

# Utopia & struggle

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Translated by Edward Hughes



# Interview

## Paul Audi <sup>PA</sup>

## David Grimal <sup>DG</sup>

PA David, I've often heard you say that the symphonic concert inherited from 19th-century forms of musical creation has lost its interest. What makes you think that? It's a form which dominates all the concert-halls in the world; how has it become outdated?

DG Ritual, Paul. Disappearance or transformation of ritual. I think really it's the human adventure which is changing completely. It's not just a question of generation, classical music isn't just for old folk, that's not true. But the fact is, that music doesn't correspond to our world's collective adventure any more. I've seen the change in former Eastern-bloc countries over the last fifteen years. I must have been hardly 25 when I had the good fortune to play in the hall at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest for the first time. I played Bartok's famous sonata for solo violin. The quality of the audience carried me along; thanks to them I played better. It's a strange feeling, one I've rarely had. Ten years later

they didn't even dare put the work on the program. The concert organizer had changed to a private company, they were afraid Bartok would empty the hall. It's almost as if no one dared program Ravel in Paris! For centuries music was the product of religion, then a response to the wishes of kings, and finally the emanation of nations. There's always been an ideological substratum, a wish to adorn power. Nowadays that power is out of date. Today's world is no longer defined in terms of nations, it's being transformed into new spaces. The new powers prefer new, more federating values, on a planetary basis, with world-cities at their heart. Power doesn't need thought or art any more to be legitimized in relation to history. Opinion polls, viewing figures, financial indexes and current affairs are enough for it to endure. Music has never developed in a non-embodied way like a pure language, separate from institutions or the place society has been willing to give it. So the question is the need for a poetic language to make itself adequate to a political system, or society in general...

Of course you could put forward the opposite example; the accursed artist who resists all the different powers – the tragedy of misunderstood geniuses who've been cannibalized by following generations, such as Van Gogh or Mozart – turned into industries after their deaths, when in their lifetimes they could hardly survive.

PA Isn't it rather that the ritual has changed with the form? I mean, thinking of great collective enthusiasms, we've shifted from classical to rock music – we see a new community communing around a different musical genre. So the issue is not so much the ritual as you call it, but a certain form of music...



DG The form that's ceased to interest us, collectively speaking, is that which concerns learned music. I think it's a pity that people associate it with the well-behaved, boring image of classicism, when really learned music is more "rock n' roll" than rock itself! In fact rock is much more classical. And if we oppose baroque and classical, for example saying that the baroque is "crazy" unlike the classical which is "reasonable", then learned music will turn out to be much more baroque than rock, or any other music which uses extremely simple compositional forms. Schematically, we could categorize learned music into repertory-music, heritage-music and contemporary music. Unfortunately nowadays contemporary learned music isn't a vector which brings people together. I was going to say it's an empty church, but it's not even a church. It's only possible thanks to subsidies. And those subsidies are only made acceptable because of a belief in progress. In France the support comes from the state, from public powers. In the USA it's mainly private money. It makes no difference: the music doesn't reach its audience. Very often it doesn't even reach musicians! But does that mean we should decree it to be null and void? I wouldn't say so; if you start to judge a thought or a creation by its immediate audience you end up with a collective suicide. I mean there is no possible Noah's ark any more. I'm sure it's this paradox of contemporary creation which drives music-lovers away, this paradox which is at the root of the profound malaise in our musical microcosm. To think that the hottest news in the musical world, what mobilizes the largest funds and the pens of all our critics, is nothing more than the latest staging of operas from the repertoire, or what golden sneakers the latest prodigy is wearing...

PA You've always made sure you include works by contemporary creators in "Dissonances" programs, though.

DG That was the idea at the start. Unfortunately it's one of those ideas which comes up against harsh realities. Talking about it with you, I want to spell out the theme of our interview at the start: the ideal and struggle. I say struggle, because it really means asking ourselves how we can make things exist without giving up on our ideal. The first problem is that to bring creations into existence you have to commission composers. To commission composers, first of all you have to have money available. If you have no money you can't get anything created. The second problem, which I just mentioned, is that contemporary creation has the reputation of emptying concert-halls. So apart from a few courageous institutions and a few specialized festivals, as an independent ensemble which doesn't specialize in contemporary music, it's been hard for us to keep our initial promise. But the struggle isn't always lost in advance.

PA You've traced two lines there: the struggle you're engaged in, and the ideal you pursue. It means your project, fueled by a certain ideal, is forever encountering obstacles, starting with that of existing structures which are supposed to enable the project to exist, but which nonetheless are always contradicting the creative aspirations of the project's players.

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PA If only to get our discussion off to a good start, I'd like to go back for a moment over your experience of the contemporary music played by "Dissonances". I'm not talking about your solo career, but the career you've had – and continue to have – under the banner of "Dissonances". In that context, have you seen the halls fill up?

DG The new works we've performed in "Dissonances" haven't had the slightest negative impact on the audience, in that I've always been careful to mix contemporary creation with great works from the repertoire so as not to scare the audience away. On the other hand, I've noticed that more daring programs of 20th-century music without any new works have tended to empty the halls. As a rule, in the way I tackle things, I always have to take account of the very strong dialectic which exists between the desire to create, artistic requirements – energy, in the end, the intensity of the energy a performer or creator can bring to their field – and the reality of the way organizations function.

Now, in a world where states are going broke, where public money has become a virtual quantity because we know it's soon going to stop being distributed, in a world which can't make its structures function properly any more, the yardstick of their validity is only defined by attendance figures. What I mean is that a structure which doesn't get full houses is regrettably condemned to die, to the precise extent that it lacks impact on the collective level. Politicians can no longer justify financing it. We're subjected to the same logic as the city of Detroit in the United States, the city that was left to die, right up to the moment when it really was worth nothing... The only exceptions are in the rare geographical zones where there is a surplus of public money, generally in oil-exporting countries: Norway, Qatar, Kazakhstan, and Venezuela. Apart from Norway and Scandinavia in general, where music is a deep-rooted cultural phenomenon, for the other countries it means neither more nor less than buying western culture with bundles of petrodollars. In Venezuela, on

the other hand, *El sistema* – inspired by the former USSR – seems to be asking interesting questions about the power of music to make the world a better place.

PA But there's a paradox here: at the start, the subsidies which were given – the very idea of subsidy, even – came to help that sort of problem; their mission was to support a work which didn't necessarily reach an audience, and which for that very reason had to be financed. So now we're seeing a reversal...

DG And the worst thing is that this reversal, which is caused by the economic climate, leads to a structural modification in the ways people think. When a ruined state can no longer meet the needs of creation, the question has to be asked whether the plane still needs a pilot or if it isn't better without a pilot. We can see quite quickly that if the plane can fly alone, it must contain a sort of kinetic energy – which means the passengers are obliged to behave in such a way that the plane keeps flying. All those who don't behave in such a way have to be thrown overboard. And so we arrive at a situation where it's up to the forces of nature to decide what survives and what doesn't.

PA Given this situation, has it led you to change the way you “direct” “Dissonances”, or have you carried on in the same way as before?

DG Right from the start of the “Dissonances” adventure, the situation has been clear to me. Since the first time I went to the Ministry of Culture to get a subsidy – as you can't build an orchestra without subsidies. The performing arts dig holes, they can't do anything else. Financially, I mean. Performing arts, at least those practiced in the theater or music, can never break even financially. Which means nothing is possible without patronage or subsidy. So a few years ago we

went to see the people in charge of the music department at the Ministry of Culture; we'd just recorded a disc where of course the musicians hadn't been paid, etc. It was the first time that repertoire had been recorded without a conductor. A very well-known repertoire work, Richard Strauss's *Metamorphosen*, which has been recorded by the greatest orchestras under the greatest conductors. And – outside France of course, apart from Télérama – we'd had rave reviews. They said it was better than the greatest versions by Karajan and co. So I arrived with those articles and said to them: "there you are, we've shown what sort of domain we're inventing. A new way of doing things, a new way of making music. Making music together, in fact. Incidentally it's also a way of questioning the society we live in, and that reflects our ideal, etc." This is what they said to me: "You really do that very well. So you don't need any aid. We have to help those who can't make it by themselves." That was the ideology of the period: "You all have careers already, so you can do this on Sundays to amuse yourselves." And when I replied "But we're the first French orchestra to record this repertoire, and what's more this French – well, European – orchestra, but in France, is getting international recognition! Don't you realize, for musical life – and musical life is the life of musicians, not the life of the audience – it's something necessary?" they replied "not interested." We were asking for €10,000!

The difficulties are the same today. When we ask a local authority for €50,000 (local authorities are all ruined) to make the project work, in exchange for social and educational services, they tell us the coffers are empty. Those authorities would do well to compare that sum with the millions that regional orchestras cost – or the tens of millions football

clubs cost. I can only conclude that society absolutely doesn't want to budge. Now a society which doesn't want to budge is, to say the least, a moribund society. Likewise a state in ruins is a phantom state, a puppet state, which takes no political decisions. Because taking from Peter to give to Paul is always a political decision... When we ask the highest decision-makers in French cultural policy to "make a choice", they invariably reply, "we can't take from Peter to give to Paul." Which we have to translate like this: "we aren't doing politics, we're just trying to limit the damage." You get the feeling they are dominated by fear of an uprising. So they throw out a few bones for people to chew on, hoping everyone will keep quiet...

