

## Close Encounters of Another Kind: Strategies of Intercultural Composition, 1960s-2000s

In recent years, the contemporary music scene saw the appearance of several multicultural ensembles that aim to go beyond a type of interculturality commonly referred to as exoticism. One of them is the Amsterdam-based Atlas Ensemble, a collective of musicians uniting strings, zithers, lutes and winds from various parts of the Eurasian continent. Initiated in 2002 by the Dutch composer Joël Bons, the Atlas Ensemble has grown into an international meeting place for teachers and students committed to exploring the communalities between musical traditions that usually do not meet. This article discusses Bons's Ensemble, as well as Theo Loevendie's kindred yet different Ensemble Ziggurat, in light of the aims and ambitions of an earlier generation of 'intercultural' composers, including Tōru Takemitsu, Chou Wen-chung, and Ton de Leeuw. If the latter aspire(d) to a confluence of Eurasian music traditions through a reorientation toward the aesthetic and ethical principles of modality, the repertoires of the Atlas Ensemble and Ensemble Ziggurat demonstrate a wide variety of aspirations for, and approaches to, intercultural composition.

Although regular visitors of the VARA Saturday Matinee at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw are accustomed to adventurous programming, the concert of 7 December 2002 is likely to have ventured beyond both their visual and aural horizons. Even for those who keep a close track of musical East/West exchanges on the concert stages, a thirty-headed ensemble compiled of masters in winds, strings, lutes, zithers and percussion from the whole cross-section of the Eurasian continent must have been a curious experience. Apart from one sceptic voice raising a hue and cry about 'virtual neo-colonisation', all reviewers were unanimous in their admiration for the Atlas Ensemble and its prime mover, Joël Bons (b. 1952), and made it clear that more of the same would be desirable. And more they got: as the Atlas Ensemble approaches its tenth anniversary, it has presented several equally acclaimed concert programmes, drawn commissions from an international selection of composers at various stages in their careers, and established an annual summer school, the Atlas Academy, which provides a laboratory of experimentation and exchange for students and teachers alike.

Bons's project would surely have appealed to Ton de Leeuw (1926-1996), a name in Dutch musical life inextricably associated with the advocacy of musical cosmopolitanism. In the 1970s, De Leeuw's life-long exploration of differences and communalities between music traditions across the Eurasian continent culminated in a series of informal meetings and workshops for composers, musicians and (ethno)musicologists similar, yet not identical, to those of the Atlas Ensemble. This article discusses the enterprises of De Leeuw and Bons as examples of a trend in the contemporary music scene that emerged in the 1960s as a critical response to both a predominantly Eurocentric and past-oriented musical establishment and the (perceived) failure of the avant-garde to provide an alternative. Proponents of this trend (variously dubbed as 'transethnicism', 'transculturalism', 'cross-culturalism'

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or ‘interculturalism’) cringe at straightforward evocations of ‘otherness’ (‘exoticism’ or ‘orientalism’), and aspire instead to a state of mind in which – as De Leeuw phrased it – the world’s music, in all its diversity, is no longer understood as ‘exotic’, but ‘endotic’, i.e., as something in which all listeners can recognise themselves.<sup>1</sup>

### Diagnosis and Antidote: The Musicultura Meetings

‘There’s still a lot to be done’, Ton de Leeuw concluded after his first tour of India, January-February 1961. ‘On both sides [i.e., India and the West] there exists not only non-understanding, but most of all ignorance [of each other’s music].’<sup>2</sup> De Leeuw did not leave it at this observation: thirteen years later, he urged an international gathering of music experts, convened on his initiative in what was the first of the so-called ‘Musicultura’ meetings, to face up to what he saw as the problems and needs of music in his time. In De Leeuw’s diagnosis, music’s predicament everywhere across the globe resulted from a general lack of cultural policy combined with the relentless expansion of what Theodor Adorno was wont to call the ‘culture industry’: a monolithic conglomerate of broadcasting networks and recording companies that in the name of profit figures would sacrifice the artistry and authenticity of living traditions to the marketing laws of efficiency and accessibility. Convinced of the acuteness of music’s challenges in a globalising world, De Leeuw had been most discouraged to find many of his colleagues to react with indifference whenever he brought them up. Through informal concerts, lectures and discussions by, for, and between representatives of endangered music traditions, the Musicultura meetings were hoped to lure all those involved in the production of music from their ivory tower, and incite them to act upon the perceived threats to music’s integrity.<sup>3</sup>

De Leeuw’s advocacy on behalf of ‘traditional’ musics in his time tuned in to widely shared concerns. Alain Daniélou (1907-1994), for instance, felt equally compelled to increase awareness of the challenges that a commercially-driven or state-sponsored media apparatus poses to local traditions and musical taste. The noted indologist particularly deplored the way in which Europe’s (former) colonies had internalised their coloniser’s idea that their music would be monotonous and underdeveloped to the extent that they did not deem their traditions worthy of governmental support, and deliberately allowed them to be packaged and adjusted – literally ‘harmonised’ – for global consumption.<sup>4</sup> To prevent bearers of music traditions in Africa and Asia from resorting to the ‘music industry’ out of dire necessity, Daniélou had founded, in 1963, the Institute for Comparative Music

- 1 David Nicholls, ‘Transethnicism and the American Experimental Tradition’, *The Musical Quarterly* 80/4 (1996), 569-594; Yayoi Uno Everett, ‘Intercultural Synthesis in Postwar Western Art Music: Historical Contexts, Perspectives, and Taxonomy’, in: Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau (eds), *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004, 1-21; Ton de Leeuw, ‘Les cultures musicales des peuples: traditions et actualité’, lecture delivered at the seventh International Music Congress, Moscow, October 1971. Cited in the introduction to *Ton de Leeuw*, ed. Jurrien Slijter, transl. John Lydon, Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995, xxi.
- 2 De Leeuw, ‘People and Music in India’, in: *Ton de Leeuw*, 13. De Leeuw’s travelogue of his Indian trip was originally published in three parts as ‘Mensen en muziek in India: Reisdagboekbladen’, *Mens en Melodie* 18/5 (1963), 144-149; 18/7, 213-216; and 18/8, 239-243.
- 3 De Leeuw, ‘Premises and Aims of an East-West Music Encounter’, in: *Ton de Leeuw*, 57-65. This lecture, delivered on 21 October 1974, was originally published in the proceedings of the first three Musicultura meetings, *The World of Music* 20/2 (1978), 19-33. The sessions, organised under the auspices of the Eduard van Beinum Foundation, took place at the Foundation’s residence, the patrician estate of Queekhoven in Breukelen, The Netherlands, and were funded by the Dutch Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs, UNESCO, the Utrecht Association for Arts and Sciences, and the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds.
- 4 Alain Daniélou, in collaboration with Jacques Brunet, *The Situation of Music and Musicians in Countries of the Orient*, Florence: Olschki, 1971, 1-18.

Studies and Documentation in West Berlin, which would gain a reputation for its defence and promotion of music traditions outside the Western sphere of hegemony.<sup>5</sup>

If the sociologist Max Weber had construed the emergence of Western music as the unique and favourable outcome of processes of rationalisation (the development of music notation and equal temperament, for instance), De Leeuw and Daniélou considered the very same processes as having led to the bankruptcy of Western contemporary music.<sup>6</sup> More than Daniélou, however, De Leeuw proved willing to appreciate the positive consequences of rapidly advancing media technologies as well. He recognised, for instance, that the same 'culture industry' could stimulate a wider interest in the West for non-Western musics, and – if used conscientiously – could be instrumental in breaking down provincialism, if not chauvinism. Moreover, following from his observation that the dominant Western music tradition was just as much misunderstood in the non-Western world as vice versa, De Leeuw sensed that any attempt at mutual understanding was destined to fail if it would depart from differences instead of communalities. Therefore, he proposed to discard persistent myths about 'Western' or 'Eastern' uniqueness, and to focus on ways in which cultures could influence each other ('acculturate', in De Leeuw's terminology) for the good of world's musical ecology.<sup>7</sup>

De Leeuw's position is intriguing: on the one hand he wished to 'correct' the average Westerner's conception of non-Western musics that has been shaped for decades by exotic appropriations à la *Madama Butterfly*; on the other hand, his perception of 'the East' was arguably no less filtered through an exoticist lens, since it reflected a trend – particularly strong since the late nineteenth century – of idealising 'the East' as the panacea for all that would have been lost in 'the West': a sense of spirituality, intuition, communality, craftsmanship, etc. The Japanese composer Tōru Takemitsu (1930-1996), whom De Leeuw met at a UNESCO conference in Tokyo in 1968, realised that his thinking about East/West relations held the same paradox. He knew that he himself – like Claude Debussy, one of his main examples – had often construed 'the East', including Japan, as the living source of what 'the West' would have abandoned. On the other hand, he understood that his country did not belong (anymore) to that idealised image of the 'East' he and De Leeuw had treasured in their minds. This once more dawned upon him while being on an international musical expedition in Indonesia, 1973, where he saw the disenchanting effects of Japan's economic hegemony on indigenous communities in its sphere of influence. This experience made him feel at odds with both the West and Japan, as if he were 'sandwiched between two mirrors' and looking at a 'complexly replicated, skewed self'.<sup>8</sup>

This feeling of belonging to neither 'the East' nor 'the West' was perhaps what De Leeuw wished to overcome, not merely by reflecting upon it in academic or musical writing, but also by fostering international dialogue about the issues of the time. The

5 The initiative for this institute was taken at the 1961 East-West Music Encounter in Tokyo, an event organised as part of the efforts of the so-called Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) to lure intellectuals the world over away from the overtures from the Soviet Union. For an account of the CCF's music festivals and conferences, see my dissertation *Negotiating the East/West Divide Musically: Connecting and Confronting Musics in the Early Cold War, 1945-1961*, Utrecht University, forthcoming.

