

Henri Pousseur in Buffalo, 1966-1968



**University at Buffalo Music Library Exhibit
Curated and written by John Bewley
October 2017 – January 2018**



Portrait of Henri Pousseur
Unidentified photographer

Belgian composer Henri Pousseur (1929-2009) came to the University at Buffalo in 1966 as the Slee Professor of Music. While in this position, Pousseur presented nine lecture recitals between February 28, 1966 and April 10, 1967. The last six lectures were on the topic of Chance in new music. By the time Pousseur arrived in Buffalo at age 37, his career had already put him in contact with a wide range of musicians, including avant-garde composers Pierre Boulez, Luciano Berio, Bruno Maderna, Luigi Nono, and Karlheinz Stockhausen, as well as Americans John Cage, David Tudor, David Behrman, and Frederic Rzewski.

Pousseur answered questions from Renée Levine-Packer in 2000 in preparation for her master's thesis, *In the Center: The Center of the Creative and Performing Arts in the State University of New York at Buffalo* (2001). He indicated in his remarks that both Stockhausen and Behrman contacted Lukas Foss (then Co-Director of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts and conductor of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra) to suggest Pousseur as a prospective candidate to become Slee Professor.



Lukas Foss, Renee Levine, and Henri Pousseur, February 1967

Photograph by Jim Tuttle

Once in Buffalo Pousseur stayed at the Victor Hugo apartments at 414 Delaware Avenue (now operated as the hotel, The Mansion). He lived across the hall from composer/pianist Frederic Rzewski, a Creative Associate at UB's Center of the Creative and Performing Arts. Pousseur told Levine-Packer that Rzewski helped him prepare and practice the presentation of the English version of his first Slee lecture. Pousseur commented,

BUFFALO COURIER-EXPRESS, Sunday, January 2, 1966 31 A

On Campus

Belgian Composer To Give First Lecture

Belgian composer Henri Pousseur, visiting professor of composition at University at Buffalo for the second semester, will present his first public lecture at 8:30 Monday night, Jan. 31, in Baird Hall on the UB campus.

Educated at the Royal Conservatory of Liege, Pousseur also studied at the Royal Conservatory in Brussels and has taught at Darmstadt, the Conservatory in Basle and in Cologne. He is the author of many compositions for voice, piano, strings, and electronic music.

Note that the date of the first lecture was later changed to February 28, 1966

“However, you must remember

that my accent was still very Frenchy, and that this, especially appreciated by the Buffalo leading ladies, seriously contributed to my success!”

State University of New York at Buffalo
Music Department
presents

HENRI POUSSEUR

Slee Composer, Spring Semester - 1966

THREE LECTURE DEMONSTRATIONS

BAIRD HALL - 8:30 P.M.

FEB. 29

MONDAY, ~~JAN. 31~~

*Calculation and Imagination
In Electronic Music*

taped music by
HENRI POUSSEUR

MONDAY, MAY 2

LECTURE - RECITAL
Webern and Silence

MONDAY, MARCH 14

LECTURE - RECITAL
*Harmony, A Renewed
Question*

"MIROIR DE VOTRE FAUST"
BY HENRI POUSSEUR

*Sylvia Dimiziani, soprano
Frederic Rzewsky, piano*

Handout provided for Henri Pousseur's first Slee Lecture, February 28, 1966

Electronic music presents two images. It is, in one sense, the final result of the rational, quantitative tendencies always present in our traditional music--tendencies inherent in the classical spirit that surrounded its birth and development. At least one branch of its geneological tree sprang from the desire of the musicians to control the most minute particles of audible substance. But at the same time, electronic music gives evidence of a quite different origin, rooted in the least romantic works of the 19th century, which is expressed in our time by the pressing need to justify every repudiated or repelled reality: more or less opaque noises, obscure feelings, confused images, subversive ideas.....Besides, it is the very experience of electro-acoustic means--the apparent domination which then give over the nature of sound, which leads the composer to examine profoundly his theoretical and practical attitude: He must recognize the irreducible qualitative essence, the autonomy and the indissoluble material properties, the consistency of the phenomena to which he may perhaps enter into a relationship of reciprocal exchange. If he is able to bridge the gap between rational demands and his often anguished feelings (even if they manifest themselves by humor, provocation, sarcasm, or offhandedness), if he succeeds in changing the rational demands into the voluntary preparation of a world which cannot simply be possessed, but with which one has to come to terms, if he can stand up to it without being intimidated by the numerous and varied obstacles which he will encounter, here is hope that we shall see music collaborate modestly in the resolution of the problems which confront humanity today in all aspects.

Examples are taken from:

Seismogrammes.....Cologne 1954
using only pure sine tones

Scambi.....Milan 1957
produced by using other sonorous materials of electronic origin and of aleatoric (random) formal factors

Rimes.....Brussels 1958
(combination of magnetic tape and orchestra)

Electre.....Brussels 1960
(after Sophocles--work especially developed for voice, language, and affected gestures)

Trois Visages de Liège.....Brussels 1961
Intended for a game in the open air; three "Sound Pictures" particularly exploiting the figurative capacities of electronic music.

AT NORTON HALL 3, 1, 66

By John Dwyer

Eerie Music World of Tapes, Generators Is His Domain

Slee Composer Pousseur Offers Startling View Of New Adventures in Electronic Sounds

This composer can spend months working at his latest opus, without writing an eighth note. Without using staff paper, in fact, and without the slightest worry about how the violins are going to sound.

They aren't going to sound, usually. For Belgian composer Henri Pousseur is an electronic composer, and his orchestra is a battery of sound generators, filters, speakers and tapes. His object is less easy to describe, but it's not what Stephen Foster had in mind.

MR. POUSSEUR gave his first lecture and demonstration, Monday evening in Norton Hall, recounting the short and explosive history of electronic music and illustrating with his own taped works.

The works were fine, from very old one of 1954 in simple sound textures and pulsations, to a broad, theatrical "Elektra" of 1960, with the electronic score as both tapestry and Greek chorus, a grand feed-back of voices in a brief, torrential fugue.

Mr. Pousseur does use conventional instruments, on occasion, along with electronic fabrics, and there was a set of variations titled "Rimes" for three loudspeakers and a 25-piece orchestra of strings and percussion, with the idea of exploring rather pure impulse and transparent sound, against explicit statements of familiar quality.

A 1957 PIECE called "Scambi" was a duo between an improvising wind storm and a disembodied chirp, leaving the ear's form-sensing instincts in a void. It captured the interest, however, through the ear's equally - instinctive fascination with virtuoso dialogue, in whatever strange form.

The lecture, for a presentation on open invitation to the public, was clear enough to scholars forced or impelled to keep in some pace with compositional trends, but far too abstruse and involved with exclusive terminology for general reception. It also was too long, for a nice balance between words and music.

The impasse between artist and public, a formidable one today, is not so much the work of art, but rather its cabalistic trappings.

There is some implication here, in this electronic development, that a secret society is at work, privileged in its sensibilities and existing primarily for the aesthetic fulfillment of its membership.

AND YET, extensive tests show, strikingly enough, that there are as many people outside the profession of music, as inside, who are gifted listeners, able to distinguish the finest gradations of pitch and rhythm.

An audience is there, then, for even the wildest-seeming innovation in sound form. And, when such a form is absorbed into the experience, it no longer will be an innovation, and then must declare its artistic function or collapse.

Mr. Pousseur is a sensitive and versatile musician, and it will be most interesting to hear his views, in future lectures, on two needful questions:

¶ What is the place of the audience in electronic music?

¶ How is it that whole lectures on the subject, and whole volumes of such ultra-modern tomes as "Perspectives" can pass by without a discussion or even the mention of the electronic composer's "personal style?"

The reason we want to know is a human one. If the impasse is contrived and intentional, we aim to provide some electronic listeners.

Pousseur, as with fellow Slee Professors Leo Smit, Lejaren Hiller, and Morton Feldman, was invited to join UB's music department faculty after the expiration of his tenure as Slee Professor. After some time at home in Belgium, he returned to Buffalo with his wife Théa and their four children. They lived in the house of a UB English professor, most likely Thomas Connolly, while he was away on sabbatical. Pousseur stated that he completed the last part of the score for *Votre Faust* at Professor Connolly's desk.

