

...Voici le bateau pour les calanques...

Written for the Left Coast Ensemble, and commissioned by the Barlow Endowment for Music Composition

I conceived this piece while living in Cassis, France, as a guest of the Camargo Foundation. My studio overlooked the small port from which tour boats departed every day towards the famous Marseillaise calanques.

As I was finishing the work in San Francisco, almost two months after I had left Cassis, I realized—perhaps only out of nostalgia—that, to me, the piece hid a clear—albeit not exactly deliberate—Southern French “program”. The organized pitch structure (four transpositions of a twelve-note motive, displaced registrally according to a quasi-serial plan) are the backdrop for a free arabesque melody that tries hard, but never quite finds its way fully to the surface of this “ocean” of Western sound. Like the Northern Africans in French society, the melody will never adjust entirely to the rigidity of its environs. However, its character ends up permeating every note and rhythm around it. A musical pastis, a sonic couscous.

Maybe it was the daily experience of hearing the tourboats’ announcement “voici, le bateau por les calanques”, or perhaps I am just imagining things...

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"Noise"? Did somebody say "noise"?

[Kurt] Rohde has gone even further in talking about another work on the program, Carlos Sánchez-Gutiérrez' . . . voici les bateau pour les calanques . . ., commissioned for the LCCE by the Barlow Endowment: "Pitch quickly turns to noise, it's the density of sound that's important . . ." As it happens, in the Ensemble's high-spirited, devoted performance, the brief piece came across as a strong, atmospheric work, with character, and an appealing sense of drama. (And with no conceivable connection with the title, which refers to an announcement that the tour boat is departing for the calanques near Marseille, those deep narrow inlets, Provençal fjords, in the rocky cliffs along the coast.)

Violinists Anna Presler and Phyllis Kamrin, Rohde, cellist Leighton Fong, and pianist Eric Zivian poured heart and soul into the Mexican composer's work, so much so that the four string players, as they went on to perform the Ligeti [String Quartet no. 2], then sounded just a bit underpowered in the quartet's more dynamic passages.

Janos Gereben

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