6 Max Weber, *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music* [1921], transl. and ed. Donald Martindale, Johannes Riedel and Gertrude Neuwirth, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958.

7 De Leeuw, 'Premises and Aims of an East-West Encounter', 65-72; see also De Leeuw's essay 'Interaction of Cultures in Contemporary Music', in: *Ton de Leeuw*, 33-34, 53-56, originally published in *Cultures* [UNESCO et la Baconnière] 1/3 (1974), 13-32.

8 Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence: Selected Writings*, transl. and ed. Yoshiko Kakudo and Glenn Glasow, Berkeley, CA: Fallen Leaf Press, 1995, 27-31, 52, 92; idem, 'Contemporary Music in Japan', *Perspectives of New Music* 27/2 (1989), 198-206; idem, 'Mirrors', *Perspectives of New Music* 30 (1992), 39-42, 47, 57, 69-70; Debussy, 'Du goût' ['On taste'], *Revue Société Internationale Musicale* 9/2 (1913), 48.

first three weeks of the month-long Musicultura conventions were devoted to thorough introductions in music traditions from a particular geographic area by specialists and performers. The last week was reserved for discussions and evaluations by a core group of musicians, composers and musicologists representing the generation to be confronted with ‘the negative consequences of current trends.’<sup>9</sup>

One contemporary reviewer of the first Musicultura meeting noted how, in spite of the active participation of the members of this core group, the lack of common terminology, as well as the limited experience and knowledge of the music traditions in question, prevented discussions from becoming truly reciprocal. Nonetheless, an exchange did occur at different levels: the setting provided the Chinese composer Chou Wen-chung (b. 1923) – who had resided in the United States since 1946 – with a platform for airing the problems he faced as a composer in the West as well as for adjusting some Western misperceptions about the effects of the Cultural Revolution on the musical life of the People’s Republic of China (Chou visited the PRC in the wake of President Nixon in 1972). Also, the South-Korean *gayageum* master Hwang Byungki heard the compositions of his exiled compatriot Isang Yun for the very first time. Most disappointing, however, was the lack of response from those who truly had the power to bring about concrete changes: representatives of record companies, concert managements, cultural ministries, publishers, broadcasters, educators, the press, and other arbiters of taste. All had been invited, but with the exception of Dutch NOS radio and the specialist music press, none of them showed up. And those parties were not the only ones that were notably absent: many musicians from the countries involved failed to respond, with the result that the meetings remained to a large extent a convention of the usual suspects preaching to the already converted.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, apart from the published lectures given by participants, documentation about the first Musicultura meetings seems to be scarce. There is a brief report on the session of 1978, though, which gives us a glimpse. Organised in collaboration with the National Music Committee of Bulgaria represented by Dimiter Christoff, the theme of this meeting concerned the integration of ‘folklore and traditional music in contemporary composition techniques.’ A recurring issue centred on the question to what extent indigenous musics could be manipulated without losing their artistic and communicative value. Christoff, for instance, explained how he left the procedure of dividing a folk tune in several segments and then combining them in different orders for a procedure of deriving pointillistic textures from the tune without affecting its recognisability. The participants generally seemed to agree that folk styles should not be ‘over-abstracted’ when being adopted in the idiom of contemporary music. Neither, however, did ‘under-abstractation’ seem to meet with unanimous approval. Could Henryk Gorecki’s Third Symphony (1976), with its ‘twelve-part canon on an actual folk tune [*sic*], still be considered as ‘truly contemporary music’?<sup>11</sup>

9 ‘Musicultura 1974’ covered traditions from China, Japan, Vietnam and Korea, ‘Musicultura 1975’ traditions from the Philippines and Indonesia (Java and Bali), and ‘Musicultura 1976’ traditions from Iran, Arabic countries, and India (Hindustani and Carnatic classical traditions). Reports on the lectures can be found in the proceedings, *The World of Music* 20/2 (1978). In the period between 1983 and the passing of De Leeuw in 1996, the meetings were continued as the International Composers’ Workshop, which alternately took place in the Netherlands and Bulgaria under the auspices of the International Music Council.

10 Sylvia Moore, ‘Reflections on Musicultura 1974-1976’, *Sonorum Speculum: Mirror of Musical Life in Holland* [Donemus] 57 (1974), 30-39.

11 William P. Malm, ‘A Composers’ Workshop: Folklore and Traditional Music in Contemporary Composition Techniques’, *Musicultura*, 10-24 October 1978. Netherlands Music Institute, The Hague.

Interestingly, one point of concern that popped up in the evaluation of the 1978 Musicultura meeting was the lack of a workshop character. Apparently, participants spent most of their time on lectures, discussions, private lessons with Christoff and De Leeuw, and concerts (the latter of which were not always germane to the topic of the workshop – like a recital of Bach harpsichord pieces or a piano recital of sonatas by Beethoven, Brahms, and Prokofiev). It was felt that one should have the opportunity to perform together and process the newly acquired insights in composition assignments to be presented to all for discussion. This is precisely the format that the Atlas Academy offers thirty years later: for two weeks, composition students work, under the guidance of composers experienced in writing for an intercultural formation, with members of the Atlas Ensemble on pieces that are presented in public concerts at the end of the period.

Needless to say, De Leeuw could only have dreamt of having an intercultural ensemble like Bons's at his disposal. Composers of his generation had rarely, if ever, the opportunity to write for any other formation than an ensemble of 'Western' instruments and perhaps one or two 'non-Western' ones. The consequence of this pragmatic limitation is not without irony, as those composers committed to reaching a responsible integration of different musics had to design their solutions for an ensemble of mainly, if not exclusively, 'Western' instruments played by 'Western' performers trained in a 'Western' performance practice.<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that if collaborations with non-Western musicians would have been an affordable option at the time, all composers would have seized that opportunity. A general reluctance prevailed in the contemporary music scene as to the use of non-Western instruments out of fear of sounding 'exotic' or being accused of a naïve or disrespectful attitude towards other musics – an attitude that Maurico Kagel satirised in *Exotica* (1971), in which six European musicians literally play *with* about sixty non-European instruments without having a clue about their usual socio-cultural habitat. Instead of facile appropriations, composers such as De Leeuw, Takemitsu, and Chou Wen-chung sought for intersections between different traditions on the level of pitch content, timbre, and temporal organisation.

### **Confronting Cultures Consciously: Modality as a Poetics of Intercultural Composition**

With respect to the question of how to respond to processes of globalisation in a creative sense, superficial approaches to cultures beyond one's immediate experience were obviously wasted on sensitive minds like those of De Leeuw or Takemitsu. As De Leeuw observed in 1974, access to unfamiliar musical traditions might have increased significantly, yet still too often the contemporary composer from the West treated Eastern music as something 'exotic from which he will at most extract a few picturesque details', whereas his non-Western counterparts often tried to follow – rather unsuccessfully – Bartók's lead in integrating their folk music in a traditionally Western idiom. To De Leeuw's ears, such half-hearted attempts at attaining a synthesis merely sounded like colourless assemblages of heterogeneous materials. The possibility of a 'true' synthesis might only arise, De Leeuw assumed, 'when we no longer think of the various musics of the world as being "outside of us"' – a state of mind that is admittedly subjective and unverifiable, but nonetheless sensible when one compares the unique syntheses of Bartók, Debussy, De Falla, Stravinsky, Milhaud and Messiaen to 'the innumerable stitchers of folk music patchworks throughout the world.' These were the composers that according to

12 An exception in De Leeuw's oeuvre is *Gending, a Western Homage to the Musicians of the Gamelan* (1975), which premiered at the 1975 Musicultura meeting. Far removed from an attempt at achieving 'authenticity', De Leeuw conceived this work for gamelan (performed by students of the universities of Utrecht and Amsterdam) as the result of an acculturation process, in which the qualities of the gamelan are highlighted in a structure that is thoroughly Western. 'Ton de Leeuw's Composition *Gending*', *The World of Music* 20/2 (1978), 98-99.