One of the musical memories Pousseur noted in his interview was attending a performance by pianist Cecil Taylor. Although Pousseur stated the concert was in Baird Hall (now Allen Hall on UB's South campus), it could have been Taylor's performance at Upton Auditorium at Buffalo State College as part of the Second Buffalo Festival of the Arts Today, March 3, 1968. It was this festival that featured a performance of the concert version of Pousseur's opera, *Votre Faust*.

Henri Pousseur's first Slee Lecture was published in *Electronic Music Review*, incorrectly dated as being presented in 1967

Calculation and Imagination in Electronic Music

delivered at the State University of New York at Buffalo, on February 28, 1967, by

Henri Pousseur

Serial electronic music in Europe began as a result of two seemingly contradictory intentions. One of the most pressing reasons we had fifteen years ago for searching after new acoustical means was the need to enrich the resources of sounds at our disposal — and not in general but precisely in the direction of those complex sound qualities that for a long time were contemptuously grouped under the category of "noise". We had already heard some examples of these sounds in the music of the early part of this century, for example in the Rite of Spring and in Schoenberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra, in some pieces of Webern — like the Bagatelles for String Quartet and in a very different way the later Variations for Orchestra, and in much music of Edgard Varèse. However, there were also other strong influences contributing to this new special sensibility: the kind of sound the contemporary world makes (traffic, factories, and so on), and also the kind of general experience it creates without looking principally to its sounding aspects; this experience is basically one of movement, of speed, of complexity. And finally, there was the growing asymmetry in other artistic fields, and even in other levels of musical composition, which were awakening in us the desire for a new, fresh, and aggressive sound material.

However, at the same time we were possessed by an implacable desire for strict organization, for rigorous and clear control of what we were doing. This was the time of so-called "total organization" in its first, very rigid version; we had undertaken to apply, on all possible levels and in every perceptible dimension, methods of guiding and combining the musical elements which we had deduced from the Schoenbergian and above all from the Webernian serial system, stressing almost exclusively the rational, quantitative, and metrical aspects.

The two intentions, which probably developed themselves on different levels of our consciousness, the one more imaginative and the other more rational, were not, however, completely independent of each other. For example, experience with so-called "musique concrète" (an experiment that Boulez was making as I first met him in 1951) had taught us almost ad absurdum that such complex materials as those recorded sounds and noises needed a particular care in manipulation and in putting together, a very strong and, above all, well adapted structure to become musically significant. So we thought it would be better to take the question from its most simple side, to study at first the elementary properties of sound material, to reduce it to essentials, and to try to rebuild from that point all the other things, all the complex phenomena we knew to be lacking. That was the beginning of electronic music in its narrow sense, and of its at first extremely pointed opposition to such practices as "musique concrète".

Karlheinz Stockhausen was the first to have the chance to try to realize this idea, and I think this was appropriate, since he had the strongest, the most radical, and probably the clearest conception of what there was to do. When he was invited to work at the Cologne radio studio in the summer of 1953, he decided to use only pure sine tones. Such waves have the simplest,

While in Buffalo, Pousseur also took part in other activities. In his exchange with Levine-Packer he noted that he was asked to collaborate on the establishment of an electronic music studio at the University at Buffalo and remembered taking a trip to the Moog Company in Trumansburg, New York to see their equipment.



Henri Pousseur, Allen Sapp, Niccolo Castiglioni, Lukas Foss, Cornelius Cardew, and Maryanne Amacher, panelists at the 3rd International Webern Festival, October 28, 1966

Photograph by Jim Tuttle

Pousseur was an avid student of the music of Anton Webern and Webern's music played a formative role in Pousseur's development as a composer. The UB Music Department hosted the Third Annual International Webern Festival October 28, 1966 and Pousseur participated as one of the panelists along with Lukas Foss, Allen Sapp, Cornelius Cardew, Niccolò Castiglioni, and Maryanne Amacher.

The following year Pousseur participated as an audience member in a lively discussion that took place among composers at the State University of New York Convocation on the Arts. The event was held at Buffalo State College March 29, 1967.

Courier Express

Review of Apr. 4, 1967

Buffalo State Panel

Composers Debate

Two speakers from the floor—Henri Pousseur and Stefan Bauer-Mengleberg—generated the most excitement during the final music panel Wednesday morning in Buffalo State University College's New Science Auditorium. The panel, that included chairman Aaron Copland and composers Milton Babbitt, Luciano Berio and Harold Shapero, was part of the State University of New York's Convocation on the Arts.

Pousseur, who is the visiting Slee professor of music at the University of Buffalo, spoke at the invitation of Berio. He said he disagreed with the position of Milton Babbitt. Babbitt had said that "we need theorists to teach a language as it has been spoken."

Pousseur said that music is not capable of being contained in a theory. "The object is richer," he said. "It is unexhaustable." He said that music theory is a "limited number of statements about past things." "We must produce a system that is so large and true that it can embrace all styles of music."

In defense of Babbitt, Bauer-Mengleberg spoke of the computer. He said that computerized music is very much with us, and he castigated scholars who are unwilling

to investigate the subject. Bauer-Mengleberg, who is president of Mannes College of Music and associated with IBM, said that "the computer is able to give us insights." He said that the computer will aid us in investigating the modulatory processes of Bach, to which Pousseur replied that "to look inside the music of Bach is not too bad."

Bauer-Mengleberg said that it is possible to put all music of Webern on tape. He said that Allen Forte estimates the programming job will cost about \$7,000. With Webern computerized, it would be possible to receive information about his music by merely consulting a computer.

Cite Disagreement

Berio and Pousseur were angered by Bauer-Mengleberg's statement that "a score is a certain stock of information." Berio said that a score is "not an object;" Pousseur said it is not measurable in dollars.

Copland best summed up the panel when he said "We are discussing two things: the science of music and the art of music." The music theorist and the composer may never understand each other completely; but it certainly doesn't do any harm to get together and talk things over. T.P.

Buffalo Evening News

Apr. 5, 1967

**Leading Composers
On Arts Panel Talk
Of Today's Trends**

Emerging theories of musical structure were discussed and debated by four leading modern composers in a panel headed by the well-known Aaron Copland, Tuesday afternoon in Buffalo State University College Science Auditorium.

Taking part in the event, one of several in the many-sided State University Convocation of the Arts, were composer: Milton Babbitt, Princeton University; Luciano Berio, Julliard School, and Harold Shapero, Brandeis University.

Mr. Copland, perhaps the most prominent American composer today, and former UB Slee Professor, is an excellent speaker and his were among the best thoughts of the meeting, and certainly the clearest.

With some insight into modern music in view of the historical background since Debussy, Mr. Copland discussed two opposing trends today, the "chance" composers, who want more and more freedom, and the electronic composers, who want more and more control.

There are extremes in both cases, he said, to the point that some new music is more interesting to see than to hear.

Mr. Babbitt, also a mathematician, presented the case for electronic music, without any detailed theory or extended mathematical analysis. He is concerned with current misunderstandings about the electronic approach, including the misuse of the word "logic" as applied to the form.

Mr. Berio said music can be meaningful only with analysis, but that the converse is not necessarily true — that music can be derived from theory or analysis.

Mr. Shapero represented more traditional positions, and said that music is a craft, and that he believes in several of its elements now considered "out" in the current trend, such as melody and sentiment. Mr. Shapero did not have much sympathy with some tendencies, including what he described as the "kindergarten philosophy" of John Cage.—V.C.B.

When Henri Pousseur arrived in Buffalo in 1966 he had already been at work on his “variable fantasy in the manner of an opera”, *Votre Faust*, since 1961, when he began collaborating with French author Michel Butor (1926-2016) (Butor served as the Melodia E. Jones Chair in French at UB 1962-1963). Pousseur had



Michel Butor and Henri Pousseur being interviewed by an unidentified woman, March 1968
Photograph by Jim Tuttle

been attracted to Butor’s ideas about the representational capabilities of music, as expressed in such articles as Butor’s “La musique, art réaliste: les paroles et la musique” (*Esprit*, Nouvelle Serie, no. 280 (1), January 1960).

