

VIOLIN CONCERTO

Two movements of almost equal duration but highly contrasted, like two monoliths opposite and inverted, make up Bernard Cavanna's *Violin Concerto*.

Written between 1995 and '98 and dedicated to violinist Noëmi Schindler, the *Concerto* was first performed at the Maison de la Radio in Paris on 13th February 1999 by the dedicatee and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio-France, conducted by Dominique My. Even though quite remote from the customary idea of a « concerto », in which the soloist is generally « magnified », carried or at least supported by the orchestra, here the solo part is singularised and identifiable with the being/individual (as in Ligeti's *Cello Concerto*) and acts like a free electron in a hostile environment (the orchestra), while contributing to destabilising it and generating « chaos ».

These confrontations are expressed through various figurations or variations that sometimes espouse the outlines of a mode, sometimes the outlines of « harmonic blocs ». There is something of the nature of the virtuoso and of the fairground, the tragic and the grotesque, pleasure in sound and inner trouble, an inner trouble that will always be expressed with modesty.

The first movement (monolith) constantly evolves in energy and force, with a central part that is both calm and taut. The second movement (inverted monolith), written in a very slow tempo and generally *piano*, presents, to the contrary, a very dynamic central part, advancing generally *forte*. The contrast between the two movements is expressed just as clearly in the materials used : thick and rich in the first movement, a more impressionist or individualised texture in the second.

The alternation between the playing of the soloist and the orchestra is often established according to an irrational periodicity (seven in the first part of the first movement) that works largely towards dramatising each of its appearances. The orchestra brutally demonstrates its reaction with formulas borrowed from modes or harmonic blocs.

The « hopelessly closed » universe of the second movement juxtaposes several polarisations : a high G as ultimate limit, a B (cellos and violas) in the middle register, constantly varied in the sound production, a low E in the double-basses, an unchanging alternation of two « classified » harmonies, two fourth and sixth chords in a rhythmic unit of 11 beats (5+6) that will imperceptibly expand up to 19 beats.

Furthermore, all these « polarisations » could be read in relation to F sharp which, in the course of this movement, takes on increasing importance and implicitly exerts a powerful attraction on all the other sounds (even though it is in fact the G that is most widely heard). The high G and low E might then be considered as a sort of appoggiatura of the F sharp. Moreover, this attraction towards F sharp is expressed by almost cadential formulas which grant a brief moment of balance-perhaps the only one in the entire concerto- or a feeling of relaxation.

The tension returns with the solo violin, which again polarises itself on G (as the ultimate limit). The orchestra acts, in the central part of the second movement, pitting large masses, sometimes linear, sometimes vertical, against each other as if to demonstrate, one last time, its power in face of this « ultimate » threshold.

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