De Leeuw had shown a capacity for weaving unfamiliar musics into highly idiosyncratic works without imposing their ego on them in a Romantic fashion.<sup>13</sup>

It was this quality of transcending one's own subjectivity, of resisting the temptations of 'narcissism, vanity, ambition, *Weltschmerz*, power, and violence', that attracted De Leeuw in non-Western musics, in particular in those from India and Japan:

In retrospect, I think that certain characteristics of Asian music corresponded to my personality: a penchant for introspection, a strong feeling of affinity with nature; the idea that nothing need be conquered, nothing need be invented, everything already exists; an inclination towards spirituality coupled with a deep distrust of its sectarian expressions; and, in connection with this, an instinctive aversion to all ideology, equating this with an assault on true inner freedom.<sup>14</sup>

Considering this self-observation, it is hardly surprising that De Leeuw's mind could not be captured for long by those of his contemporaries who affiliated with the Darmstadt avant-garde. True, like De Leeuw, they also sought to disassociate themselves from the Classical-Romantic heritage. Their solution, however – a highly cerebral method of dispelling the past and the possibility of expression, designed in a climate that was anything but free from sectarianism, ideology and vanity – ran counter to De Leeuw's own self-perception. Conversely, John Cage's resort to chance operations as a way of minimising the composer's control seemed to pass by what De Leeuw saw as the real nature of the problem. For him, it was not imperative to eliminate the composer's presence from music-making, so to speak, as it was to bring him back in the position he used to have in a time when 'the absence of an ethical, artistic, and spiritual foundation' would not yet have resulted in 'a deceptive world' reigned by money, publicity and superficiality, and the composer still would have been a humble mediator instead of an all-controlling, and perhaps all too arrogant, authority.

Takemitsu, too, with an obvious reference to integral serialism, wished 'to free sounds from the trite rules of music, rules that are in turn stifled by formulas and calculations.' He agreed with De Leeuw that music should be based on a profound relationship to nature and society rather than on the 'ideology of self-expression'. Likewise, he conceived of the musician as a mediator instead of an author:

What I don't want to do is use my control to set sounds moving in the direction of a particular goal. Rather, I'd like to release them, if possible without controlling them. It would be enough to collect the sounds around me and then gently set them in motion. To move sounds around, as though you were driving a car, is the worst thing that you can do with them.<sup>15</sup>

For De Leeuw, Takemitsu had that state of mind to which he aspired himself: the openness to musics from anywhere and everywhere, the capacity to internalise them, and the creative energy to melt them together into a profound synthesis.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, the Japanese composer himself did not seem to have considered his compositions as

13 De Leeuw, 'Interaction of Cultures in Contemporary Music', 35-36. See also his *Music of the Twentieth Century: A Study of its Elements and Structure*, transl. Stephen Taylor, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005, 117-133. Originally published as *Muziek van de twintigste eeuw*, Utrecht: Oosthoek, 1964.

14 De Leeuw, 'Back to the Source', in: *Ton de Leeuw*, 73.

15 Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 4, 7, 80, 119; idem, 'Mirrors', 41, 66; liner notes of *In an Autumn Garden* (Deutsche Grammophon, 2002).

16 De Leeuw, 'Travel Memories from Japan', in: *Ton de Leeuw*, 19-21. Originally published as 'Reisherinneringen uit Japan', *Mens en Melodie* 23/12 (1968), 354-359.

syntheses. In his writings, he frequently related how the contradictions he experienced between Japan, the West, and his own life led him to feel that he should not solve them, but ‘confront’ them, even intensify them.<sup>17</sup>

In *November Steps* (1967), Takemitsu’s first attempt at a large-scale composition for orchestra and two traditional Japanese instruments, the *biwa* (pear-shaped lute) and *shakuhachi* (vertical bamboo flute), the working device ‘not to blend but to confront’ has been pursued to such an extent that the Japanese soloists hardly play simultaneously with the orchestra. And yet, they are also not playing against it. At the start of the performance, it might seem difficult to imagine how the subdued, syrupy gestures of the orchestra – consisting of two ensembles of strings, harp and percussion that are placed antiphonally on stage, with a woodwind and brass section located at the back centre – will connect with the Japanese instruments (Example 1).

*Example 1*

Tōru Takemitsu, *November Steps* (1967): reduction of the opening measures.

The image shows a musical score reduction for the opening measures of Tōru Takemitsu's *November Steps*. It consists of two staves for strings (right and left sides) and a staff for violins. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 60. The right side strings start with a triplet of notes marked *pp*, followed by a *p* dynamic. The left side strings start with a *fp* dynamic. The violin part features a triplet of notes marked *pp sempre*, followed by a *p* dynamic. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *mf* and *p*, and performance instructions like *vlns + vlns* and *tutti con sordino*. The notation includes triplets and complex rhythmic patterns.

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As the double concerto evolves, however, the elusive, fluid sound worlds evoked by the orchestra (reminiscent of Berg, Webern, Varèse, Messiaen, and Ligeti) and soloists appear to be highly compatible in terms of pitch treatment (indeterminate intonation and microtonal inflections), temporal conception (oscillation between a pulse-based mode and *senza tempo* mode), timbre (evocation of multiple harmonics in order to avoid pitch stability), dynamics (highly differentiated), and articulation (breathy, percussive, noise-like effects). In other words, the worlds of the Western avant-garde and traditional Japanese music (insofar as the music Takemitsu wrote for the *shakuhachi* and *biwa* can be called ‘traditional’ – their very presentation as a duo is already unconventional) might not *blend*, but they certainly *bend* toward each other to the extent that an impression of unambiguous juxtaposition is avoided.<sup>18</sup>

17 Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 52, 93; Takemitsu in an interview with Luciana Galliano, ‘The Roaring Epoch: Works of the 1950s-1960s’, in: Hugh de Ferranti and Yōko Narazaki (eds), *A Way a Lone: Writings on Tōru Takemitsu*, Tokyo: Academia Music Limited, 2002, 35.

18 For Takemitsu’s comments on *November Steps*, see: *Confronting Silence*, 62-63, 87-90; ‘Sound in the East, Sound in the West: The Way to *November Steps*’, transl. Mimi Yiengpruksawan, *Ear* 5/8 (1990), 21; and, ‘Contemporary Music in Japan’, 201-202. For other discussions of *November Steps*, see: Edward Smaldone, ‘Japanese and Western Confluences in Large-Scale Pitch Organization of Tōru Takemitsu’s *November Steps* and *Autumn*’, *Perspectives of New Music* 27/2 (1989), 218-221; Peter Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 112-117; Christian Utz, *Neue Musik und Interkulturalität*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002, 296-299; Yayoi Uno Everett, ‘Reflecting on Two Cultural “Mirrors”: Mode and Signification of Musical Synthesis in Tōru Takemitsu’s *November Steps* and *Autumn*’, in: *A Way a Lone*, 125-154.

Rather than as a deadlock confrontation, the interaction between ‘West’ and ‘East’ in *November Steps* seems to be conceived as a confirmation of the impression that, as Chou Wen-chung formulated it, ‘the traditions of Eastern and Western music, [which] once shared the same sources, “re-merge[d]” [...] to form the mainstream of a new musical tradition.’<sup>19</sup> To draw this process of convergence to its end, Takemitsu, Chou, and De Leeuw proposed a re-appreciation and extension of earlier principles of modality with respect to composing, performing, and experiencing music. From De Leeuw’s perspective, such a strategy (‘extended modality’, as he called it) would not only provide a possible solution for the impasse reached by (a)tonality, it would also reconnect the West with its past *and* the rest of the world from which it had separated itself in name of innovation and self-supremacy. In other words, where Max Weber had accepted the loss of modality as a necessary given of the processes of rationalisation that decisively affected the course of Western (and, by extension, Japanese or Chinese) contemporary music, Takemitsu, Chou, and De Leeuw sought to restore what had been sacrificed to those very same processes.<sup>20</sup>

What united the three composers’ understanding of modality concerns – as mentioned before – the relation between the author and the authored. Instead of conceiving their role as one of creating something *ex nihilo* (the Romantic conception of artistic creation), all three rather saw themselves as mediators between the sounding and ‘unsounding’ world. In other words, their task was not one of creating a new universe, but of ‘actualising’ (i.e., rendering audible) an already existing universe of sound. Takemitsu phrased it as ‘capturing a single defined sound’ out of the ‘stream of infinite sound’ produced by the ‘vibrations’ that fill both the ‘external and internal world’.<sup>21</sup> In terms of composition, this meant that all three composers worked with a pre-composed set of pitches and/or other parameters (the sounding potential) from which they derived musical material (the sounding actuality) in a quasi-systematic way.

Although Takemitsu had a name for being evasive about his composition method, analyses of his work have demonstrated that his seemingly panchromatic vocabulary results from an interplay between a wide variety of modal collections, including the more customary ones (the European ecclesiastical modes, the pentatonic, hexatonic and octatonic modes, or modes common to traditional Japanese music), Messiaen’s ‘modes of limited transposition’, and his own modal constructions.<sup>22</sup> In *November Steps*, for instance, the first entrance of the *shakuhachi* (on a pitch swaying between D and E) is prepared by a swelling, polyrhythmic gesture in the brass and winds section (at m. 15) that culminates in a chromatic cluster (at mm. 18-20) containing all pitch classes except for D and E (Example 2). This cluster ‘implodes’ as the brass fall away and the winds feint a ‘solution’ into an incomplete octatonic cluster that introduces E. As this cluster fades away, the first contrabasses present the missing D (as a harmonic, mm. 21-24), which subsequently is taken over by the *shakuhachi*. At the second entrance of the *shakuhachi* (this time on E), the orchestra provides a harmonic background consisting of a chromatic

19 Chou Wen-chung, ‘East and West, Old and New’, *Asian Music* 1 (1968), 19; idem, ‘Asian Concepts and Twentieth-Century Western Composers’, *The Musical Quarterly* 57/2 (1971), 24-29.

