

Theodore Lotis – Sibylla’s Voice (15:14, 2001)

To Annette Vande Gorne

- Commission: Musiques & Recherches
- Premiere: October 2, 2002, L’Espace du son — M&R (Brussels, Belgium)

In classic mythology, and even in more ancient legends, sibyls were female prophets whose ecstatic utterances were inspired by Apollo. According to those legends, some sibyls could interpret dreams, and others could make their voices heard after death. Their oracles were taken seriously and with special care. Virgil, in his Aeneid (book 6, 42-51), describes the Cumaean Sibylla, the most famous of all sibyls, thus: “She changes her features, and the colour of her countenance; her hair springs up erect, her bosom heaves and pants, her wild heart beats violently, the foam gathers on her lips and her voice is terrible.” Their simplest words were covered up by the most complicate and misleading ecstatic screams. Therefore, it was extremely difficult for someone to understand the meaning of the oracles.

When Annette Vande Gorne asked me to compose a multi-channel piece, the idea of covering up simple musical ideas into complicate and obscure textural morphologies was pestering my mind. Sibylla’s Voice uses heavily treated instrumental (violin) and vocal recordings, in order to produce a strange ‘vocal’ feel (due to convolution between the violin and the vocal sounds). It is not a piece about movement in terms of displacement between loud speakers. It is rather about the co-existence of diverse spatial environments. It is also about how the same simple musical elements, an interval of a second for example, behave under different and constantly changing and contrasting spatial environments. Like Sibylla’s words, those elements are sometimes covered up by thick and often obscure spectral textures. People in our days also use to seek advice from ‘sibyls.’ It is possibly the unknown and unforeseen future that lent colour to their prophecies.

Sibylla’s Voice was realized in 2001 at the Métamorphoses d’Orphée studio in Ohain (Belgium) and the studio of City University in London (England, UK) and premiered on October 2, 2002 during the 9th International Acousmatic Festival L’Espace du son (Brussels, Belgium). The piece was commissioned by Musiques & Recherches. Thanks to Eleni Mpratsou for her voice. The present version is a stereo mix of the original 8-track piece. Sibylla’s Voice was a finalist at the 2nd Biennial Acousmatic Composition Competition Métamorphoses (Brussels, Belgium, 2002). It has been recorded on the compact disc Métamorphoses 2002 (MR 2002, 2003).