

Vergers d'Éclairs (1975)

for flutes, cello, prepared piano and percussion

Inscribed to the honour of the French poet, Saint John Perse, this work, the first of a series, takes its title and its essential idea from the following lines:

Demain les grands orages maraudeurs, et l'éclair au travail...
Le caducée du ciel descend marquer la terre de son chiffre.
L'alliance est fondée.
...Et nos actes s'éloignent dans leurs vergers d'éclairs.

(Tomorrow the great marauding storms, and the lightning at work...
The caduceus of the heavens falls, stamping the earth with its cipher.
The alliance is sealed.
... And our acts recede in their orchards of lightning).

The structure is divided into eight connected sections, in each of which the same cyclic process takes place:

A continuum for two instruments – dormant, neutral, stagnant – is assailed by the intrusion of an outsider. The moment of impregnation – ('le coup') – is followed by a gradual 'quickening' of texture towards a higher plane of vitality, a further continuum for three instruments. This in turn is disturbed by the 'malignant' domination of one instrument and the resultant sapping of vitality, erosion of texture. These evolving relationships, symbolized in various strictly ordered permutations of duet and trio ensembles, take place against a fixed noise-environment provided by the fourth, absent, player. Since no individual part is synchronized with another – players depending upon aural signals – the course of the work is determined by the caprice of the assailant. It culminates in a protracted 'jeux d'éclairs'.

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