

Dear Antoine,

First of all, your question from last month made me very curious if you could elaborate a little bit more on your own views about silence. Given last month's answer, do you think silence means something different for you than it does for me?

But my main question for this month is about the number two. I remember you multiple occasions in which you introduced a piece of yours, which was for two instruments, as an essay on love. Do you hear any duo in music as an essay on love? And can you indicate something that music has helped become aware of about love?

With warm regards,
Samuel

Dear Samuel,

your two questions touch things, that are so important to me, that i think it would not be very hard to write a whole book as an answer. I also think, that most of my work can be seen as an attempt to find (musical) answers to these questions, in many different, often quite tentative, even incoherent ways.

So i'll probably best just start talking and see, where it goes.

Breaking the silence, as it were. To me, silence always had to do with the event: the quiet before the storm as much as after the storm. Interestingly enough this seems to be nearly opposite to Cage's conception of silence as "everything there is". Somehow it may have to do with a difference between "being" and "taking place": things "are", an event "takes place". After an event has taken place, "things" are different from how, from what they were before. While possibly being "nearly nothing", a "druidic difference" as Emily Dickinson once called it, such a difference can be life changing or of historical significance. After the event, or also (just) before it, there is a silence: speechlessness; absence of images; vanishing of any representations, that might have been effective before, but are suddenly obsolete now; loss of concept.

To me, music always was related to this experience: this incredibly elusive silence that sometimes occurs just before a piece starts. Or after it ended. I have always loved this and one of my main desires has always been to try and have this silence occur not before or after the music, but as part of the music. Not as a formal or structural musical device, but as something happening to the music, like a hue or a glance, or an incredibly gentle touch. Of course, there is no way of "composing" this. It cannot be caught. It immediately shies away from being approached too directly. As a composer one shouldn't even think of it. But if one is really longing for it, really open for it, i am tempted to say: really in love with it, one's composing will become very different. More and more one's music will become "just a few sounds", "just something", but also more and more ungraspable, evanescent, elusive. By taking on these qualities it will be more and more reminiscent of the event, or, as i once called it: commemorating the event, celebrating the fact that, in our world (irrevocable) "things take place". Rather than representing or imitating the taking place of an event, it will (being itself completely eventless) become reminiscent of it. Silent music (St. John of the Cross: "musica callada"): music paying homage to the event.

Maybe i have already implicitly answered your second question.

Love starts with an event: the encounter with the beloved. St. John of the Cross would call it: the being incurably wounded by him, by her. Being so deeply touched by the other person, that it changes one's life forever into an infinite quest, an infinite approximation never to be completed.

I strongly believe, that of all the arts, music, the art of sounds appearing and disappearing, the art of approximation (in tuning, timing, sound balancing ...), can be the most reminiscent, commemorative, resonant of the single most important event, that human beings may experience in their lives: love.

And if music *can* be this, it *should* be this. Especially in the constellation that is by itself closest to a love relationship: the duo.

Yours,

Antoine