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Music and Sexuality

Esteban Buch and Violeta Nigro Giunta

- 1 In August 2020, between two waves in the COVID-19 pandemic, soprano Chloé Briot denounced in *La lettre du musicien* that she had been the victim of sexual assault by a male singer, her partner in Francesco Filidei's opera *L'Inondation* (The Flood) staged by Joël Pommerat.¹ In the days that followed, this affair garnered significant media attention, particularly when, after it was announced that Chloé Briot had filed a complaint (which had in fact occurred five months earlier), the opera houses involved released statements and the government referred the case to the courts.² In September, *La lettre du musicien* published the results of a study conducted in the French opera world by the collective ComposHer, according to which 83 percent of the women and 39 percent of the men surveyed said they had been "the target of sexist remarks in their career and their musical studies", 61 percent said they "had already been hit on in an insistent, intrusive or disturbing manner in the workplace", and 17 percent said they had experienced "harassment on the part of a colleague while working on stage".³
- 2 "Has the #MeToo moment of French opera arrived?" asks in the article singer and journalist Juliette de Banes Gardonne. The previous year, similar accusations had sent tremors through the French cinema world. Circumstantially, however – with the collapse of the music sector in autumn 2020 as the pandemic entered a new wave, and the deep anxiety gripping musicians across the industry over the survival of their careers – this sort of denunciation was largely lost in the fray. Nevertheless, in January 2021, the Ministry of Culture did announce a programme to combat sexual harassment in the music world, citing Chloé Briot's case.⁴ It is impossible to say what will come of these issues when artistic life, and life in general, return to a semblance of normality.
- 3 As the affair around *L'Inondation* unfolded, there was little mention of the fact that the alleged incidents of harassment, which the soprano said included inappropriate behaviour during rehearsals and performances, concerned a work whose libretto stipulates two sex scenes that are explicit, at least with respect to the conventions of the opera genre. The opera by Filidei and Pommerat, based on a 1929 novella by Soviet writer Evgueni Zamiatine, tells the story of a couple made up of *la Femme* [the Woman],

called Sophie and played by Chloé Briot, and *l'Homme* [the Man], a nameless character played by her alleged aggressor. In between the two sex scenes, their life is upended by *la Jeune fille* [the Girl], a fourteen-year-old orphan they welcome into their home, and who disappears mysteriously after an adulterous relationship with the man. The first of the sex scenes is initiated by *la Femme*, silently, to obsessive music in ascending figures, echoing her husband's fixation on his desire for a child. In the second scene, to a static melody, *l'Homme* asks, "Are you there?" "Yes, I am here", she answers three times from their bed, as he approaches her body to an orchestra crescendo. As can be seen on the video recording of the show, the scene culminates this time in the darkness of an ellipsis.

- 4 It must be said that the opera, whose libretto closely follows Zamiatine's text, deals with forms of gender violence in a way that disregards issues of major concern today. The girl, whose existence oscillates between reality and fantasy, and who today could be described as the victim of a form of incest, is portrayed on stage as a nonchalant and seductive manipulator. The woman, a housewife whose jealousy pushes her to the murder of her rival, is a psychologically fragile being who, towards the end, like a river bursting its banks, gives birth to a baby girl while also delivering her confession. The man, a hard-working husband lured into adultery by his affection for the orphan girl, stays to the end by the side of his unwell and pregnant wife, concerned by her suffering but without assuming the slightest responsibility. Meanwhile, a flood that is constantly referred to and never perceived becomes the metaphor for the characters' moral and psychological world. Beyond the innovative aspects of its dramaturgy and music, which diffract the central action into the doings of other characters living in the same building, *L'Inondation* resembles a modern-day illustration of the "defeat of women" typical of traditional opera, and critiqued decades ago by Catherine Clément.⁵
- 5 Thus, it could be said that the entire *L'Inondation* affair hinges on the stage directions and verbal instructions given by the director, the soprano having specifically emphasised that her partner seriously overstepped the contact instructed by the director, touching her in ways that were inappropriate and non-consensual. This naturally brings to mind the debate over intimacy coordinators in the film industry, which, in the post-Weinstein era, have become increasingly important in the United States. Of course, the behaviour the soprano describes would be just as inexcusable in an opera without sex scenes; and conversely, there should not be limits, *a priori*, on what can be portrayed in an opera scene. However, in this specific case, the abuse denounced by the singer in real life seems to echo the portrayal of the power dynamics in the fictional world of the opera – with the exception that, unlike the woman, who incriminates herself in a moment of Dostoevskian madness, Chloé Briot chose to report the situation to the justice system, thereby inscribing, in an unexpected manner, Filidei and Pommerat's opera in the political history of the relationship between music and sexuality.