20 Weber, *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*, 123; De Leeuw, ‘What Can We Do For Our Musical Future?’, lecture delivered at a congress of the International Musical Council, Manila, 1966; Chou, ‘Asian Influence on Western Music: Influence or Confluence’, in: *Traditional Korean Music*, ed. Korean National Commission for UNESCO, Arch Cape: Pace International Research, 1983, 226.

21 Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 8; Noriko Ohtake, *Creative Sources for the Music of Tōru Takemitsu*, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993, 61-62.

22 Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 97-126, esp. 117-119; Peter Burt, *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*; Timothy Koozin, ‘Spiritual-Temporal Imagery in Music of Olivier Messiaen and Tōru Takemitsu’, *Contemporary Music Review* 7 (1993), 185-202.



## Example 2

Tōru Takemitsu, *November Steps* (1967): harmonic configurations at transitory moments.

TRANSITION TO FIRST ENTRANCE *SHAKUHACHI* AND *BIWA* (STEP 1)

18-20 | 20-21 | 21-24

trps + trbs  
obs + cls

obs + cls

vcs + cbs + hrps

chromatic collection excluding D $\sharp$  and E $\sharp$

octatonic collection (incomplete)

entry tone *shakuhachi*

TRANSITION TO SECOND ENTRANCE *SHAKUHACHI* AND *BIWA* (STEP 6)

32-36

chromatic cluster (excluding C $\sharp$ )

vns, vcs, cbs, hrps

trps + trbs

chromatic collection excluding C $\sharp$

pentatonic collection (anhemitonic) Y6 scale

pentatonic collection (hemitonic) In scale

⑥ pitch collection *shakuhachi*

※ The framed chords sound simultaneously

cluster containing all pitch classes except for C (mm. 32-35). The chord scored for the brass stands out against this panchromatic backdrop, and appears to be what in Japanese music theory is known as the *yō* scale (on E: E-F $\sharp$ -G $\sharp$ -B-C $\sharp$ ), the anhemitonic pentatonic mode that in the West has been established as a conspicuous aural marker of the 'Far East'. Significantly, in its following phrase (the apex of which is C6), the *shakuhachi* does not employ the same mode, but its hemitonic version, the *in* scale (on B: B-C-E-F $\sharp$ -G), which is more idiomatic to the *shakuhachi* tradition. It seems as if these subtle instances of pitch extraction, completion, and friction are deliberately designed as to mediate between two different yet convergent sound worlds.

Initially, Chou, too, sought ways of integrating – or, to use his term, 'remerge' – modality (in this case pentatonicism) in the Western practice of chromatic harmony. Since he was not satisfied with having to rely on pentatonic collections, he developed a system by which modes for pitch, and occasionally also duration, timbre, density, or other parameters, are constructed, and subsequently combined. The catalyst of this system is the *yin/yang* principle, which one of the oldest surviving Chinese classic texts, the *Yijing* [*Book of Changes*], expounds as the eternal interaction between two opposite yet complementary forces from which everything emerged and emerges. As for pitch, Chou's application of the *yin/yang* principle involves the subdivision of the octave in three conjunct or disjunct segments, each of which can appear either as 'unbroken' (*yang*) or as 'broken' into two intervals (*yin*). For *Pien* [*Transformation*] (1966) for winds, piano and percussion, Chou devised three pairs of complementary modes based on three sets of so-called *Yijing* trigrams (Figure 1).

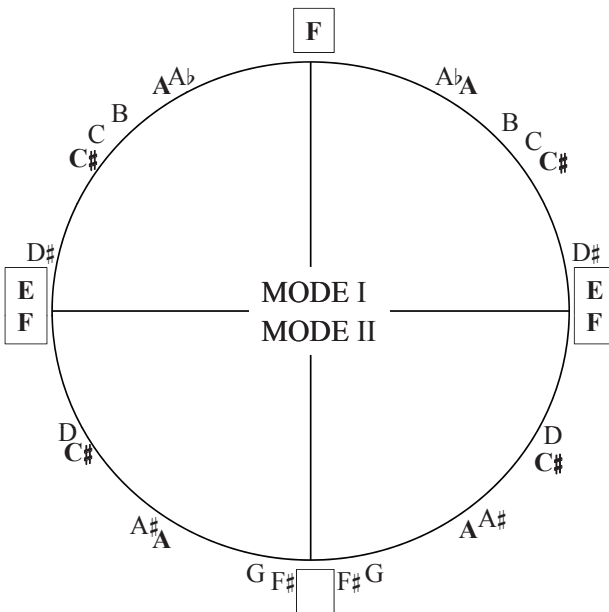
Consisting of either one or two broken (*yin*) or unbroken (*yang*) lines, each trigram within a set mirrors its neighbour and finds itself back after two permutations. Following the reading direction indicated by the arrows, each trigram is interpreted as a succession of three minor thirds (separated by a minor second) that are either unbroken or broken, that is, divided into a major and a minor second. Each order is negated in terms of the sequence of interpolated and uninterpolated thirds along the horizontal and vertical axis, and complemented by its ascending or descending associate along the diagonal. A circular representation particularly clarifies the relationships within a modal pair (Figure 2). At the macro level, each mode consists of the same intervallic configuration of three minor thirds at a major third's distance (F-A-C $\sharp$ ). At the micro level, each minor third is at variance with its counterpart in the opposite mode. For instance, the A and C $\sharp$  occur in each modal pair as anchor points, yet their neighbouring tones appear in inversion. Also, the range of one

Figure 1

Chou Wen-chung, *Pien* (1966): derivation of modal pairs from *Yijing* trigrams.

Figure 2

Chou Wen-chung, *Pien* (1966): derivation of the first modal pair from *Yijing* trigrams.



mode (F-E) is compensated by the range of its complementary mode (F $\sharp$ -F). Variety within invariability, change within continuity – that is the central philosophy of the *Yijing*.<sup>23</sup>

De Leeuw's modal poetics is equally dedicated to the principle of cyclical transformation. However, in contrast to Chou – whose Varèse-inspired sound world is essentially static – De Leeuw explores the implications of this principle with respect to temporal development. In addition, De Leeuw's pre-composed material consists of more than a set of scales: it entails an extensive imaginary rotating sequence of tones of equal duration from which segments are rendered audible according to a particular selection pattern. In *Résonances* (1984-1985), a work written on the occasion of the Concertgebouw Orchestra centennial, this sequence (which De Leeuw calls a 'model') comprises 144 eights (Example 3, ossia staff).

### Example 3

Ton de Leeuw, *Résonances* (1984-1985): opening measures with model (110 out of 144 tones; not included in the score).

The musical score for Example 3 is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staff is a single melodic line in 12/8 time, marked 'Andante sostenuto' with a tempo of approximately 60 beats per minute. It features four numbered points of interest (1, 2, 3, 4) indicated by arrows. Below this are three systems of staves. The first system includes two staves for 'cl. 1' and 'cl. 2', both marked 'pp', and a staff for 'vc. o. vln 1 o.' marked 'p'. The second system continues the 'cl. 1' and 'cl. 2' parts, with dynamic markings 'f' and 'p', and includes a staff for 'vln 1 o.' marked 'p'. The third system shows a staff for 'elision (E)' marked 'f', a staff for 'tr' marked 'f' and 'p', and a staff for 'fig. 1' and 'fig. 2' marked 'p dolce', 'mf', and 'p'. The score is a reduction of the original work.

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23 For more on what Chou called the 'variable modes', see: Chou, 'Towards a Re-Merger in Music', in: Elliot Schwartz and Barney Childs (eds), *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary music*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1978, 309-315; Eric Lai, 'The Evolution of Chou Wen-chung's Variable Modes', in: *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music*, 146-167; idem, *The Music of Chou Wen-chung*, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009, 43-79; Peter M. Chang, *Chou Wen-chung: The Life and Work of a Contemporary Chinese-Born American Composer*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006, 87-115.

