

PREFACE

LE MARTEAU SANS MAÎTRE was written between 1953 and 1955. The work consists of nine pieces associated with three poems by René Char. The titles of these three poems are as follows: 1. *L'Artisanat furieux*, 2. *Bourreaux de solitude*, 3. *Bel édifice et les pressentiments*. However, the voice is not an obligatory part of each piece; I make a distinction between the pieces where the poem is directly incorporated and expressed by the voice, and the development-pieces where the voice has, in principle, no role to play. Thus the cycle based on *l'Artisanat furieux* comprises: AVANT *l'Artisanat furieux* (instrumental), *l'Artisanat furieux* proper (vocal), and APRES *l'Artisanat furieux* (instrumental). The cycle constructed on the basis of *Bourreaux de solitude* consists of: *Bourreaux de solitude* (vocal), and Commentaires I, II and III on *Bourreaux de solitude* (instrumental). The cycle based on *Bel édifice et les pressentiments* is made up to the first version and its 'double'. However, the cycles don't follow one after another: they interpenetrate in such a way that the overall form is itself a combination of three simpler structures. It should be enough for me to give the order of the pieces; one will see the desired hierarchy without further comments being necessary:

1. avant *l'Artisanat furieux*
 2. Commentaire I de *Bourreaux de Solitude*
3. *l'Artisanat furieux*
 4. Commentaire II de *Bourreaux de Solitude*
 5. *Bel édifice et les pressentiments* – first version
6. *Bourreaux de solitude*
7. après *l'Artisanat furieux*
 8. Commentaire III de *Bourreaux de solitude*
 9. *Bel édifice et les pressentiments* – double

In choosing this order I have tried to interlock the three cycles in such a way that the passage through the work becomes increasingly complex, making use of memory and virtual relationships; it's only the last piece that, to some extent, offers the *solution*, the *key* to this labyrinth. This concept of the form actually led me much further, and completely freed the form from all predetermination; here the first step was effected by breaking away from 'one-way' form. As for the use of the voice in what one might call the "kernel" of each cycle, *l'Artisanat furieux* is a completely *linear* piece, in the sense that in it the text is handled, "set to music", in the most direct manner. The poem is sung in an ornate style, accompanied by a solo flute which counterpoints the vocal line (a direct and intentional reference to the 7th piece in Schönberg's *Pierrot lunaire*). Here the poem is very much to the fore. The first version of *Bel édifice et les pressentiments* yields another sort of relationship: the poem serves to articulate the major subdivisions of the overall form. The voice is still of great importance; all the same, singing doesn't have the preeminence it enjoyed before, this preeminence being contested by the instrumental context. *Bourreaux de solitude* resolves this conflict by means of total unity in the composition of the vocal and instrumental parts, which

are linked to the same musical structure: the voice emerges periodically from the ensemble in order to enunciate the text. Lastly, the 'double' of *Bel édifice et les pressentiments* shows a final metamorphosis of the role of the voice: once the last words of the poem have been pronounced, the voice — now humming — merges into the instrumental ensemble, giving up its own particular endowment: the capacity to articulate words; it withdraws into anonymity, whilst the flute, on the other hand, — having accompanied the voice in *l'Artisanat furieux* — comes to the fore and takes on the vocal role, so to speak. One can see how the relationships of voice and instrument are gradually reversed by the disappearance of words. The idea is one to which I attach a certain importance, and I would describe it in the following way: the poem is the *centre* of the music, but it is *absent* from the music, just as volcanic lava can retain the shape of an object even though the object itself has disappeared — or again, just as the petrification of an object makes it recognisable and unrecognisable at the same time.

Turning to the instrumentation: what is the link between the various instruments, which seem outwardly to be so disparate? I think it should be enough for me to explain certain linking devices which reveal a continuous passage from voice to xylophone, absurd as this may seem at first sight. The connection between voice and flute is obvious: human breath, and a purely monodic power of elocution. Flute and viola are linked by monody, if the viola is bowed. On the viola, the notes can be 'rubbed' or plucked: in the latter case, it connects with the guitar, also a plucked string instrument, but one with a longer resonance time. Considered as a resonating instrument, the guitar connects with the vibraphone, which is based on the prolonged vibrations of struck metal keys. The keys of the vibraphone can also be struck without resonance, in which case they relate directly to the keys of the xylophone. A chain is established from one instrument to another, with one common characteristic being conserved each time. I deliberately haven't mentioned the percussion proper, since it plays a 'marginal' role in relation to the other instruments. The choice of instruments varies from piece to piece — this is another direct and intentional reference to *Pierrot lunaire*. The entire ensemble is only once used continuously, in *Bourreaux de solitude*.