An impossible mapping

- 6 The *L'Inondation* affair illustrates, in a literally spectacular way, that beyond power dynamics between genders, sexuality in musical works is interlinked with the sexuality of the social environment in which they are conceived, performed and received. Given the Soviet author of the work the opera is based on, Stalin's censorship of

Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth* in 1936 inevitably comes to mind, a ban that explicitly targeted the ways in which the composer used sound to represent the characters' sexuality. By the same token, the totalitarian State sought to monopolise the framing of gender dynamics and their portrayal on the stage. In democracy, too, gender and sexuality are bound up in power configurations that are continuously being transformed by social and political history, destabilising the strict distinctions between what is one or the other, especially in the realm of the arts and literature. In the case of works from the past, any performance of them hermeneutically links the sexual morals of both moments in history, i.e. that in which the work was created and that of the performance itself. Attesting to this are recent feminist readings of *Lady Macbeth*, in which the character of Katerina, who according to the libretto submits to Sergei's advances during what is in fact a rape scene, becomes an active woman who, metamorphosed by sheer desire, takes the initiative in the act of sexual intercourse, at her own risk and peril – after which the opera continues with a series of murders, culminating in Katerina's suicide.

- 7 In fact, portrayals of sexuality traverse the entire history of opera, back to Monteverdi, and including of course the pillars of the repertoire – Mozart and Wagner – as well as twentieth-century male figures such as Schreker, Berg, Britten and Maderna. Even more broadly, it could be said that all vocal music – including in the vast sphere of popular song – exists by virtue of gendered codes, whether they follow the heterosexual norm or a gay, lesbian or queer model, and that with each voice these codes define a *persona* endowed with very real sensual appeal. The sexualisation of female jazz singers, for example, is an essential element of their profession.⁶ From Madonna to Lady Gaga, Elvis to Kaaris, Bowie and Prince to Björk and Stromae or Cardi B and Lana del Rey,⁷ no serious analysis of their music can ignore the unique performance of their sexualised personas – nor, of course, can it reduce them to mere sex symbols.
- 8 However, the Kamasutra had already provided specific description of the role of musical instruments in the bedroom, where sexual acts take place. Plato's *Republic* outlines a theory of State music that associates sexuality and organised sounds. In Rome, certain Pompeian frescoes show pairs of lovers forming sexual triangles with a male or female musician. Even the Church has recognised, throughout history, the sensual appeal of sound, attempting to harness this appeal for a more “elevated” experience, or in other words, for what we commonly (though questionably) refer to in Freudian terms as “sublimation”. Saint Augustine was suspicious of singers who, as he said, took greater pleasure in the act of singing than in the love of the God whose praises they were singing. Together with the actual bodies singing the music and their phantasmal projections, and beyond the texts and their ritual meaning, it is the temporality and the body or “grain”⁸ of the sonic forms themselves that open the door to somatic effects and erotic pleasures.
- 9 Moreover, these formal elements are also prominent in instrumental music, where an artist's singular breathing meets the listeners' anticipation of pleasure. The sexy sound of the saxophone is a cliché that cultural industries have been exploiting since the early twentieth century, including in erotic films and porn, and that would not have become so pervasive without the temporal figures of desire cut by Charlie Parker and John Coltrane. Of course, breath is not the only way in which the sensuality of vocal music can exist in instrumental music; one need only hear and see Martha Argerich or Yuja

Wang on the piano to be convinced. The ability of music to eroticise its listeners does not only depend on the anthropomorphism of the instruments or electronic sources involved. Today these are treated by a myriad of software resources that often blur the lines between organism and machine, between human and non-human sounds, between musical sounds and sounds that custom or tastes distinguish as *not music*.