The model itself is cyclical, and unfolds itself more and more with each appearance (as indicated by the brackets). When all intervallic gaps larger than an augmented second have been filled and the apex has been reached (at a point approximating the Gulden Section), the model reverses its direction and descends back to its point of departure. From this model, the instruments select pitches according to a particular selection pattern that may vary per section of a movement. The pattern applied in the introduction of *Résonances* is the descending version of the scale on which the model is predicated: C-B-B $\flat$ -A $\flat$ -G-F-E-D $\flat$ . Clarinet 1 ‘actuates’ the first C in the model, and sustains it until the next scalar step in line presents itself. Clarinet 2 does the same, but is hampered by the rule that it has to give priority to any instrument that has begun its search for a particular pitch earlier (in this case Clarinet 1). Given the irregularity of the time intervals in which the desired pitches in the model recur, each melodic line follows a slightly different rhythm, thereby creating the impression of an intricate heterophony.<sup>24</sup>

Of the three discussed applications of modality, De Leeuw’s is the furthest removed from the world of the 1960s avant-garde. His is also most aligned to modal practices of Arabic, Persian, Indian, or Javanese classical music (*maqām*, *dasgāh*, *rāga* or *patêt*), in that sense that he allows his musical material to be determined – to an important extent – by a self-created system of rules, patterns, and formulas. As mentioned earlier, Takemitsu, Chou, and De Leeuw’s understandings of modality mainly meet on the abstract and ethical level: the three composers embrace the ideas of modesty, introspection, cyclicity, and balance in response to what they see as the defining characteristics of Western music: the dominancy of the composer, the dictate of self-expression, and a predilection for expansive, climax-oriented forms. In addition, all three emphasise that, if composers aim to fuse music traditions, they should depart from a profound understanding of one’s own musical tradition and those of others, and be determined to go beyond (self-)exoticism. To them, a mere appropriation of exotic elements in an overall ‘Western’ form not only attests of lack of taste, but also of irresponsible behaviour.<sup>25</sup>

### ‘How Would This Sound Together?’: The Atlas Ensemble and Ensemble Ziggurat

If De Leeuw ever cherished the hope that he would live to see the day when musics from ‘others’ and ‘elsewheres’ would pass their state of being exotic in the West, he might have grown disillusioned by the late 1980s. To be sure, by then, non-Western musics enjoyed more interest in the West than ever before. However, more than to a genuine search for ways of mending the perceived ills of Western society, this success has to be largely ascribed to the success of the music industry to broach a niche in the market for musics outside mainstream popular music: ‘world music’. Ironically, this umbrella category for musics that until then were invariably labelled as ‘folk’, ‘traditional’, ‘ethnic’, or some other equivalent, tuned in to the very notion that appealed to De Leeuw so much, i.e., the ‘East’ as a source of rejuvenation, authenticity, originality, the spiritual, and the natural. What must have abhorred him, however, is how this notion got woven into a rather saccharine advertisement rhetoric, designed to sell musics that were deliberately

24 For an extensive analysis of De Leeuw’s concept of modality, see: Rokus de Groot, *Compositie en Intentie van Ton de Leeuws Muziek: van een evolutionair naar een cyclisch paradigma* [Composition and Intention of Ton de Leeuw’s Music: From an Evolutionary to a Cyclical Paradigm], PhD dissertation, Utrecht University, 1991. For an English explanation, see of the same author, ‘Circles, Mirrors and Motion: An Analysis of Cyclicity in the Music of Ton de Leeuw’, in: *Ton de Leeuw*, 141-162.

25 De Leeuw, ‘Music in the East and the West: A Social Problem’, in: *Ton de Leeuw*, 27-32, originally published in *The World of Music* 11/4 (1969), 6-17; Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 59, 91-94; Chou, ‘Music “Commercialism” and “Globalization?”’, keynote speech delivered at the Chou Wen-chung Music Festival, Taipei, 2003, <http://www.chouwenchung.org> (accessed 2 October 2011).

'aestheticised' in the process of their commodification as to make them more palatable for Western consumption. Conversely, the relentless and deliberate adoption of Western instrumentation, vocal styles, harmony and formats by non-Western musicians continued to drive those who devote(d) their lives to protecting the integrity of music traditions to despair.<sup>26</sup>

Although less conspicuously, the Atlas Ensemble is equally committed to 'protecting the invaluable trove of musical traditions against the ever-looming threat of musical globalisation.' Neither just a once-only flirtation with 'other' musics, nor a celebration of alterity under the sweeping category of 'world music', Joël Bons wishes his ensemble to be appreciated as more than a source of sounds that, probably for the majority of its audience, appear as new, exotic, strange, in short: as 'different'. To avoid 'the pitfalls of today's world music hodgepodge', Bons urges the composer not to recoil from a number of complex issues, such as the legitimacy or viability of treating instruments merely as sound sources, detached from their cultural background; the balance between different tunings and systems of tone-organisation; and the need to mediate between different performance practices. In order to resolve these issues, Bons expects Western musicians and composers to gain more in-depth knowledge of the musical techniques, ethics and aesthetics outside the West, just as (most of) their non-Western colleagues have familiarised themselves with Western music(s). By organising lectures, workshops and concert programmes during which visiting musicians, before they work with the Atlas Ensemble, can present the instruments and traditions they excel in, Bons hopes to 'broaden our horizon and to enrich our vocabulary' in a way that goes beyond superficiality, thereby providing an impetus for musical innovation in the ensemble culture which, states Bons, after a vital period of the past decades has become somewhat static.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from these ethical concerns, the Atlas Ensemble appears to be the logical step in Bons's search for new sound worlds which he pursued as artistic director of the Nieuw Ensemble [New Ensemble]. Founded in 1980 as a then-unique combination of plucked instruments, strings, winds and percussion, the Nieuw Ensemble established a reputation for its creative collaborations with contemporary composers such as Boulez, Carter, Donatoni, Fernyhough, Kagel, Kurtág, De Leeuw, Loevendie and Murail. In the early 1990s, Bons paved the way for the international breakthrough of several members of the first post-Cultural Revolution generation of Chinese composers, including Tan Dun, Chen Qigang, and Guo Wenjing. The Nieuw Ensemble also hosted various festivals and workshops on a wide variety of topics pertaining to the performance of contemporary music, including a festival of plucked instruments from all over the world in 1998. The latter project in particular inspired Bons to raise the question how the music traditions he had come to learn would sound together. In the spring of 2002, he conducted artistic research in the Near East and Central Asia. Upon his return, he compiled a chamber orchestra uniting the Western instruments of the Nieuw Ensemble with their relatives

26 Many critical discussions of the world music industry have appeared since its existence. See for instance: Peter Manuel, 'Popular Musics of the Non-Western World: An Introductory Survey', Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, 1-23; Veit Erlmann, 'The Aesthetics of the Global Imagination: Reflections on World Music in the 1990s', *Public Culture* 8/3 (1996), 467-487; Timothy D. Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets*, New York: Routledge, 1997, 1-37; Steven Feld, 'A Sweet Lullaby for World Music', *Public Culture* 12/1 (2000), 145-171. For an extensive review article of the literature on world music, see: Martin Stokes, 'Music and the Global Order', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004), 47-72.

27 Joël Bons, 'A New Sound World: The Wealth of Non-Western Musical Cultures and Their Instruments' (in Dutch), programme booklet of the Dutch debut concert at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, December 2002, 5-10. A slightly revised version of this essay in English can be found on the Atlas Ensemble's website: <http://www.atlasensemble.nl> (accessed 23 August 2011); Bons in an interview with the author, 5 April 2005, and an Atlas Academy lecture, 21 August 2010.

from Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Uzbekistan and China. In September of that year, this chamber orchestra, the Atlas Ensemble, debuted at the Berlin Festival to a wide acclaim.

Bons conceives his ensemble as a flexible formation, the size and composition of which can be adjusted for specific occasions. Yet, in order to attain the ‘integrated sound’ he is looking for, he always seeks for a carefully balanced ensemble in which the Western instruments are proportionally represented in conjunction with their Asian relatives.<sup>28</sup> Thus, departing from the historical fact that most European and East-Asian instruments find their ancestors in the Middle East or Central Asia, the first Atlas project (December 2002) united the *oud* with its European and Asian descendents, viz. lute, mandolin, guitar, *pipa*, and *liuqin/ruan*; the *ney* with the flute and *dizi*; the *zurna* and *duduk* with the oboe, *suona* and *guanzi*; the *santur* and *qanun* with the harp and *zheng*; the *kamāncha* and *kemenche* with the *erhu* and violin.<sup>29</sup>

In this respect, it is interesting to mention another, smaller intercultural ensemble that debuted in February 2004 in a programme of the Atlas Ensemble, namely, Ensemble Ziggurat of Theo Loevendie (b. 1930), a prolific and versatile composer who had once unintentionally been responsible for the creation of the Nieuw Ensemble. (His stage music written for a 1980 theatrical adaptation of Shakespeare’s poem *Venus and Adonis* inspired the musicians who gave it its first performance, among whom Bons, to found the Nieuw Ensemble.) Loevendie intends to develop an idiom that is ‘not New Music, not jazz, not world music, but something that is in between.’<sup>30</sup> His conception of a sonic synthesis differs markedly from that of Bons’s, though. With a motley combination consisting of a mezzo soprano, soprano saxophone (played by Loevendie), pan flute, *duduk*, (double bass) recorder, *qanun*, *erhu*, viola da gamba, double bass, and percussion, Ensemble Ziggurat presents a repertoire that fleetingly transverses various cultures, times, and moods: scraps of jazz, gentle *erhu* playing, fragments of a Bach cantata, a jolting avant-garde sound, an extensively drawn-out improvisation.