One passage from that article, in its translation by Donald Schier, provides a sense of a part of what Butor was expressing.

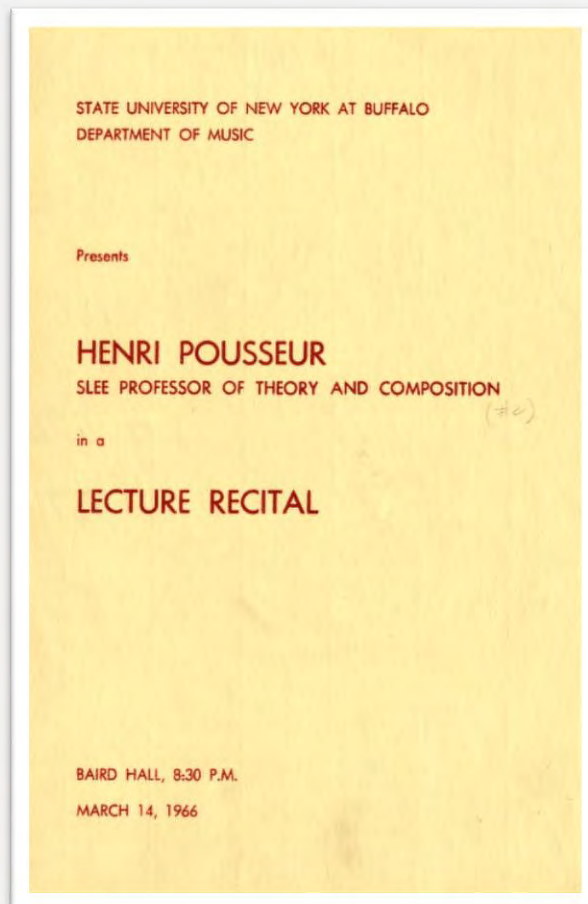
Since sound is in its origin a warning, a sign, any conception of reality which includes it necessarily abolishes the absolute distinction between nature and language and hence between matter and thought; thus everything is susceptible and capable of interpretation, nothing is sheltered from daylight or from the intelligence.

That is why I declare music is a realistic art, and assert that it teaches us, even in its highest and apparently most detached forms, something about the world; that is why I claim musical grammar is a grammar of reality, that melodies transform life.

The closing sentence of the article is as true today as it was when Butor wrote it:

Music is indispensable to our life, to everybody's life, and we have never needed it so badly.

It was natural that Pousseur would not only continue working on *Votre Faust* while in Buffalo, but also take advantage of the extraordinary musical resources to perform versions of the work. In fact, Pousseur wasted no time in presenting a performance of a derivative work, *Miroir de Votre Faust, Caractères II* on his second Slee Lecture Recital, March 14, 1966. It is scored for solo piano and optional soprano. This was followed by a March 20, 1966 performance of *Miroir de Votre Faust, Le Tarot d'Henri* by pianist Frederic Rzewski on an Evenings for New Music concert.



LECTURE

HARMONY, A RENEWED QUESTION

For a rather long time, new music, above all post-Webernian music, has had a very negative attitude towards the questions of harmony. When it has not simply negated or neglected them, it has set its entire attention to neutralize them as much as possible. Of course, this new music exhibits many harmonic relationships, at least many differences of pitch; but the composers tended to ignore the harmonic effect of intervals, an effect that has to be distinguished carefully from other aspects of pitch-perception, like color, imaginary distance, motion, etc. The increasing efforts of modern composers to use more highly ordered, more selective and characteristic elements to realize their structural aims, has led them also to a gradual re-examination of their theoretical points of departure.

In his last work, *Votre Faust*, an opera, conceived in collaboration with Michel Butor (a former Jones professor at the State University of New York at Buffalo), Henri Pousseur has attempted to reintegrate all known harmonic means, including the most consonant ones, in the service of his esthetic intentions.

RECITAL

MIROIR DE VOTRE FAUST,

a work for piano and soprano ad libitum, drawing on material from the opera *Votre Faust*, gives an exhaustive demonstration of the new harmonic possibilities. It is divided into three parts:

Le Tarot D'Henri
La Chevauchée fantastique
Souvenirs d'une Marionette

Sylvia Brigham-Dimiziani, soprano
Frederic Rzewsky, piano

Mar. 15, 1966

AT BAIRD HALL

Slee Lecture, Opera By Henri Pousseur Explore New Trends

An exploration in depth of the mind of a modern composer, with visiting Slee Composer Henri Pousseur of Belgium conducting the excursion through his own capacious mind, and the performance of a Pousseur work made up the Slee lecture program, Monday evening in Baird Hall.

In a most exhaustive treatment of his own contemporary approach, which includes electronic techniques and new views of the old ideas of scale and structure, Mr. Pousseur devoted a solid hour and a half to the subject, a difficult one clarified by his own lucid understanding and gifts as a teacher.

* * *

AIDED BY SLIDES of graphs and charts, with illustrations by pianist-composer Fredric Rzewski, one of the Creative Associates, Mr. Pousseur demonstrated that some composition today, if not all, is backed by thorough and scholarly involvement with musical materials.

The half-hour work completing the program was the Pousseur "Miroir de Votre Faust," a reduced and excerpted version of a larger opus in free-opera form.

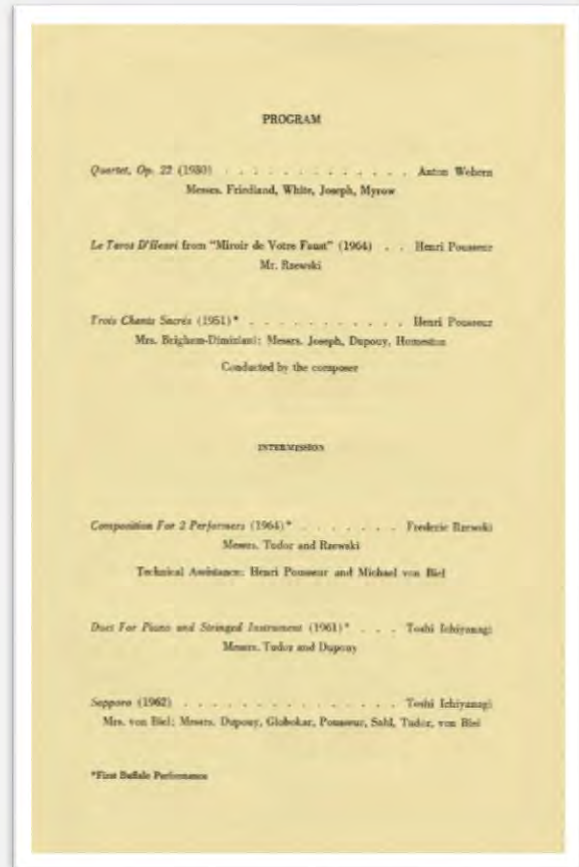
Pianist Rzewski performed one of three episodes, and accompanied soprano Sylvia Brigham-Dimiziani in the other two.

* * *

CALLING for performers versed in both ancient and modern disciplines, the work contained a stimulating surprise not only in the composer's own venturesome style, but also in the literal inclusion, as is, of episodes from Wagner, Schubert and other composers of established record.

A fair-sized and very intent audience followed the lecture closely and applauded the performance heartily.

This was the second Slee lecture by Mr. Pousseur. His third and final one will be May 2, promising equal stimulation and liveliness with a discussion of atonalist composer Anton Webern, and a performance by the La Salle Quartet.—J. D.



Program note for March 20, 1966 performance.

LE TAROT D'HENRI from "Miroir de Votre Faust" -- HENRI POUSSEUR

Miroir de Votre Faust consists of three pieces, all of which have a different relationship to "Votre Faust," the opera which Mr. Pousseur has composed in collaboration with the French writer, Michel Butor. Le Tarot d'Henri (written in 1964), is a mobile book for piano. During the scenic performance, the pianist -- who is on the stage with all twelve musicians and who is a double of the actor playing Henri -- has to perform some extracts, according to the dramatic situation and to the previous order of his score. The whole "Tarot" will only be performed in concerts as a part of "Miroir." It is the demonstration of a large harmonic system, including principally all former known harmonic possibilities, from the most consonant to the most dissonant ones.

