**Luc Ferrari** (1929-2005)

Eric Drott

French experimental composer. Ferrari attended the Conservatoire de Versailles before enrolling at the Ecole Normale de Musique in 1948, where he studied piano with Alfred Cortot and composition with Arthur Honegger. In 1953-54 he attended Olivier Messiaen’s class at the Paris Conservatoire, and in 1954 he made the transatlantic crossing in order to meet Edgard Varèse. In 1958 he was invited by Pierre Schaeffer, the pioneer of *musique concrète*, to join the *Groupes de recherches musicales* (GRM).

As a member of the GRM, Ferrari was one of the key figures in the development of electroacoustic music in France during the late 1950s and 1960s. While early tape pieces such as *Etude aux accidents* (1958) and *Etude aux sons tendus* (1958) were consistent with the research objectives promulgated by Schaeffer, abstracting sounds from their sources in order to direct attention to their phenomenological characteristics, Ferrari soon developed his own distinctive approach to electroacoustic composition, what he dubbed “anecdotal music.” Inaugurated in his composition *Hétérozygote* (1963-4), “anecdotal music” exploited the referential character of recorded sound to reintroduce a narrative dimension hitherto absent in *musique concrète*. This fascination with quotidian sound was further developed in *Presque rien ou le lever du jour au bord de la mer* (1969-70), which reproduces in condensed form the noises heard during the morning hours in a small coastal town on the Black Sea. The documentary character of *Presque rien* – specifically its concern with capturing the distinctive sonic character of a locale – has led observers to describe it as a forerunner of soundscape composition.

Although he is best known for his electroacoustic compositions, Ferrari worked in a wide variety of media and techniques throughout his career. After a brief flirtation with serial devices in his instrumental works of the 1950s, in the 1960s and early 1970s he worked with a number of experimental practices, including sound installation (*Music Promenade* [1964-69]), collective improvisation (*Spontanés* I-IV [1962]), and text composition (*Société I* [1965]). Ferrari’s politicization in the wake of 1968 was reflected in his work of the 1970s. In documentary pieces like *Algérie* no. 1 (1976) and *Chantal, ou le portrait d’une villageoise* (1977-78). Ferrari combined interviews with recordings of the ambient soundscape to create compositions that explored such contemporary socio-political issues as life in post-colonial Algeria or the experience of women in rural France. His instrumental music of this period bears the imprint of American minimal music, as well as his sustained engagement with vernacular and popular musical traditions, evinced in works like *A la recherche d’un rythme perdu* (1978) and *Ce qu’a vu le Cers* (1978), both of which seek to bridge the gap between oral and notated musics.

INSERT IMAGE [Manuscript page of Ferrari’s *A la recherche d’un rythme perdu*]

In Ferrari’s work from the 1980s on the overt political engagement of the preceding years receded in favor of pieces exploring themes of intimacy, sensuality, and memory. In his final years his music elaborated concepts that had long preoccupied him – anecdote, the superimposition of rhythmic cycles, autobiography, the sounds of everyday life – resulting in a series of compositions that he grouped together under the generic title “Exploitation des concepts.” He died in Arezzo, Italy, in August 2005.

**Major Works**

*Antisonate* for piano (1953)

*Etude aux accidents* for tape (1958)

*Etude aux sons tendus* for tape (1958)

*Hétérozygote* for stereo tape (1963-64)

*Tautologos 3* for any group of performers (1969)

*Music Promenade* for stereo tape (1964-69)

*Presque rien ou le lever du jour au bord de la mer* for stereo tape (1969-70)

*Cellule 75, Force du rythme et cadence forcée* for piano, percussion and tape (1975)

*Presque rien* no. 2: *Ainsi continue la nuit dans ma tête multiple* for stereo tape (1977)

*A la recherche d’un rythme perdu* for piano, instruments, and tape (1978)

*Ce qu’a vu le Cers* for tape and ensemble (1978)

*Histoire du plaisir et de la désolation* for orchestra (1979-81)

*Journal intime* for female singer, spoken voice, and piano (1980-82)

*Presque rien avec filles* for stereo tape (1989)

*Comme une Fantaisie dite des Réminescences* for two pianos (1989-91)

*Cahier du soir* for actress, slides, and fourteen instruments (1991-92)

*Tautologos IV* for orchestra and four samplers (1996-97)

*Presque rien avec instruments* for fifteen amplified instruments and recorded sounds (2000-01)

*Les Anecdotiques* (Exploitation des Concepts no. 6)piece for radio (2001-02)

**Further Reading**

Castanet, Pierre-Albert; Gayou, Evelyne; and Teruggi, Daniel (2001) *Portraits Polychrome: Luc Ferrari*, Paris: CDMC/INA Groupe Edition–Documentation. (A collection of texts on Ferrari and his music. In French.)

Drott, Eric (2009) “The Politics of Presque rien” in *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties*, Robert Adlington, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press: 145-166. (An essay examining Ferrari’s work *Presque rien* in the context of contemporary debates on cultural democracy.)

Ferrari, Luc (1996) “I Was Running in So Many Different Directions,” Alexandra Boyle, trans. *Contemporary Music Review* 15 (1-2): 95-102. (Autobiographical reflections by Ferrari.)

Ferrari, Luc; and Caux, Jacqueline (2012) *Almost Nothing with Luc Ferrari*, trans. Jérôme Hansen, Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press. (A collection of interviews with Ferrari.)

Gonot, Florence; and Yterce, Alexandre, eds. (2007)  *Luc Ferrari*, special issue of *Sonopsys: Cahiers musique concrète/acousmatique* 4. (A collection of texts on Ferrari and his music. In French.)