PA But when will they be able to do something? What's the point at which public powers will feel authorized to act? Because they do act elsewhere, don't they?

DG They won't be able to. I mentioned Budapest at the beginning of this conversation. Last year I went back for a chamber-music festival organized by my friend the pianist Denes Varjon. All the performers played without taking a fee because there was no budget, despite the presence of internationally-recognized artists such as the cellist Steven Isserlis in particular. After the concerts we went to dinner, and a Hungarian musician talked about the difficulty he has surviving as a professional musician in Budapest. He said one sentence which particularly struck me: "Since they built the big new hall [about ten years before], there is no musical life any more; we musicians have no home; all the money is used to pay the big foreign orchestras and soloists who come to perform there. Before, we had the Franz Liszt Academy; after our instrumental classes we'd slip into the hall in the evening and listen to concerts, and the

best of us also gave concerts there.” Budapest’s famous music academy and the concert-hall were one and the same; the market had no place in either the one or the other. That’s what’s happening in the famous land of music central Europe has always been. Is that the way we’re headed too?

PA But they do subsidize plenty of other groups...

DG Real *power* consists in making a completely *disinterested* gesture. Not a gesture for oneself, or for one’s friends, or just in order to hold on to power. In other words, power means putting the Republic back on its feet. I’m talking about a Republic in the strict sense: one which would only function in terms of merit. Will the Republic be put back on its feet? For that to happen we’d need to reconsider our values. Putting the Republic back on its feet implies saying “That, yes; that, no.” Telling people, even if they are the majority and influential, that “no means no.” Power means having the knowledge which makes it possible to make the right choices – and then of course having the courage to carry them out. It can’t be said that our country is guided by that sort of energy...

PA So here the criteria for evaluating who-deserves-what come into play?

DG It’s pretty simple in reality. It’s simple to the extent that the same problems arise in every profession. What I think has to be underlined first is the existence of networks. We function by networks. Whether it’s in the medical domain, the university domain or the musical domain – indeed in all domains, which require a sort of career. *And you enter into your career once the elders are no longer there.* There’s always a certain

form of establishment set up, installed there, and you're not allowed to disturb the established order. Now in a world, which is changing as much as ours is, not upsetting established values means committing collective suicide. It's obvious. So now we have a paradox: we respect the established order, but on the other hand we don't respect our elders. We talk about "elders" when old people age well. And we talk about the "old" when our elders age badly. Nowadays we talk about the old, not about elders; and in fact we're in a society, which doesn't respect its elders – whereas its very strength ought to come from them – and which at the same time is wary of its youth. Old people on the rubbish heap, young people waiting in line like everyone else – except the ones who play the game perfectly...

PA But maybe it's also because the elders themselves no longer reach out to the young, to new talent. Perhaps that's a failing we should criticize, too.

DG At every level, society produces bad cholesterol. It's a state of mind, first of all. Upsetting that state of mind, considering that difference isn't necessarily subversion or danger, that would be a good start. But instead we are constantly making new stuff, which doesn't invent anything and only reproduces what we've seen before. In what "Dissonances" does there isn't any invention, strictly speaking, just starting afresh with a certain number of things that weren't working, and trying to make them work again. Offering something different, in other words. I see it every day: the inability to welcome a grain of sand – sadly, it's considered a grain of sand when in fact it's nothing less than the *liberation* and expression of a positive energy – this inability comes from fear. The public powers in France have no answer any more; they are impotent,



corrupt even, and in a way they prevent private power from playing its part because they still want to control everything. So the country is stuck and can't see how to reinvent itself. All the more so because we're sunk in market-logic as the only possible evaluation of a project's validity; always the same logic, the logic of ratings agencies incidentally, the implacable logic of figures which abolish frontiers, those famous figures which you can make say whatever you want.

I'll give you an example. We met a German concert-manager who told us, "I'm looking for a 'vibrating body'... I'm going to sell you on the European luxury market" - isn't that already a strange phrase? - "but you'll have to agree to be directed by conductors and accompany soloists." In other words it meant nothing less than undermining the totality of our project as a condition of any collaboration. When I refused, the interview came to a pretty swift conclusion: "You'll never do it, no one cares about orchestras, what people are interested in is who's out front..." Concert-halls are managed like planes. At one time it was the first-class seats which gave the so-called regular companies their turnover; then those same companies were destroyed by low-cost carriers, turned again to the now-downgraded population and became low-cost themselves... Nowadays the great symphony orchestras, which used to be at the service of the rich, are turning toward the small folk to justify their existence. Art has to be educational and social to get subsidies, but don't worry, there are always a few star artists ready to empty the coffers and fill the halls...

PA There's been a similar mutation in the plastic arts. Projects are all "sold" to luxury labels. Nowadays everything called "contemporary art" mainly works for brand-names.

DG Yes.

PA So the attitude you're describing is much more general. Most of the arts now find themselves having to face a sort of collusion with the instances of fashion. Instances of fashion which themselves can only function on condition that they can stake everything on individuals turned into stars, on the enthronement of certain personalities who embody a certain glamor, etc. No place there any more for an "equitable" collective model, as you would say. Everything goes on between the masses on one side and the star on the other.

DG But it's been like that for some time.

PA Yes. I think we could say it's been like that for a good twenty years.

DG I tend to think the dogs were let loose after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. That was a real change in the world, a change that's the equivalent of closing a parenthesis, which was opened three centuries earlier, in the Enlightenment. The only merit I can recognize in communism is that the danger it represented for capitalism forced the establishment of a form of social democracy, at least in Europe. It's that model which is slowly being killed, gnawed away by the permanent state of crisis which is organized by the poetic logic of figures and statistics. And so even individual emancipation has become an obsolete idea.

PA Totally agree.

DG Nowadays we're made to believe we're free, autonomous, etc., but in fact we're totally enslaved. But we don't realize. It's wonderful! What enslaves us is mass consumption ...

PA ... and its corollary, mass communication.

DG "Fordism" has reached its apogee. But the planet won't hold out. At any rate, the last collective issue remaining to us is just that: the planet; the ecosystem, which could be the basis, if we really wanted it, for us to re-weave the idea of community and a common destiny. Otherwise everything will be abolished.

PA Which for you means that artists no longer have the capacity – as they nonetheless did, for a long time – to re-weave social connections, to re-create *communities* around their expression and the emotion it generates.

DG Isn't the "artist" a western 19th-century invention? Like the word "art", the word "artist" makes me particularly uneasy. The artist-superman, the creator, etc. - these are notions I'm wary of. Because I believe that first of all there are rituals. We said it earlier: music is a form of communion, a form of silence within human expression, which enables us to commune with more than the self. This "more than the self" could be the Other, it could be the Spirit... When we talk about spirit, or soul, in my opinion we're talking about the most potent forces there are. And here we're no longer at the level of the "individual" at all. Seen from this level, art is defined as listening, much more than performance. It's more of a question than an answer. It's a way of reuniting with oneself. But

reuniting with oneself really means reuniting with everyone else. What I'm pointing to here is a path some would call mystical. But we are far from it today because we're in a pragmatic world where music is used as a means of transcending objects. Yet maybe that's the adventure, the real adventure. It starts with an inner path, renewed, rediscovered, taken with a view to regaining peace...

PA I hear what you say, but it seems to me that this discourse has imposed itself several times, in several periods, and on several people, in the same way as it imposes itself on you today. I remember reading texts by the young Wagner where he rails against a certain drift in music, the fact that music could no longer create this sort of communion, both spiritual and political, which you are now calling for once more, so that his entire project was aimed precisely at achieving the realization of that communion, or at least, first of all, at taking account of its absence. And I have the impression that we hear the same lament from Schönberg... Anyway, since the 19th century (once again) musicians have continually been confronted with the loss of meaning in what they do, convinced, as they are that music is intrinsically capable of producing such a communion by its own powers. But isn't that conviction just a belief? A belief in the virtues, the strength, the potency of their art? Perhaps music isn't capable of that at all! And maybe what makes that communion possible is only ever external conditions, relative to a given social and political situation. For music to attempt to ally itself to the social and political context (ally itself, not sign up to) – no doubt that's a good thing, but it doesn't always succeed. It's always exceptional when it succeeds. And then it's miraculous.

DG I don't think we can say it like that. It's an interesting suggestion admittedly, but I don't think we should turn things upside down as you're doing. Communion is not extrinsic to music. But we need to be able to get rid of all the accumulated polluting elements in the ritual itself, to see how far the ritual is one with the music. True, nowadays the system is a kind of machine, and this enormous machine called *entertainment* sends...

PA But that's what works!

