated images representing some of these elements, closing the circle begun at the outset with the demonstration using the first two movements of the Vivaldi, focusing on the second which features the musical representation of the barking dog mentioned in the poem. We see the appropriate portion of the Vivaldi score with its notation as well as the text of the poem in French in the course of the video. We see Dhomont recording a dog barking and electronically isolating and manipulating the sound, and subsequently coaching a violist in his attempt more accurately to reproduce the real sound—to some extent an exercise in futility, since the instrument can only suggest it—with the real one in the background. This cyclical form is also emphasized by the use at the opening of an interview clip from the conclusion in which Dhomont likens his compositional process to "a voyage of discovery," and himself to Christopher Columbus, setting out to find one thing and finding something else that is completely different. Many of Dhomont's sounds are water-based. The video shows gorgeous shots of Canadian landscapes resembling those described by Vivaldi; we are shown the sources of the sounds we hear, focusing on the textures of the natural elements in the close-ups. Hence we have a direct link between the concrete reality in nature and the abstraction that is music. The challenge for the electroacoustic composer is to transform the sounds into a new, different, but pleasant musical experience for the ear.

The program also contains four audio tracks presenting complete works by the two composers. They are: Dhomont's "En cuerdas" (using sounds produced by the plucked, rubbed and struck strings of a guitar), and Lansky's "Night Traffic," "Table's Clear" (featuring sons Jonah and Caleb on Kitchen Percussion—strikingly reminiscent of gamelan music), and "Idle Chatter Junior." Lansky's titles give away the content and its sources, which we have also seen in the documentary portion, along with the methods he uses to isolate the sounds and recombine them. The documentary shows how the sounds were found and transformed into music, but in this portion, the photographic image of the source has been eliminated as we listen—as would be the case in a concert hall. For this reviewer, a couple of the works seemed a bit long and monotonous due to their repetitive nature, but they were far from unpleasant. Their genesis and realization are intriguing, and knowing it enhances understanding and increases enjoyment.

The original soundtrack is in French, except for Lansky's contributions during the conversations with Dhomont; each clearly understands the other's language completely even if he does not use it. It is pleasant to be able to listen to it this way. It is also possible to view the film with English or German subtitles. The menu lists a subtitled version of the original, but I was unable to make it work; choosing that item also gave the English subtitles when French is being spoken. The twelve-page booklet contains, in addition to track listings and credits, short essays by filmmaker

Aumüller, both of the composers (Dhomont's in both the French original and English translation), and video artist Darroll, setting forth both their esthetic and their creative goals in the individual works or in their contribution to the project. It is an interesting complementary read. There are a few sloppy production errors in it including a couple of typos, and, curiously, a space between the apostrophe and the 'o' in "l'oreille" on the front cover of the DVD case.

This is perhaps not a film you would want to watch numerous times (as you might listen to a CD of a classical composition) unless you were a composer or a student of electronic composition, but it is most definitely worth a second, even a third immediate repeat viewing, and one you would want to come back to again at a later date. It is a valuable document, an artistic success, and an informative, insightful and enjoyable viewing and listening experience. Highly recommended.

Marvin J. Ward

<http://www.audaud.com/audaud/JUN02/hJUN02.html>

AUDIOPHILE AUDITION
DVD Video Reviews for June 2002, Pt. 1

My Cinema for the Ears:
The musique concrete of Francis Dhomont and Paul Lansky (2002)

- Directed by Uli Aumüller.
- Interview with Francis Dhomont and Paul Lansky.

- Studio: Bridge Records
- Video: 4:3 fullscreen
- Audio: Dolby Digital 5.1
- Extras: Four audio tracks
- Length: video: 59 minutes; audio tracks: 50 minutes
- Rating: ****

I didn't expect to like *My Cinema for the Ears*. The description seemed precious and ill-defined: "An impressionistic, wryly humorous look at nature and the creative process." It didn't help that it began unassumingly, with shots of the Stanstead, Canada's countryside accompanied by Vivaldi's "Spring" segment from *The Four Seasons*. So what else is new? Plenty. Not long after that inauspicious introduction, Aumüller introduces veteran electronic composer Francis Dhomont at work, assembling his music to Vivaldi's poetry. He needs a "faithful dog," so he goes out into the countryside with his analog recording equipment and finds one. The humor creeps in as he encounters an uncooperative sheep dog, a curious farmer, and bees. Aumüller shows brief glimpses of Dhomont's computer technology at work, yet not in a dry expository sense, but more as a link in the process. Dhomont is then quoted as saying that Debussy wanted to paint music, which is not exactly true but it leads into a charming sequence composed of Aumüller's poetic images and Dhomont's music. He says "we have more in common with the filmmaker than with traditional musicians," because of the dependence on media and the way that concrete composers intervene by cutting, mixing, etc. At the 19 minute mark a fragment of the piece *Water Music* (*En cuerdas*) plays, a hypnotic composition that becomes more concrete with Aumüller's brilliant use of sped-up and close-up imagery. Soon Dhomont is discussing work methods with American musique concrète composer Paul Lansky.