- 10 However, the intensity curves that drive the different sonic parameters of music are affordances that, depending on individual contexts and dispositions, can resonate – or not – with the beat of an individual’s intimate pleasures. People for whom dance is an erotic experience – however consciously, and variably according to the occasion – know this well, whether couples held together by what tango calls an *abrazo*, or persons on the dancefloor moving independently in interaction with their neighbours, in a sort of collective sensual performance. This is also an everyday practice for the many people who make music into an atmosphere, or a presence, in their shared or solitary sexual experiences.
- 11 In this way, music can be incorporated into the sexual scripts that human beings have at their disposal, to live out their desire and that of their partners.⁹ And this cannot be explained simply by associating a type of music with a mood, as streaming platforms suggest with their “romantic evening” or “special Valentine’s Day” playlists. It is absolutely possible to listen to Donna Summer’s “Love to Love You Baby” without being the least bit aroused, and equally possible to be aroused by one of Bach’s works. It is true, however, that the former, with the singer’s orgasmic vocalisations and its disco rhythm, provides more obvious footholds for sex than the latter. In technical terms, according to the ecology of perception, this corresponds to a higher density of affordances that connect the two areas of human experience.

Latent sexualities?

- 12 Compiling even the most basic inventory of all musical genres and all situations in which music meets sexuality is a task destined to fail. On this subject, it is always relevant to consider Michel Foucault’s classic lesson, in which he takes issue with the “repressive hypothesis”, i.e. the idea that patriarchal culture has systematically reduced to silence all discourses on sexuality.¹⁰ On the contrary, music has unceasingly conveyed and articulated sex, sounding out its logics of desire and its time curves, stimulating fantasies and igniting bodies. Given the constant presence of sexuality in the history of music, whether “Western” or not, one could even be surprised that a journal such as *Transposition* would still need to put out a special issue on “Music and Sexualities”, as if it were a new theme.
- 13 Yet, scientific studies at the intersection between music and sexuality remain sparse, both in number and in the themes covered. This dossier seeks, to some extent, to fill in the silences of knowledge, and to reopen a conversation that, in fact, touches the core of the powers of music. However, the idea of a contrast between music unceasingly portraying the sounds of sex, and musical studies unceasingly avoiding to address this phenomenon, demands first a clarification of the terms of the debate. The book *Feminine Endings* by Susan McClary owes its title to the vocabulary that nineteenth-century theoreticians used in reference to musical phenomena not directly related to sex or gender, but that mobilized gendered and sexist clichés, such as the naturalised association of femininity with weakness.¹¹ Richard Wagner, who made sexuality a

recurring theme in his music dramas, often transgressively, also deployed a gendered imaginary in his theoretical texts, for example describing music drama as a union of poetry and music, presented as masculine and feminine, respectively.¹² Also, all of the discourses on “degenerate art”, from Max Nordau to the Nazi persecutions, was based on recognition of the sexual effects of modern art, including music, on bodies and subjectivities¹³.

- ¹⁴ Sexuality and gender, and their close bind within the system of heteronormativity,¹⁴ are indeed clearly present, even in the reactionary discourses. Incorporating music theories into the cultural framework of discourses on sexuality or, to continue in Foucauldian terms, of sexuality as discourse, is a theoretical and empirical domain still largely unexplored. This is why we propose with this dossier to reconnect with certain significant texts from the 1990s, which constituted a pivotal moment in this area, and whose influence extends to us today via more or less direct routes. Prior to this period, it is probably to Theodor W. Adorno that we owe the first formulation of a “sexual theory” of music, in terms that in certain ways are close to the contemporary theoretical landscape. In his essay *Über Jazz* (“On Jazz”), written in England in 1936, soon before he moved to the United States, Adorno wrote that the rhythm of jazz is the same as the rhythm of sexual intercourse, going on to develop the implications for his theory of the cultural industry.¹⁵ By turning upside down the Freudian hypothesis of latent sexual content in dreams and neuroses, which psychoanalysis is supposed to make manifest for the subject, Adorno argues that jazz is characterised by a manifest sexual content of which the latent content is social domination, translating into individuals’ alienation from their desire or, in Freudian terms, into a form of castration. In his view, the fact that the pleasures of jazz most often emanated from black musicians had nothing to do with their racial origins, but rather was due to their condition as dominated. The frequent contention around his diagnosis of jazz, which cannot be developed more fully herein,¹⁶ only confirms the heuristic power of this critical discourse on the relationship between music and sexuality – which, curiously, the author subsequently toned down for the remainder of his life.¹⁷

