

*et avant / image* (2011) for percussion ensemble and flute

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*et avant / image* is scored for nine percussionists and solo flute. In this work the percussion ensemble is subdivided into several small groups: a trio, two duos and two solos. In keeping with my longstanding interest in the spatialization of sound (both in electronic music and instrumental music) these groups are scattered around the concert hall and throughout the audience. The overriding sonority of the percussion ensemble is white noise of the maracas, which comes to dominate the composition in its final moments. Generally, over the course of the piece the percussion ensemble moves from un-pitched sounds toward more pitched sounds and then back toward un-pitched sonorities. This transformation is initiated by the solo flute which begins tentatively and then gradually ushers in the pitched sonorities of the percussion ensemble. Even though it is brief, and concentrated in only one part of the composition, the flute solo is a catalyst for the entire sonic transformation which takes place in the work. At the conclusion of this solo the flute articulates several very high notes in which pitch is partially supplanted by air, momentarily transforming the flute into a generator of both pitched and non-pitched sound.

A secondary element of the composition is the introduction of a short text by the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé which the percussionists speak at various moments of the work both voiced and unvoiced, in French and English. This text constitutes one fragment of a large unfinished poem Mallarmé. The poem was intended as a memorial to poet's son Anatole who died in childhood at eight years of age. However, it was left incomplete at the time of the poet's own death. The numerous existing sketches for the work were collected and first published in 1961 under the title *Pour un tombeau d'Anatole*. In the words of Paul Auster, the first English translator of this unfinished work, these fragments are really:

... the raw data of the poetic process. Although they seem to resemble poems on the page, they should not be confused with poetry *per se*. Nevertheless, more than one hundred years after they were written, they are perhaps closer to what we today consider possible in poetry than at the time of their composition. For here we find a language of immediate contact, a syntax of abrupt, lightning shifts that still manages to maintain a sense, and in their brevity, the sparse presence of their words, we are given a rare and early example of isolated words able to span the enormous mental spaces that lie between them ...

For this work I chose the 90th fragment (as numbered in the North Point Press edition of 1983).

pureté	purity
double	double
- identité	-identity
-	-
les yeux	the eyes
les deux points de	the two points of
vue égaux	equal sight