Music: New but Not Good

Carnegie Recital Hall
Host to Innovators

By HAROLD C. SCHONBERG

EVENINGS FOR NEW MUSIC, last night in Carnegie Recital Hall, led off with Anton Webern's Quartet (Op. 22). This is a classic, like. It was followed by Bo Nilsson's "Zwanzig Gruppen," for flute, clarinet and oboe. This is not a classic, but its post-Webern patterns only take up five minutes or so.

Then the fun started.

Henri Pousseur's "Miroir de Votre Faust" is in three sections. The first, for solo piano, goes on a long time, very much in the Boulez idiom. Then the soprano comes on. All of a sudden the pianist is recapitulating the history of music. Mozart is heard, and Gounod, and a tiny hint of Chabrier's "Trois Valses Romantiques," and a lot of the opening "Tristan" chord, and doubtless many other things. Here and there the soprano has a few lines to sing.

The third part is a montage, in which materials of the first two parts are cut in. Was the whole thing a parody? You never know, these days.

A long intermission was necessary to prepare the next delicacy, Frederic Rzewski's Composition for Two Performers. The delay was caused by the necessity of setting up electronic equipment and then trying to track down a noisy channel, Channel A never did get cleared up. There was an awful lot of thermal noise.

Not that it made much difference. Nor can I discuss the work with Olympian detachment. That is because I have a peculiarity. I happen not to like the sounds of rough metals rubbed against glass, especially when the sounds are amplified. I can't help it;



Henri Pousseur

The Program

EVENINGS FOR NEW MUSIC, directed by Lukas Foss. At Carnegie Recital Hall.
 Quartet, Op. 22 Anton Webern
 Zwanzig Gruppen Bo Nilsson
 Miroir de Votre Faust Henri Pousseur
 Composition for Two Performers Frederic Rzewski
 Sapporo Toshi Ichihyanagi

that's the way I am. I have a positive thing about it. And when the assistants riding gain open up the amplification to 90 decibels, it hurts.

Much quieter was Toshi Ichihyanagi's "Sapporo." Mr. Ichihyanagi is an easy-going composer. He has given his performers permission to use any sound-making instruments. Anything at all. He lets his players and conductor trade parts at will.

So there was a bass fiddle, lying flat on the ground, bowed by a player lying on the ground. That was nice. There was an empty cardboard box, and a pretty young woman bowing it with a bass-fiddle bow. That was nice. A flute player blew over the top of his flute. That was nice. A man mounted a ladder. That was nice. Along around 10:40 I had to leave while things apparently were just getting warmed up. That was nice.

(Model)

Ste. St. M. L. P.

henri pousseur

MIROIR

DE

"VOTRE FAUST"
(CARACTÈRES II)

pour piano solo
(et soprano ad libitum)

II

LA CHEVAUCHÉE FANTASTIQUE

(pour piano solo et soprano ad libitum)

GIFT OF
CENTER OF THE CREATIVE
AND PERFORMING ARTS

Reproduction of manuscript score of Henri Pousseur's *Miroir de Votre Faust*,
Le chevauchée fantastique
Tr Rm M11 P867 m/c

PUSSEUR
1830
M
11
P867
m/c

$\text{♩} = 112$

ad lib.

mp
Es war ein Kö-nig in Tho-le gar treu bis an das

grab,
den sterbend sei-ne Buch-te

Einen gold-nen Be-char gab

legato

Reproduction of manuscript score of Henri Pousseur's *Miroir de Votre Faust, Le chevauchée fantastique*
Tr Rm M11 P867 m/c

La chevauchée fantastique

Remarques concernant l'exécution.

1) Il ne semble pas souhaitable d'exécuter séparément cette pièce (ainsi que c'est tout à fait pensable pour le Tarot d'Heuri), mais je ne m'y oppose pas formellement.

2) Si l'on exécute tout le "Miroir de Votre Faust", et qu'il y ait un soprano pour chanter la Ballade du Roi de Thulé dans "La Chevauchée fantastique", il pourra s'efforcer d'"attraper au vol" les passages de piano des "Souvenirs d'une Marionette" qui correspondent à ses interventions, et placer celles-ci.

certains de
Lors de la première apparition d'un vers, il chantera entièrement ~~le vers~~, même si le pianiste passe déjà à un élément musical différent. Lors d'apparitions répétées, il ne chantera qu'aussi longtemps que le pianiste jouera l'"accompagnement" correspondant (il pourra cependant terminer le mot commencé, si l'effet de "coupure" de celui-ci devrait ne pas s'avérer heureux).

Heuri prouvent

1 Sur mon malheur

2 Dei que en pas-sant

3 Mais sur les yeux

4 Abs-condi-ta te nera rum

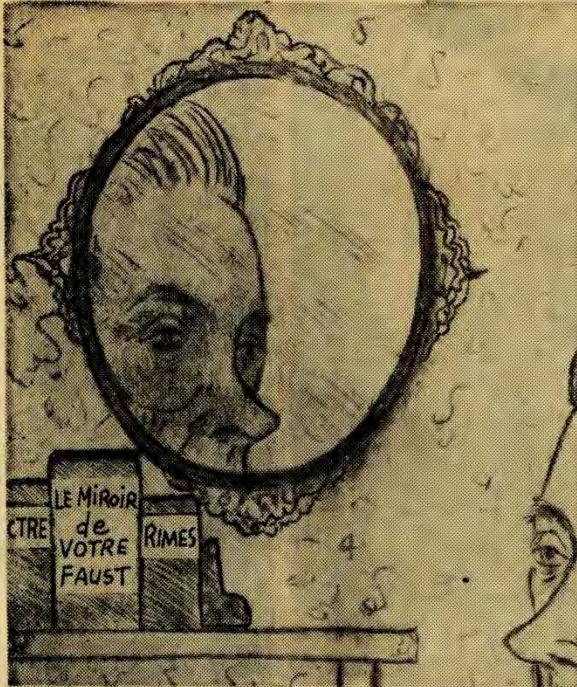
5 Je suis de solo e

6 Il n'y a que toi qui a pu te lui dire

Final page of manuscript score of Henri Pousseur's *Miroir de Votre Faust*, *La chevauchée fantastique*
Tr Rm M11 P867 m/c

600-Page Opera Is a Mirror

By JOHN DWYER



As an audience member, you will gaze into the glass and see whatever of yourself you can find in this modern version of the Faust legend.

IT IS a tonal mirror, an opera score 600 pages long. As an audience member, you will gaze into the glass and see whatever of yourself you can find in this modern version of the Faust legend.

The fateful turn of dramatic events is in your hands. You will vote for or against the damnation of this modern Faust, a composer whose name is Henri.

He is faced with selling out, or not, to a speculating theater manager—whose idea of art is property—and thus risking both his artistic integrity and the woman he loves.

Until the last moment, the audience will control the destiny of the hero and turn of the plot, and also the choice of music from the 600-page tonal reservoir.

began to study seriously, and at 18 entered Liege Conservatory.

ORGANIST and teacher Pierre Froidebise, an extraordinary musician who died in 1962, brought the young Pousseur to the study of modern composers, and took him to Paris to meet the avant-garde leader, Pierre Boulez.

The Pousseur style grew out of a profound inquiry into serial style, the early-century innovation, and he thinks of his music, now, as serial, but in a much broader sense.

He was a firm classicist, mind you, and audiences having trouble moving from Debussy to atonalist Anton Webern, for instance, might be interested in the Pousseur experience.

"It took me two years to absorb the language and art of Webern," says M. Pousseur. "I understood the intellectual idea first, but the true aesthetic nature only after a long while."

M. POUSSEUR came to Buffalo from Cologne, where he had been teaching and working in the world-famed electronic studios, the circle which includes the trail-blazing Karlheinz Stockhausen.

The Italian Radio gave its composition prize to the Pousseur "Electre." His work, "Rimes," for three orchestral groups and taped music, was a Philharmonic premiere under Lukas Foss three weeks ago. He is writing an orchestra work for the Koussevitzky Commission of the Library of Congress.

"Buffalo music, and equally the wonderful art gallery, are most stimulating," says M. Pousseur. "This should become a very important music center."

