

Intense works by Xenakis

Elements (of nature) and violence sound as architectural space, making the music of Xenakis the opposite of a dry mathematical exercise.

Asko|Schonberg, Residence Orchestra, Sonia Wieder-Atherton and Arne Deforce (cello) conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw and Arturo Tamayo, performed works by Xenakis, Rihm and Ayres. Until June 24, the exhibition *Iannis Xenakis: Composer, Architect, Visionary*, with sketches and drawings by Xenakis, is available for viewing at the Music Building in Amsterdam.

Holland Festival
Anthony Fiumara

Whoever walked into the Muziekgebouw aan't IJ on Saturday, saw that the great hall had been transformed into a big stage: a flat floor with loose seats, the musicians of the Hague Philharmonic (RO) scattered through the hall, in the center was a high block-shaped podium for the conductor Arturo Tamayo. You could choose a spot between the musicians [en zo als het ware in de muziek van Iannis Xenakis (1922-2001) verkeren - could not translate].

That was precisely the intention of the composer when he composed *Terretektorh* written in 1966. Groups of players threw Xenakis' sounds like balls to each other, making seem like it is continuously traveling through the room. Paradoxically, this effect is best visible from the balcony, where you have enough distance from the sound of clouds below. If you were right in the hall what you heard was mostly the instrument played closest to you. It was Xenakis' dream for *Terretektorh* that the listener would be surrounded by a natural phenomenon - in his own words: "A hailstorm or even the whisper of pine forests, will surround the listeners [...]. Eventually he finds himself sitting on top of a mountain in the middle of a storm that attacks him from all sides, in a rickety boat

swinging on the open sea, or in a universe filled with tiny stars of sound, moving in small or isolated mists."

The Greek composer, deceased as of ten years ago, was born in 1922 in the Romanian town Bralla, near the Black Sea. Xenakis moved to Greece early and during the Second World War, participated in the resistance against the Nazis. A shrapnel disfigured his face in 1944, causing him to lose an eye. When Xenakis landed in Paris in 1947 as a refugee, his life really began again. With his engineering degree he started working as an assistant architect to Le Corbusier, the top architect of his day. His old passion, music, was his destiny in Paris: without any formal training as a musician, he enlisted in 1951 in the composition class of Olivier Messiaen, foremost among the composers of his time.

Messiaen advised him in the usual training (counterpoint, harmony and form) and to use his knowledge of architecture and mathematics to connect with the music. Xenakis did this in *Metastasis* his opus 1. In 1958 the composer designed the dashing Philips Pavilion for the Brussels World Fair. He based the building on the sketches he made for *Metastasis* about four years before: straight lines fanning out all forms of corrugated surfaces.

[He employed] the mathematical principle that music is made audible by masses of sliding tones on the strings.

It seems like the rough sound thus had volume and depth. Xenakis himself compared the irregular sound points to a field full of cicadas or the mass political demonstrations during the war: "I listened to the sound of the marching masses in the center of Athens, the chanting of slogans and - when she encountered Nazi tanks - it was continually interrupted by the [screech] of machine guns, the chaos. I will never forget the transformation of the regular rhythmic sound of hundreds of thousands of people in a wonderful sort of chaos."

Those elements of (natural) violence sound like architectural space that make the music of Xenakis the opposite of a dry mathematical exercise. The big (and little-heard) orchestral works such as *Terretektorh* and *Nomos Gamma* proved that Saturday night. In the intense performance by Tamayo took the rough pieces mercilessly by the throat. It sounded like electronic music, but played by real people.

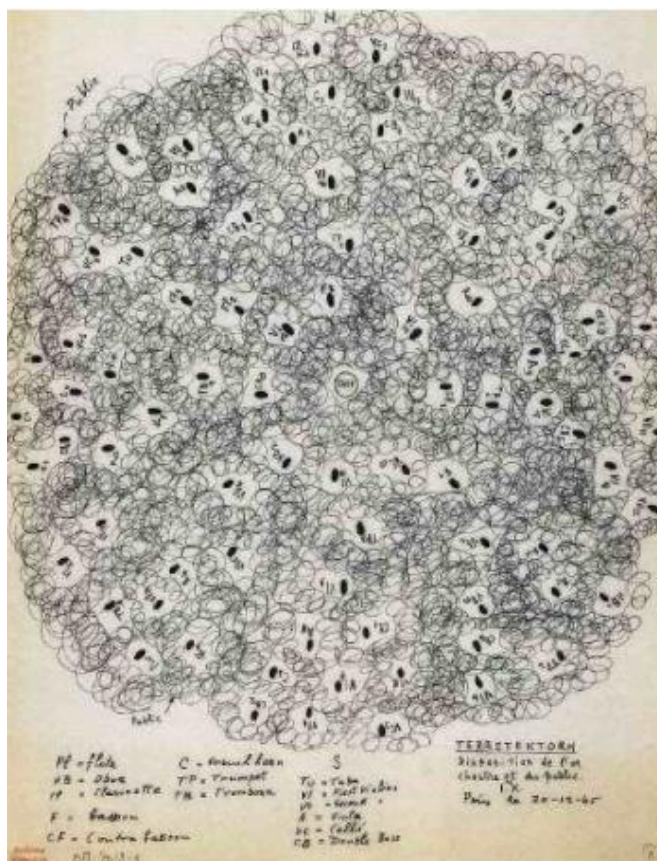
In *Nomos Gamma* the public was placed between the musicians. But where the small drums that the band members *Terretektorh* used reminded

one of hail or rain of bullets, you could tell that the crackling eight percussionists in *Nomos Gamma* were meant to be compared to bombers. The Holland Festival provided earplugs at the entrance.

This almost archetypal power was achieved by Xenakis not only in these great works. The interpretation of "Nomos Alpha" by cellist Anne Deforce (cellist and a shadow from the RO for the final passage) was downright overwhelming. [En liet Asko|Schonberg onder Reinbert de Leeuw het ensemblewerk 'Phlegra' schuren en janken - in wolken, hagelbuien en morsecodes - could not translate]

In between all that violence remained the vital orchestral work No. 46, with Richard Ayres standing proud: his tragic cartoon music fitting wonderfully with Xenakis' violence.

“Even the whisper of pine forests, can encircle any listener.”



Score Page of Xenakis' *Terretektorh* performed and exhibited at the Holland Festival.