

Echoes Around Me 2024

AI Future Sounds Festival (All—In—Future—Sounds)

17. October - 19. October 2024
Schauspielhaus Wien | Porzellangasse 19 | 1090 Wien

Francis Dhomont | *Forêt profonde* | Stereo | 45' | 1994 - 96

Commissioned by the French State (Music Office) and the Ina-GRM (Paris).

To my mother

(*Deep Forest*) is an acousmatic melodrama, based on Bruno Bettelheim's essay "The Uses of Enchantment" (Alfred A Knof / Random House, New York 1976), of which this is the third version; an extensively modified version, almost double in length compared to earlier versions. "*Forêt profonde*" is a work that has accompanied me for the past fifteen years, and its final production required more than two years.

Begun thirteen years after "*Sous le regard d'un soleil noir*", "*Forêt profonde*" also derives its inspiration from a psychoanalytic reflection. An adult reading of children tales that moves between the memory of my naïve wonder and the discovery of its secret mechanisms. This hesitating between two ages perhaps presents the risk of failing to reach either one; but it is nevertheless possible for the magical intuition of childhood, that always sleeps in us with one eye open, to revive buried revelations, and for the rational mind to delight in deciphering, under the manifest content of this universal unconscious, the logic of its latent content.

It is a listening on three levels — novelistic, symbolic, musical — more disconcerting no doubt, but more active than an unidimensional listening.

The human journey of Bruno Bettelheim, whose thoughts are behind this star shaped course, interferes, for obvious reasons, with these old stories that confront us with questions on our time.

A guided tour of the childhood soul, which is nothing more than a return to the initiatory world — both cruel and reassuring — of fairy tales.

"*Forêt profonde*" comprises 13 sections, of which the 6 "Rooms" (sections 1, 3, 6, 8, 10 and 12) constitute transit periods/areas, secret passages of sort, between the seven thematic sections (sections 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11 and 13). These "Rooms" contain little or no text.

Each of the 13 sections borrows a brief element, a colour, an atmosphere, from the 13 "*Kinderszenen*" (Scenes from Childhood) op. 15 from Schumann, as a tribute to this pathetic composer, engulfed in the depth of his forest.

I wish to thank Inés Wickmann Jaramillo for offering me a poetic Colombian sound recording, and Beatriz Ferreyra for allowing me in such friendly manner to borrow a short but colourful excerpt from her "*Petit Poucet magazine*" (1985).

Francis Dhomont

Trained by Nadia Boulanger and Charles Koechlin, Francis Dhomont began his career composing instrumental music. But from 1947, before musique concrète was theorized by Pierre Schaeffer, he began experimenting with one of the first Webster wire recorder models. He would record sound objects, before this term existed, and compose with them.

Dhomont settled in Les Baux-de-Provence, where, to earn a living and raise his children, he became a woodworker. In his free time, he composed in a studio he built in Avignon. Away from the Parisian music scene, he started producing his music in a closed circuit and only composed acousmatic pieces. On discovering works by the Groupe de Recherche Musicale, he took a course with them from 1973 to 1974 and programmed their creations in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence at the Musiques Multiples festival, which he founded and was president of from 1975 until 1979. It was during one of these festivals that he met the soprano Marthe Forget, with whom he traveled to Canada, settling in Québec. He carried out a one-year residency at the Université de Montréal's Music Faculty and stayed twenty-six years on Canadian soil. During this time, he wrote, composed, and taught, mainly at the Université de Montréal from 1980 to 1996. Since 2004, Dhomont had been living in Avignon.

Apart from works written in his first few years of composing, Dhomont's catalog is strictly dedicated to acousmatic music. This form, by its nature, is devoid of any visual spectacle. Affected by eye problems in his youth, Dhomont was forced to remain in the dark to heal. These conditions, present during his formative years of making music, made his output a strictly sound affair.

These conditions are also the reason behind the recurrent theme of darkness and night in his catalog. Examples include *Figures de la nuit* (*Figures of the Night*, 1991), *Studio de nuit* (*Night Studio*, 1992), *Nocturne à Combray* (*Nocturne in Combray*, 1996), and *Forêt profonde* (*Deep Forest*, 1996). This last piece, inspired by Austrian-American psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* also attests to his sensitivity toward psychoanalysis as a subject of composition. He read and worked on psychiatrist R.D. Laing's writing, particularly *Knots*, a collection of poetic texts on confusions of the mind and difficulties in relationships. He later drew inspiration from Laing's book *The Divided Self* for his piece *Sous le regard d'un soleil noir* (*Under the Gaze of a Black Sun*, 1979-1981), which deals with schizophrenia. This piece is a good example of Dhomont's belief that electroacoustic music allows "sound compositions close to opera in their dramaturgy, but an opera without singers, without instruments, and completely free from the conventions of lyrical art."¹ Often bordering on texts, even when absent of lyrics, his pieces are figurative and develop an idea, as the different titles of his cycles testify: *Cycle de l'errance* (*Wandering Cycle*), *Cycle du son* (*Sound Cycle*), *Cycle des profondeurs* (*Deep Cycle*).

Dhomont was very active in contemporary music institutions. A founding member of the Canadian Electroacoustic Community, begun in 1986, he was also president of the Marseille collective *Les Acousmonautes* and the *Klang Projekte Weimar* organization's Ehrenpatron. In 2014, he became Honorary Member of the International Confederation of Electroacoustic Music (CIME). He was also a guest editor for the reviews *Musiques & Recherches* and *Circuit*, and directed several programs for Radio-Canada, such as *Voyage au bout de l'inouï* (*Journey to the End of the Incredible*) and Radio France, such as *L'Acousmathèque*.

Until his death in December 2023, he focused on composition and theory.