DG No! That's just what doesn't work. The problem goes back to the very education of musicians. It's made to create "individualities". But music isn't "individualist". Music is *together*. It's made, just as it's lived, *together*. Music has meaning only in and for sharing. Yet no one cares. First of all the system of instrumental tuition supposes that musical writing is relegated to second or third place. We try to train virtuosos, virtuoso instrumentalists, for virtuoso instruments, I imagine... For even orchestral instruments – at least, those that aren't solo instruments – we teach them in such an obsessional way, with such a sense of detail, that it becomes completely senseless. There's this teaching of athletes or experts, who are trained that way by people who have already been trained in the same way, who have diplomas in teaching that way (absurd teaching diplomas, validated by people who are already failures of the first system themselves). So much so that we're blindly reproducing mediocrity and stupidity, promoted so that all companies of musicians will no longer be a problem for society – on the contrary, they'll be capable of playing in minimum time a maximum of things, whether they

are trained – as in Chaplin’s *Modern Times* – to tighten their screws or turn their nuts in the right place in record time. It truly is a 19th-century model. The specialized worker. It’s also the model of the top-level athlete who ends up in front of a group of helpless musicians – the least we can say of them is that they are no longer aware of the condition they’ve been put in – who ends up, then, in front of them to achieve the truly great performance which everyone accompanying him would have dreamed of doing if they weren’t kept in this state of frustration and submission, increased by the fact that they have to do with this athlete who has succeeded in standing apart from the herd. But why has that one succeeded in standing apart? Not necessarily because he is better, not necessarily because his is the most sensitive, but above all because he has the personality which has enabled him to extract himself from the group. It’s a system the former USSR praised to the skies and which today suits China very well, after a few dozen glory-years in Japan and Korea. A system built on formatting, which is supposed to produce good little soldiers. We’re in a particularly poetic semantic here...

PA And it’s precisely that position of dominance by one person over all the others that “Dissonances” have decided not to reproduce. If “Dissonances” are so unusual it’s in order to affirm, claim, promote – but above all establish – such a counter-model.

DG Community is an extraordinary factor for personal fulfillment. Other people are not a danger. The individual is absolutely transcended, enlarged by community – which is anything but the individual’s obliteration. That’s very important because, you see, I’m not a communist at all. In fact I detest egalitarianism. I

simply don't believe in it. Equality seems to me to be a lie. That's why I place justice on the level of *equity*. Equity is what we have to think about, apply, defend. For in equity there is the sense of measure, and that sense of measure is exactly what's lacking in today's economic society. Measure, for me, is the north pole the compass ought to indicate. The wealth created by liberalism is good, and distributed with measure it serves its function. But that measure has to exist in the facts, and be applied itself with measure. So I don't believe at all that you ought to be at the service of an apparatus which always ends up by crushing you. Yet things have been constructed on concepts which were completely perverted, or misunderstood, or perhaps badly put – maybe they weren't even the right concepts. Like opposing collective and individual, for example. That doesn't seem to me a good thing. The time has come to understand that personal fulfillment is not a problem for collective fulfillment, and collective fulfillment is not a brake on personal fulfillment. It's indispensable to reconnect these two dimensions once more.

PA As for music, doesn't it in a way come to remove that false relation of opposition between individual and collective?

DG It should! But in the way it works, it's even worse; it's sworn allegiance to this ultra-liberalism with neither faith nor law, which tames everyone from the earliest age into sterile individualism.

PA When you say it should, you indicate the whole aspiration you've committed to, the ideal you pursue; but when you continue but it's really not the case you indicate the obstacle...

DG Reality, rather. Harsh reality... For it seems to me we have to ask ourselves this question: when we raise a child, is coercion the only way to teach her to become herself? Doesn't that coercion reflect the parents' fear? Fear that later on she won't be able to find a place in the human world? From our earliest youth, is there any limit to the way we are trained to get to the finishing line first? From this point of view there's nothing which seems as agonizing as our societies full of a fear which never prevents people falling once they start to fall. They are allowed to fall all the way to the street; when we look at the pavement it's the Middle Ages looking back at us. That fear allows the latest generation of iPhones to cohabit with people living in the same place, in the same space-time, but with a life expectancy of forty years at most. This pitiless reality also concerns one of "Dissonances" activities: "L'Autre saison."

PA Can you be more precise?

DG We created a musical "season" for the homeless in the church of Saint-Leu-Saint-Gilles in the rue Saint Denis in the very heart of Paris, so as to throw the spotlight on this situation of absolute barbarity, a crime against humanity. What guides us is the idea of individual responsibility, in that we've created a fund to help the people who decide to get off the streets; consequently we don't help people who don't want to get off the streets as we don't want to help them stay where they are; in short we try to re-create a virtuous circle to their advantage. We already have one person who's repaid the help they received, when we don't even ask them to pay it back... To my eyes, that's true "success": dignity recovered and affirmed by the individual who finds a place in society once more. It's exactly the same thing as the dignity of a musician who becomes a musician again. They understand what they are by listening to the others; and thanks



to the others and also thanks to the strength they receive from the others, they become themselves, finally themselves. So the important thing is to stop breaking personalities, to try as much as possible to put an end to the indefatigable get out of my way symbolized by a society which identifies with the values of sport. Attention: the values of sport are very good when it means being well in one's body; they aim at a point of equilibrium. But they become evil when they are aimed at performance, performance for performance's sake, and expose sport to cheating. Then it becomes a spectacle in the same way as music today; at least, it contributes to an instrumentalization of activities to the advantage of individuals who will never practice them, but who nonetheless get fat on the denaturation – I don't really know how to put it – of what they put in place. Yes, these issues are important. The situation of the homeless bears witness. Besides, it's complex and multiple. In France, apart from people on the margins and populations living in deep vulnerability – and there are more and more of them in these times of social crisis – many of the homeless are foreigners, not just the gypsies who are stigmatized today; foreigners who come here because in France we don't let people die in the street. We let them live in the street; I'd say that in a certain way they are welcomed in the street. Which is as much as to say that we also let them fall into the street.

Now of course, behind all that there is the question of immigration, the question of what to do to organize collaboration with the countries of origin so that those countries too can manage their population. But when you scratch a little at the surface – and you only have to scratch a very little – you realize that the governments who ask the question have no way of answering it. If the powers that be are already powerless to say: “From a cultural point of view we're going to encourage this model rather

than another,” how can they ever have the power to say to an industry “Stop behaving as you are”? Or to tell shareholders who aren’t even in this country “Stop putting pressure on industries”? It’s always this same infernal dance of money, with no frontiers, no limits, no ethics; this fetishized dance which denatures everything including music! All this is found, and illuminated, in the terrible, sordid problem of the homeless, which politics doesn’t resolve and economics allows to endure, so as to set up a scarecrow to put a bit more pressure on the middle class – which will surely end up, one day, by disintegrating. Consequently, faced with this situation – which is tragic, after all – we shouldn’t give up asking the question: music, in the end, what is it? Well, it’s everything which can find its place in the gaps, it’s everything which is non-functional, it’s everything which is both essential and useless. Yes, it’s everything which doesn’t fit into the frame of the useful, and it will stitch together the flesh which has been bruised and torn apart by this peculiar law of the strongest.

PA Georges Bataille calls whatever doesn’t fit into the field of usefulness, everything which isn’t useful, sovereignty. And that’s because what’s useful – what’s at the service of... - is first of all servile. In that sense music is essentially sovereign. Let’s say there’s a centuries-old pact between the sovereignty of music and human liberty!

DG But according to you, how can we manage to find that sovereignty – with ourselves, first of all – that authorization to become essential? How?

PA First, by being aware that a certain form of liberty only exists by taking one’s distance from the useful, utilitarianism, profitability, productivity – in short, everything which generates quantitative excess, not qualitative surplus at all.

But I'm under no illusion either: that distance has become invisible and a fortiori impossible to measure, we're so stuck in functional schemas where time itself has to be earned like a simple foodstuff which makes surviving possible. So the great paradox is that developed – economically developed – societies are in fact survival societies which dare not speak their name.

DG More and more. Much more, at least, than thirty years ago.

PA And survival goes hand in hand with the fear you were talking about. As a result, apart from precariousness, we have the reign of a permanent threat which weighs on the maintenance of a certain social balance; a balance which can really only be achieved by allying several parameters: professional, family, spiritual, cultural. Yes, all that is fundamentally threatened. And this survival economy which dare not speak its name truly is characterized by this threat weighing on our awareness; a society which is nothing less than paradoxical, since meanwhile the standard of living has risen. To repeat: this is the immense paradox of our so-called developed societies: we live better in them than in developing societies, but at the same time we are exposed to a greater threat. And we have terrible difficulty adjusting those two poles which appear antinomial or contradictory but which in reality cannot do otherwise than coexist. From now on, in our part of the world, we are the subjects of this tension between living better and surviving.

DG I feel the great sadness of that tension in relation to music, the expression of the soul, and I tell myself it's not possible under these conditions.

PA It's not possible?

DG No, because music is life, not survival.

PA Thinking is also life, not survival.

