Henri Pousseur in Buffalo, 1966-1968

University at Buffalo Music Library Exhibit
Curated and written by John Bewley
October 2017 – January 2018
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.
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, “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 POUSSER
Slee Composer, Spring Semester - 1966

THREE LECTURE DEMONSTRATIONS
BAIRD HALL - 8:30 P.M.

MONDAY, JAN. 31
Calculation and Imagination
In Electronic Music
taped music by
HENRI POUSSER

MONDAY, MAY 2
LECTURE - RECITAL
Webern and Silence

MONDAY, MARCH 14
LECTURE - RECITAL
Harmony, A Renewed Question
"MIRIOR DE VOTRE FAUST"
BY HENRI POUSSER
Sylvia Dimiziani, soprano
Frederic Rzewsky, piano
Handout provided for Henri Pousseur’s first Sleee 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 genealogical 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 romantical 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.
Eerie Music World of Tapes, Generators Is His Domain

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

By John Dwyer

AT NORTON HALL 3,1 66

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. POUSSIEUR 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 "Sambu" was a duet 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 equality - 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.
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.

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.
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 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-Weberian 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-Dimizianni, soprano
Frederic Rzewsky, piano
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 spacious 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 Voire 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-Diniziani 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.

LE TAROT D’HENRI from "Miroir de Votre Faust" -- HENRI POUSSIER

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 mattered much. 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.

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 Ichiyanagi’s “Sapporo.” Mr. Ichiyanagi 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.
henri pousseur

MIROIR
DE
"VOTRE FAUST"
(CARACTÈRE II)

pour piano solo
(et soprano ad libitum)

II

LA CHEVAUCHÉE FANTASTIQUE

(pour piano solo et soprano ad libitum)
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 se fera entendre par souhaitable d’exercer séparément cette pièce (ainsi je croyait à faire passer pour le faust 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 informe pour chanter la Ballade du roi de Thulé dans “La chevauchée fantastique”, il faudra s’ecrire de refaire avec les longues de filière des “hommage d’une trahison” qui correspondra au plus interventions, et ‘prier elles-ci.

Lors de la première partie d’un son, il chante unisement ou même si le pianiste a pas de son en l’auront réservé différent. Lors d’opposition répétée, un chantier qui aussi longtemps que le pianiste finira l’accompagnement correspondant (il le sera cependant terminer le mot commencer), si l’état de confirmer le clavier devait ne pas l’aurer honteux.
600-Page Opera Is a Mirror

By JOHN DWYER

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.

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 Silee 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 Silee 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 Maimedy, Belgium. At 10, he was playing the piano and writing little pieces. At 18, he began to study seriously, and at 18 entered Liege Conservatory.

... ORGANIST and teacher Pierre Froidevaux, 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. POUSSIEUR came to Buffalo from Cologne, where he had been teaching and working in the world-famed electronic studio, 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 orchestra 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.
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 Slee Professor of Composition. Born in Malmedy, 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 Athénées Royaux in Seraing, Esen and Forest. He has taught in Darmstadt, Basel 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 Slee 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 1951, 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.
Poussieur Likes Music To Involve Audience

By THOMAS PUTNAM

The opera will be performed here in the spring of 1969 during the Festival of the Arts and will include a work already performed here.

The unusual thing about Poussieur’s “Faust” is the degree in which it allows the audience to determine the direction it will take. Audience participation (it was done by Poussier) will include interaction with black and white models during intermissions; vocal protests will interrupt a scene and start a different one in motion. “Faust” will be a game involving the audience.

Compositionally, Poussier said he wanted to see “everything” all the possibilities of modern music. One section (in “Prologue in Heaven”) employs a Weberian harmony that becomes reminiscent of the bridge with a large sample of flutes, octaves, and seconds. It is obvious that Poussier, for all his intellectualism, is a man who wants to enjoy what he is doing, and wants this; and being a performer, he likes to enjoy himself. He wants to play it all, all the windows of pleasure and let in the fresh wind that accompanies change. “Faust” is already something to look forward to—because it is, if you’re willing, to take a chance.

