

Melaine Dalibert - Ressac (2017)

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1 *En Abyme* 10:25 2 *Ressac* 49:58 Melaine Dalibert – piano

Everyone knows the first movement of Beethoven's so-called "Moonlight Sonata," but fewer are aware that Beethoven wanted the sustain pedal held down for the entire first movement. This is very difficult to do convincingly on a modern piano, but on an instrument of Beethoven's time, which doesn't sustain as long, it is quite an extraordinary effect. These two piano compositions, performed by their composer Melaine Dalibert, also use the pedal throughout the vast majority of the music, creating a world of magic and mystical beauty.

Of course, the French composer's achievements go far beyond simple employment of the sustain pedal. Much, if not all, of the slowly unfolding music is comprised of single notes that melt together to form ghost sonorities of extraordinary beauty and a surprising clarity of harmonic intent. The relatively brief opening piece, "En abyme," is almost conventionally orderly when its framework of repetitions and resolutions become clear. Yet, all of this is achieved one pitch at a time, any sense of preconceived order and familiar drama shattered by each semisoft pitch as it joins the others already fading beyond easy recognition. Beethoven's moonlight principle has been simultaneously simplified and enhanced, creating a nearly audible world of orchestrally morphing harmony that never quite materializes. There are thirds, fifths and sixths among other intervals in play, like some of the early contrapuntal devices Webern would use to unify his pieces, but all reference to the standard canon stops there. Maybe only the Wandelweiser composers would constitute a useful point of comparison in terms of dynamics and maximal use of minimal material, but even that would be highly debatable.

"Ressac," taking the better part of an hour, ups the ante. Again, the vast majority of it is woven of single tones, and I only qualify the statement because I can't remember any dyads or clusters. Yet, the music's glacial pace is amplified, and the harmonic language resulting from

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pedal and sustain is even more adventurous. Chromatics are gradually introduced and what could cheekily be called a “melody” wends its slinky tortoise-y way along its path of disjunction and recurrence. If there are formulaic repetitions, as in the opening piece, they are difficult to spot on the first few listens.

Like a virus, the music is infectious. It produces an initial sense of fascination, scales the heights of something bordering incomprehension and even disconcertion, and then, it becomes an environment in which to explore sonic subtleties. A tone thought to have disappeared fades softly back into focus; microcosmic relations between two tones and a ghosted third are foregrounded. In other words, what is listener-invested pays huge dividends with patience. Dalibert creates a gloriously quasi-accessible universe of relationships which, for those travelers so inclined, is well worth inhabiting. ---Marc Medwin, dustedmagazine.tumblr.com

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