

Laurent Mettraux

composer

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LAURENT METTRAUX

(* 27. 5. 1970)

Laurent Mettraux was born in 1970, in Fribourg (Switzerland). He completed the studies of analysis, counterpoint, harmony and fugue with René Oberson at the Music Academy of Fribourg, as well as piano, violin and singing. He continued his studies in Geneva (composition with Prof. Eric Gaudibert, conducting with Prof. Liang-Sheng Chen), while following also courses of ancient music and musicology. He received a prize of the Kiefer-Hablitzel Foundation (Association of Swiss Musicians). Counsels and courses with, among others, Klaus Huber, Luis de Pablo, Heinz Holliger, Arvo Pärt, Paul Méfano.

His Symphony for chamber orchestra won in 1993 the 1st Prize and Public Prize of the 1st Competition for young composers, organized by the Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne. He has been laureate of several foundations, and finalist of, among others, the European Competition of Choral Composition (Amiens, France). His work « Ombre » (« Shadow ») for orchestra, won 1998 the prize of the prestigious Donaueschinger Musiktage, given for the first time (among the members of the Jury: Wolfgang Rihm, Sylvain Cambreling, Gérard Grisey, Christian Wolff). He is also honoured in 2000 with a *contribution ad personam* from the UBS Kulturstiftung for his « remarkable partaking to the musical life in Switzerland and abroad ».

First compositions in 1982. He receives numerous orders, as much from the interpreters as from concert associations, festivals, broadcasting and foundations. His works are more and more performed, as well in Switzerland as in other countries. His style is appreciated as well by specialists of contemporary music and musicians as by the public. He is also one of the youngest composers about whom a notice appears in the International Who's who in Music and Musician's Directory, from the 16th edition onward (1998). He is since July 2007 member of the committee of the Association of Swiss Musicians.

His works are performed in many countries all around the globe (more than 30 countries, in Europe, North and South America, Central Asia and Far-East), among others during numerous festivals, out of which are to be mentioned the Tibor Varga Festival, the Bachfest of Leipzig, the European Month of Music 2001, the World New Music Days, the Davos Festival, the Festival de Radio France – Montpellier, the Festival Musica of Strasbourg, the Viva Cello Festival of Liestal, the Festival of Universal Sacred Music of New York, the Festival des Rives d'Accordéon of Paris, the “Musicales” of the Auberive Abbey, the

Rencontres Musicales Internationales des Graves, the Scènes d'Eté of the Villette Park in Paris, the Festival of Sacred Musics of Fribourg, the Greifswalder Bachwoche, different world saxophone or cello congresses, the festivals of contemporary music of Bratislava, Kaunas, Ljubljana, Odessa, El Salvador,...

His works are played by numerous Swiss and foreign ensembles and interpreters, among which a great number of famous interpreters, for instance : the Talich Quartet, the Janacek Quartet, Riccardo Chailly, Tibor Varga, Jesus Lopez-Cobos, Sylvain Cambreling, Francisco Araiza, the Wiener Klangforum, the Zürcher Streichtrio, the New London Chamber Choir.

Among his works are to be mentioned the Concerto for 15 soloist strings, personal order by Tibor Varga, for the opening concert of the 1994 Tibor Varga Festival ; the 2nd Violin Concerto, also first performed under the direction of Tibor Varga, on the occasion of the celebrations, in Budapest, of the 150th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution in 1998 ; the oratorio Vers le Soleil Couchant (Towards the Setting Sun), commissioned by the Fribourg University choir, first performed in 1996 in Fribourg ; the orchestral work Le Cocyte, ordered by the Pro Helvetia Foundation for the 100th Festival of Swiss Musicians (Swiss Musicians Association) in St. Moritz in 2000 ; the choral work La Plus Belle des Lumières, commissioned by the Festival of Sacred Music of Fribourg ; a String Quartet, first performed in 2003 by the Talich Quartet.

Among his recent compositions : an oratorio for the Swiss National Exposition ; "Complainte" for solo violin, written at the request of Shlomo Mintz to be the set piece of the International Violin Competition of Sion ; a choral work, commission awarded through competition by the Foundation for Universal Sacred Music of New York ; « Émergences » for violin and accordion, first performed by Marianne Piketty and Pascal Contet ; a double-concerto for Boris Livschitz, violin, and the famous pi'pa player Yang Jing ; a quintet for flute and strings for Alexandre Magnin and the Janáček Quartet ; "Stèles" for piano, first performed by Dana Ciocarlie ; a concerto for organ and orchestra, for the inauguration of the new great organ of the Lausanne Cathedral. This concerto has been played again as German first performance in June 2010 together with the world first performance of a work for choir and orchestra (commissioned by the Gewandhaus) by the Gewandhaus Orchestra Leipzig, conducted by Riccardo Chailly.