The moment of new musicology

- ¹⁵ This latent presence of sexuality in traditional music studies gave way to a veritable *coming out* in the 1980s, which manifested first and foremost as interest in gender issues. The United States was the epicentre of this new movement, due to the growing influence of feminism and gender studies, but key impetus also came from France, owing to the impact of French theory on theoretical thinking in general, and especially Derridean deconstruction.¹⁸ In this context, Catherine Clément’s 1979 book, translated in 1988, argued that, though women often play a central role in opera, the opera genre is not any kind of feminist liberation: “On the contrary: they suffer, they scream, they die [...]. They expose themselves, in robes with plunging necklines, gleaming with tears, under the gaze of those who come to enjoy their feigned agony. Not one of them comes through unscathed, or so few...”.¹⁹ Setting aside the music to focus on the librettos, Clément invites us to hear, behind the adored voices, the brutal words that kill them. In this way, according to Clément, opera expresses the “defeat of women”, who are condemned by the patriarchal power to deny their desires, suffer and die. The beauty and virtuosity of their voices only enrich the gruesome spectacle that culminates in the

slaying of the soprano for the pleasure of an audience of men – accompanied, of course, by their wives, who watch their fellow womankind come to tragic ends on the stage.

- 16 Clément argues that to not perpetuate this violence, the first step is to show that it exists. This viewpoint was shared within the *new musicology* movement, which irrupted into the mainstream during the American Musicological Society conference of 1990 in Oakland, with panels on homosexuality, feminism, and rap, and the First Feminist Theory and Music Conference in Minneapolis in 1991. With this new movement, the sexual orientation of composers became the subject of research, such as Maynard Solomon's study on Schubert, whom he described as homosexual based on the composer's writings, behaviour in society, rejection of marriage, a certain antipathy for women, and his close relationships with men.²⁰ This was met with a certain amount of scepticism and resistance, as pointed out by Susan McClary, who drew a parallel with the censorship of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe in 1991 and the restrictions on the rights of gays in the United States military in 1992.²¹
- 17 In this debate, McClary defended the importance of considering sexuality in a broad sense in order to understand the contexts of creation. She argued that the supposed sexual fantasies of Schubert shed new light on "absolute music", or even laid the foundation for a new interpretation of this repertoire. Lawrence Kramer in turn contended that the forms of self-considered normal by Western culture promote and rationalise violence against women, and analysed nineteenth-century musical works to understand the historical evolution of conceptions of desire.²² In 1994, the book *Queering the Pitch*²³ set aside the essentialist definitions of sexuality in favour of a performative perspective, converging with Judith Butler's theses in *Gender Trouble*, published in 1990. Suzanne Cusick – who contended that to be a lesbian is to escape the structures of patriarchal power – explored the consequences of her sexual orientation on her career as a musicologist and musician, describing playing Bach's *Canonic Variations* on the organ as a sexual act in which music is the partner: "What if music IS sex?" she reflected.²⁴ In 1996, John Corbett and Terri Kapsalis wrote a widely read article on the female orgasm in popular music, opening the door to the inclusion of music in a broader field which would come to be known as *sound studies*.²⁵
- 18 However, the most influential text from this period remains McClary's book *Feminine Endings*, published in 1991, and whose most significant contribution is also the most controversial: she argued that the way in which musical time is organised in the tonal system delays gratification by creating in the listener the expectation of a return to the tonic, a final release that she described as "metaphorical ejaculation". This approach sparked controversy in 1987 when she suggested that, following from feminist poet Adrienne Rich, "the point of recapitulation in the first movement of [Beethoven's] Ninth is one of the most horrifying moments in music, as the carefully prepared cadence is frustrated, damming up energy which finally explodes in the throttling murderous rage of a rapist incapable of attaining release".²⁶ In her book, McClary later rephrased this passage, removing the figure of the rapist, but remaining unflinching in her radical criticism of the connection between the tonal system and patriarchy.²⁷
- 19 She also sought to bring together classical and popular music, joining in the examination of the role of women in the musical canon that Marcia Citron had pursued since the late 1980s.²⁸ At the same time, the topic of sexuality also burst into popular music studies, notably with the "Rock and Sexuality" section in a book by Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin published in 1990.²⁹ In France, in 1991, Eugène Lledo came out

with a reading of the history of rock from 1950 to 1980, examining the points of contact between music and sexuality.³⁰ This reflected an earlier interest: already in 1978 Frith and Angela McRobbie had pointed out the phallic dimension of the electric guitar and, at the risk of essentialising the link between genders and tastes, had compared the passive, feminine consumption of pop by teen girls, and the active, masculine consumption of *cock rock*. In 1984, Sue Wise examined her erotic fascination with Elvis Presley and the apparent dissonance between this adolescent desire and her subsequent radical feminism, or in other words, between sexual logic and gender logic. To counter the temptation of essentialist theories, in 1999, Susan Fast responded with an ethnographic study of female fans of Led Zeppelin, who described Jimmy Page's extended guitar solos as "electric prolonged orgasms".³¹