This untroubled, playful way of combining musics from all times and places reveals a radically different approach towards an intercultural ensemble than the one adopted by Bons. Indeed, Loevendie seems to deliberately avoid the ethical issues of intercultural composition as broached by De Leeuw and – to a lesser extent – Bons. This appears, for instance, from the concept behind his second series of performances with Ensemble Ziggurat, June 2005. Rather than as a meeting of ‘East’ and ‘West’, Loevendie facetiously billed this series as a unique opportunity to experience ‘the music tradition of the centuries-old and still undiscovered island Okrahiti.’<sup>31</sup> In making up such a hybrid music tradition, the composer cleverly sailed around the issue of musical difference. After all, to the *undiscovered* insular society of the Okrahitians, the very notion of an ‘other’ and the ‘new’ must be unknown. Also, as the only authority on Okrahitian music, Loevendie does not have to bother himself with the question whether his presentation is authentic or not: ‘The very fact that Ensemble Ziggurat has no tradition enables me

28 Bons in an interview with the author, Amsterdam, 8 June 2005.

29 A short explanation and demonstration of many of these instruments can be found on the website of the Atlas Ensemble (see Footnote 27).

30 Programme booklet ‘De kleine Bosatlas: vier premières voor niet-westerse en Europese instrumenten. [‘The Small Atlas: Four Premieres for Non-Western and European Instruments’], 22 February 2004; Sandra Heerma van Voss, ‘De mooiste noot: Theo Loevendie’ [‘The Most Beautiful Note: Theo Loevendie’], *NRC-handelsblad*, 7 June 2003.

31 Programme booklet ‘Terra Incognita: Muziek uit Okrahiti’ [‘Terra Incognita: Music from Okrahiti’], 7 June 2005.

to make the sounds I want. It is a wonderful liberation.<sup>32</sup>

To be sure, Bons's pursuit of an 'integrated sound' does not interfere with the personal ambitions of the composers who he engages to write for his ensemble. On the contrary, Bons conceives his role as that of a facilitator rather than that of an all-controlling authority, who single-handedly works to realise his own concept of musical interculturality. When asked for an example of the latter, he mentions Karlheinz Stockhausen and his 'intermodulation' technique as applied in *Telemusik* (1966) and *Hymnen* (1967), by which musics are dissected into their parameters in order to be assembled by Stockhausen's scissors and glue in such a way that the rhythmic structure of one sample can be combined with the melodic structure of another sample.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, Bons expects the Atlas Ensemble to allow for an interplay of different conceptions of music: on the one hand by carefully selecting musicians on the basis of their flexibility and openness to the project's objectives, on the other by nudging them out of their comfort zone. Thus, he hopes to anticipate the problems that might arise from differences in performance practice.<sup>34</sup>

For instance, *kemenche* player Neva Özgen, a frequent member of the Atlas Ensemble and daughter of the renowned interpreter of Ottoman classical music, Ihsan Özgen (who initially had encouraged her to study Western instead of Turkish music), admitted that at first she found it confusing to play a composed piece – from notation under the baton of a 'maestro' – in which the tempo continuously oscillates from one extreme to the other.<sup>35</sup> After all, she was used to (1) take cues of timing and dynamics from the musicians around her rather than from a single person in front of the ensemble, (2) improvising on a pre-existing mode (*makam*), and (3) animating her tones by idiosyncratic intonations and embellishments. In the Atlas Ensemble, however, musicians are expected to (1) keep to a score, (2) improvise only when the score 'says' so, and (3) prioritise simultaneous interplay and timing to individual interpretation. Also the *duduk* player Gevorg Dabaghyan and *ney* player Kudsi Ergüner admitted that they were ill at ease with the fact that the coordination of time is so centralised in the figure of the composer/conductor. The idea of being obliged to take a fixed amount of time rest (and hence to be temporarily 'out of the music'), or playing something 'new' instead of elaborating on a tradition, did not feel 'right' to them.<sup>36</sup>

For Bons, it is the composer's responsibility as well as challenge to mediate meaningfully between oral/improvisational traditions and notational/compositional traditions. How, for instance, can he integrate a master of the *tār*, the *kamāncha*, or the *qanun* in a fundamentally written music practice without losing their virtuosity and spontaneity? One of the strategies to which some composers resort in order to draw a mainly written performance practice closer to an oral one is to insert small sections of a determined duration in their compositions, during which one or more representatives of oral traditions may improvise. This granted

32 René van Peer, 'Ziggurat: De muzikale ontdekkingsreis van Theo Loevendie' ['Ziggurat: The Musical Explorations of Theo Loevendie'], *New Folk Sounds* 99 (2005), 20-21. In 2009, a disagreement over the artistic course of Ensemble Ziggurat led to a split between its members and Loevendie. Since then, the ensemble has continued without Loevendie under the name Ensemble Zerafin.

33 It was Stockhausen's intention to oppose what he called 'environmental pollution' (*Umweltverschmutzung*): a process that, if not halted, would lead to a 'uniform, superficial and homogeneous world culture.' Accordingly, his 'intermodulation' technique was not meant as a way of creating a synthesis, but of harmonising different 'layers of consciousness' (*Bewusstseins-schichten*). Stockhausen, 'Materialien zu *Telemusik*', *Musik und Bildung* 6 (1974), 31; 'Weltmusik,' in: *Texte zur Musik 1970-1977* (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1978), 468-476.

34 Bons in an interview with the author, Amsterdam, 8 June 2005.

35 Özgen at a composers' forum organised by Bons, Conservatory of Amsterdam, February 7, 2005; Özgen in an interview with the author, Conservatory of Amsterdam, 29 August 2010.

36 Jacqueline Oskamp, "'Gelijk inzetten heeft geen prioriteit": Mee op repetitie met het Atlas Ensemble' ["'Playing in Time Has No Priority": Attending a Rehearsal of the Atlas Ensemble'], *Vrij Nederland*, 19 June 2004), 72-74.

freedom, however, is conditional: musicians are requested to improvise on material existing only within the boundaries of a composition. Conversely, Western musicians are asked to immerse themselves in the art of improvisation and delicate nuances in intonation and rhythm. This is one example of an exchange such as Bons pursues: not a casual one-night acquaintance, but a 'close' encounter that enables musicians to learn from each other, thereby stretching the limits of their musical imagination.<sup>37</sup>

### Reconciling the Irreconcilable: Five Approaches to the Atlas Ensemble

In its nearly ten-year existence, the Atlas Ensemble has amassed an impressive repertoire demonstrating a variety of approaches to an intercultural ensemble. This last section will discuss five commissions for the 2006 'Grand Tour' programme, all of which demonstrate different stances regarding the ethics of intercultural composition.<sup>38</sup>

The title of the contribution by Saed Haddad (b. 1972) is unambiguous as to the composer's opinion on the endeavour of crossing cultures: *East/West: Irreconcilable Antonyms*. Born in Jordan and living in Germany at present, Haddad identifies himself – by his own account – as an 'other' within the Western cultural context. At the same time, as a composer of Western contemporary music, he finds himself an outsider to his own cultural heritage, where contemporary music does not exist or is neither understood nor appreciated. This feeling of finding oneself in between two traditions without being fully at home in either of them echoes the experiences of Takemitsu (before his re-appreciation of Japanese music traditions). Like Takemitsu, Haddad has no intentions to reconcile the different cultural streams that have shaped his identity. Instead of attempting to create harmony (which equals in his view to 'homogenising' differences), Haddad explores oppositions in the hope to liberate himself from them, and allow his music to 'escape definition when definition is put into place.'<sup>39</sup>

During a presentation at a composers' forum organised by Bons, Haddad addressed the main ethical issue that is – as has become clear from the discussion thus far – involved with any attempt at bridging cultural differences: the legitimacy of integrating non-Western musics in a musical practice that is ultimately predicated on the assumptions of Western modernism. Haddad is of the opinion that composers should proceed from a thorough understanding of the musical traditions they seek to integrate, respecting the values of the carriers of those traditions. However, whereas De Leeuw and Bons understood/understand their activities precisely as a response to that need – filling a general gap in knowledge about non-Western musics in the West –, Haddad feels that composers in general turn too quickly from the study phase to the composition phase. He himself, too, asked himself what entitled him to use instruments that until his commission for the Atlas Ensemble were barely known to him. How could he guarantee on such short notice a presentation of unfamiliar music traditions in a way that is truly authentic? Not being able to find a justification for incorporating 'other' musics in his own music, Haddad eventually decided to withdraw *East/West: Irreconcilable Antonyms* from his catalogue.<sup>40</sup>

37 Bons, 'Challenges, Doubts, Perspectives – Working with the Atlas Ensemble', unpublished paper, August 2009; Bons in an interview with the author, Amsterdam, 23 May 2006.

38 The program 'Grand Tour: 25 briljante musici uit oost en west' ['Grand Tour: 25 Excellent Musicians from East and West'] premiered on 9 March 2006 at the Amsterdam Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ. A live registration of this concert is available on the website of the VPRO broadcasting network: <http://www.vpro.nl/programma/avondconcert/afleveringen/25676113/> (accessed 24 August 2011).