For many listeners, the first impression of the piece gives rise to 'exotic' associations; in fact xylophone, vibraphone, guitar and percussion are clearly far removed from the models for chamber music offered by the Western tradition, but come much closer to the sound of Far-Eastern music, in particular, though without having any relation to the musical vocabulary of the latter. I must admit that I chose this instrumental "corpus" under the influence of non-European civilisations: the xylophone is a transposition of the African balaphone, the vibraphone refers to the Balinese gendér, the guitar reminds one of the Japanese koto... In actual fact neither stylistic factors nor the actual use of these instruments are in any way related to the traditions of these various musical civilisations. It's more a matter of European musical vocabulary being enriched by non-European hearing.

The arrangement of the instruments on the stage helps to clarify the acoustic

relationships between the various instruments. As for the voice, it is *enclosed* in the group: it can emerge as a soloist, but can equally well integrate completely and see itself supplanted by the flute.

Should I briefly say something about the form? The length of the pieces varies considerably: the cycles themselves are by no means equal in length and importance, and each has its own constitution. I don't want to go into detail about the way they proceed; I shall point out, however, that the three 'commentaries' on *Bourreaux de solitude* form a single large piece, directly linked from a formal point of view to *Bourreaux de solitude* itself. AVANT and APRES *l'Artisanat furieux*, two brief developments, enclose the central piece. In *Bel edifice et les pressentiments*, the first version consists of a completely isolated unit; the 'double' mingles elements drawn from all three cycles, both literally, as quotations, and in a *virtual* manner, if I may call it that, namely as an exploitation of their potential for development. So this last piece interlocks the three cycles of the work both literally and virtually, providing a meeting point which at the same time winds up the whole.

Pierre Boulez

The text comes from the essay *Dire, jouer, chanter*, published in *La musique et ses problèmes contemporains 1953-1963* (Cahiers de la Compagnie Madeleine Renaud - Jean-Louis Barrault, Julliard, Paris).

Dire, jouer, chanter is a lecture that Boulez gave in Basle on the occasion of a concert which he conducted *Pierrot lunaire* and *Le Marteau sans maître*.

I. avant «l'Artisanat furieux»
arrêt assez court (4")

Flûte, Vibraphone, Guitare, Alto = $\sqrt{V_1 \cdot V_2}$

II. Commentaire I de «Bourreaux de solitude»
arrêt moyen (5")

Flûte, Xylorimba, Tambour sur cadre, 2 Bongos, Alto

III. «l'Artisanat furieux»
arrêt long (8")

Voix, Flûte

IV. Commentaire II de «Bourreaux de solitude»
arrêt moyen (plutôt long) (6")

Xylorimba, Vibraphone, Cymbalettes, Cloche double,
Triangle, Guitare, Alto

V. «Bel édifice et les pressentiments» – version
première
arrêt très long

Voix, Flûte, Guitare, Alto

VI. «Bourreaux de solitude»
arrêt moyen (5")

Voix, Flûte, Xylorimba, Vibraphone, Maracas, Guitare,
Alto

VII. après «l'Artisanat furieux»
arrêt très court (2")

Flûte, Vibraphone, Guitare

VIII. Commentaire III de «Bourreaux de solitude»
arrêt long (8")

Flûte, Xylorimba, Vibraphone, Claves, Cloche double,
2 Bongos, Maracas

IX. «Bel édifice et les pressentiments» – double

Voix, Flûte, Xylorimba, Vibraphone, Maracas, Tam-
Tam aigu, Gong grave, Tam-Tam très profond, Grande
Cymbale suspendue, Guitare, Alto

Free translation of the René Char poems used in
The Hammer without Master, by P. H. Leez

The Furious (Angry) Craftsmanship

The red caravan at the edge of the prison (also: nail or hint)
And corpse in the basket
And work horses in the horseshoe
I dream the head on the point of my knife Peru

Hangmen of Solitude

The step has receded the walker is silent (has shut up)
On the dial of the imitation
The Pendulum thrusts its load of reflex granite