Contributions from the social sciences

- 20 Emerging in the 1990s, new musicology, as its name suggests, emerged as a novel movement within the established field of musicology; in other words, without challenging the institutional definition of the field. Popular music studies, in turn, began incorporating questions of gender and sexuality, spurred by an intellectual dynamic that came largely from the objects themselves, yet without challenging the usual scope of the field. During this period, however, the social and human sciences increasingly fostered interdisciplinary dialogue, at times even assuming a transdisciplinary outlook, as became typical in cultural studies, for example. Conversely, traditional disciplines such as history, sociology, and anthropology increasingly took up subjects that had previously been reserved for specific fields such as musicology, literary studies, and art history.
- 21 This same period, the 1990s, also marked the emergence of a resolutely social sciences-based approach to the relationship between music and sexuality, one that this special edition of *Transposition* seeks to uphold and illustrate. This spurred interest in questions that could not be resolved through analysis or hermeneutic study of musical subjects alone, in the way that new musicology proceeded. Rather, it was a matter of concretely understanding how music and sexuality are interconnected in practice, how this interconnection becomes meaningful for individuals in the form of representations and experiences, and how in turn these practices, representations and experiences nourish the musicians' creative output, according to social and political logics that include gender dynamics. This is why our dossier opens with the republication of two texts put out in the 1990s, with introductions by the authors written specially for this issue, offering both reflexive retrospection and informed insights on the evolution of the field.
- 22 The first of these texts, by Annegret Fauser, was written and presented in French in 1992 at a conference on Jules Massenet, the proceedings of which were not published until 1999.³² It examines the "erotic element" in Massenet's work, specifically in the opera *Esclarmonde*, which premiered in 1889 at the Opéra-Comique. The author, born in Germany and today a professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (US), was at the time a doctoral student interning at the École normale de Paris. A specialist on French music of the *Belle Époque*, the subject of her thesis, she sought with this pioneering article to define what she calls the "erotic element" by articulating a non-formalist musical analysis, along the lines of *new criticism*, as adopted by Joseph

Kerman,³³ *inter alia*, and chronicling a history of the critical reception. She gathered traces of great eloquence, such as this critic's account of the opera's premiere in *La Revue des Deux-Mondes*, in which, describing its sexuality, he attempts to "say it without saying it", eventually confessing his embarrassment in a nod to the reader: "Never before, it seems to me, had anyone described in sound so accurately, and in such detail, the physical manifestation of human tenderness (you can see that I am choosing my words delicately)".³⁴

- 23 Focusing more on the music than on the texts, Fauser seems to arrive at an opposite conclusion to that of Clément: in Massenet's *Esclarmonde*, the musical eroticism of the heroine – a magician with fabulous powers – allows her to gain influence, to achieve her ends, and to attempt a transgression of the patriarchal structures, almost an emancipation. The musical devices employed give the female character the form and material with which to express her desire, in an active process which at the time was considered unbecoming of a woman. However, the resolution of the story returns to the bourgeois ideals of its era: stripped of her magic powers, *Esclarmonde* must submit to the will of her father the Emperor, who has promised her hand in marriage to the victor of a tournament, which is luckily won by he with whom she is already secretly in love. Thanks to this apparent convergence of desire and duty, the patriarchal order is restored in a happy ending.
- 24 The other text republished in this dossier is by English sociologist Tia DeNora, a professor at the University of Exeter (UK). Entitled "Music and Erotic Agency", it dates back to 1997, and is part of the author's work on "music in everyday life", which culminated in the now classic book by this title.³⁵ This text may be the first to have outlined a sociological study of music in the sexual life of real people, specifically a population of female students, whose experience was collected through interviews. This process led DeNora to broader questions: what are the connections between our everyday lives and the cultural products we consume? How can erotic agency be, in DeNora's terms, "musically composed"? If we accept that music is a resource for regulating the body, emotions and actions, can one listen to music *in sex*? With this work, she also contributed to the feminist turning point in the social sciences: indeed, a common thread throughout the interviews in her studies, all with women, is anecdotes about heterosexual men's inability to find the right music and the right behaviour, or in other words, their inability after to follow the heteronormative script for sexual encounters, while at the same time tuning into their partner's desires and penchants.
- 25 The intensity of the debates and the quality of texts produced in the 1990s contrast with the less significant production in the years that followed. Meanwhile, social and political hermeneutics for musical works became accepted, along with the inclusion of gender issues in the approaches of musicologists, sociologists, and cultural historians. It was thus a natural evolution, as it were, for a major reference book on Debussy from 2003 to include a text by Julie McQuinn on the eroticism in his music.³⁶ On Madonna alone, the cumulative bibliography is astonishing and of course includes reflections on the performance of her sexuality. Also noteworthy are Robert Fink's 2005 book on repetition in music, and the 2010 volume *Earogenous Zones*, a reflection on sound in film in general, with an emphasis on music.³⁷
- 26 Among other references from the past decade we can cite Federico Lazzaro's article on Ravel's *Chansons madécasses* (Madagascar Songs),³⁸ Ted Gioia's book on love songs,³⁹ Ivan Raykoff examination of the cliché of the romantic pianist,⁴⁰ and François Péréa's study