In terms of the world at large, he means. And with international musicians such as M. Pousseur retaining their associations here, and also carrying the word on Buffalo to a dozen nations in their yearly travels, the process seems to be under way, right now.

THE REAL-LIFE composer's name is Henri, too. Henri Pousseur, Belgian musician who has been at work eight years with French librettist Michel Butor on the avant-garde opera, "Le Miroir de Votre Faust," and will complete it in time for the full world premiere in Brussels, in December.

M. Pousseur is 37, well-established in Europe, and this season's Slee Professor in State University of Buffalo, a post held by a succession of ranking composers over a number of years.

It turns out that we—all of us in Buffalo—are going to have a traveling cultural representative in M. Pousseur.

He will leave in May for Belgium, France and elsewhere in Europe, but as a new, touring member of the UB faculty. He will come back in the spring of 1968, in time for the second two-week, glittering and innovative Festival of the Arts.

THE FIRST ONE hit the middle of Life magazine, the principal music periodicals of the world and an audience of thousands—right between the eyes.

It's more than likely we will see "Le Miroir de Votre Faust," in some future programming. M. Pousseur played some taped excerpts this season, in one of his Slee lectures. They were from a concert version last year in Brussels, a preview of the full theater work to come.

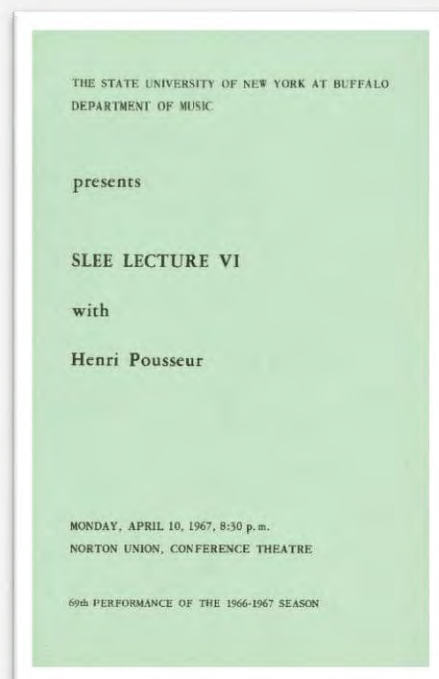
As a "variable opera," it will never be heard twice exactly alike, because interventions of the audience, by vote or demonstration, will guide the choice of sequences. There are five possibilities here, six there, and so on.

M. Pousseur was born in Malmedy, Belgium. At 10, he was playing the piano and writing little pieces. At 16, he

Pousseur presented excerpts from recordings made of a concert performance of *Votre Faust* in Belgium in 1966 at his final Slee Lecture on April 10, 1967. This was followed almost a year later on March 17, 1968, with the first United States performance of the concert version at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery as the culminating musical event of the Second Festival of the Arts in Buffalo. The first fully realized performance of *Votre Faust* took place January 15, 1969 at the Piccola Scala in Milan, Italy.

Although the premiere performance of the full version was not a successful effort, the work retains its significance as a landmark of music theater of its time, as noted by Robert Piencikowski in the closing of his essay about the work in *Settling new scores: Music manuscripts from the Paul Sacher Foundation*. (Mainz: Schott, 1998).

*But regardless of the present-day evaluation of *Votre Faust*, this attempt to pour into one mold open forms, stylistic pluralism, and serial rigor remains one of the most characteristic creations illustrating the new trends in the field of music theater in the 1960s.*



Henri Pousseur has returned to the University faculty once again as Snee Professor of Composition. Born in Malmédy, Belgium, in 1929, he was educated at the Royal Conservatory of Liege and at the Royal Conservatory in Brussels. He received first prizes there in harmony, solfège, organ and fugue. From 1950-1960 he was professor of vocal music at the *Athenées Royaux* in Seraing, Eupen and Forest. He has taught in Darmstadt, Basle and Cologne; many of his compositions for voice, piano and strings, as well as electronic music, have been widely performed throughout Europe. A variable fantasy in operatic genre, "Votre Faust," in which Mr. Pousseur collaborated with Michael Butor, was performed in Europe last fall.

* * * * *

In the last of his six Snee lectures, dealing with the question of "Chance in New Music," Henri Pousseur will simultaneously try to draw some general lessons from the reflections accumulated during the previous evenings, and illustrate these conclusions by examples taken from a very recent and quite original work of his own. Since 1961, he has been working, in collaboration with the French writer Michel Butor, on "Votre Faust," a variable, "mobile" opera in which the audience itself has to decide, by different types of interventions, how the plot (and with it the closely interrelated music) will develop and come to a "solution." In this work, which has just been finished, and from which musical excerpts have also undertaken (in an almost "Joycean" way) a broad confrontation with all the musical means of operatic expression from Monteverdi through Gluck, Mozart and the whole 19th century up to the most advanced experiences of this time.

Final Slee Lecture

Pousseur Likes Music To Involve Audience

By THOMAS PUTNAM

In a refreshingly romantic outburst, Henri Pousseur made clear his predilection for music of chance when he gave this philosophical summary: "Take your chances, take what comes, like a game, like life, and see what comes out of it." The occasion for his remarks was the final Slee lecture Monday evening in the Conference Theater of the University of Buffalo's Norton Union.

The Belgian composer, who is a visiting professor at UB this year, spoke to a small audience. The series of six Slee lectures concerned the subject "Chance in New Music."

Pousseur rejects the definition of chance which implies lack of intention. Although he said that imprecise co-ordination of the music can have positive consequences, Pousseur said "we need intention."

Pousseur played taped excerpts from his opera "Votre Faust" after giving a dramatic reading (he actually took two parts in a dialogue) and explaining some aspects of the work. With French writer Michel Butor, Pousseur has been working on this "mobile" opera since 1961 ("we had four children when we started, eight when it was finished").

The opera will be performed here in the spring of 1968 during the Festival of the Arts (portions have already been performed here).

The unusual thing about Pousseur's "Faust" is the degree to which it allows the audience to determine the direction it will take. Audience participation (compose along with Henri) will include balloting with black and white marbles during intermission; vocal protests will interrupt a scene and start a different one in motion. "Faust" will be a game involving the audience.

Compositionally, Pousseur said he wanted to "reconsider all the lost possibilities of modern music." One section (the "Prologue in Heaven") employs a Webernian harmony that becomes consonant in the middle with a large sample of fifths, octaves and seconds.

It is obvious that Pousseur, for all his intellectuality, is a man who wants to enjoy what he is doing, and wants those involved—performers or listeners—to enjoy themselves too. He wants to open new windows of pleasure and let in the fresh wind that accompanies chance. "Votre Faust" is already something to look forward to—that is, if you're willing to take a chance.

NORTON HALL

By John Dwyer

Preview of Modern Opera On Faust Is Fascinating

The legend of Faust, who sold his soul to the devil for a worldly price, is four centuries old, and so compelling to the renewed literature, music and art of each generation that we may expect some version of it to open the New Mercury Theater. The first theater, that is, on the planet Mercury.

In this generation, it has captured the fancy, and a good deal of the life, of Belgian composer Henri Pousseur, and his French librettist, Michel Butor. After seven years of work, their modern opera "Votre Faust" is completed, and glimpses of it were presented by Dr. Pousseur, in his own words and in tape recordings, Monday evening in Norton Conference Theater.

Dr. Pousseur had special reasons for revealing this much of "Votre Faust" to a Buffalo audience. This was his final lecture as this season's UB Slee Professor, and the last opportunity to discuss the magnum opus of his career, to date.

AND THEN, the American premiere of "Votre Faust," and the first staged version, is planned for the second Festival of the Arts Today, in Buffalo next March.

The recordings were from a European concert version of last year, and from a chamber presentation of some of the same materials.

Whatever else this work may be, and the question remains open, it is fascinating.

Faust is re-cast as a young composer about to write an opera, and the Faustian dilemma is whether he will accept a cynical director's unlimited money, and control, or run true to his own ideals and the advice of his beloved.