Beautiful Building and the Premonitions

I hear walking in my legs
The dead sea waves over my head

Child the wild promenade-pier
Man the imitated illusion

Pure eyes in the woods
Seek weeping the head to live in

L'Artisanat furieux

La roulotte rouge au bord du clou
 Et cadavre dans le panier
 Et chevaux de labours dans le fer à cheval
 Je rêve la tête sur la pointe de mon couteau le Pérou

Bel édifice et les pressentiments

J'écoute marcher dans mes jambes
 La mer morte vagues par-dessus tête
 Enfant la jetée-promenade sauvage
 Homme l'illusion imitée
 Des yeux purs dans les bois
 Cherchent en pleurant la tête habitable

Bourreaux de solitude

Le pas s'est éloigné
 Sur le cadran de l'In
 Le Balancier lance s

on a

On being asked which work of the younger generation had impressed him the most, Igor Stravinsky, in his *Conversations with Robert Craft**, cites Pierre Boulez's work »Le Marteau sans Maître«, which at that time (1957) he felt to be the »only really important work of this new age of search. It will be a considerable time before the value of »Le Marteau sans Maître« is recognized. Meanwhile I shall not explain my admiration for it but adapt Gertrude Stein's answer when asked why she liked Picasso's paintings: 'I like to look at them' — I like to listen to Boulez.«

Boulez was born at Montbrison on the Loire in 1925. His first studies were directed towards mathematics and technical sciences. Not until later did he devote himself exclusively to music. In 1945, with a reference from Arthur Honegger, he approached Jean-Louis Barrault, who at that very moment was forming a theatrical company in collaboration with Madeleine Renaud and appointed Boulez musical director. For fully ten years he was a member of this group, composing, conducting the music of the theatre and travelling halfway round the world with the company. Meanwhile he was developing into an outstanding conductor whom the best orchestras of Europe and other continents would invite

their rostrums. Concurrently with this activity with Barrault Boulez was also studying composition: with Olivier Messiaen, the celebrated organist of the Trinité in Paris whom many of the younger composers venerate as their mentor, and with René Leibowitz who initiated him into Schönberg's twelve-tone technique.

The range of Boulez's effect has been extended in particular through the foundation of the concert series »Le Domaine musical«. At that time, in 1953, it was the sole venue in Paris where one could hear the works of the younger generation and of their great models Schönberg and Anton Webern. Similar institutions on the lines of the »Domaine musical« were started in many other cities, in Milan, Brussels, Vienna etc.

In the development of his musical style Boulez has moved through various phases. In his early works, for instance the Flute Sonata (1946), the cantata »Le Visage nuptial« (1946/52) or the second Piano Sonata (1948), the formal model of Schönberg and the tonal one of Olivier Messiaen are still recognisable ingredients. But here already something individual is dominant: here is the revelation of a rugged temperament which appears in its dynamic charge to burst all barriers. As in this eruptive creative period he comes to terms with the works of Anton Webern (1883–1945), at that time virtually in eclipse, Boulez is working out those obligatory relationships which later reach an extreme stage in the Structures pour deux pianos (1952). In its tonal picture Boulez's explosive dynamism has little to do with Webern's extremely delicate gradation of filigree interval structures. And yet, Boulez — on his own evidence — owes a very great deal to Webern, for Webern's pattern of tonal relationships has found its

continuation in the integral serial technique of Boulez and other composers of the younger generation of that time, in that technique of composition which subordinates all musical elements to the law of the tone-row sequence: not only the melodic and linear succession of pitched notes as in traditional twelve-tone technique, but equally well the sequence of rhythmic values, dynamics, tone-colours, modes of attack etc.

As compared with the preceding works, in the cantata »Le Marteau sans Maître«, completed in 1954 and first performed at the Baden-Baden world music festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music, a distinct process of tonal clarification can be observed. The extreme austerity is missing, in its place has appeared a melodic pattern rich in nuance, and also sounds which suggest that Indonesian gamelan orchestras have exerted a certain influence. The especial distinction of this cantata and a constant feature from this point on of Boulez's output is supremacy in the manipulation of the musical media, the clear shape and the order which can be immediately felt to dominate his music as a whole and in details. Despite all the audacity in the tonal invention and the novelty of his musical notions which at the first encounter can often be perplexing, the music of the »Marteau sans Maître« undoubtedly possesses characteristic traits of the classical: maybe not stylistically in the sense of neo-classicism, from which Boulez holds himself severely aloof, but of the classical in the sense of the highest quality and of form disciplined by the intellect. In this respect Boulez shows himself to be the rightful custodian of the great tradition of French music. His frequently uttered acknowledgement of Claude Debussy is audible in his scores too.

