

“Sandglasses” for four cellos, live electronics and the installation of video, light and tulle (2010)

Idea and music: Justė Janulytė

Video installation: Luca Scarzella

Video assistant: Michele Innocente

Live electronics: Michele Tadini, Antonello Raggi

Scenography: Juratė Paulėkaitė

Light design: Eugenijus Sabaliauskas

Performers: cellists of “Gaida Ensemble” (E. Kulikauskas, P. Jacunskas, R. Tamutytė, O. Švabauskaitė)

The project is initiated and supported by the European network for the creation and promotion of new music *Réseau Varèse*.

“Sandglasses” explores acoustic, visual and symbolic meanings of a sand timer, as a phenomenon. The inspiration of the piece is a simultaneous launch of several sandglasses of different capacity and duration. This idea is materialized in music by a polytemporal canon played by cellos which pass through their entire register at different rates, thus the initial unison splits off, the voices keep moving further from each other and reach the lowest note at different moments. The sounds produced live are being recorded and repeated in several variants that individually slow down and therefore descend, so that every cello’s sound generates its own polytemporal canon. They keep multiplying and layering before finally interlacing into a dense micropolyphonic texture which covers, floods and replaces the real sources of sound.

The musical idea is visualized by the purpose-built cylinder screens, made of tulle, where video images and light effects are projected. They extend and transform the performers’ existence on the stage while creating fictions and submerging spectators into various perceptive experiences.

Although the point of departure of the piece was of a purely acoustic-visual nature, the phenomenon of sandglass, being open for diverse interpretations, got wrapped with some implications and associations during the creative process. The metaphoric sand which seeps from the sandglasses, as a sediment of the passing time, accumulates and submerges the imprisoned individuals. Their identities transform, fade and vanish until the glasses fill up and the relentless operation of the chronometers stops. Everything freezes and the reverse process of purification starts.

Justė Janulytė

The relation between music and images in the “Sandglasses” might be defined as structural, derived from the initial design of the idea which the composer and the video artist used as their starting point. The projected images are functioning more according to the principle of experience than as a narrative or illustration, thus avoiding usual contrapuntal games or sight-sound reactions. Music is experienced with the help of video and creates perceptions that merge sight and audition.

Moving in this direction, a more intimate than usual relation between the projected images and musicians was targeted. We decided to place the cellists inside the tulle cylinders (abstract sandglasses). This way, the projected images completely enshroud the musicians, while the transparent tulle and certain lighting allows regulating density of relations between the cellists’ movements and video images. Thus the cylindrical scenography becomes three-dimensional. Video art and music get linked not only linguistically but also physically, interacting with the players and their bodies. It either allows them to “breathe” or imprisons them inside the impenetrable image.

The acoustic start of the piece gradually densifies by adding increasing amounts of recorded material until the musicians are choked with the ever growing intensity of live electronics. The process of transformation of the video images is taking place in a similar way. By the way, all the images are real phenomena shot by a camera, not computer-made. Their density, intensity and expressivity is gradually growing and get increasingly dominating, thus the visibility of the musicians and the music played live starts fading away, video projections start restricting the players’ movements until they get locked inside the images covering them. Having reached a climax, the video projections and electronic sounds start receding. They vanish and clear gradually while the musicians are being brought back to the spotlight of action.

Luca Scarzella