of “what we say in bed”, a text that can now be read as a work of sound studies.⁴¹ In addition, Danielle Sofer has developed an analytic questionnaire on sexuality in contemporary music.⁴² Finally, without being able to address here all musical genres in which issues around sexuality are predominant, we can mention several studies published in Latin America following Marta Savigliano’s *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*⁴³: a special edition of the Mexican review *Versión* (2014), and the ethnographies by María Julia Carozzi and Mercedes Liska on the milongas of Buenos Aires.⁴⁴ Lastly in this list, we include the dissident artistic practices in Argentina which are central to the Opera Queer collective, interviewed for this issue by researchers Jazmín Tizcornia and Giselle Méndez.

- 27 Thus, in recent years, sexuality has been becoming once again a prominent subject in musical studies, in connection with broader perspectives in the social sciences and the significant growth of gender studies. Nevertheless, the thematic line between gender and sexuality is somewhat blurred, as there are far fewer studies on sexuality in the strict sense than on power dynamics in general, the focus of multiple groups of researchers. In France, a key moment was the translation in 2015 of *Feminine Endings* by Susan McClary, under the title *Ouverture féministe*, with a foreword by Catherine Deutsch.⁴⁵ She is a professor at the Sorbonne and the author of decisive studies on sexuality in the music of the Renaissance⁴⁶ conducted within the Circle for Interdisciplinary Research on Female Musicians (CReIM) and the Gender, Music and Female Musicians programme (GeMM) at the Institute for Research in Musicology (IReMUS), which, moreover, has produced considerable research on the musical practices of women. This impetus also gave rise to the Philharmonie de Paris translation (*Anatomie de la folle lyrique*⁴⁷) of Wayne Koestenbaum’s 1993 book *The Queen’s Throat: Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire*.
- 28 In 2013, *Transposition*’s third thematic dossier, *Music and Queer Theory*, included an ethnographic study by Esperanza Miyake on a gay and lesbian choir, and an interview with Annegret Fauser in which she discussed the evolution of her work in an expanded musicological field, at the intersection between gender and sexuality on the one hand, and history and politics on the other.⁴⁸ At EHESS, the collective seminar on the cultural history of dance has examined, since 2008, the way bodies are swept up in the movement of music, as described in Sophie Jacotot’s research on American dances in Paris in the interwar period, and Elizabeth Claire’s research on the waltz.⁴⁹ Finally, since 2016, the Music and Politics seminar led by Esteban Buch has given rise to a study on the relationship between musical climax and orgasm in Debussy’s oeuvre,⁵⁰ and to a number of study days on the theme of *Music and Sexuality*.