39 Jacques Derrida cited by Haddad on his personal website: <http://www.saedhaddad.com> (accessed 22 August 2011).

40 The composers' forum took place at the Conservatory of Amsterdam, 10 March 2006. I am grateful to Haddad for sharing his thoughts with me through email correspondence, 4 October 2011.



Haddad's concerns reflect his engagement with the sharp diagnosis of the West's mentality towards 'the Orient' by the literary critic Edward W. Said. In his seminal 1978 publication *Orientalism*, Said made a strong case of the consistent and quasi-scientific way by which European scholarly, literary and popular texts contributed to the spreading and consolidation of a particular image of 'the Orient' as if 'Easterners' were uncivilised, unreasonable, immoral, backward, inarticulate, effeminate, superstitious, anarchistic or passive, begging to be guided by, and towards, a more civilised civilisation – an image that demonstrably could function to legitimise the colonialist ambitions of its authors 'to manage – and even to produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively.'<sup>41</sup> Haddad has come to the conclusion that 'interculturalism' is largely a continuation of this very same mentality – this time, however, under disguise of a politically correct ideology of multiculturalism, which makes it even worse. 'Time has come for the Western world', thus Haddad argues, 'to stop consuming the Other, and to finally accept him/her on his/her own terms.'<sup>42</sup>

Haddad's criticism is at once provocative, puzzling, and at times contradictory. If he alludes to the relentless recycling of stereotypical images of 'others' and 'elsewheres' in contemporary media, he is certainly right. If he has grave doubts about whether initiatives like the Atlas Ensemble, which only address a very select and privileged part of society, can truly change the way the average 'Westerner' perceives 'others', he hits the nail on the head. He has also a strong case when he points out the lacunae in Western music curricula if it comes to musics outside the canon of European/American 'masterworks'. But is the Atlas Ensemble not precisely trying to address these lacunae with the limited means at its disposal? And what does it mean to 'understand' a culture 'authentically'? Do we 'understand' our own culture 'authentically'? Does the very notion of 'authenticity' not impose a uniformity on a culture which in reality is constituted by individuals of various persuasions – the one having more power than the other to determine how a culture should perceive itself and its 'others'? Are we not equally falling in the trap of speaking *about*, instead of *with*, 'others' when we suggest that they are exploited for 'Western' purposes? None of the members of the Atlas Ensemble interviewed by me has indicated to feel, or having felt, exploited. This is not to say that they all have embarked upon the project without certain reservations, but ten years later, they seem to feel that the Atlas Ensemble is an enterprise based on respect and consensual participation.

The difficulty with Haddad's anxiety of encroaching on the integrity of 'others' is that it does not seem to be derived from the experiences of the participants who are implied by that elusive term. Indeed, by using mutually exclusive oppositions like 'West/East' or 'Self/Other', Haddad actually replicates the very logic on which Europe, and by extension the United States, has defined itself in the time when it acquired hegemony over the world. This paradox revealed itself, for instance, at the aforementioned composers' forum, when someone from the audience admitted to hear more unity than implacability between 'East' and 'West' in Haddad's *East/West: Irreconcilable Antonyms*. Although it is beyond doubt that the two worlds evoked by the 'Eastern' and 'Western' section of the ensemble are at discord, for this listener the two poles seemed to be involved in a dialectic process by which both adopt each other's language – an observation Haddad objected against, thereby unconsciously denying his audience the possibility to hear something in a different way. He might have convinced his audience of the impropriety of placing a question mark after the title of his

41 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* [1978], London: Penguin Group, 1995, 3, 204-205.

42 I am grateful to Haddad for letting me read an unpublished essay in which he elaborated his thoughts: 'Über die derzeitige europäische musikalische "Nutzung" des Anderen', 2010-2011. Parts of this text have been published in an interview with Haddad by Doris Kösterke, 'Die westliche Welt muss dem Anderen Raum geben', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 172/1 (2011), 56-58.

work, had he advanced that the seemingly dialogic moments in his work are not dialogic in the sense of prolonged equality. In a duet between the viola and *kemenche*, for instance, it is true that the former seems to adopt the language of its conversation partner; the latter, however, obviously turns out to be unable to hold its own against the viola (acoustically speaking), rather echoing than complementing it. And indeed, the moment one thinks that this duet succeeds in ‘escaping definition’, the aggressive ‘West’ (including the viola) pops up to cut the two short.

*Le vitrail* (‘stained-glass window’), a poetically titled work by Artyom Kim (b. 1976) does not reflect on the political and ethical issues raised by Haddad at all. Indeed, at the above-mentioned composers’ forum, the Uzbek composer insisted that music is not in need of translation or cultural adaptation as long as the listener approaches it with an open ear. If for Haddad universality (the transcendence of categories) is the outcome of an emancipatory trajectory of which *Irreconcilable Antonyms* is perhaps the beginning (or becoming), for Kim universality is an inherent quality of music that only needs to be actualised in the moment of performance (being). His concerns are purely artistic: for each composition he attempts to find a ‘beautiful structure balanced in numbers and proportions’ in which to pour his freshly shaped sounds. Well-versed in writing for various combinations of Western and Central Asian instruments, Kim does not treat the Atlas Ensemble as an ‘East/West’ formation, but as a source of possibilities that any other ensemble is. In his opinion, it is important for any intercultural ensemble to pass as quickly as possible the inevitable phase of being considered as a curiosity – a musical ‘zoo’ or a ‘museum’ – and proceed to build up its own tradition instead.<sup>43</sup>

To this end, Kim aims in each of his Atlas Academy projects since 2009 to deepen his understanding of the technical potential of a particular group of instruments (zithers, lutes, strings, winds, etc.) in order to arrive at a guide of orchestration for the Atlas Ensemble. (To explain the scope of his ambition, Kim refers to the intensive knowledge of traditions and languages that informed the universe J.R.R. Tolkien created for his epic novel *The Lord of the Rings*.) *Le vitrail*, for instance, is the result of an extensive study of the *zheng*, the Chinese zither. While the soloist accommodates her instrument to the ensemble by adapting its habitual pentatonic tuning to include scordatura and chromaticism, the ensemble accompanies, enhances, and imitates both the ephemeral sound and the bending curves of the *zheng*. As the texture increases in density and heterophony, the *zheng* ever more merges with its environment. By the time the built-up tension reaches a Stravinskian *danse sacrale*-like climax (at the Golden Section), its character has been transformed beyond recognition of those who are familiar with the instrument’s conventional repertoire. That is precisely what Kim strives for: to appeal to those sides of an instrument that are unknown to listeners both inside and outside the tradition from which it originated.

Stefano Bellon (b. 1956), too, looks for ways of engaging the instruments of an intercultural ensemble in a dialogue that is at once new and coherent. The main challenge he poses for himself is to negotiate the differences between written and oral performance practices. An improviser himself, Bellon knows from experience that improvisation can impede the unity of a composition: ‘If you do not set any limits to masters from modal performance practices, they eat your music.’ In *Alfabeto deserto*, a double concerto for the Atlas Ensemble, flute and English horn, Bellon occasionally requests the representatives of modal traditions to improvise on a particular mode within a static harmonic environment evoked by other members of the ensemble. Interestingly, when at one point in a rehearsal he gave the solo flutist, Harrie Starreveld, whose part proved to be at times unperformable, the freedom simply ‘to leave out some notes’, the latter did not agree that he should decide instead of the composer,

43 Programme booklet Atlas-concert ‘Grand Tour’ (March 2006), 10; Kim in an interview with the author, Conservatory of Amsterdam, 20 August 2010.

maintaining that the score is the composer's responsibility.<sup>44</sup> Is it possible to overcome such pragmatic difficulties while working within a performance practice in which every event is staged by a composer, fixed in notation, and directed by a conductor?

The issue of authority and control seems to be broached in *De Beeldenvreter* (*The Devourer of Images*) by Fabio Nieder (b. 1957), a composition conceived as a scene of a music theatre project about the tragic life of the painter Viktor von Thümmel alias Vito Timmel (1886-1958), who ended up in the lunatic asylum of Trieste, the city in which he lived and worked most of his life. Intrigued by Thümmel's desire to free his mind of all the words in the world, Nieder devised a musical narrative in which a 'conducting wizard' (Thümmel) summons epigrammatic sound images from an orchestra compiled of eighteen instrumental groups. After each presentation, the percussionist of the ensemble identifies the images by evocative but puzzling words that are revealing of Thümmel's biography (like 'the sea', 'the house', 'dead friend', 'Trieste'). Only the last image, Thümmel's self-portrait, remains unnamed. The conductor/Thümmel shows himself spellbound by this universe of freely floating images, 'like a child that admires an illuminated Christmas-tree.' At one moment he takes a fishing rod to dredge up those images one by one, after which they vanish 'in the blink of an eye'. At last, he remains alone with his own image, which finally also lapses, like the other sound images before him, into silence.<sup>45</sup>

In the scenic version, Thümmel swallows up each image after it has been denominated, and tumbles into the water, sated, once he arrives at his self-image. All of which is to suggest (thus Nieder explains) that the consequence of naming is the destruction of the named.<sup>46</sup> Could Nieder's poetical narrative enclose a critical commentary on the practice of representing other cultures musically? That is, the practice of evoking 'others' and 'elsewheres' through musical textures and devices that, though perhaps alluring and innovative, are essentially alien to the culture that is represented and actually more revealing of the one who evokes them? Nieder's method of continually highlighting another element from the same fabric ('filtering' or 'transposing' are the terms he uses) seems to support this reading. The moment when the composer/conductor/listener (the 'I') captures the images he imagines in words, they withdraw from his control; indeed, they take control over him and blind or deafen him for what they really reflect: himself. When he tries to regain his control, the images disappear, leaving the 'I' behind without an image of himself.