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PRINCIPAL WORKS

Orchestral works :

- **Shadow** for full orchestra (1995-8). Composition prize of the "Donaueschinger Musiktage 1998", chosen among more than 80 scores by a board of examiners including Wolfgang Rihm, Gérard Grisey, Christian Wolff, Sylvain Cambreling, Armin Köhler. First performed by the SWR Orchestra, conductor: Sylvain Cambreling (Donaueschinger Musiktage, October 17th, 1999).

- **Symphony for Chamber Orchestra** or **First Symphony** (1992). First prize and public award of the composition competition of the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra (1993). First performance: Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, conducted by Jesus Lopez-Cobos (Lausanne, March 1st, 1993). First performed in its version for large orchestra by the Philharmonic Orchestra of Volgograd, conducted by Emmanuel Siffert (October 31st, 1999).

- **Concerto for 15 soloist strings** (1994). Personal order by Tibor Varga. First performed at the opening concert of the 1994 Tibor Varga Festival by the Festival Orchestra, conducted by Tibor Varga (Sion, July 12th, 1994).

- **Concerto n.2 for violin and string orchestra** (1998) commissioned for the celebrations, in Budapest, of the 150th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution and of the Swiss Confederation. First performance by Isabelle Lambelet, the Camerata Symphonica of Budapest and Tibor Varga (Budapest, October 1st, 1998).

- **Le Cocyte** for orchestra (1999) ordered by the Pro Helvetia Foundation for the 100th Festival of Swiss Musicians (Swiss Musicians Association). First performed in St. Moritz by the Symphony Orchestra of Bern, conducted by Luca Pfaff (September 2nd, 2000).

- **Concerto n.3 for violin and orchestra** (1999) ordered by the Swiss radio for the International Violin Competition Tibor Varga 2000 (set piece). First performed by Ryoko Yano and the Chamber Orchestra of Lithuania, conducted by Gilbert Varga (August 17th, 2000).

- **Concerto for organ and orchestra** (2002-3), for the inauguration of the new great organ of the Lausanne Cathedral (First performance in December 2003 with Jean-Christophe Geiser at the organ and the Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, conducted by Jean Balissat). The German first performance has taken place in June 2010 at the Gewandhaus of Leipzig, with Michael Schönheit at the organ, and the Gewandhaus orchestra, conducted by Riccardo Chailly.

- **Concerto for pi'pa, violin and orchestra** for the famous pi'pa player Yang Jing and Boris Livschitz, violinist of the Zurich String Trio.

- **La Mort sur un Cheval pâle** (Death on a pale Horse) for orchestra (2007), commissioned by Pro Helvetia for the Basel Sinfonietta (first performance during May-June 2008 in Basel and during a concert tour in Germany).

Vocal works:

- **Vers le Soleil Couchant** (Towards the Setting Sun) (1995-6), oratorio for soloists, choirs and orchestra (on words by around forty authors), commissioned by the Fribourg University choir. First performance on June 1st and 6th, 1996, in Fribourg.

- **Elogio della Notte** for bass voice and piano (1997), text taken from sonnets by Michelangelo. First performed during the Orpheus Concerts in Zurich (March 1st, 2000).

- **First lamentation for Maundy Thursday** for mixed choir (1997) and **Lucis Creator optime** for children's choir (1997). Finalist works at the European Competition of Choral Composition of Amiens (1997).

- **Crucifixion** for mixed choir a cappella (1998). Commissioned and first performed by the Chamber Choir of the Fribourg University at the Greifswald Festival (Germany) and in Stettin (Poland), June 1999.

- **La plus belle des Lumières** (2000), on texts taken from the Rig Veda, choral work commissioned by the Festival of Sacred Music in Fribourg for the New London Chamber Choir, for the Festival of 2000.

- **Le Nom Caché** (The Hidden Name – 2001-2), oratorio commissioned by the Swiss National Exposition of year 2002.

- **Plus près de toi que tu ne l'es toi-même** for vocal ensemble (2006). Commission of the Foundation for Universal Sacred Music (New York), awarded through competition. First performance in November 2006.

- **Choral Variations on the Christmas Carol « Vom Himmel hoch, da komm' ich her »** for choir and orchestra (2009). Order by the Gewandhaus Leipzig. First performance by the choir and orchestra of the Gewandhaus, conducted by Riccardo Chailly, in June 2010, during the Bachfest of Leipzig.

Instrumental and chamber music:

- **Gethsemané** for organ (1990). First performance in Bern by Erwin Messmer (1994). This work has often being performed (Kreuzkirche Dresden, Braunschweig Cathedral, ...).

- **Fantasia** for violin (1995) commissioned by the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation. Set piece of the International Violin Competition Tibor Varga 1995.

- **Trio** for violin, cello and piano (1995-6) commissioned by the Musical Youths of Fribourg. First performance by the Trio Animae in 1999 at the Bratislava Festival of Contemporary Music.