DG Whatever is strong, beautiful, complex, powerful, that's what life is. Life is at a great distance from survival – this survival we see in the barroom philosophizing on prime time TV, in empty music, I mean music which has been emptied of meaning and content, and is poured out like syrup in elevator cabins.

PA What's even more serious is music which prides itself on not being elevator-music but behaves, outside the elevator, if I can put it that way, like elevator-music. I mean exactly what you have often pointed out yourself: this arrogant, pretentious musical world which delivers so-called learned music, but which at the same time keeps transforming it into elevator-music so that it conforms to the "apparatus", if not to the institutions these groups are subject to by nature.

DG Institutions where what has disappeared is music's *raison d'être*.

PA Maybe that is what's most serious of all.

DG Survival reflects a general giving-up, it's the reign of the destroyers. Nowadays leaders in charge of culture act as destroyers. Mainly because they only think about their careers, as that's what a career depends on... The destroyer is the one who only accords value to the logic of functioning. And I recognize that it's very difficult to escape, as there's always a moment when you have to move your boat ahead with whatever means you have on board.

*A boat less and less drunken...*

PA Your answer shows that you don't discredit the form of institution, but only the use that can be made of it. So you believe in the virtues of the institution. In this interview you've revealed how much your project – and this is your mark, your profound identity – is not strictly musical. The project overflows the duly limited field of music to reach something which is of the order of living-together, and thus of the political, which encounters the way a human person has of behaving in the world, I mean: of redrawing the world by their behavior. You always have this yearning to go beyond. That going-beyond is what tests your fantastic vitality every time. And it's through it that life – or, better, what gives life – penetrates things and perseveres in its own being.

DG The ivory tower has no meaning. Not for me, in any case. If I were a great thinker, convinced I'd be understood centuries from now, maybe I'd believe in it. But that's not the case.

PA Even a great thinker who was sure of being understood centuries from now ought not to believe in it.

DG Anyway everything which is not operative, everything which is not effective, means nothing to me. The world is dying from overspecialization, the fencing-off of genres, and above all the lack of attention to others. So what does it mean to put music back into a political or social process, if not giving the world its acoustic back? Music has no meaning if it speaks only to itself.

PA That reminds me of a lovely phrase by Lévinas, which sums up his whole philosophy. Lévinas says meaning is the other man.

DG Exactly.

PA Meaning always overflows the field of definition, as long as it's defined by the idea of comprehension. But meaning cannot and must not be reduced to the sphere of significations, to the level of comprehension. Meaning is the Other.

DG For my part I'd say meaning without sensitivity has no meaning.

PA But sensitivity is precisely the intervention of the Other, seen from the point of view of how the Other is received. Receptivity, susceptibility, liability towards the other, all that is the basis of sensitivity.

DG Once the Other is excluded it's the end. But we all want to be right. For at any rate we can only be right. But from the moment we're right, in a certain way, it's screwed up.

PA Camus used to say (it's a phrase Romain Gary often claimed for himself) "A priori, I am against everyone who believes themselves to be absolutely right".

DG Yes, from the moment there's no longer a question mark, it's screwed. You'll tell me I've been proceeding by way of definitive affirmations for an hour now, but in fact they're only openings, bridges, bridges, bridges – bridges I'm trying, with your help, to build, to project across to meet the other shore. Questions define the intelligence of the heart, which is more important than the intelligence of the mind by far. It will do humanity much more good than that of the mind. So that's the intelligence we have to rediscover. It sounds completely demagogic to say it like that, but I can't see any other way of bearing witness that that intelligence should be guiding the way of the world. Unfortunately intellectual fetishism, this permanent tropism of reasoning, this obsession

with classifying things, all that is appalling. And unbearable.

PA That's another subject.

DG But it's the real subject. The heart's insouciance, indifference is the subject. Could we say, in all innocence, "True, there's suffering in the world, but art is something more important because in the end it's going to save humanity"?

PA But people say nothing else!

DG Well, I don't believe it. Art doesn't save humanity. The music of Bach didn't prevent human beings turning into Nazis. Maybe even some of them felt carried along, justified by that music...

PA Your romanticism has its limits, then?

DG I'll never place art above human beings. True, art is the luminous part of humanity, it's humanity head-on, as it were. And yet I don't put the work of art above the human being. Just as I don't put money above people. It's very clear for me; I have no problem with it. And from that point of view the market in contemporary plastic art is nothing less than an oxymoron. Art as an object of consumption has become a tax haven...

PA I'm pleased that we've come back to contemporary art, from the angle of the plastic arts this time – good-for-nothing art, as they say... What do you think it's all about?

DG The great washing-machine of our time, which aims to wash consciousness, launder bank-accounts and whiten all vices. On the pretext, once more, that there is purity in art. That doesn't mean I'm not sensitive to creation, when it exists. But that's another subject again.

PA I don't think it's another subject.

DG Edgar Morin was right when he said "when it comes to living together we are in the stone age". But that Stone Age is going to lead to the Apocalypse if we're not capable of making mentalities evolve! What I like in Morin is his capacity not to theorize too much, to look at the dysfunctions and tell us: But look, look. What does all that mean? Look how values are being perverted. And just what is happening with the emblematic thing, which is contemporary art, is happening in exactly the same way with classical music, with learned music: the most absolute cynicism, and the instrumentalization of fetishized works which have absolutely no meaning any more. It's even becoming obscene.

Is it normal for a conductor to arrive in a private jet to do a concert, empty the coffers of a provincial town, leave in the private jet and then perform in one of the world's great countries which is also a great dictatorship, and say "This president is wonderful," help him get re-elected for the fourth time - all that in exchange for 500 million to rebuild his opera house? Is it right? I hear people say "but it's so beautiful when he conducts!" In fact, no; it's not beautiful. It's not beautiful, it's serious. It's wrong. Is it normal for animal entrails exhibited in formaldehyde to be sold for millions? If art really is the mirror of society, in that case the whole violence of the cult of money regardless of human life is well exposed...



PA Indeed it is wrong. It's something, which poses a serious problem for all human beings, whether they realize it, or not.

DG It's true that these things exist, that they've always existed and always will. What I find revolting is the way art is put on stage. There is something indecent which reminds me of Vatel's feasts with Fouquet when the people were starving. But... the show must go on!

PA And for you that's not what music is.

DG It's more of an alibi. And I'm not being otherworldly when I say that. I don't think I'm otherworldly. I have my share of shadow like everyone.

PA You're being hard on yourself.

DG Yet it's the minimum we can demand, if there's going to be any living matter.

PA What's becoming apparent, though, is that this minimum has become a maximum. It's even become too much.

DG Nowadays people talk a lot about food allergies. Well, the system as it's built in our day has a food allergy, probably, to this sort of demand. The ravages of egalitarianism are hardly suspected any more. Nor does anyone suspect that elitism is something indispensable, which has to be protected. The elitism of knowledge, the demand for sharing, rather than just parading a void.

PA What do you mean by elitism?

DG Going as far as possible. Going further, always further. But being clearer and clearer about the goal pursued.

PA But further in what? In perfection, or improvement?

DG In reflection, in comprehension, in sensitization. In everything where the power of the spirit is fully expressed, remaining attentive to society. Attentive to the world. Without restraint, but with ethics. Survival – that is, life for oneself – is without ethics but with restraints. Don't you think so?

PA Yes.

DG As a general rule difference, divergence even, is a treasure. In the name of that treasure I don't consider that a group will function just because it's homogeneous. What makes a group function, what leads it to become stronger even, is that it puts itself at the service of something which is bigger than itself, yet without erasing the differences. So everyone agrees to modify their language with this in view. But this is so as to be more themselves! The main thing is that there are rules, rules of play. But those rules aren't applied to the detriment of individuals. On the other hand it is people's egos which have to learn to give way to them. As for "Dissonances", I'd say that we started with the observation that the world is in the state we mentioned; the world does not make music, in the sense that it does not put *individuals together*. And you've understood that these two words hardly contradict each other; indeed they are reinforced by their contact. But today it's as if everyone had closed the doors of their "self". So much so that when I say the world doesn't make music, I think that the way people act towards one another, and the possibility of

friendliness between people, seem dangerous to everyone. Everybody has the impression that they'll put themselves in a state of fragility if they start to open up to others. They have the impression they'll be trampled on, they are afraid of being used or instrumentalized, they suspect in advance that they'll be manipulated or lost. Whereas in reality the Other is neither an enemy nor a danger, but much more of a joyful traveling companion. Besides, music – the symphony in particular – is the very symbol of that companionship! It's the symbol of the miraculous simultaneity of things. Which means that all at once you're no longer following the vision (or lack of it) of a conductor who is a conductor because he's standing up when everyone else is sitting down, or because he's the only one not playing an instrument, and with his arm or just his presence he tries to drag the herd along behind him. The symphony, at least as it's been conceived since Beethoven, is quite the opposite, I think: it's the emancipation of the individual.

PA But not in aid of individualism.