There are five languages—the predominating French, with combinations of German, English, Italian and Spanish. There are several possible turns of the

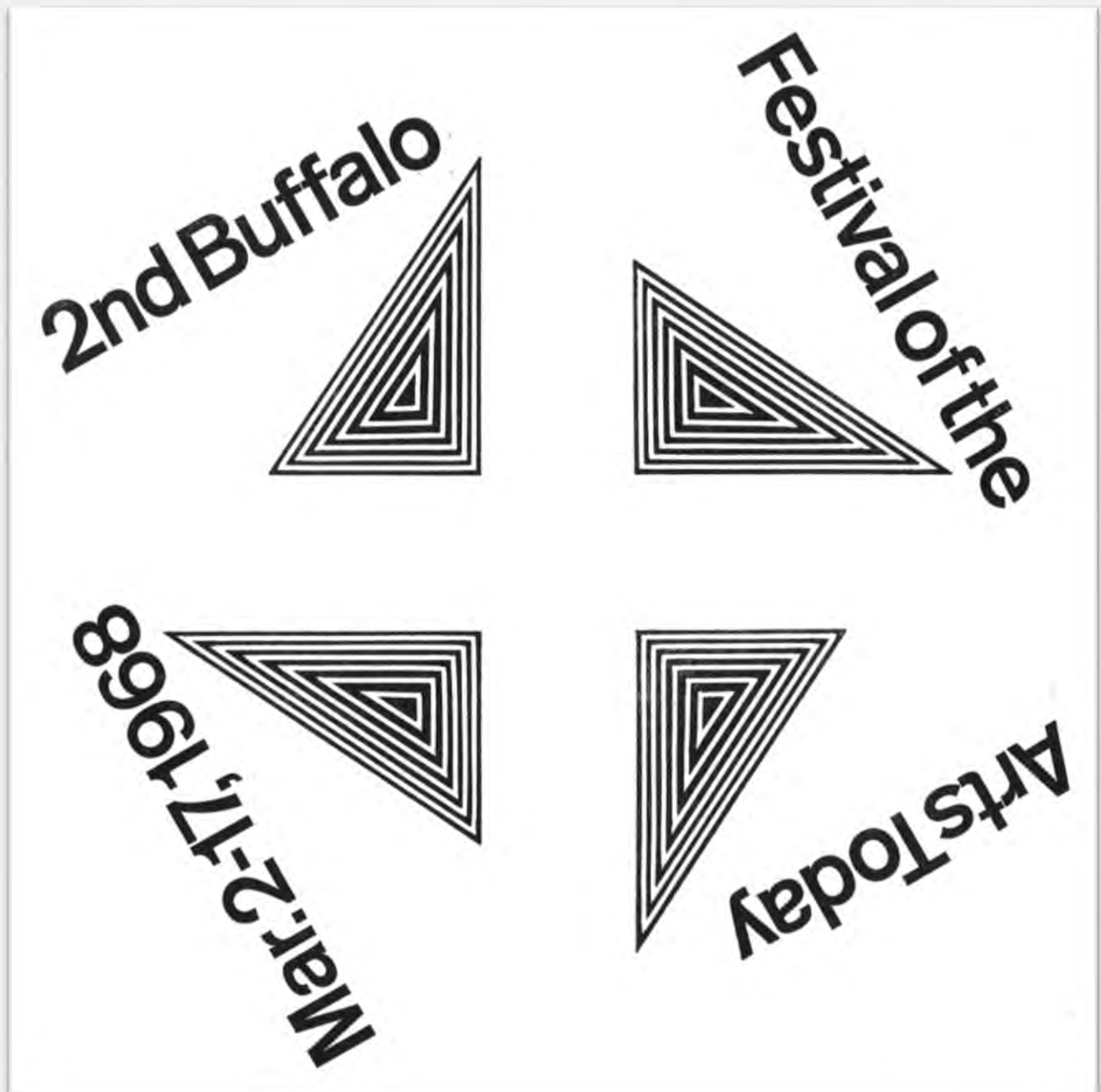
plot, to be changed by audience vote or demonstration. Singers and actors have separate roles, and the score includes live and taped performance.

THE MUSICAL STYLES review the course of centuries—melanges of early Italian and French modes, on to Verdi, Debussy, Webern, Berg, perhaps overlaid with the manner of Milhaud here, Stravinsky there. Serial writing and elements of chance are involved, and electronic composites complete the span.

A critical estimate must await the full production, its balance of dramatic content and theatrical design against the musical structure and vision, and those indefinable blends of force and imagination which separate the work of art from valiant striving.

As of now, "Votre Faust" looks like one of the most provocative events in future music programming, whether or not it accompanies the Faust legend into the planetary future.

The premiere United States performance of the concert version of *Votre Faust* took place March 17, 1968 at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery as the final musical event of the Second Buffalo Festival of the Arts.



EVENINGS FOR NEW MUSIC

March 17, 1968

FROM "VOTRE FAUST"²⁶

By Michel Butor and Henri Pousseur

DECORS

Prologues
Henri's Room
The Fair at the Port
The Cabaret Near the Church
Maggy's Street
Finale of the First Part

Ensemble

Conducted by the composer

MIROIR

Marcelle Mercenier, solo piano

SCENES

Another Fair,
Containing Three Versions,
More or Less Interrupted,
of the Puppet Play.
Grand Finale

Ensemble

Conducted by the composer

*American Premiere

FROM "VOTRE FAUST"

by Michel Butor and Henri Pousseur

THE ENSEMBLE

Group I: Robert Beckwith, bass; Suzanne Thomas, harp; Frank Preuss, violin; Robert Martin, cello
Group II: Merete Bekkelund, mezzo-soprano; Darlene Reynard, bassoon; Charles Wyatt, flute; Jerry Kirkbride, clarinet; William Lane, French horn
Group III: Miriam Abramowitsch, soprano; Yuji Takahashi, piano; Jan Williams, percussion
Group IV: Laurence Bogue, baritone; Frank Collura, trumpet; Edward Yadzinsky, saxophone; Makoto Michii, contrabass

Tape operated by David Behrman
Acoustical engineering by Joseph Romanowski

Pousseur wrote the program notes for the March 17, 1968 performance. It is possible to compare his original typescript copy of the notes against the version published as program notes.

THE WORK

In November, 1960 Butor and I met for the first time and ~~decided~~ decided to begin to compose a variable work for the theatre in which the audience would take an active part and which would use the story of Faust. We spent the whole month of June, 1961 together with our families at the Belgian beach working out the basic structure of the game, deciding the main features of the plot and of the musical ~~form~~ form, choosing the pre-existing literary and musical elements by quotations and stylistic imitations, which would be used. At the end of 1961, Butor had completed a provisory version of the text which I could then freely interpret as the base of my musical composition but which I respected very much because of its beautiful qualities. During the time of my own work, which went on until 1967, we worked together very often including two minor periods of vacation so that all decisions up to the details were really made in common. The material of the tape was recorded in Brussels in the summer of 1965 and elaborated in the studios of Brussels and Ghent between '65 and '67.

THE WORK

“In November, 1960, Butor and I met for the first time and decided to compose a variable work for the theatre in which the audience would take an active part, to be based on the Faust story. Together with our families, we spent the whole month of June, 1961, at the beach in Belgium, working out the basic structure of the game-play, deciding the main features of the plot and of the musical form, choosing the pre-existent literary and musical elements which would be quoted or imitated. By the end of 1961, Butor had completed a provisional version of the text; I was free to interpret it as the basis of my composition, but its beautiful qualities helped me very much in shaping the musical structure. I continued working on the score until 1967. During this time, we saw each other very often (including two more joint family vacations) so that all decisions about the details were really made in common. The tape used in the performance was recorded in Brussels in the summer of 1965, and completed in the electronic music studios at Brussels and Ghent between '65 and '67.”

