

**Graciela Paraskevaidis:  
An interaction between technology, composing and teaching.  
The French Composer Fernand Vandenoogaerde \***

Fernand Vandenoogaerde pursued scientific studies (mathematics and physics), having started music studies at Roubaix, where he was born in 1946. From 1966 to 1969 he attended the Schola Cantorum in Paris (studies with Jean-Étienne Marie), from 1968 to 1971 the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique (studies with Beaufils, Schaeffer, Guézec, Messiaen), in between he attended a composition course by Stockhausen at the Rheinische Musikschule in Cologne and visited from 1968 to 1970 the Internationale Darmstädter Ferienkurse für Neue Musik. He also took conducting lessons from Bruno Maderna and Michel Decoust, studied electroacoustic music at the Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM) in Paris and attended computer music courses at the IRCAM in 1979.

Vandenoogaerde seems to be among the few composers of his generation in France, who have chosen to approach music from several points of departure: not only composing, conducting and teaching, but also organising and spreading new music. For over twenty years now he has orientated his creative work also towards specific pedagogical aims as well, though he does not strictly-speaking teach composition but is deeply concerned with:

a) composing pieces for performers so that, from the beginning of their instrumental training, they can come in close contact with the music of today;

b) the organisation of concerts and musical events centered on twentieth century music, conducting the students' orchestra of the École Nationale de Musique et de Danse du Blanc-Mesnil, a music school in the Paris periphery which he has headed since 1976.

Fernand Vandenoogaerde, how do you cope with these responsibilities?

*In France, as in many other countries, there is neither a structural nor an organising link among the different components of musical life. On one side, there exists in the Western countries a very traditional training based on musical patrimony which does not take account either of new technologies, or of music created at the present historical moment, or of evolution in the ways of thinking and of society; and when it does, it is with an enormous delay. On the other side, there is a system of spreading music also based on patrimony but with the intervention and mediation of certain performers. This kind of diffusion as well as all the policies of music festivals are not based on the pieces played, but on the names of "prestigious" artists who become the "obliged passages" for musical diffusion. One does not listen anymore to such and such a piece of music, but to such and such an orchestra or soloist, one sees such and such a conductor or the staging of such and such a director. The work and its author are only an excuse and his name is sometimes difficult to find in the program. And, finally, creation and research are isolated in ghettos, have few resources and a total lack of resonance in the press.*

What about the creator in this context?

*There is a romantic vision of the creator in his splendid isolation, who ignores or pretends to ignore the numerous inadequacies and obstacles existing between his creation and the tools for its reception by an audience. The education of audiences and performers and the structures for spreading music and their functioning should be a prior concern. And there is the vision of the artist inserted actively in society and attempting to act upon the production chain by trying to master its different parameters. It is on this second road that I simultaneously try to conceive the different facets of my work, which do not stand at all apart for me, that is between music education, music creation and music diffusion. My responsibility is involved in finding a coherent action in order that the musics of today and the patrimony be perceived by young people as one and the same living work, at whose service one should be.*

How has this experience influenced your own creative work?

*It is impossible for me to tell what the influences are on my creative work, things being all too overlapped. One thing though is certain: if I had not thoroughly reflected on pedagogics as well as on the problems of diffusion of new music for such a long time, my own musical production would not have been the same, though of course I cannot say what its evolution might have been.*

You have worked at different times at several European studios for electroacoustic music, such as the GRM (Paris), the GMEB (Bourges), the Studio de Musique Expérimentale (Gand), the Studio voor Sonologie (Utrecht), the Studio at the University of East Anglia (Norwich). What kind of equipment should an "ideal" studio have nowadays?

*The equipment of the studios at the present time poses many great problems. In the good old times of analogue studios, there was a basic structure common to the different installations: different analogue machines for sound transformation, dispatchers, mixers, et cetera. The appropriation and mastering of the studio could be easily achieved by a composer having acquired a certain practice so as to be able to manipulate things by himself without the aid of a technician. The digitization of the studios is carried out in a more "personalized" way and according to very different basic conceptions, very often demanding from the guest composer complex information and training. These do not allow him to achieve immediately the necessary skills for rational use of the equipment: there arise problems of under-use, great losses of time and the need for permanent help from a technician accustomed to deal with the studio. In my opinion, this is not a method which allows the composer to show the full measure of his creative potential. Moreover, questions of aesthetic influence from the technician or of human relations can also jeopardize the composer's ongoing project. The best solution for the composer is to have at his disposal his own little digital structure, out of which he can obtain more possibilities and more freedom than within a very heavy structure.*

You were teaching electroacoustic music at the Conservatoire Municipal de Pantin between 1972 and 1982. What was your experience on this field?

*The fact that I taught electroacoustics during ten years has allowed me permanently to think about the adequacy of basic equipment that would consider the diversity of persons manipulating the material. This has led me to a rather broad aesthetic vision in teaching, to give each student the possibility of becoming autonomous concerning the material, in*

order to be able to work afterwards with other structures. It seems though that this orientation is at present more difficult to carry out with the digital system.

From 1967 to the present, your catalogue contains ninety-one compositions, twelve of which are what you call *pièces à caractère pédagogique* for orchestra, smaller and larger ensembles or different instruments, with or without electroacoustics. Is there a common point of departure for these pieces? What are they aiming at? Why is electroacoustics or, in your own words, a *dispositif électroacoustique* part of many of them?

*There is a common point for all the pedagogic pieces I have composed: not to sacrifice anything of my musical language or my aesthetics in composing, but to adapt only the media and the way of writing down the music to the possibilities of the students or amateur musicians, for whom these pieces are thought. It is moreover a pedagogical need, in the sense of using these sounds and of confronting young people with a new type of relation with their instruments, with musical time, with another musical material.*

As far as other compositions with or without tape are concerned, there seems to be a clear choice for certain instruments: trumpet, French horn, trombone, piano, percussion. Why?