- **String Trio** (1997-8) commissioned by the Pro Helvetia Foundation for the Zurich String Trio. First performance during a concert tour in India and Sri Lanka, in August 2000.

- **String quartet** (1998-9) ordered by the Jeunesses Musicales Gruériennes for the Talich Quartet. First performance in March 2003.

- **Paremboles** (1998) commissioned by the Triades Ensemble. First performance in Mar del Plata and Buenos Aires (October 1998).

- **Duo for flute and clarinet** (1999) commissioned by the Boswil Foundation for the Wiener Klangforum (First performance on November 27th, 1999).

- **Duo for two saxophones** (1999-2000), first performed on the occasion of the 12th World Congress of the Saxophone (Montréal, July 8th, 2000).

- **Wind Quintet** (2000). First performance by the Eole Quintet (Fribourg, on September 11th, 2000).

- **Lux Mundi** (2000). Commissioned by the European Music Month 2001. First performed by more than ten organists of Basel and surroundings, during the Holy Week of 2001.

- **String Quintet** (2001-2). Commissioned by the Zurich String Quintet, this work has been first performed during a concert tour in Helsinki (Finland) and Lithuania, in July 2003.

- **Quintet for flute and strings** (2002-3) for the flutist Alexandre Magnin and the Janacek Quartet (First performance in September 2003).

- **Complainte** (2003). Written at the request of Shlomo Mintz to be the set piece of the International Violin Competition of Sion (2003).

- **Trio for clarinet, cello and piano** (2003), order of the Avalon Trio, first performance during a concert tour in Ukraine and during the Festival « 2 days & 2 nights of modern music » of Odessa (April 2004).

- **Reflets** for violin and percussion (2002-4). First performance in 2004, Costa Rica, by Jan Dobrzewski and Stuart Marrs.

- **Swiss Dances** for four-handed piano (2003-4). First performed July 2004, by the Piano Duo Dominique Derron & Pius Urech.

- **Stimmungen** for four cellos (2005-6). Commissioned by the Festival Viva Cello of Liestal.

- **Suite** for three flutes (2005-6). Written for the ensemble Les Chemins de Traverse.

- **Serenata in chiaroscuro** for organ (2005-6). Commissioned by the Bümplizer Orgelserenaden on the occasion of their 20th season. First performance in 2006-7 by Erwin Messmer.

- **Émergences** for violin and accordion (2006). First performed in July 2006, during the Festival of Auberive (France), by Marianne Piketty and Pascal Contet.

- **Le Tombeau de Ravel** for ensemble (2006). Commission by the Compagnie CH.AU, which has first performed the work in December 2006, in Vevey. This work has been transcribed for chamber orchestra (first performance of this version on October 2nd, 2008, in Quito, by the National Orchestra of Ecuador, conducted by Emmanuel Siffert).

- **Quintet for clarinet and strings** (2008). Order by the Davos Festival for Shirley Brill and the Terpsychordes Quartet. First performance in Davos, on July 30th, 2008.

- **Sonata for guitar** (rev. 2008). Commission by the International Guitar Festival of Fribourg. First performance on May 1st, 2009, by Olivia Steiner.

- **Stèles**, cycle of piano pieces after poems by Segalen (2007-8). First performance in Lausanne by Dana Ciocarlie on March 23rd, 2009, during a concert of the International Society for Contemporary Music.

- **Traces gravées dans le Sable**, cycle of piano pieces inspired by texts of the Chan tradition (2009). First performance in Zurich by See Siang Wong on September 9th, 2009.

QUOTES

After I had heard a work by Laurent Mettraux, I have spontaneously written to him, asking him to compose a work for my orchestra. The "Concerto pour 15 soloist strings" (1994) was the result of my demand, a work of exceptional quality. The innovative ideas, the subtleties, the contrasts, everything contributes in forming a work of perfect homogeneity. It requires from the musicians a great sensibility, an important mastery of the instrument, without appealing to a mathematician's austerity nor to the manual capacity of a circus artist. The musicians have played this work with an very great pleasure, the reaction of the public was spontaneous, enthusiastic. I hope to have the pleasure to listen to and to interpret more works by Laurent Mettraux. **Tibor Varga, violonist**

[About the first string quartet :] We enjoyed playing this lovely, thoughtful piece. **Jan Talich, violinist from the Talich Quartet**

The sonnets by Michelangelo are intense and wonderfully written. **Dalton Baldwin, pianist**

What moves me is the authenticity of his language. He never writes in a way that could be contrary to the instrument, but inscribes himself in its musical heritage. What pleases me as well is that he dares the emotion. Not a romantic emotion, but something powerful and personal. He writes what he has to write. **Marianne Piketty, violinist, professor at the National High School of Music of Lyon**