THE PLOT

Henri, the young composer, comes into the theatre hearing "Votre Faust" shall be performed. He has to introduce the audience to the problems of the modern music but even though his lecture, which is somewhat confused and mixed with a complaining monologue, the director of the theatre offers him a commission of his operas which would solve his problem. He gives him as much time, as much means and as much money as he wants. There is only one condition: **IT MUST BE A FAUST!**

During the first part of the opera, in which the part beyond Henri and his mephistopholes is ~~xxxx~~ concluded, Henri meets Maggy, a very nice waitress at the cabaret ~~n~~ near the church. She will try to steer Henri away from his dangerous fate but the director succeeds in removing her from the scene. Then he turns to the audience and explains that from now on they will be asked to about the way the story will evolve and conclude. In the intermission they will have to vote on the question: Will Henri go to the puppet play at the Fair (a little Faust) with Maggy or with another girl? (This is done by the audience casting white or black marbles into boxes which are weighed to provide the decision during the second part. But ~~d~~ during this second part, it will be possible for ~~x~~ the audience to ~~int~~ intervene directly in order to correct or even to reverse the result of the vote. If the audience has voted for Maggy and has ~~nt~~ not intervened at all, Henri will finally ~~find~~ himself back ~~int~~ his room with Maggy. He will begin to work; she will write the text; but it will not be a Faust; it will not be for the director; and they won't have all the money. If the audience had voted against Maggy and intervened four times (the maximum possible, which reverses the result of the vote) one will arrive at the same conclusion, but through a completely ~~an~~ different way. If the audience had voted against Maggy and not intervened at all, Henri would find himself alone, tired and sick in the harbor with plenty of money in his bank account. But he would never begin to work (the director tells him that he will drown in the harbor). There are three more intermediary final scenes which can occur according to a black or white vote and to the fact that the audience has intervened one, two, or three times.

THE PLOT

Henri, the young composer, arrives at the theatre where an opera called "Votre Faust" (Your "Faust") is to be performed. He has been asked to give an introductory talk to the audience about the problems of modern music. His lecture becomes somewhat mixed up with a recital of his own difficulties as a composer. After the lecture, the Director of the theatre commissions him to compose an opera. He will be given whatever time, resources, and money he needs. There is only one condition: it must be a "Faust".

During the first half of "Votre Faust" which follows, the pact between Henri and his Mephistopheles is concluded, and Henri meets Maggy, a waitress, at the cabaret near the church. She tries to steer Henri away from his dangerous fate, but the Director succeeds in removing her from the scene. Then, turning to the audience,

the Director explains that from now on *they* will be asked to decide how the story will evolve and conclude. During the intermission, the audience will have a chance to vote on the question: Should Henri go to the puppet show at the fair (itself a little "Faust") with Maggy or with another girl? As the second half unfolds, the audience can also intervene directly in the stage action, if it feels strongly enough, in order to correct or even to reverse the result of their vote. If the audience votes *for* Maggy, and does not intervene at all, Henri will finally find himself back in his room with Maggy. He will begin to compose; she will write the text; but it will not be a "Faust"; it will not be for the Director; and they won't get the money. If the audience votes *against* Maggy but intervenes four times (the maximum possible, which reverses the result of the vote), we will arrive at the same ending, but by a completely different route. If the audience votes *against* Maggy and does *not* intervene at all, Henri will find himself alone, tired and sick at the port, but with plenty of money in the bank. And he will never even begin his work; the Director predicts an early end by drowning. There are three other possible final scenes, depending on how the audience votes, and how many times they intervene to stop the action on stage.

THIS CONCERT VERSION

As the speaking actors, who play the main characters--Henri, Maggy, the director, etc.--are not present, there is no plot and there is no possibility of choice. The musical material, which of course includes much text, is arranged to give the most complete possible insight into the world of Henri and into the way events take place in it.

In the first part, Decors, the main places of the action (preceeded by a combined prologue, & concluded by a finale which is an invocation to the ghost to provide good advice before the audience votes and separated by small instrumental interludes) are musically described. Only the actors' dialogue has been omitted and is partially replaced by tapes (mostly representing Henri's internal monologue).

Miroir is to some extent an independent piece from which only small excerpts would be played during a theater performance. It is the most systematic exposition of the musical, of the harmonic syntax which was developed for "Votre Faust". One can _____ as the result of Henri's quest during the opera.

In the third part, Scenes, the Fair in the Harbor is played once more, completed by new ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ tape elements. This time, one enters into the puppet theater and experiences various versions of the Faust, which are interrupted by the cries of an imaginary audience. In each version, the story of Dr. Faust (and the story of Henri) are confronted with various myths of Western romanticism: Gluck's Orpheus, the gradual destruction of tonal harmony, Don Giovanni, early 20th-century cabaret (like Weil's Three Penny Opera).

In the General Finale, this whole system of comparison goes one step further and confronts itself with one more model: the Stations of Christ.

The whole concert is actually framed by the lecture which Henri is supposed to give and the beginning of the plot. --H. P.

THIS CONCERT VERSION

Since the speaking actors who play the main characters — Henri, Maggy, the Director, etc. — are not present, there is no attempt to convey the plot, and no possibility of choice for the audience, in the version presented tonight. The musical material, which of course includes much text, is arranged to give the most complete possible insight into the world of Henri.

The first part, *Décors*, describes the various locations in which the story takes place. The actors' dialogue has been omitted, but is partially replaced by taped material, mostly representing Henri's interior monologue. The scenes are preceded by a general prologue and separated by brief instrumental interludes. A concluding finale invokes the aid of the spirits in the choice the audience is about to make.

Miroir is to some extent an independent piece, from which only short excerpts would be played during a staged performance of the opera. It is the most systematic exposition of the harmonic syntax which was developed for "Votre Faust". Thus it is, in a sense, the outcome of Henri's quest in the opera itself.

In the third part, *Scènes*, the music of the Fair at the Port is played once more, with new taped elements added. This time, we enter the puppet theatre and experience in rapid succession various versions of the Faust story, interrupted by the shouts of an imaginary audience. In each version, the story of Dr. Faust and the story of Henri are interwoven with other legendary elements of the European Romantic tradition: Gluck's *Orpheus*, the gradual destruction of tonal harmony, *Don Giovanni*, early twentieth-century cabaret (as in Weill's *Threepenny Opera*), etc.

In the Grand Finale, this whole system of relationships and allusions is carried one step further to embrace still another model: the Stations of the Cross.

The disquisition on modern music which Henri is supposed to give at the beginning of the opera serves as a frame for the entire concert version. It is almost as if this evening's music FROM VOTRE FAUST were a parenthetical interlude within a continuing "lecture" by the composer.—H. P.

SOME VERBAL ELEMENTS OF THE MUSIC OF V.F.

1) Henri's internal monologue (basic~~l~~ set of words)

Maggy, les dents de Maggy, les lèvres rouges, la langue rouge,
les gencives rouges de Maggy, Mamamimamimamina Maggy,
Comment se peut-il que, je ne puis y croire, je ne pouvais
y croire, je n'y croyais pas, je n'en pouvais croire
mes yeux, j'ai été bien forcé d'y croire, je suis bien
obligé d'y croire, il faut que vous sortiez, mon
gargon, c'est une foire fort singulière, certaines de
ses boutiques, de ses attractions sont très anciennes,
il y aura là pour vous quantité de choses à
glaner, il faut vous ^{aérer} aérer, mon cher, allons, commen-
cez votre existence nouvelle, détendez-vous, les choses
sont réfléchies maintenant, j'adore la musique d'église,
je ne savais pas que vous aviez fait aussi de
la musique d'église, il faut que cela soit un
faust, c'est que nous n'avons pas encore abordé la
question du livret, le coin des lèvres, le sourire, les yeux,
l'éclat des yeux, le brillant des yeux, le ^{monnaie} monnaie des yeux,
le velours sombre des yeux, la sombre douceur des yeux,
la tendre profondeur des yeux, les algues des yeux,
les herbes des yeux, le cil, les ^{sourcils} sourcils, les che-
veux, les longs cheveux, les touffes de cheveux, le
déroulement des cheveux, les poignées de cheveux
dans les mains, les bouillons de cheveux sur
mon visage, les aisselles, le long des bras, le long
du corps, l'os de la hanche sous mes mains,
le nombril, la taille, la poitrine, le cou dans
mes mains, la gorge sous mes mains, les courbes
dans mes mains, les poignets dans mes mains,

**First page of Henri Pousseur's manuscript,
Some verbal elements of the music of *Votre Faust*.
The notes were transcribed and used as accompanying
notes for the March 1968 performance**



Henri Pousseur conducting his *Votre Faust* March 17, 1968
at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery
Photograph by Jim Tuttle



Henri Pousseur conducting the March 17, 1968 performance
of his *Votre Faust* at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery
Photograph by Jim Tuttle

The March 17, 1968 performance of *Votre Faust* prompted the National Opera Association to include three articles about the opera in its Spring 1968 volume of *The Opera Journal*. The Associate editor at the time was UB's professor of voice and the opera studio, Muriel Hebert Wolf.