DG Precisely. Everyone is indispensable to how things happen – whether they happen well or not – so that although all the roles are in a hierarchy they are interdependent. You can't do one without the other. And I find the symphonic group, as an allegory of a properly collective or “participative” world, where everyone has the feeling that they contribute to the whole thing going well, is something admirable, something it's imperative that we defend and preserve. In this world, even if you're not the greatest thinker, the greatest doctor or the greatest artist, if you're just a little baker for instance, you still have to be able to tell yourself that the greatest thinker, the greatest doctor and the greatest artist all need a

decent baguette. I notice my unconscious has led me to mention the baker's baguette rather than the conductor's baton... And if he makes his baguette well, everyone will think, act and create better. And so in that respect he too has the same value as the others in the smooth functioning of the system. Here's something which starts from the moment the Republic really gets into action. The Republic is a music between individuals. It's primordial. Primordial in a globalized world. Primordial if we are to get out of, or recover from the financial imperialism which continues to govern humanity... An imperialism developed by a western civilization which is soon going to find itself buried by its own blindness... and by Asia, soon enough.

PA What do you mean by that? What has Asia got to do with it?

DG Think of the relation with medicine. Chinese medicine, which considers illness as a dysfunction, so that you have to try to avoid the dysfunction. It's much more intelligent than creating dysfunctions so that pharmaceutical industries can prosper on the back of them...

PA Is that the impression you have when you go to China? Do you see that wisdom at work there?

DG It's mainly the impression I have in France when I'm ill: calling it a remedy, they give me a poison to kill something that's not right. I well remember the first time I went to Hong Kong (Hong Kong is interesting precisely because it's a nerve center): at 5am (I was up because of jet-lag), walking in Victoria Park, I saw people doing Tai-chi. I saw a world which awakes on a human scale, an

ancestral world, but at the same time a world which is vertical, the fruit of the west; I saw a world which has the capacity to make the two coincide. It's extremely interesting. No doubt in the future there will be heavy problems, convulsions and conflicts. But in the long term, Asian living-together, living-together with the earth and with time, according to an immemorial wisdom based on a non-desire to invade, a non-desire to dominate, in the end that will prevail. I don't say the model is ideal. But I think the setting to music of western imperialism is well and truly finished. I believe it doesn't make music any more, quite simply. There are too many wrong notes. What is opening up before us is a vision in island groups, a vision with different speeds, with paradoxes. According to the criteria of western thought they are paradoxes, but in reality they are parallel entities, with different speeds as I said. There is no black or white any more. Differences are not lived in the same way, as irreducible oppositions. And of course that changes everything: the relation with the self, the relation with time, the relation with the ensemble. Let me make it clear that I don't idealize the way China functions politically, far from it, nor of course the environmental destruction going on in that country. The relation with the world which seems interesting to me is situated at the individual level. At least, I hope so...

PA In what way do "Dissonances" share in this scheme of recognizing parallel models?

DG If one thing is essential, it's the lack of any will to dominate in relation to the musical mechanism. That means, when we play a symphony we truly attempt with all our strength to play that music, all together. The idea is to understand the mechanism to as to allow it to happen.

PA But playing it implies an interpretation.

DG No. Well, yes and no...

PA Why 'no'?

DG By force of circumstance, the symphony will never be played the same way twice. But that's not because of an individual interpretation, nor the result of a collective interpretation. It's impossible for 65 musicians to think consciously and decide at the same moment to interpret it in a certain way...

PA But in that case what do we call interpretation in music?

DG Believe me, a large part of it is fetishism. Music is a mechanism, a celestial mechanism, but a mechanism all the same. Just as anything else is. That's why I always prefer to speak of craft, I don't like the word "art". In art there's always an ego which rears its ugly head, a sort of magic remedy which seeks to produce effects. Whereas when you get rid of those effects you stop seeing the tree that was hiding the forest and you start to enter into things, the spirit of things. The *noumenon*, as Kant would say. You leave the field of phenomena and enter into the essence of things, we could even say into life itself. And when 60 or 65 of you suddenly feel the essence of things, enter into life itself, then the only thing you can say is that you are carried by the music – and so it's not being carried by us. You stop "dissonating" and start resonating (reasoning) with something which is pre-existent, in fact. That's all. It's like in philosophy: you read a text, a very great text where there is not one superfluous word, you couldn't take away a single term; well, that text, you'll read it all your life, for yourself, and maybe in the end you'll have risen to the level of the text; that's when you really go towards it; but to start with you had to imbibe it for years before the text

resonated in you fully. And it won't be the intonation of your voice which will make it take on meaning; it will have taken on meaning within you by itself. No?

PA It's debatable. I don't know how far it's true, this story of pure passivity in relation to the impact of the object... Something happens anyway which comes from oneself, which adds or is added to the thing.

DG But it's not passivity at all. It's the opposite of passivity. It's a concentration which is a thousand times stronger. In fact it means being ready to receive. And this readiness, despite appearances, is extremely important. It's even what's most important.

It's like martial arts: if you want to be stronger than the wall, the wall will break your hand; so you have to pass through – and for that you need the wall to no longer exist. Everything then is a question of energy. The powers of mind and body we have are much greater than the ones reason would wish to let us see. At the same time, this power which can be revealed is established on the path of objective knowledge, collected both in the body and the mind, as musicians live music in all these dimensions.

PA Does the thing exist independently of the way it is received? This is a huge question, a very complicated one, the question of the subject-object relation. The question is all the more complicated because the manner in which the thing is received never forms a disposition which is transparent to itself. This manner has itself already received a great deal, and no doubt it's the secret history of the disposition known as

subjective, the components of its *genesis*, which explain why one musician will never play the same work in the same way as another, and the work will be played differently by several musicians, and that from one evening to another there will be a radical change in the way it's played, as you said.

DG But it's because we're never the same! Never the same... self! The universe isn't in the same place, are we tending to forget that?... The universe...

PA I'd tackle it differently. The conception of interpretation which considers it as a sort of corset placed on an already-existing body which is obliged to take the form the corset imposes on it – this conception seems to me a poor interpretation of interpretation itself. Interpretation just isn't that. The interpreter is the one who accepts (it's the a priori of an interpreter) that the music will be able to resonate differently each time. Interpretation means giving perceptible value to that acceptance. So if I read a philosophical text today, no doubt I'm going to understand it in a certain way, but no doubt also if I re-read it in three weeks I'll understand it quite differently. Is it because I myself have changed in the meantime? That's not the question. The only question which arises in this case is whether the understanding I'll have in three weeks' time will be better, more correct, more valid, more adequate or better conformed to the text I had read. The only thing I can say in answer to that question is: the greater my knowledge of the text's *raison d'être*, the more my interpretation of its meaning will be right.

DG Things happen differently in music. I think there are two periods in a musician's life when access to music is simplified: childhood and old age. These



are the times when, respectively, the struggles of existence haven't yet begun and when those same struggles are finally at an end. This is when you can give in to a sort of *laissez-faire* or letting-go, which means that the music literally takes hold of you. Which is as much as to say that the more you're in a moment where you are in control, the more you have to let go. In music that's the way things happen. The right gesture would be a sort of whole, containing the path and the very essence of the path. A sort of reconciliation between the everyday and the eternal.

PA But what if you're neither in childhood, nor old age?

DG I do have to agree with you somewhat there, even if evaluation has no place here, and say that at any rate it is subjective and that takes away all its interest. I'll agree with you in the sense that the only objective evaluation we can have is what we call professionalism – that is, whether you play correctly or not, whether the voice works for a singer, whether people really play together when that's what they are supposed to do. So if there is any objectivity it's at the level, if I can put it this way, of the craft required to do justice to the work and to the audience who have come to listen to it. If there is that, that's already quite a lot, by the way. But all the rest, which is no less essential, is made up of non-measurable dimensions, it's a certain densification of the self which happens, along with a greater transparency, a crystal which is more and more powerful, more and more pure. For the rest isn't connected only to work but also to love, the capacity for opening up and welcoming a being. That's where music stands, right up to its execution. Nothing else has any importance. All the fetishizing that goes on around what I can't even put a name to, it's

so stupid, around the fact of being impressed by a circus act, blown away by the performer's virtuosity, all that only touches the surface of things, it's the glitter that's thought necessary to make the "intermediary bodies" function...

PA Also necessary, I imagine, to chime with the taste for the spectacular which the public cultivates. Or rather, which it is encouraged to cultivate, sometimes flagrantly...

DG Is that even what the public is looking for? I'm not so sure. In any case, the very idea of "public"... It's yet another idea which comes to us from the 19th century. Before that time, music wasn't practiced in the same way. People played at home, they went to church to listen to music, or the king had little symphonies composed for him, that's all. Of course, people sang drinking-songs... Then the operating modes changed... Let's be very clear: I have no nostalgia for times I didn't know, I'm not regretting anything. It's just that if we could only take some distance – and it would be a good thing to do, a good thing if western societies managed to put some distance between themselves and their rituals, and understand that some of the forms of fetishism they nourish have no genuine necessity – then that would enable us perhaps to embrace changes in the world in a way which was more intelligent, or at least more consistent. So, yes, we'd see that there's an accumulation of negative energy which in the end can only trigger a cataclysm. Everyone feels it; we know we're not well, we know that we're in an impasse where entropy has become a threat for the whole planet and disastrous for life.