Presentation of the dossier

- 29 The thematic dossier, *Music and Sexuality*, in this issue of *Transposition* includes the republication of articles by Annegret Fauser and Tia DeNora, and the publication of five recent studies. The first of these previously unpublished articles is by Aurore Flamion, « L’agentivité d’une île : au cœur des *Stigmatisés* (1918) de Franz Schreker » (The agency of an island: in the heart of Franz Schreker’s *The Stigmatized* [1918]). The author starts with the opera’s reception after its premiere in Frankfurt, observing that the critics readily refer to the presence of sexuality in the libretto, the music, and the life of the composer. She then turns her focus to the opera and the musical materials *per se*, which

she sees as inviting the audience to experience a form of erotic stasis. Her analysis unfolds in two parts. She begins with the start of Act III and the presentation of the island of Elysium created by the protagonist Alviano Salvago, purportedly to celebrate beauty, and which in fact spurs the characters' debauchery. In response to interpretations of the island as a narcissistic projection of the protagonist, Flamion suggests that the island intrinsically has the power to place the spectators in an erotic situation. In the second part of her analysis, Flamion examines the orchestral textures characteristic of the composer: Schreker's *Klang* (sound) becomes a dramatic element in its own right through its allure, the "mystical, sensual, dangerous and irrepressible" power it holds over the characters, with complex sound timbres that contribute to the induction of stasis. From this, she concludes that the island's effect on the characters is analogous to the effect the composer wants to elicit in his own audience, wherein nature becomes a place endowed with life.

- 30 In « L'hyperféminisation des chanteuses japonaises : *shôjo kashu* et *aidoru* » (Hyperfeminisation of female singers in Japan: *shôjo kashu* and *aidoru*) Chiharu Chujo and Clara Wartelle-Sakamoto examine the sexuality of young Japanese singers, dancers and actresses. Retracing the historical evolution from the *shôjo kashu* ("girl singers") of the 1950s to the *aidorus* ("idols") of today, their article sheds light on a phenomenon of gradual sexualisation of women's bodies and behaviour, according to a market logic born of the political and cultural upheaval in post-war Japan. They study these women's image and how it is managed, and the forced adaptation of their private life in order to attract a voyeuristic, mostly male, audience, also indirectly raising difficult questions on paedophilia. In the authors' view, sexuality – which remains a repressed subject in Japanese society – finds in these young singers a way of being manifested, according to a logic of *fan service*.
- 31 Marion Brachet's contribution, "Multiple and Sustained Climaxes in Icelandic Post-Rock: For an Expansion of the Notion of Musical Climax" explores possible connections between musical forms and sexual intercourse. In the first part, the author reveals the multiple concordances between musical climax and sexual climax, with the idea of orgasm as a formal reference for musical analysis. From models of orgasm classified according to the biological sexes, she proposes an expansion of the masculine-feminine binary, defining three types of climatic timing: single, multiple and sustained. Brachet then analyses Icelandic post-rock songs – "Popplagio" by Sigur Rós, "Naros" by Sólstafir and "The Prolonging" by Triptykon – as examples of multiple and sustained climax, as opposed to the teleology of classic cadences and the sonata form, thus contributing to the demasculinisation of these notions.
- 32 Toby Young's article, "*La Petite Mort* : Techniques of Orgasm in Electronic Dance Music", offers a study of discourses on sexuality in EDM. Based on interviews conducted in the United Kingdom, he shows that through contact with this music, the participants themselves draw parallels between their experiences in dance and in sexuality, notably by using the same lexical field to describe them. Young analyses the sexualised space of the dancefloor as a *safe space* where one can meet partners and express oneself, and where experiences are often amplified by the use of drugs. Furthering the exploration of the notion of climax in the previous article, he observes that in the music itself, repetition, bpm progressions, and harmonic resolutions amplify, building up to the "drop". Instead of the heteronormative model of the orgasm as the single arrival point, he examines the excitement and arousal technologies used in EDM, extending the

discussion to kink theory and BDSM theory. This allows him to introduce a notion of non-genital *jouissance*, essentially composed of mechanisms of control and power games in the service of the movement of the bodies and the pleasures of listening.

- 33 In the last article, Charlotte Vaillot-Knudsen invites us to enter the realm of music of the Earth, in resonance with the ecosexual movement, started in the 2000s by artists Elizabeth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle. These erotic-artistic practices, combining humour and environmental activism, converge in the caverns that are the subject of her study. Her article « De l'orgue au septième ciel. Pour une spéléologie du souffle-désir » (From the organ to seventh heaven. For a speleology of breath and desire) concludes the dossier, returning to the question of the erotic agency of sound environments, already discussed with regard to Schreker's island. In a sexualised and mineral underground world, the author explores in particular the Great Organ in the Luray Caverns in Virginia (US), including delving into the etymology of the word "organ", its history and repertoire, and the speleologist-researcher poetic-aesthetic listening experience.

NOTES

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