

INTERVIEW WITH JEAN DENIS MICHAT

Hi Jean Denis, thank you for allowing me to conduct this interview with you. I am looking forward to hearing more about your biography and your works.

ABOUT YOU

1. When did you start composing? What inspired you to start composing?

I composed and improvised from my beginnings on the saxophone, at 8 years old. But the first "official" piece played by professionals dates from 1989, "Spirale" for 9 instruments including 1 baritone saxophone.

2. When you are creating, who are the main figures that inspire you?

Puccini for the drama, Stravinsky for the pulse, Ravel for the colors.

3. I have been looking over your works and I have realised that many pieces are written in a *classical* language whereas many others have a contemporary language. Would you label your work as any particular compositional style?

No, I follow my instincts of the moment. I really consider myself to be an amateur, I have no pretensions about the outside view of people. I just want to write the music that I would like to hear or play.

4. Has performing works in different styles and by different composers affected the way you compose? Or do you compose things in your own way?

There is clearly a huge, even direct influence of the saxophone repertoire. Kokoro looks like Maiï, Clos guinguet à caprice en forme de valse. I have just finished a "Suite française" for quartet (!) And I am starting a "Legende" for altosax and orchestra. The link is omnipresent!

5. What kind of challenges do you think saxophonists and saxophone music will face in the future? Where do you think we are heading/going?

The challenge is to find great composers who will write great works. The challenge is the repertoire. The saxophoists are ready.

ABOUT BACK TO BACH

Introduction

Why did you dedicate this work to Ariana and Mariano? Was there a musical reason for this or is it purely a symbol of friendship?

It is first of all a friendly gesture. But I also knew that Mariana and Aniana have a "classical" approach to contemporary music. It was therefore the guarantee of a neat, sharp, meticulous work with canons of classic beauty. And it was the case !

Structural analysis

1. This work is divided in two movements, how would you describe their forms? Did you compose the work with a classical structure in mind or did you follow other parameters? These are my suppositions:

1st movement → minuet

2nd movement → ? (Did you use any classical structure here?)

The piece was first conceived in 4 movement as a standard baroque sonata (sonata for harpsichord and violin by Bach). As I was late I delivered the first 2 movements to Mariano and Aniana. When I heard the result, I found it touching to end on "real" Bach (end of the movement, even if it is a fake). Suddenly, I decided to stick to this effect of respectful memory and not to write the 2 other movements planned.

2. 1st movement I am not sure whether the first section starts in D or in E. Is D a transition divided in two parts?

I would say in D...

Performance

Regarding the articulation:

- In the main theme, the last three notes are linked. Should the first four be interpreted as 2+2 or as 4?

1+3+3, like written....:-D

- Would you stress the internal melody (for instance in rhythm number 69 of saxophone and left hand rhythm 73 of piano)?

Oui, polyphony in monody, cf. Bach.

- Did you have the sound of the harpsichord in mind for the second movement instead of the piano?

More or less, I have the sound of Gould's piano in the Goldberg which actually between !

- What is the reason for stressing the last note in rhythms 22 to 24 of the second movement?

it must sound like an old broken record that skips

- The saxophone and piano play in different ways in rhythms 48 to 53. What kind of effect did you have in mind for these rhythms?

The saxophone must gradually cancel the piano. Mariano said that it could be the expression of my tinnitus that is disturbing my left ear. I hadn't thought about it but I like it!

Composition

1. I have noticed that you have used some contemporary signs in this work. Why did you use these three or four elements in such an unusual/anecdotal way?

I write what I hear. The way of writing is just to convey what is in my head to the performer. it has no value in itself.

2. Why did you use 14/16 or 10/16 instead of $\frac{7}{8}$ or $\frac{5}{8}$?

Because $\frac{7}{8}$ is not a 2 bats bar for example, because 16 is not 8..... What a strange question !!!! Like asking why 4/4 instead of 2/2....because it's not the same thing at all !!!

Learning process

What would you recommend to any students planning to perform Back to Bach? Is there any structure the teaching process should follow? Which elements would you focus on?

Work on the real, the great, the only, the unique JS Bach. And try to remember all that you will have learned from this when you play my little piece, with humility, enjoyment and gratitude to him.

Many thanks again for allowing me to interview you and for taking the time to help me. I have admired your work for a long time and so this has been a wonderful opportunity for me. I am certain that your response will prove very useful in my research.