

INTERVIEW. JUSTĖ JANULYTĖ: COMPOSING VISUAL METAPHORS

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Justė Janulytė does not revolt against anything, does not proclaim any manifestos and does not seek to shock anybody intentionally. Yet her music is still provocative by its very nature – it demands maximum concentration, being introvertedly serious and refraining from any sort of confrontation and polemic, as if demonstrating that it is self-sufficient. It manages to be virtually amorphous and oddly monolithic at the same time. It appears that all of the composer's works, free of any incidental elements, conform to some unerring and immutable inner logic. Paraphrasing Justė Janulytė's own statement that her preferred method of composition resembles an attempt to see one object from all possible sides, one could say that she writes one multi-part piece all the time, only changing the perspective. Noticed by Lithuania's contemporary music lovers, the young composer is increasingly looking for new opportunities on the international level: her new work titled *Eclissi* was performed by the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group at the CBSO (City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra) Centre, on September 29.

How can one interpret the frequently 'fluid' form of your music? What is its relationship with your inner mental state(s)? To what extent one can identify music with the temperament, character and worldview of its author?

There is no doubt that creative work is a very accurate reflection of the author – of the author's tempo, temperament, mentality, ability to comprehend a certain density of information, level of spirituality, simplicity or complicatedness, sensitivity, freedom, strength of will, and all other qualities. The study of music from the point of view of psychology is an extremely interesting topic. The notion of music as autotherapy and self-exploration is just as important. When I work on a piece, I clearly feel the borders that I can't trespass, just as I cannot avoid the mentioned 'fluidity' of forms (which is in fact a variation-based development) and get rid of the odd phobia of pauses and attacks of sound. Surely, certain rational automatisms and borrowed technological 'recipes' can help escape from oneself at times, but rarely they become one's 'own' music, so one inevitably has to return and delve into individual principles of thinking, listening to one's inner voice and hoping that it is precisely the latter that determines the authenticity and certain

uniqueness of music. On the other hand, I'm far from believing that these 'proprietary' principles of thinking are absolutely original and not characteristic of anybody else; they're most probably formed by impressions left by acquired musical and non-musical information, which, selected and processed by the individual filters of taste and values, become that musical intuition that anticipates something new and distinctive.

The 'scenography' of your Breathing Music is probably one of the best examples of visualizing sound—the visual part is not just a complementary or parallel narrative, but rather another dimension of sound. Vice versa, the sound is organically born from what the listener sees. How do you understand the relationship between music and non-musical elements? Might it be possible to create music that would be perceived by senses other than hearing?

A sound is inevitably born from the image of its source and the concrete movement that produces this sound. That vision does not necessarily reflect the acoustic result or have an artistic quality, though. Currently I'm very interested in the possibility to integrate the visual process of sound production into the very musical idea, or, put differently, to visualize musical ideas. This intensifies the experience of listening and allows the listener to comprehend the visual nature of some ideas with the help of another sense – that of vision. For instance, the 'invention' of electronic music – the idea of surround sound migrating across the space – is of a purely visual nature, just as many other musical phenomena. Holding that true, the conceived musical pieces are perceived not only by hearing, but also by vision. Of course, I'm not talking about the fairly artificial imitation of electronic compositions by visual screen projections, but rather about much more organic connections between the sound and the movement producing it (and, at the same time, the image of that movement).

The titles of some of your works resemble excerpts from poetic texts. What is their function and relationship with the music itself? Is it possible that they are not really titles in the traditional sense, but rather an additional layer of meaning that extends music instead of naming it?

My pieces' titles, even though they do indeed sound poetic, usually reflect the constructive idea realized in the composition. For example, in *White Music* the idea of the formation of white colour in nature is interpreted, in *Let's Talk About Shadows* certain textural, dynamic and harmonic metaphors of shadows are developed, while *Breathing Music* imitates the periodic rhythm of breathing, and so forth. Titles are important and inseparable of music, they verbalize its intentions, as subjective and open to interpretation the latter could be.

Alongside a degree in composition, you have one in musicology. How do these

two spheres, seemingly related and yet, to my mind, radically different in their nature, fit together? Does the ability to professionally analyze and evaluate music help in the process of composition or vice versa?

I believe that writing about music, just as creating, performing or listening to it, is related to comprehension and exploration of musical phenomena, which is of utmost importance to composers. Speaking about the studies of musicology in particular, the intensive practice of verbalizing, classifying and analyzing musical phenomena has a twofold effect. On the one hand, it could lend some clarity and logic to the creative process while selecting the musical material and working on it, as well as being helpful in evaluating or presenting one's own works. On the other hand, however, that theoretical approach could make the creative process artificial to some extent, repressing spontaneity and risk-taking. However, a balance of self-critical analytical outlook and open-ended creativity is probably necessary for productive work. As for my current musicological practice, the genre most appealing to me at the time is that of interview, which allows me (usually during the Gaida festival) to talk to some remarkable visiting composers (for instance, Kaija Saariaho or Jean-François Laporte), and ask them questions that interest me personally, thus quite egoistically turning the commissioned interview into a private lesson of composition.