PA You mention a cataclysm. Of what order?

DG Societal, environmental, social, economic... All the ingredients are there for things to go wrong, don't you think?

PA It would need a war too, no doubt.

DG That could happen, if it's true that war is waged to relaunch the economy by means of a general purge, whilst putting off any questions about society's existing choices and the search for a "new way". Saying that, it appears to me that the only question which has ever governed what I do in "Dissonances" is this: can we get out of the grip of this negative energy which is leading us to the abyss? How are we to find the way to collective fulfillment on a large scale? In fact I think the whole difficulty consists precisely in that change of scale...

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PA Couldn't we say, not only that art is the main victim of the situation you deplore, but also that what has led us to this situation is the way that on the scale of our whole civilization we have misused, abused, made bad use of the concept of "art", whose original truth has been perverted from the start?

DG For me, art – as we can no longer get away from the concept – art would be the descent of God.

PA The descent of God? You mean his deposition? Or his fall?

DG No, I mean descent.

PA Descent in the sense of emanation?

DG Not that, either.

PA So what is it, this descent of God?

DG It's the fact that all at once everyone, as they have part of the work, would possess a little bit of the Holy Shroud. In other words, as the work is first of all and above all a creation, it contains a share of the divine.

PA But the whole effort of the bourgeoisie, the whole effort of liberal political economy if you prefer, has been to absorb that share of the divine, thought to escape from the general economy, to reinsert it into the circle of value. What comes from the cursed part, as Bataille called it – that is, the surplus which cannot enter into a system of exchange without divesting itself of its prerogatives – that's what's been reinserted by force into exchange, in the name of value. So in a certain way there has been a profanation. Profanation of what you call the share of the divine...

DG This summer I went to the Iguazu Falls. I wept, struck by an intense emotional shock...

PA When I went there I experienced a similar shock too.

DG I was shaken, terribly shaken by the feeling of... reconciliation. Yes, the reconciliation I felt.

PA This reconciliation, as you say, no doubt we're no longer capable of finding it in the beautiful but only, from now on, in the sublime...

DG Or in nature.

PA But there you're taking the example of a nature whose manifestation is among the most potent, a nature which surpasses understanding, which defies the imagination itself. Thundering waterfalls are the example Kant uses to say what the sublime is, and how it differs from the beautiful. With the sublime, we find ourselves robbed of any concept adequate to enable us to receive what the senses offer us on the level of understanding. That's what forms the sublime; it's when our intellectual forces turn out to be...

DG Insufficient?

PA No, but: overwhelmed by the size of the phenomenon itself.

DG Well there, by saying that, you've defined what interpretation is perfectly. It's exactly that, interpretation in music. That's what I was trying to outline earlier, without getting there.

PA Interpretation is the experience of the "sublime"?

DG In any case that's what I seek with "Dissonances". That's it. The Iguazu Falls!

PA So what you seek is to be taken over by a phenomenon greater than your "little individual" as Rousseau would say; to be gripped by a phenomenon which exceeds you, and toward which you only have two possibilities: not only recognizing your humanity, and therefore your humility and vulnerability towards what comes to you, what happens or arises – in short, towards the event – but also trying to raise yourself to the level of what's given to you in that way.

DG That's it! And that's what music is. That's "Dissonances". Exactly that. That acceptance of fragility which gives you an absolutely vertiginous strength – instead of being confronted, as we are all the time, with an enslaving system which unlike the Iguazu Falls gives you the impression of turning on a tap and getting hardly a trickle of water... Whereas a Brahms symphony, that's the Iguazu Falls! I understand better now what you meant by an active disposition to receive. You've made it very clear now. I could never have put it that way. But it's exactly that. I mean that we are totally alive, and thus totally ourselves, when we find ourselves – against our will, sometimes – part of a whole which submerges us... Then there is reconciliation. Time is finally in its place.

I saw this in India, when I watched a scene taking place in the countryside. A woman dressed in saris of all colors was washing her linen, crouched at the edge of a lake, surrounded by little monkeys who were surreptitiously watching her. The sun was setting, nature's peace was taking over. I had this feeling of plenitude which I'd already experienced in the Egyptian countryside when I was a child... The feeling of Gaia, of eternity, of being in something, in harmony with that something, in harmony with myself in that something. Music is that. The music of nature is Brahms, Bach, Schubert, Ravel or Debussy – even more Bartok or Mahler. The list is endless. Each one in his way gathers the telluric feeling of things, that belonging as spirit, as body, as animal, to one and the same world.

PA It's interesting, this attention, full of insistence, that you bring to bear on harmony. Particularly as you chose the word "dissonance" as the name of your group.

DG But isn't harmony, searching for harmony in a dysfunctional world, putting oneself in dissonance with that world? We absolutely must be dissonant!

PA So this dissonance is in relation to dissonance. It's not dissonance in relation to harmony.

DG No.

PA I felt it was important to make that clear.

DG The choice of word was deliberately provocative. It's a fact that dissonance, by definition, evokes something disagreeable, like a friction. But at the same time dissonance is the very thing which has made language progress and change. However that may be, at different periods different intervals have been considered harmonious or unharmonious. People were burned in the Middle ... Ages for writing thirds! Nowadays in musical creation it's a perfect chord which would be judged dissonant compared to a general dissonance. So the term dissonance is very relative... It's an absolute which is always relative, since it functions in terms of our perception of things...

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PA As we're on the path of "Dissonances" again with those reflections, I'd like to ask you this: do you sometimes think that a performance, a concert you've given, has been based on a misunderstanding? If I ask that question it's because among the audience who come to listen to "Dissonances" there are few who know the issues raised by this group, few who know the background – artistic, ideological and political – which

structures it. People generally come to your concerts with an idea your concerts with an idea inherited from the common spectacle – of that way of doing things which you and your co-religionists in “Dissonances” want to escape from. True, the audience immediately find themselves confronted with a group which doesn’t resemble the ones they are used to at all. But do you think that audience, ignorant of the reasons which are the foundations of “Dissonances” and the proposition you make, do you think that audience leaves the concert with a different idea, an idea that would make them want to change their apprehension of music, their conception and relation with music or their relation with the musical spectacle? Do you think that “Dissonances” produce that sort of effect on an uninitiated audience?

DG I have absolutely no idea. And I’ve never asked myself the question. Because in reality I’m not in that sort of calculation at all. I’m in a rhythm which isn’t that one. It seems to me, incidentally, that the underlying issues of the experience we’re living through are not always perceptible even to the people playing. Even I only grasp a part of them. But that’s not the subject. It might be the subject of our conversation, but it’s in no way what interests “Dissonances”. When we get together it’s in order to take hold of a work and do our maximum for it. What information the audience has, either before or after the concert, has no importance. Their reaction, yes, but only in that it’s the reaction of musicians or music-lovers.

PA So let’s talk about the way you work.

DG We work with a lot of intensity, which creates very strong positive energy. That means when we finish we are usually galvanized, drained, and full of energy. We each experience this with a force we don’t necessarily encounter elsewhere.



And at root, that is the subject; the subject is there. It is to open up, to do the maximum and to be in craft, pure craftsmanship. You see why we don't need to concern ourselves with consequences. Still, there's an enormous difficulty, a difficulty which becomes a problem for me, because "Dissonances" gets bigger year by year and the weight is heavier and heavier on my shoulders. The problem which is starting to invade my life concerns everything which is not music: it's a problem of structuring. We need to find a way of structuring things quickly, someone else needs to take over, to take on a certain number of extra-artistic responsibilities which I look after at the moment, because otherwise I can feel I'm going to get completely lost in this whole aspect of struggle, of fighting.....

PA But you're the only one who can embody the group.

DG No doubt, but maybe that's where the limit of the model is. In any case that's the paradox of the orchestra with no conductor: it can't do without its leader!

PA On that very subject, the embodiment of a group, there's something I'd like to know: this function of authority which normally resides in the conductor, the leader – is it something you can take on without difficulty? Exactly how do you exercise that authority?

DG If an authority isn't natural it can't be exercised.

PA So in this case it's based on your personal charisma?

DG You mean the charisma people accord me... Quite honestly, I don't think there's any need for authority, in that as I told you we are always in a

horizontal relation. Of course I've often had occasion to set things straight. And in that case I've always assumed the authority imparted to me without havoring. Because what is authority, at root? It only legitimates an action to the extent that the person acting works more than the others, gives (and gives of himself) more than the others. Which I think is my case. As you know, I carry this project entirely. Everyone recognizes that. And respects it. So it's up to me to maintain myself in these conditions at a level which is more or less acceptable, so that this authority isn't contested. It's up to me to do the job, as it's my responsibility to do it. After that, if there are relationship problems here or there, if there's a hard decision to take, well, even if reluctantly, I take it.