If Haddad showed himself sceptic as to the reconcilability of 'East' and 'West', Bons – not surprisingly – set himself to prove the opposite true. In his work, *Tour à tour*, the Atlas Ensemble's initiator sought for the right conditions for a reflective dialogue between different identities to occur – not only between different musical traditions, but also between the composer, performer, and listener. The main protagonists of his piece are the *sheng*, *kamāncha*, and *tār*. As the interpreter of the *sheng* part, Wu Wei, is well-versed in the musical avant-garde, Bons wrote his solo in full. For the Azeri performers Elshan Mansurov (*kamāncha*) and Elchin Nagiyev (*tār*), both of whom are not familiar with the performance of written music, Bons only sketched a few lines within a given mode on which they may improvise in the *mugham* tradition, the modal practice of Azerbaijan. The rest of the ensemble provides a texture designed to connect and support the solos. Offering the *sheng*, *kamāncha* and *tār* an unequalled amount of time to introduce themselves in turn (*tour à tour*), Bons seems of the opinion that 'listening before speaking' is one of the most basic requirements for the possibility of a dialogue.

44 Bellon and Starreveld at a composers' forum organised by Bons, Conservatory of Amsterdam, 10 February 2005 and 10 March 2006.

45 Programme booklet Atlas-concert 'Grand Tour' (March 2006), 8-9.

46 Quoted from the programme notes to *The Devourer of Images*: <http://www.ricordi.it/composers/n/fabio-nieder/der-bilderfresser-the-devourer-of-images> (accessed 22 September 2011); Nieder in an Atlas Academy master class, Conservatory of Amsterdam, 25 August 2009.

The same holds true for the quartet of *erhu*, *kemenche*, viola and cello that forms the heart of *Tour à tour*. Instead of being engulfed by the convulsive gestures of the (post) serial avant-garde or the microtonal heterophony of Asian musics, Bons grants the four musicians the time needed to develop a feeling for each other (Example 4). Departing from a superimposition of two fourths (the fourth being the interval that used to be fundamental to both European and Asian musics), the musicians and the audience are drawn in what could be considered a harmonisation of a descending scale, were it not that actually none of the four instruments claims melodic supremacy, as each instrument proceeds independently from the other at a pace that is utterly unpredictable. As a result, the attention of the listener is directed to each moment at which one of the instruments moves another step on its way to the point of where they are expected to meet (which is also a superimposition of two fourths).

Perhaps *Tour à tour* approaches in musical terms what the literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, known for his reflections on linguistic hybridity, described as ‘creative understanding,’ that is, ‘a dialogic encounter of two [or more] cultures, [in which] each retains its own unity and open totality,’ while ‘mutually enriching each other.’<sup>47</sup> None of the musicians seems to be hindered by notational or technical difficulties, nor by a lack of experience in improvisation. This is not to say, however, that they are fully doing their ‘own’ thing. Both the *tār* and *kamāncha* player are requested to improvise on the material Bons prescribed, while the European musicians are encouraged to adjust their sound to that of the more delicate and flexible ones of their Asian counterparts. Thus, Bons created a context in which all participants – composer, musicians and listeners – experience something that is unconventional, but not alienating.

## Epilogue

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Chou – having outlived his colleagues Takemitsu and De Leeuw – still feels the urge to advocate a critical form of musical integration. In his view, a ‘healthy interest’ in non-Western musics in the 1960s has been replaced by a trend of ‘ever-multiplying commodification’ of ‘otherness,’ triggering ‘irresponsible promotions that further provoke contempt for, and misunderstanding of, non-Western cultures, particularly those habitually regarded as inferior or exotic.’<sup>48</sup> As a result, Chou argues, Asian composers trying to build an international career find themselves pressed/tempted to respond to the exoticist expectations of a Western-dominated audience. For Chou, the twenty-first century is in need of composers who, regardless of their heritage, resist the temptation of quick commercial success, and commit themselves to a responsible confluence of musics based on a thorough expertise in the traditions they fuse.

Chou is diplomatic enough not to name those who, to his taste, engage in ‘close’ encounters of the wrong kind. When he speaks about ‘commercially driven musical enterprises in the West,’ does he perhaps mean the Silk Road Ensemble? An intercultural formation of representatives of musical traditions along the historical Eurasian network of trade routes, the Silk Road Ensemble was established around the same time as the Atlas Ensemble by Sony-contracted and award-after-award-winning cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Ma’s non-profit project indeed partly depends on corporate sponsorship and record sales. More than the Atlas Ensemble, however, it addresses an audience wider than that of the contemporary music scene, including elementary and high school students for which

47 Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Response to a Question from the *Noviy Mir* Editorial Staff’ (1970), in: *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, 6-7.

48 Chou, ‘Whither Chinese Composers?’, *Contemporary Music Review* 26/5-6 (2007), 504-506.

Example 4

Joël Bons, *Tour à tour* (2006): proportional reduction of string quartet, mm. 61-118. (Each tone is sustained until the arrival of the next tone.)

The image displays a musical score for a string quartet, consisting of four staves: Eritu (Violin I), Kemeneche (Violin II), Viola, and Cello. The score is divided into three systems, with measure numbers 61, 80, and 100 marked at the beginning of each system. The notation is a proportional reduction of tones, where each note is represented by a black dot on a five-line staff. The notes are sustained until the next note appears. The Eritu staff uses a treble clef, while the other three staves use alto clefs. The notes are distributed across the staves, with some notes appearing on multiple staves, indicating a shared or overlapping sound. The overall texture is sparse and focused on the vertical arrangement of tones.

it designs educational programmes.<sup>49</sup> Whether or not Chou considers the Silk Road Ensemble's intercultural repertoire 'integrated' enough is not so interesting as the question itself: after all, what are the criteria for determining the degree of 'integratedness'? When can we safely say that an intercultural project contributes to a 'new global mainstream' instead of being just an umpteenth evocation of 'otherness'? What are the conditions for a 'right' encounter?

Needless to say, these questions are rhetorical. What is certain, however, is that a format like the Atlas Academy and the Silk Road Project enables encounters to evolve into long-term relationships for learning, exchange, and creativity. The regularity of meetings allows composers and musicians to elaborate on earlier experiences, and experiment with solutions for compositional problems. The repertoire of both ensembles attests to an increased familiarity with, and variety in, composing for an intercultural ensemble. Perhaps with a view of avoiding the pitfalls of interculturalism, several of the composers discussed above deliberately refrain from the missionary zeal that drove Chou, Takemitsu, and De Leeuw to somehow negotiate differences between such vague concepts as 'Western' and 'non-Western' musics. Of the Atlas Ensemble's 2006 'Grand Tour' programme, only Haddad thematised 'interculturality' by staging a dialectics between his conceptions of 'East' and 'West'. Kim, Nieder, and Bellon, on the other hand, approached the Ensemble as if it were just another of the myriad instrumental combinations that the contemporary music scene has put forward. Bons's *Tour à tour*, in conclusion, did not represent an encounter between imaginary musics (like Haddad's *East/West: Irreconcilable Antonyms*), but *present* a dialogue between musicians in which Bons reduced the role of the composer from an all-controlling authority to that of a mediator.

In the present times of economic malaise and a political consensus about multiculturalism's presumed default, one can only hope that initiatives like the Atlas Academy are allowed to continue and develop as a centre for intercultural experimentation and research, perhaps involving – if Bons would wish to – music historians, music theorists, and ethnomusicologists with an interest in the as intricate as fascinating relationships between musical traditions on the Eurasian continent.<sup>50</sup>

49 Website Silk Road Project, <http://www.silkroadproject.org> (accessed 24 August 2011). For a comprehensive discussion of both the Silk Road Project and the Atlas Ensemble, see my MA thesis, *From Monologue to Dialogue(?): The Poetics and Politics of Inter/Musical Collaboration*, Utrecht University, 2007.

50 Initiatives that come to mind are, for instance, the Centre for Intercultural Music Arts and Musicology (Churchill College, University of Cambridge), established in 1988 by composer and musicologist Akin Euba; Association DROM (Brest, France), an organisation founded in 2003 by singer and clarinetists Erik Marchand to study and promote transmissions of modal music traditions (Brest, France); and a journal, a book series, and an annual conference on 'Analytical Approaches to World Music' initiated by composer and music theorist Michael Tenzer (Vancouver, Canada).