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What is the nature of your compositions? Are they sequences of notes and parameters of sound, imaginary landscapes, chromatic palettes, dynamic processes, or something else? What are the compositional principles that you usually employ?

Luca Francesconi, one of my most important teachers, distinguished two methods of creating the musical score: that of a painter and that of a sculptor. The painter starts to work on a painting from one small stroke and, repeating that gesture, fills the entire canvas; some additional layers might be painted on top of the others, but essentially the painting is created from nothing, starting with a white sheet and ending with a finished work of art. Meanwhile, the sculptor has the work's material—the stone block—from the very beginning, searching for the 'concealed' relief of the future work in the process of hammering the stone. In contrast to the painter, the sculptor starts with the excess of material, shaping and polishing it until the desired silhouette of the sculpture becomes clear. Both of these two methods are characteristic of my work, although the first one might be more typical: I have written the majority of my works starting with one musical gesture, a DNA of the piece of sorts, gradually subjecting it to textural, dynamic and harmonic metamorphoses, until it might even become its own antipode. Even though I tend to think in pure musical parameters, paying considerable attention to the consistency of the harmonic field and searching for new textures and methods of sound production, at the same time I perceive my compositions in terms of visual metaphors

based on oppositions. The latter can include colours, or, to be precise, relationships between colours (black-white, light- shadow), dynamic processes (motion, stillness, ascent, descent) and certain compositional parameters that are as common for music as they are for visual phenomena (vertical-horizontal, foreground-background, close-far), among other things.

A couple of your new works are premiered this autumn. How are they related to what you have done until now?

My recent works are connected to the earlier ones through both the visual nature of the ideas underlying them and the further development of the same aesthetic and rhetoric: monochromatic instrumentation, slow tempos, pulsating sounds without the attacks (as if emerging from nowhere) and a certain mixture of sonorism and minimalism.

The exploration of the possibilities of visualizing musical ideas, started in *Breathing Music*, is continued in *Eclissi* (*Eclipses*, 2007) for violin, viola, cello, double bass and live electronics. In this work, the musicians perform inside a soundproof Plexiglas installation, while the electronic algorithm produces audiovisual fictions: the audible sound (i.e. the sound that is selected and amplified by the computer) does not necessarily match the musicians' movements seen by the listener, and vice versa. Both the live instrumental parts and the electronic filters are based on periodically pulsating rhythms, thus creating multilayered counterpoints of interflowing pulsations and achieving an effect that would be hard to arrive at with acoustic instruments only: the parameters of a single sound – dynamic, timbre, harmony and texture – pulsating at different tempos that don't coincide with the rhythm of the bow's movement. Speaking metaphorically, these silent, barely audible pulsations can remind white dwarfs – the stars in the last phase of their existence, which are the object of study of my father Rimas Janulis. *Eclissi* was commissioned by the *Integra* project, which unites eight important European music research centres with the purpose of developing a new automated live electronics application. As a part of this project, ten composers were commissioned to create works employing live electronics, realizing the electronic part at one of the mentioned centers, subsequently using this experience in the development of the new application. I was fortunate to write my piece for Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and create the electronic part at the electronic music studio of the Malmö Conservatory together with a great composer Kent Olofsson.

In addition to *Eclissi*, two acoustic works are to be premiered soon. *Aquarelle*, which will be performed by the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir at the Gaida Festival on October 30, interprets the old *cori spezzati* tradition, dividing the choir into four microensembles. Meanwhile, on April 3, 2008, the French Flute Orchestra, directed by Pierre-Yves Artaud, will perform my new piece for 24 flutes in Paris.

Do you imagine yourself in any other creative role, for instance, that of a painter or a film director? Do you feel that boundaries between different forms of expressions might be done away with someday?

It is possible to do away with them even now, and without considerable effort, since all arts – be it sound, visual or performing art – have many points of intersection and common expressive principles. It might be not an exaggeration to say that they condition the existence of each other. Speaking in fairly primitive terms, everything that moves usually emits some kind of sound (perhaps with the only exception of falling snow, the metaphor of which I tried to get in my piece for two pianos *The Silence of Falling Snow*, 2006) and most probably is visible. The task, then, is to make these three components work together in a way that will result in a single undivided artistic effect, where all three – sound, vision and motion – would be equally important and interdependent.

Going back to the question of different creative roles, I would assume that the mentioned ones are appealing to me, especially since the skills common for painters and film directors are just as crucial for composers: the ability to envision the composition in its entirety, feel the proportions, direct the temporal allocation of musical events, apply certain narrative structures, and so on. Sometimes it appears to me that the differences between various art forms lie solely in the use of different material, while fundamental expressive principles remain the same.