As more of these segments transpire-interview, compositional fragment, interview again--it becomes apparent what this film is showing us. These musicians mine everything in nature, the city, and social interactions (like parties) as sources for music. A thumping trip over a suspension bridge: why not digitally alter that rhythmic sound and distort it so that it's both unrecognizable and a fascinating musical figure? Attend a social event and record snatches of conversation. "Loudspeakers are windows into an imaginary space," says Lansky, with Aumüller skillfully illustrating his point. The DVD comes with four excellent audio tracks, featuring pieces by Dhomont and Lansky. Oddly, they aren't sequenced, so you have to play each one separately. Also, your DVD player's pause button may refuse to work, like mine, although I had better luck on my DVD-ROM player. Despite this technological fluke in the middle of a DVD about audio technology, this art/documentary film is memorable and worth having.

Peter Bates

Cdemusic

My Cinema For The Ears

Composers Francis Dhomont and Paul Lansky are the joint focus of this very informative film by Uli Aumüller, available here on DVD. Interviews with both composers in various locales are supported by samples of their work. Scenes of natural landscapes are used to illustrate parallels between rhythms, narrative, sound, textual allusion, and imagery in music and nature. We observe and listen to Dhomont in his process of doing field recordings and studio

assemblage for 'Un Autre Printemps'. Animated images created by video artist Robert Darrol accompany Dhomont's composition 'En Cuerdas'. Lansky describes his process of work and the concepts behind 'Night Traffic', 'Table's Clear', and 'Idle Chatter Junior'. The languages spoken are French and English with subtitles in French, German and English as appropriate.

WIRE Sept. 2003

MY CINEMA FOR THE EARS:
THE MUSIQUE CONCRÈTE OF
FRANCIS DHOMONT AND PAUL
LANSKY

BRIDGE 9117 DVD

BY COVVLEY

There is a certain beauty in noise says - Canadian musique concrète composer Francis Dhomont at the start of director Uli Aumüller's 59 -minute documentary, conducted in French with subtitled versions for English and German viewers.

Dhomont casts himself as an explorer, a serendipitous voyager through the world of sound, open to accident and surprise. He goes on to cite Debussy's observation that "People have written too much music for paper. Music is made for the ear." The sound sources Dhomont encounters and abstract in the course of this film range from that banal staple of the concert hall, Vivaldi's Four Seasons, to that equally banal staple of environmental sound art, chirping pond frogs. His interest is in innate qualities of sounds, as heard when they are dislodged from their habitual context and become something new and unexpected.

Aumüller samples the natural environment of rural Canada and compiles a cinema concrète of images. Dhomont makes explicit correlations between eye and ear, between film making and studio-based compositions, in conversation with younger composer Christian Calon. Embedded in the imagery is a sequence where Dhomont stalks a sheepdog to capture barks for his transformations of Vivaldi's "Spring". He then digitally processes the obliging canine's woof and later goads a viola player to give a faithful instrumental rendering of the barking in keeping with Vivaldi's written instructions.

Shifting to the cityscape of Montreal, Aumüller makes a patchwork of urban samples and Dhomont converses with Paul Lansky, masterly American transformer of found sound. Lansky is also dedicated to revealing, through exploration and artifice, music stashed away secretly in everyday noises. The composers discuss the importance of recognising sources of sound materials and identifying the gestures that generated them, a persistent issue of debate in the electroacoustic field. Lansky explains his conception of music as "eavesdropping into an imaginary space" and is seen turning recorded small talks into arresting music in his studio at Princeton University, New Jersey.

The last seven minutes are given over to presentation of "Another Spring". Dhomont's transfiguration of Vivaldi's "Printemps", with Aumüller's correspondingly processed visuals. It's possible on this DVD to access just audio tracks - one by Dhomont, three by Lansky - that fully justify the title's allusion to cinema for the ears. Yet in the film itself Aumüller's sympathetic visual accompaniment is far from superfluous and the conversation of these two important practitioners, while raising unanswered questions, sheds light on some of the assumptions, methods, means and implications of musique concrète now.