You have clearly your own particular way, which has not much to do with the musical languages of most of the contemporary composers. Your love for the grand phrase, for rhetoric in the noblest sense of the term, as well as your whole musical deportment associate you with a certain 'enlightened romanticism' and general independence of mind. That is the reason for which I want to tell you this : only listen to your own voice. **Luis de Pablo, composer**

Your Clarinet Quintet is enrapturing music where the balance between fragile lines and vigorous outbursts is fascinating. Simple details - but so full of meaning ! **Erkki-Sven Tüür, composer**

Laurent Mettraux is a young promising composer, following an atypical and personal way, creating free from the dogmas and fashions of contemporary music. **Jesus Lopez Cobos, conductor, after the first performance of the Symphony for chamber orchestra by the Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne in 1993.**

The "Complainte" by Laurent Mettraux is the best set piece of all competitions I have attended as a member of a Jury. **Prof. Herman Krebbers, violinist**

FROM THE NEWSPAPERS

“He is part of a new generation of musicians grown weary of formal researches, who return to the expression of their personality in contempt of the vanguards, and resort to tonality whenever they want to.” (Jean-Jacques Roth, *Le Nouveau Quotidien*, March 3rd, 1993)

“What strikes the listener in Laurent Mettraux’ work is the sense of construction, as well architected as implacable. [...] In the great majority, instrumentalists declare being very receptive to his music.” (Antoine Pecqueur, *Revue Musicale de Suisse Romande*, September 2007)

“A composer of a new generation attracts the attention: Laurent Mettraux of Fribourg. His work *Ombre* is freed from the vanguards. It shows a strong, rather intuitive talent.” (Simone Mahrenholz, *Die Welt*, October 20th, 1999)

“The highly and subtly lyrical music of the *second Trio* (1996) by Laurent Mettraux ! A really rare music, narrative to the utmost, that lays out a way of poetry filled with passions and illuminations [...] a striking language.” (Bernard Sansonnens, *La Liberté*, February 21st, 2000)

“The first performance of the work *Gethsemané* by the 24 year old high talented composer Laurent Mettraux from Fribourg constituted a high point. The work pictures in a subtle dramatical way the arrest of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.” (pof, *Der Bund*, March 29th, 1994)

“Out of a deep harmony emerge forces that will stretch the phrase up to its climax. [...] There is a real talent in this language, that affects by the strength of its conviction.” (Patrice Borcard, *La Gruyère*, July 18th, 2000)

“The public has discovered with astonishment the very beautiful *Concerto for 15 soloist strings* by Laurent Mettraux. [...] This work is very modern as well as very classical, perfectly harmonious.” (Vincent Pellegrini, *Le Nouvelliste*, July 14th, 1994)

“The *Symphony for chamber orchestra* is a work that speaks both to the heart and to the mind. A warm lyricism imbibes this score enriched by instrumental solos of unquestionable attraction. The revelation of a real talent.” (Yves Allaz, *Journal de Genève*, March 3rd, 1993)

"It is to be said that this work [*Suite for three flutes*] is one of the most impressive Swiss first performances that I've heard for a long time : rich, amazing, full of an emotion accessible to all and reaching a depth and a sincerity of all instants." (Alexandre Traube, *l'Express*, April 26th, 2007)

"His work *Traces gravées dans le Sable* flows slowly and softly, in a slight expressive tension, going through magnificent sonorities : really a music, at the listening of which one has to close the eyes." (Thomas Schacher, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, September 11th, 2009)

"Laurent Mettraux is one of the most promising young Swiss composers. He is already the author of an important and diversified work, interpreted all around the world by famous ensembles. The Organ Concerto, first performed in December 2003 for the inauguration of the new great organ of the Lausanne Cathedral, impresses by its expressiveness and meditative depth. It evokes numerous connections of ideas: one thinks he perceives a "growl from heavens" in the powerful tremolos of the organ and the orchestra, the trombones of the Last Judgment resound dramatically and the heavens seems to open in the ethereal sonorities of the Vox coelestis stop." (Renate Herklotz, Program book of the 229th season of the Gewandhaus, 2009/10)

"It is a music made of strong atmospheres, of dramatical and meditating aspects. There is something authentically and deeply romantic in this *first symphony*. There cannot be found anything artificial in the writing manner of Laurent Mettraux." (Emmanuel Siffert, quoted in *La Liberté* of October 16th, 1999)

"Today, his music corresponds to the expectations of the interpreters as well as of the institutions. It benefits by the traditions as well as it reflects the individuality of its conceptor, who vindicates by means of it the right to move freely." (Dominique Rosset, *L'Hebdo*, August 3rd, 2000)

"In *Stèles*, five short piano pieces after poems by Victor Segalen, Laurent Mettraux shows an outstanding knowledge of historical musical forms." (Tobias Rothfahl, *dissonance*, March 2011)