

VIOLECTRA

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There are two basic experiences and conceptions of time which are of particular significance in the cultural history of mankind and consequently also in history of music. The first is our occidental, directional, Jewish-Christian (I am only using catch-phrases), and consequently marxistic conception of time. The belief that everything continues to develop, historical consciousness, utopias, enlightenment, materialism, fear of death, progress. The other is more an oriental, cyclic conception of time which is more mythical and archetypical, the experience of the "eternal recurrence", repetitive rituals, the "big year" in the life of Brahma.

Contemporary physics reflects both possibilities: there is one theory on the origin of the world, where the material of the universe flies further apart emanating from a "Big Bang", and another, according to which the universe expands and contracts in very slow rhythms.

Music where nothing begins, develops and then ends, is difficult for the oriental listener to understand, especially if he follows the music and the aesthetics of the 19th Century. Even the tale of Cage-Reception is a good example of this.

In the 60's the confrontation with non-directional time starts to become important for European and especially for American musicians.

A year before "Violectra", 1970, a "Feedback" colleague Michael von Biel from Cologne played his first cello music in "German Landscapes". Biel is self-taught on the cello. His performance originated from the regular movements of the hands playing and touching to the tempo of heart beats. The listener may have the feeling as though he is present at the birth of music.

"Violectra" does not — not to be misunderstood — exclusively have this cyclic conception of time mentioned, but has taken this up as a theme in the attempt to use it to convey our directional dramatic forms that we, so-to-speak, have grown up with.

In the history of the musical instrument even the gap between man and instrument and the degree of alienation has widened with increasing differentiation and specialization: In the case of the singers in days gone by, so-to-speak, still a unit of subject and object. Then the "natural" instruments were blown, beaten, plucked and drawn. Simple aids (mouthpieces, drumsticks, plectrums, bows) act almost like extended parts of the body. The distance between music-making consciousness and the sound produced is still so minute, that areas of human entity are opened up by music in the widest variety of stages in development — in the folk music from Anatolia just as in Casal's cello performance which would otherwise remain closed, because the sound is characterized by the thoughts and perceptions of the human being producing it, irrespective of the music language system we find ourselves in.

Even in the case of keyed instruments whose complicated mechanics and tempered atmosphere is placed rigidly between music and player or listener, like an objectivizing filter. This instrumental alienation can be overcome, even in the case of the organ, and often has been overcome.

Then there are the electrically amplified instruments and finally the electronic sound producer, the hitherto climax of a de-musicalized technology.

According to a widely held opinion, the wheel of history cannot be turned back. The banal idea, that progress is from the piano to the Hammond organ, or from the organ with built-in rhythm machine to the organ with built-in synthesizer, fails to recognize that such simple rules of transition from quantity to quality in the music instrument sector have, thankfully, not yet gained recognition. There is hardly scope for improvement with the Steinway grand piano or the Sitar or the Shakuhachi flute. Stradivari violins are the best!

The rapid changes and expansion of electronic instruments cannot obscure the fact that the instruments themselves, especially the synthesizer, and the music produced, is forcing its way into the foreground in an unpleasant and unsuitable way.

Correspondingly, in live-electronic music there are still combinations of traditional instruments with synthesizers which seek to overcome this "the medium is the message" aspect. As is the case with "Violectra".