Copley News Service

August 12, 2002

My Cinema for the ears: A 59-minute film by Uli Aumüller: music by Francis Dhomont and Paul Lansky. Bridge 9117

Do you have DVD? If you don't, you must likely soon will. It is the latest method of seeing motion pictures and hearing musical offerings right in your own home.

DVD is big and growing bigger every day. Already some video outlets have stopped handling VHS and have switched exclusively to DVD productions.

For those of you to the mark with the newest video equipment and audio equipment (Surround Sound), here's a most interesting film that will test the quality of your Surround System.

Uli Aumüller films scenes and „sounds“ of nature – from the cities, from the fields, from the forests, everything from bird calls to the sounds of automobiles – and sets them to various musical forms, some already exist and some created for his purposes.

His work is quite ingenious, and I found watching and listening to it an enjoyable experience.

Computer Music Journal - Multimedia

Uli Aumüller: My Cinema for the Ears: The Musique Concrète of Francis Dhomont and Paul Lansky

DVD Video, 2001, US\$ 18.99, Bridge 9117; Bridge Records, Inc., 200 Clinton Avenue, New Rochelle, New York 10801, USA; electronic mail bridgerec@bridgerecords.com; Web www.bridgerecords.com/.

Reviewed by Kristine H. Bums and Colby Leider Miami, Florida, USA

Mein Kino für Die Ohren (My Cinema for the Ears), a 59-min film by Uli Aumüller, is not only a fascinating "under the hood" peek into aspects of the creative processes of two important contemporary composers, but also an impressive experimental work for video and tape in its own right. The DVD is presented primarily in French with some English, along with optional German, French, and English subtitles. It also includes four audio tracks in stereo format.

The film depicting the lives and creative processes of Francis Dhomont and Paul Lansky is difficult to describe. It skirts idiomatic elements common to art film, documentary, and video while presenting a nonlinear examination of its subjects. Although this may be considered a strength in many aspects, it also may lead to some confusion as to where the documentary ends and the experimental film begins. With footage of Mr. Dhomont recording samples in the field and in the studio, and footage of Mr. Lansky tweaking samples on the computer, viewers are treated to a brief glimpse of both composers working in their respective environments. Mr. Aumüller punctuates the film with footage of conversations between both composers, with Mr. Lansky speaking in English and Mr. Dhomont speaking in French (and a little bit of the other way around, to be fair!). Some of these interchanges seem scripted, although they contribute to a kind of subtle dry wit that underlies the whole film. However,

although it is interesting to see the impetus for Mr. Lansky's Table's Clear, the viewer is somewhat less interested in seeing Mr. Dhomont skipping stones on a lake. The "action" elements are a bit contrived in spots.

One of the most interesting aspects of the film is the cohesiveness between dramatic and artistic elements. A discussion between Mr. Dhomont and composer (and former student) Christian Calon about music made for the ear, rather than for paper, flows into a series of stunning water transformations accompanied by Mr. Dhomont's *Un Autre Printemps*. During such scenes, though, one wonders whether the accompanying water sounds in the foreground are part of Mr. Dhomont's composition or part of the film. However, on rare occasions the video trivializes the audio. The direct synchronicity of elements during Mr. Lansky's *Night Traffic* seems a bit too comical at times. During this part of the film, the video resorts to a clichéd montage of the industrial city, rather than balancing the audio and visual elements in a more experimental format as in the bucolic scenes.

While *Mein Kino für Die Ohren* offers much to the viewer, we see Mr. Dhomont much more than Mr. Lansky, and learn much more about his musical impetus. Curiously, Mr. Aumüller seems to be aware of this, offering three audio tracks by Mr. Lansky (*Night Traffic*, *Table's Clear*, *Idle Chatter junior*), while offering only one by Mr. Dhomont (*En cuerdas*). Both composers are quite equally represented on the DVD as a whole, but one wonders why the discrepancy between film and audio appearances exist.

The DVD is well worth the US\$ 18.99 purchase price. Video artist Robert Darroll is integral to the success of the DVD, and both he and Mr. Aumüller should be commended on the wonderful visual elements for this project. A combination of education and art, this would make an excellent film to show composition students, although it may not be what most of them would stay home on a Saturday night to watch!