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 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-cut 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
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, 1966

FROM “VOTRE FAUST”

By Michel Butor and Henri Poussieur

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,
Contacting 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 Poussieur

THE ENSEMBLE

Group I:
- Robert Beckwith, bass
- Suzanne Thomas, harp
- Frank Petras, violin
- Robert Martin, cello

Group II:
- Marco Bukhshand, mezzo-soprano
- Darlene Reynard, mezzo-soprano
- Charles Wyatt, flute
- Jerry Kiskerie, clarinet
- William Lane, French horn

Group III:
- Mieczyslaw Alesmanovitch, soprano
- Yuji Takahashi, piano
- Jan Williams, percussion

Group IV:
- Lawrence Bogue, baritone
- Frank Colura, trumpet
- Edward Yablonsky, saxophone
- Makoto Miikita, contrabass

Tape operated by David Behrman
Acoustical engineering by Joseph Romaniwski
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 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, 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 provisional version of the text which I could then freely interpret as the basis 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 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 opera 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 mephistopheles is semi concluded, Henri meets Maggy, a very nice waitress at the cabaret 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 during this second part, it will be possible for the audience to intervene directly in order to correct or even to reverse the result of the vote. If the audience has voted for Maggy and has not intervened at all, Henri will finally find himself back in 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 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, Décor, the main places of the action (preceded by a combined prologue, & xmxmx 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, Scénesc, the Fair in the Harbor is played once more, completed by new 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 Weill'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 set of words)

Maggy, les dents de Maggy, les lèvres rouges, la langue rouge, les gencives rouges de Maggy, Maggy, 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 n'ai bien obligé d'y croire, il faut que vous sortiez, mon garçon, c'est une fine tometaille, certaines de ses boutiques, de ses attractions sont très anciennes, il y aura là pour vous quantité de choses à glaner, il faut vous arrêter, cher cher, alors, commencez votre existence nouvelle, détendez-vous, les cheveux sont rallongés, 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 fait, c'est que nous avons pas encore abordé la question du loup, le coin des lèvres le sourire les yeux, l'éclat des yeux, le brillant des yeux, l'énorme des yeux, le velours doux de yeux, le loup doux de yeux, la tendre profondeur des yeux, les alizes des yeux, les herbes des yeux, le cil, les sourcils, les cheveux, les longs cheveux, les taches de cheveux, le démêlement des cheveux, les poignets de cheveux dans les mains, les lueurs de cheveux sur un visage, les oeillets, le long des bras, le long de corps, l'os de la main dans mes mains, le membre, la taille, la poitrine, le cœur dans mes mains, la gorge sous mes mains, les doigts dans mes mains, les poignets dans mes mains.
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.

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**VOTRE FAUST: Take Your Chance**

by

Muriel Hebert Wolf

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OPERA ‘VOTRE FAUST’ IS BRILLIANT IN WIT, PARODY AND ARTISTRY. The gallic poignance and lightenig parody of the modern opera VOTRE FAUST by Belgian composer Henri Poussier 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
Notre Faust is VOTRE FAUST

Conversations with Michel Butor and Henri Pousset

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

Pousset: 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—all things.

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 Faust! And we have dedicated our work to all those who have tried their hand with the Faust story. That makes us feel we're doing something.

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

I: Mr. Pousset, 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
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 skill.

We still don't know whether it will emerge as durable staged theater. That will await a full production, and those dimensions of action, histronics 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 a 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.

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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 Belkum 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 noise in a new, difficult milieu.

The music involves a panorama of operatic styles from Renaissance to Pousseur in a pointillist design. Wagnerian pans, a swatch of "Carmen", Bizet's, Handel's, Anacreon's, and various aria, Gluck and Mozart, and Verdi's cabaret, liturgical rant and all ancient and modern versions of the Devil.

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THE PLOT is a montage of Butor's "Faust" and Goethe's and Marlowe's and perhaps Faust's, overlaid with the kind of mirrored sequences we find in "Finnegans 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 Mercier, 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 crowd urgency into the homily of the lecturer, trailing away in quiet platitude, as he started.

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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-calling novelty, and the Faustian Pousseur must prevail on his own.
Henri Pousseur conducting, March 17, 1968
Unidentified photographer