Boulez wrote his work round fragments from the cycle of poems »Le Marteau sans Maître« (The masterless Hammer) by René Char, one of the poets of the French Résistance who after the war became a national idol and today ranks as one of France's foremost lyricists. For the most part Char's language cannot be comprehended as concrete subjectmatter, for his lyrical poetry stands by the pictorial quality of the images evoked by the poet in bold new verbal combinations.

Boulez's music cannot be expounded as a straightforward interpretation at the emotive level of René Char's lines. With Boulez words and music stand in an extremely involved mutual relationship. In his own words, a poem for him is the »fertilising source« of his music; he endeavours »to create an amalgam in which the poem is simultaneously at the centre and absent«. Beyond this however his music concerns itself with »the poem's general mechanism... from its pure substance as sound to its inherent intellectual arrangement«.

»Le Marteau sans Maître« is composed as a nine-part

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J'écoute marcher dans mes jambes
 La mer morte vagues par-dessus tête
 Enfant la jetée-promenade sauvage
 Homme l'illusion imitée
 Des yeux purs dans les bois
 Cherchent en pleurant la tête habitable

Le pas s'est éloigné le marcheur s'est tu
 Sur le cadran de l'imitation
 Le Balancier lance sa charge de granit réfléxe

on a Text by René Char

continuation in the integral serial technique of Boulez and other composers of the younger generation of that time, in that technique of composition which subordinates all musical elements to the law of the tone-row sequence: not only the melodic and linear succession of pitched notes as in traditional twelve-tone technique, but equally well the sequence of rhythmic values, dynamics, tone-colours, modes of attack etc.

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»Le Marteau sans Maître« is composed as a nine-part

cycle for alto voice and six instrumentalists. Each of these nine parts has a different scoring, four for voice and alternating instrumental groupings, five for instruments alone. The five instrumental pieces arrange themselves to form, on the one hand, a prelude and postlude to the first vocal piece and, on the other, three commentaries on the third one. Inter-related vocal and instrumental sections do not necessarily succeed one another but are woven criss-cross into the overall fabric of the piece. The text of the second poem appears in two musical versions (nos. V and IX). A comparison between the two makes the differences in the treatment of the voice-line very obvious: in the one instance, sustained and melismatic followed by syllabic vocal writing in association with the melodic instruments: flute, guitar, viola; in the other, speech-song with predominantly percussive accompaniment and wordless, one might say, instrumental singing.

The following tabular analysis may serve to clarify the involved construction of the work and the instrumental scoring as the essential formative element:

- I. avant »l'artisanat furieux«
flute, vibraphone, guitar, viola
- II. commentaire I de »bourreaux de solitude«
flute, xyloimba, percussion, viola
- III. »l'artisanat furieux«
voice, flute
- IV. commentaire II de »bourreaux de solitude«
xyloimba, vibraphone, percussion, guitar, viola
- V. »bel édifice et les pressentiments«, 1st version
voice, flute, guitar, viola
- VI. »bourreaux de solitude«
voice, flute, xyloimba, vibraphone, percussion,
guitar, viola
- VII. après »l'artisanat furieux«
flute, vibraphone, guitar
- VIII. commentaire III de »bourreaux de solitude«
flute, xyloimba, vibraphone, percussion
- IX. »bel édifice et les pressentiments«, 2nd version
voice, flute, xyloimba, vibraphone, percussion (in
a different version from that in no. V I), guitar,
viola

Like all music worked out in accordance with strict polyphony, music which knows nothing of subsidiary parts or broad tracts of cosy sound, Boulez's cantata makes no mean demands of the listener. However, Igor Stravinsky's experiences can perhaps furnish an approach to conscious listening to Boulez's music: »Parts of the 'Marteau' are not difficult to hear in toto; the 'bourreaux de solitude', for instance... With a piece like 'après l'artisanat furieux', however, one follows the line of only a single instrument and is content to be 'aware of' the others. Perhaps later the second line and the third will be familiar, but one mustn't try to hear them in the tonal-harmonic sense.«*