PA That leads me to another question. Among the musicians in "Dissonances" have any of them ever told you that in general, or at least in a manner regular enough for them to feel it merits recognition, that when they play with "Dissonances" they play better than in another group they could belong to elsewhere? Does something happen to them in that context which makes them feel that in their own eyes their playing is better, more affirmed, more sensitive, more alive?

DG The answer I'll give you won't quite correspond to your question. I'd formulate things differently, going back to the notions of individual, narcissism, ego and the image of the Iguazu Falls we used earlier. Very often musicians tell me "I've never played this piece like that. It's extraordinary. I've played in the best orchestras, but I've never approached this piece that way, I've never lived it that way." But no one has ever told me: I've never played it that well.

No, no one has ever told me that.

PA So I put it badly ...

DG I rephrased it because this point is very important to me. It's fundamental. It's the very heart of our approach.

PA That connects with what we were trying to clarify about interpretation. By recognizing that never before, or elsewhere, have they played in that way (which doesn't mean well or badly), your comrades in "Dissonances" are recognizing that there's no preconceived idea about the interpretation of the work, there's no preformed idea which has to be applied according to an approved recipe...

DG There you are. There is no preconceived idea of interpretation. But let me make it clear that doesn't mean there are no working techniques in the framework we choose. We don't start from scratch. Every time we tackle a work I study it deeply, maybe more than the others. I have to do this because many of them have played it before me and I haven't. For good reason: I've never really been a member of an orchestra. So I study the work as I would study any book. And I ask myself some questions. Which are nevertheless fundamental questions. That's what will give our work its direction. My priority is to ask myself questions about the character of the work, the character I see in it, the sound-aesthetic. And then we have a meeting with the section leaders – the string quartet – and we finalize what's called the bowing, fingering, etc.; we organize and pave the way for the performance. So there's that first phase of preparation...

PA Does that phase lead to a lot of debate, a lot of exchanges?

DG No. It's pretty practical actually. You know, things really have to be de-sacralized. We work. We are seasoned professional musicians. We've played lots and lots of music in our lives, we have experience, we're dealing with composers we already know. We try to stick to doing the text. We don't ask ourselves metaphysical questions, even if afterwards it's the miracle of doing the text which is substituted for the preparation-work.

PA Miracle?

DG Yes, the miracle of the simultaneity of things – when everyone applies themselves the best they can to following the composer's objective ideas. I remember when I was little I heard an interview with Maria Callas which I found sublime; she said something like this: "I only sing the text. I don't understand all these singers and divas who don't even understand what they sing, who don't know what's there in the orchestra, who don't apply themselves to doing the text". Toscanini too, used to say "the text, the text, the text, the text!" It's so true, that's all there is to do! Except that in narcissistic, fetishist marketing they want us to believe at all costs that it's the dazzling "thinking" of an individual which all of a sudden is going to re-create the work through the grace of his genius. But it's false I can't ever say this often enough: we stand in the service of the work. And all the musician's work, this work which is so difficult, an accumulation of knowledge and experience too, this work which presupposes an openness of mind and a refined sensitivity, this work which calls on the whole being, body and soul combined, is never there to just get on first-name terms with the composer. It's to sit down at the same table and understand the composer's

language. To understand both the mechanism of the works and the energy which led to their edification. Yes, where musicians are truly great is where they manage to understand the composer's genius. Whereas whoever wants to reduce the works to their own sensitivity or a pyrotechnic side will always be far from understanding them; I'd even say such a person is doing a different job. In the end there are two different sources of light, sometimes complementary or conflicting: the light given off by the work, and that of the stage lights. This dialectic gives the performing musician's job its rhythm and it's a permanent struggle.

PA If you don't mind, I'd like to return to the way you work. In the first stage, you were saying, a few of you get together, and then, once the group schema has been settled on ...

DG Then we work with just the strings. We have a three-hour rehearsal with them, where we try to see if everything works. At this stage we're still making adjustments. On very objective things. Little by little we lay the foundations. Then the wind instruments arrive and we read the work. And we start working all together. The next day we do what we call a sectional with the wind players. There's a re-infusion and we re-work what we've done, etc. Finally, when we are all together again, we start recording – generally right up to the concert. In this context we re-work again, in a different way. We don't work more than other orchestras, it's just that it's much more intense. It's much more intense because without that very intensity we'd never be able to do it. If it's not perfectly together, it doesn't work. *Together: gemeinsam; not zusammen.* Together in the sense of a community of mind, a gathering of energies. The

community of thought is not created by the addition of everyone's ideas, but much more by the capacity of each person's thought to be attentive to the composer's conception. That's what's extraordinary. Extraordinary for everyone.

PA Have you had attempts you've abandoned?

DG There have been performances which were less successful than others because they were insufficiently prepared, insufficiently worked, insufficiently rigorous. Music is only possible, can only come when there's a very solid framework, a very sharp awareness, and when you remain humble in relation to what's going to happen. Which is to say how difficult it is, how demanding, every time. It's the sum of forces which are paradoxical and sometimes antagonistic: knowledge, awareness, mastery, and finally abandoning all these accumulated certainties... in the end a successful concert is having the experience of original love, it's good like an apple...

\*

PA In the interview we've been having it's been David Grimal who has spoken in the first person; he, therefore, who has carried the project of "Dissonances" on his shoulders since it began, and who claims a certain political vision of the world. But "Dissonances" as a group consists of men and women, and nothing has yet been said about their relations, not only among themselves, but their relationship with the project. I'd like you to say a few words about their own adherence to the project, and perhaps also on the understanding they generally have of it. Doubtless they don't have the same understanding as you, if only because you have thought a great deal about this fine achievement, and perhaps it's even much more intelligible to you today than at the beginning,

when you only had an intuition of the need for it. In fact today, with experience, and with all the obstacles you've overcome, you must surely have a more precise vision of the idea you had at the start, and the orientation you want to give it for the future. But the people who make up "Dissonances" with you, what about them?

DG Your question contains several others. First I'll try to explain how I understand the idea. At first it's true I had an intuition. A very strong intuition. As I put that intuition to work the idea took form. It came into view as it was carried out, and developed alongside my struggle to bring the project to life. One of the difficulties encountered was to make other people understand my idea. To me it seemed obvious, but it wasn't so clear for everyone. This interview is part of the theorization of what we could call, not the revolutionary movement but the evolutionary movement of "Dissonances". Because what we're doing with this movement is always an evolution. An evolution which cannot take place without others, without the adherence of others. So now I'll reply to your question directly. I'll reply by saying... that I can't reply. I can't reply for my friends. All I'll allow myself to say is that I see a range of very different behaviors among them.

First let's say a word about the people for whom it didn't work, because this is quite interesting. There have been various types of dysfunction. There are people I asked to participate in the adventure at the start who have never come to join us. It didn't interest them. Very good musicians. Very nice people. But it didn't appeal to them, it didn't speak to them, and in the end they were very happy in the system where myself I felt so ill-at-ease. And yet they are really good musicians, who sent me back to my malaise as if it were a symptom which it would perhaps have

been desirable to treat by seeing a psychoanalyst. That's the first category. And I won't pretend they, didn't give me considerable doubts at the start. Then there are people who have worked with "Dissonances", people who are even close friends. But it stopped. It stopped because someone or other's ego got in the way; there were, so to speak, personal dissonances which prevented things from functioning normally. It's normal, after all, for people to fail to find a place because of a more fragile ego, even if we all have that fragility. Musicians who in the end, despite their great talent, despite their love of others and their sincerity, were prevented from belonging to the group because of a deep lack of self-love or personal worries, all sorts of things which meant that their relationship with the others had a seismic intensity which was too dangerous, too threatening for the group. There we had to take decisions and put an end to collaborations which were otherwise very rich. But quite simply it didn't go with the being-together of the group. These personalities, either too strong or insecure on a personal level, threatened the existence of the group without wanting to, without even realizing it. Personal fulfillment in a collective is so difficult to find! And incidentally for my part I'm not so sure I'd find my place in "Dissonances" if it were "directed" by someone else...

PA That's honest of you.

DG Yes, of course. If I were in a collective where I wasn't the head – even while I say that there is no head – if I weren't the leader, would that satisfy me? Probably not. In any case, I wouldn't have liked it at the start. But maybe one day it will satisfy me! It wouldn't have satisfied me these last ten



years. The energy I felt myself endowed with needed to spread out in all directions and carry the idea I started with as far as possible.

PA You were right to say there were several questions in my question. Because listening to your answer, I see there are two possible orientations: first of all – and you’ve answered this very well – there’s the question of finding out what the others can experience, on the level of developing their artistic fiber, within a collective like “Dissonances”; but there’s also the question about their own understanding of the project.

DG So to answer that second question, I’d say first that among musicians there are very different personalities. You have people who are extremely sensitive, very instinctive, who have no particular reflection on the world surrounding them: they are musicians, they make their music in environments where they feel very comfortable; others in environments where they feel less comfortable. But you also have people who are more sensitive than others to the environment in which they strive to exercise their art. Not everyone is as committed as I am...