VOTRE FAUST: Take Your Chance

by

Muriel Hebert Wolf

OPERA 'VOTRE FAUST' IS BRILLIANT IN WIT, PARODY AND ARTISTRY. The gallic poignance and lightening parody of the modern opera VOTRE FAUST by Belgian composer Henri Pousseur and French librettist Michel Butor came through with mind-jostling impact, in a concert version Sunday evening in packed Albright-Knox Art Gallery auditorium, the composer on the podium . . . In this form—stand-up singers, chamber orchestra and taped episodes, separate and concurrent, of crowds, voices and instruments—it has drama, wit, pathos and artistic size.

The Buffalo Evening News
March 18, 1968

The American premiere of this concert version of VOTRE FAUST as the final event in the Buffalo Festival of the Arts Today was applauded by critics and audience, who were swept up by the momentum of the literary, musical and theatrical concept, the total effect of the sound complexities, and the anticipation of the dimensions of action, histrionics and decor integrated in the score but as yet to be realized in a staged performance.

In seeking new directions for opera it was the idea of total collaboration which brought together the distinguished French novelist Michel Butor, formerly Visiting Professor of French at State University of

page 5

Notre Faust is VOTRE FAUST

Conversations with Michel Butor and Henri Pousseur

Interviewer: Mr. Pousseur, what do you foresee for the future of opera?

Pousseur: Well, I think that opera in the classical sense will probably go on as a sort of museum. I was in Vienna last January where they do Mozart very well. THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO is a marvelous piece of museum, but I think this form of opera has not at all the same significance for us as it had for the people in the time of Mozart. In the time of Mozart it was a very real... a very political piece. It involved the audience very directly. It doesn't for us in the same way, unfortunately. So we need a kind of theatre which would be more directly related to our life today. The old form is no longer possible. VOTRE FAUST is dealing with the old form and at the same time is trying to find a new way which would once more bring together the spoken theatre, opera, symphony—everything!

Interviewer: Mr. Butor, how much of your libretto is based on Goethe's FAUST?

Butor: Very much. It is a parody of Goethe's FAUST with plenty of quotations—quotations in French of the French translation of Goethe's FAUST by Nerval; quotations in German from the original text; and there are also quotations from other writers, especially from Marlowe's DR. FAUSTUS. So it is based not only on Goethe's FAUST but on plenty of Fausts! And we have dedicated our work to all those who have tried their hand with the Faust story. That makes at least fifty to whom it is dedicated.

P: Musicians as well as writers—also painters and movie makers!

I: Mr. Pousseur, how does the piano piece "Miroir" fit into the concept of the opera?

Michel Butor's essay, "L'opéra, C'est-à-dire le Théâtre (1968) in English translation by C. J. Beyer.

The Opera, that is to say, The Theater

by

Michel Butor

Now then, it has been four years that I have been working on a sort of opera, and I am sure that when at long last it will be finished, staged, performed, sung, spoken, the response of several people will be: a somewhat hasty job, and they will be right; sure, what are four or five years for an endeavor of this kind?

To cut short any polemics on the opera libretto, let us state at once that the traditional opera, as we know it from Monteverdi to Berg, is a dead genre which has, of course, given us admirable works, full of inexhaustible lessons, but just as obsolete, no more no less, as the evening at the theatre, even avant-garde, or the symphony concert.

These three activities belong to a system of noble spectacles which the society of the Nineteenth Century has left us, and which survives itself, thanks to the enormous power of inertia of the institutions in which it is incarnated. In fact this system is so profoundly upset by the new means of reproduction and information that it is perfectly vain to attempt to keep alive, or even to revive, one of its branches, without considering its relations with the whole. Thus the famous crisis of the theater, which worsens from year to year, in spite of all the proposed palliatives and so many good intentions, cannot be solved without solving by the same token that of the opera, indeed without abolishing the separation of these "genres," without realizing the general reorganization of the spectacle now taking place, and without its being carried to a point of new equilibrium.

One is sometimes inclined to consider an opera as the super-



Michel Butor, Marcelle Mercenier, Henri Pousseur, Merete Bekkelund, and Miriam Ambramowitsch, March 17, 1968

Photograph by Jim Tuttle



Robert Beckwith, Merete Bekkelund, Michel Butor, Henri Pousseur, and Miriam Abramowitsch after the March 17, 1968 performance of *Votre Faust*

Photograph by Jim Tuttle

BEN 3/19/66

THE GALLERY

By John Dwyer

Opera 'Votre Faust' Is Brilliant in Wit, Parody and Artistry

The Gallic poignance and lightening parody of the modern opera "Votre Faust" by Belgian composer Henri Pousseur and French librettist Michel Butor came through with mind-jostling impact, in a concert version Sunday evening in packed Albright-Knox Art Gallery auditorium, the composer on the podium. This was the final event in the Festival of the Arts Today.

In this form — stand-up singers, chamber orchestra and taped episodes, separate and concurrent, of crowds, voices and instruments — it has drama, wit, pathos and artistic size.

We still don't know whether it will emerge as durable staged theater. That will await a full production, and those dimensions of action, histrionics and decor which distinguish a true opera from sophisticated oratorio.

Henri Pousseur is one of the brilliant lecturers of the age and a composer of uncommon imagination, and the "Votre Faust" story opens out of an opera lecture by a composer named Henri.

Henri, the Faust figure, is commissioned by a theater manager, his Mephistopheles, to compose an opera, with money and fame as the rewards. The opera is to be on the Faust theme, one of the many double and triple involvements. Henri's Beatrice is Maggy the Waitress, who tries to save him from the devil's plot to award him the world but steal his soul.

SHE MAY or may not succeed. In the full-opera version, the audience intervenes at several crucial points and votes on whether the story will take this or that turn. The Pousseur-Butor work is prepared with music, dialogue and action for all choices. It is little wonder that "Votre Faust" has been more than seven years in the making.

In this concert presentation, we had singers Merete Bekkelund and Miriam Abramowitsch as Maggy and an alternate girl, another choice in the variable story; Laurence Bogue as Henri and Robert Beckwith as the devil-manager. Absolutely superior work, singing and cerebral operation, mood-casting and poise in a new, difficult milieu.

The music involves a panorama of operatic styles from

Renaissance to Pousseur in a pointillist design, Wagnerian puns, a swatch of "Carmen" allusions, Handelian Amen and verismo aria, Gluck and Mozart, and Berlin cabaret, liturgical chant and both ancient and modern versions of the Dies Irae.

THE PLOT is a montage of Butor's Faust, and Goethe's and Marlowe's and perhaps Kafka's, overlaid with the kind of mirrored innuendo we find in "Finnegan's Wake."

Centered between two groups of scenes there was the intermezzo "Miroir," a marvelous piano solo synthesis of the Pousseur rhetoric, basic to the work. It was performed brilliantly by Belgian pianist Marcelle Mercenier, to great applause.

The Grand Finale is a crisis of Salvation, with some of the symbolism of Calvary, and it dissolves from crowd turmoil and dread urgency into the lone voice of the lecturer, trailing away in quiet platitude, as he started.

LIGHTS UP, and there we were back to the real-life Pousseur on the podium. In this form it had some of the aspects of illustration, but the audience clearly felt the sweep and momentum, and applauded composer and performers ringingly.

The Pousseur music, parody aside, has moments of singular beauty. For the total effect, we must go outside music altogether and to Proust and James Joyce — though both were musicians in reverse, so to speak — for an equivalent in the total revelation of an artist's mind.

We hope sincerely it has the theatrical thrust to put it into contemporary repertoire. And we will be able to tell more about it in future hearings, when the aspects of piquant parody have lost their attention-claiming novelty, and the Faustian Pousseur must prevail on his own.



Henri Pousseur conducting, March 17, 1968
Unidentified photographer