*A stronger taste for deep sounds and for percussion, the richness of which is unique in the sound palette, are no doubt the reasons for the predominance of certain instruments.*

One of the keys to approaching a piece of music is certainly its title. In your case, there might be five possible groups:

a) titles pointing at a direct meaning specifically regarding "sound" (acoustically understood) and "space" (understood as the place where this sound exists and where sound texture is organised and transformed): **Flux et Reflux, Compact, Modifications, Métamorphoses, Matière, Space, Proliférations, Temps Mobile, Flexibilité du Temps, Jeu de temps, Masses/Fluides, Temps/Couleurs, Space Music ...**

b) abstract titles: **Deux Études pour Cor, Une et Multiple, Réactions pour Trois ..., Musique à dix, Jeu à huit, Points et lignes, Quatour de trios, H13/B13, Triade ...**

c) "psychological" titles: **Élegie, Brumes, Impavid Music ...**

d) the German titles: **Dicht, Wellen, Schein, Anschlag, Grab, Drei Nachdenken über Hymnen an die Nacht ...**

e) the Mexican titles: **Xochipilli, Quetzalcoatl, Tezcatlipoca I and II, Coatepec ...**

Beyond the more or less obvious references or associations, what are the inner relationships between sounds and words, between music and its title and the language of this title?

*The explanations on the titles are multiple, although they generally reflect the starting idea of the work. Most of the electroacoustic pieces or certain mixed pieces have as point of departure an idea of sound matter, from which the musical speech will start. A certain number of titles result from an analogy between a model serving as aesthetic stimulus and*

*the structure or the inner construction of the piece (particularly for the Mexican titles). Other titles (the German ones) are associations of ideas in a bit romantic way. In all cases, there is no direct relation between the title and the musical language; generally, a title prevails for its musical color.*

You studied with Jean-Étienne Marie with whom you afterwards worked very closely. What could you say about this collaboration with regard to your own music?

*My work with Jean-Étienne Marie during several years, first as a student, later as his assistant and collaborator, has been very rich in its teachings. Paradoxically, his influence on me has not only been positive but also negative in what concerns our respective compositional developments. The severity of his thought in the work of instrumental composition and in the analysis of works has undoubtedly marked me very much. On the contrary, his very improvised electroacoustic production has led me to a far more technical rigour and to a greater demand in my relation to the technology, which was very new at that time, of analogue synthesizers.*

In the sixties, you wrote and lectured on music and mathematics, on Xenakis and particularly on his **Nomos Alpha**. Where and how is your interest in mathematical organisation (application of numerical systems, stochastic processes, logics, et cetera) to be found in your music?

*My training in mathematics and physics, as well as the courses with Jean-Étienne Marie, have rapidly allowed me to understand Xenakis's compositional approaches actually using mathematical models. That also allowed me, by reading works by other composers, to perceive that their pseudo-scientific and pseudo-mathematical language was but an excuse subsequently to give their work an intellectual security, though their ways of thinking were not actually marked, like in Xenakis's works, by the mathematical models.*

*In my music, in many pieces and in more or less stronger degrees, mathematical models have allowed me to administrate in a completely assumed way, not only the general form of the piece but also the management of the intervention of the instrumental groups and also the intervention of instruments taken individually in the interior of the groups. The same mathematical model has often served me to construct at the same time the microcosmos of the piece and the elements of the general structure (such is the case of *Quadriquer*, *Quatuor de trios*, *Fluctuance*, *Jeu de Miroir*", *Coatepec* and other pieces).*

Since you have been active in the ISCM French Section for several years now, I would like to touch some points related to the Society. What is for you the ISCM's main contribution to new music as a possible link between contemporary music languages and audiences?

*I have been president of the ISCM French Section since 1992. But previously, to be exact since 1974, I have fulfilled tasks as joint secretary, then as secretary general and finally as treasurer.*

*The question you are posing is delicate, since there are as many answers as National Sections. Unfortunately, at the international level the ISCM does not represent a unity, nor is an entity or a carrier of ideas; it does not propose at any time that the relations between the idioms of contemporary music and audiences be studied.*

*At the international level, the ISCM contents itself with giving its support to a festival in which the Society masters neither the generative ideas nor the conception nor the programs, because it is not the Society that finances the operation. The above mentioned Festival does or does not respect a certain number of rules which actually do not satisfy anybody, because the discussions in the bosom of the General Assembly exclusively refer to "quantity" at the interior of the problems posed and never to "quality".*

How could the ISCM function more ideally? What suggestions could you make to improve and enlarge the institution's action and scope?

*The ISCM should become (or become again) a meeting place for and of composers and not, as it is too often the case, of institutional delegations more involved in the spread of music than in its creation.*

*Around a festival, there should be discussions and talks of composers on the contribution of new technology, relation with audiences, the composer's involvement in society, aesthetic evolution, all of them issues liable to concern creators. The ISCM would be entirely responsible for the organisation in relation to the selection of subjects and participants, starting from the proposals that would be discussed at the General Assembly, with the help, if necessary, of a consultant artistic committee. It is necessary, little by little, for the ISCM to recover a place at the side of composers and creation. The juries and the all-too elaborate rules can only lead to a uniformity whose only goal seems to be not to displease anyone. Artistic creation must cause trouble, must provoke reaction, it is the act of composers.*

*What is certain is that the structure and the operating manner of the ISCM cannot remain as they are today. It is impossible that, with meetings of four half-days and one or two yearly meetings of the Executive Committee, this institution can enlarge its action. find and create true dynamics for contemporary music creation.*

\* In: World New Music Magazine, 6, Koeln, September 1996.