PA But you, in the way you federate them...

DG No, they federate themselves.

PA They federate themselves? But how? Don’t they federate themselves around a project which they know full well goes beyond the musical field, which has meaning only in going outside the musical field?

DG Sure, but the federation doesn't happen in relation to me or my vision of the world. Not everyone has that vision of the world.

PA Right.

DG And yet the project does have meaning for a lot of people.

PA But exactly – that meaning; do you talk about it among yourselves? Do you ever discuss your vision of the world? Are they aware of your motivations?

DG Maybe. I'm not sure that the extra-musical issues are exactly the same for everyone. In any case I think some of them are going to learn a few things when they read this interview... To be quite frank, I don't know if they are all convinced of the authenticity of my approach.

PA You think they suspect you are secretly interested in your own career?

DG It's possible. But it's part of the game and it doesn't bother me.

PA Nevertheless if that's what they think, they surely position you in a certain way; they institute you even more in your role of leader.

DG Maybe.

PA It's inevitable.

DG But it's very difficult to reinvent the world!

PA You said it!

DG Joking apart, it's very difficult to reinvent one's relation with the world. And even for people who participate in something as singular as "Dissonances", it's not easy to imagine that the relations they have with each other within the group aren't just a little similar to those which operate outside the group.

PA What interests me in the question I asked, which might appear peripheral, anecdotal or not very important, is really this: I wonder if the enthusiasm musicians demonstrate in the practice of music within "Dissonances" - that is, in the giving of themselves which they carry out every evening they make music together - I wonder if that enthusiasm doesn't come to them from understanding the project itself?

DG I don't think so...

PA But isn't it more of a motivation to go and give oneself fully when you know that the project breaks with norms, codes, habits, systems and established values? Isn't that something which galvanizes people even more?

DG Perhaps, for some. But I don't think they ask the question in those terms. I think there is just a positive energy, a vertical aspiration, which is expressed in a horizontal space of liberty, equity and fraternity which doesn't exist elsewhere in the theater of learned musical performance.

PA So you're telling me it functions more by liberty than liberation.

DG No, not that either. That's not at all what I meant. What I think is that there is a much bigger danger, a much more constraining assumption of responsibility when you don't follow a conductor, because then you have no choice but to listen attentively to each other. It's the sine qua non without which nothing can function. The relation with the other is different. The relation with the music is different. The relation with your own questioning is different. All that forms another world, in which the pleasure is much greater, the degree of existence much higher, and the level of danger much more elevated. At root it's that, the real motor. So in comparison with all that you can well imagine that symbols, ideals, professions of faith, don't enter much into the reckoning. Even for me. When I play I haven't the slightest impression of having a flag over my head, it's really only the music which carries me. It's the only thing which is absolutely essential. And the only thing which unites us. Yes, it's the music which carries us. And it's this support, this transport, which is the project's only *raison d'être*. The horizon-line of the project is the music, period.

PA So if the music is good, everyone is happy..

DG And if one evening it didn't work, everyone would suffer.

PA But what if one day it stopped working altogether?

DG Well, musically, it wouldn't survive three months. Believe me, that's the only thing which connects us. If we're together, it is as musicians.

PA So what could prevent the group from functioning as it functions today?

DG The risk would come from a change in energy. Human relationships would be damaged. Unless external elements interfered, such as a lack of money, or a too-sudden success...

PA But dangers come from everywhere, from within as much as without. As for you, in your role of a conductor who isn't one, I imagine it consists in watching over the internal equilibrium of the movement, the fact that everyone can dispose of their liberty as they wish, while still bearing the responsibility they give themselves when they agree to be part of this collective, and without that responsibility weighing too heavily.

DG I see my role like that of a restaurant-owner who is also the cook. Isn't a good cook someone who chooses the right produce, puts it together correctly and offers it, just as much, at exactly the right moment? My role, in fact, is to make people go home... happy. That's all.

PA So if I understand correctly, you've displaced the meaning of the word chef. It's no longer the chef d'orchestre [conductor] but the chef de cuisine.

DG Exactly !

(They laugh.)

This booklet is the fruit of an encounter initiated by two friends, the painters Ronan Barrot and Bertrand Revol. They are responsible, and the guilty parties thank them.



Dissonances, a collective of artists:  
we have grown used to seeing  
musicians playing under a  
conductor's baton. Playing without  
a conductor means having the  
liberty to come together for  
working sessions in a space free  
from barriers, where each player  
creates their own place. Soloists,  
chamber-musicians, orchestral  
players and brilliant students  
starting out, all meet together and  
enrich one another.

A space where composers and performers renew a much-needed dialog.

Dissonances always strive to push the artistic level further in the challenges they take up, from the symphonies of Beethoven to those of Brahms, including programs honoring works which are too little-known by the public.

David Grimal,

Violinist and Artistic Director



Ten years ago, an unheralded musical adventure united the greatest soloists and chamber-musicians from France and Europe, before being extended to Japan. The orchestra immediately obtained recognition from international critics, and now performs in numerous European concert-halls. Why this success? Quite simply because Dissonances reinvent the practice of music, thanks to a participatory organization which honors the talents and ideas of each player. Liberty and rigor in all things; that is what unites the musicians of Dissonances. Liberty in the choice to work together, in the choice of programs and repertoire, and free association with concert-halls and festivals which share their concern for excellence and artistic innovation. To which must be added other values: Dissonances have a leader who inspires them, but it is an orchestra with no conductor! The musicians are all equal, and united by the fraternal sharing of music. They bring their music to audiences who have been the furthest from it, the most disinherited, thanks to their "Autre Saison". Liberty, equality, fraternity and generosity: these are the values which animate and inspire Dissonances... and their partners of course...

Éric Garandeau, President

Formed in 2004, Dissonances have been in residence at the Dijon Opera since 2008 and regularly perform at the Cité de la Musique and at the Volcan – Scène Nationale in Le Havre. Dissonances also organize L'Autre Saison, a series of concerts for the homeless in the church of Saint Leu in Paris. The ensemble gives its musicians carte blanche to propose a concert each month. Their first recording on the Ambrosie-Naïve Métamorphoses label, devoted to Richard Strauss's *Metamorphosen* and Schönberg's *Verklärte Nacht*, was enthusiastically received by critics: *ffff* from Télérama, BBC Music Choice and Arte Selection. Dissonances then recorded with the Aparté label: their Beethoven disc (Symphony No. 7 and the Violin Concerto), released in October 2010, received Télérama's *ffff* and was chosen in Le Monde's 2010 selection

All proceeds from the discs Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and Piazzolla (2010) and Beethoven #5 (2011, also awarded Télérama's *ffff*) went to the association Les Margéniaux, an association which supports projects to help vulnerable people. In December 2013 Dissonances launched their own label, Dissonances Records, which is to release the Brahms Violin Concerto and Fourth Symphony (December 2013) and Mozart's complete concertos for violin, flute and oboe (2014). A long-term collaboration with Heliox Films and Frédéric Delesques has enabled them to carry out a policy of audiovisual recordings which are regularly broadcast on Mezzo and various channels throughout the world, attracting millions of viewers.

*Les Dissonances* is in residence at the Dijon Opera. It is subsidized by the Ministry of Culture and Communication. It receives occasional support from Spedidam. It is a member of Fevis and of Bureau Export. L'Autre Saison is supported by Caisse d'Epargne Île-de-France.

David Grimal has led an international career as a solo violinist, which over the last twenty years has seen him playing regularly in the world's greatest classical music venues. His recordings have been hailed by international critics. Numerous composers have written works for him and he is much sought-after as a musical partner by his peers. In parallel with this traditional career he has chosen to develop more personal projects. Dissonances is at the heart of these territories of liberty and creation. In this laboratory of ideas, conceived more as a collective of musicians than a simple orchestra, David Grimal and his friends live music as a rediscovery of joy. As a natural extension of the desire for sharing, David Grimal teaches violin at the Musikhochschule in Saarbrücken. He also founded the Dissonances Quartet in the company of Hans Peter Hofmann, David Gaillard and Xavier Phillips, and created "L'Autre Saison", a concert season for the homeless in Paris.

David Grimal was made a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters in 2008 by the French Culture Ministry.

Paul Audi was born in 1963; former student at the Ecole normale supérieure, he is agrégé in philosophy and has obtained a PhD in Philosophy. After doing a thesis on Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Rousseau, éthique et passion, PUF, 1997) and teaching at Paris XII University, he worked as an editor at the Presses Universitaires de France, whilst pursuing his philosophical research in parallel. He is the author of some twenty books so far, most of them devoted to the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in the west during the Modern period. In particular he is the author of *Supériorité de l'éthique* (Champs-Flammarion, 2007), and *Créer. Introduction à l'esth/éthique* (Verdier, 2010). His latest published books are *Qui témoignera pour nous ? Albert Camus face à lui-même* and *L'Affaire Nietzsche* (Verdier, 2013).

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