

“SHÂNTI”

meditation music for electronic and concrete sounds

Produced in the Westdeutscher Rundfunk Electronic Music Studios, Cologne

*This text was written in 1978 by Jean-Claude Eloy
for the LPs album “Shânti” published by Erato (STU 71205-6)*

“Shânti” is a sanskrit word meaning peace. It is above all Spiritual Peace, the supreme Peace that yogis strive for; it is also the psychic and emotional peace of the individual. It is political peace and peace found in Nature and the physical elements of the Universe.

However, for me, no notion can exist without its opposite, its antagonistic counterpart. I mean rebellion and war in the largest sense, from the muffled explosions of a volcano to student barricades...

Therefore for me, “Shânti” is peace in constant flux (because without antagonism and struggle the world would simply end). It is the dialectic nature of things with struggle and violence. It is peace in the Heraclitian sense. Hence the continual progress, the eternal search for the elusive goal, sometimes glimpsed at and very occasionally attained: the glimmer of eternity...

It would be a mistake to think that “Shânti” was in anyway a stable or continuous peace. We have to look for it in the sound, in each of the long sequences. The whole form of this music is a slow and permanent spiral, with no limit...

The best way to listen to this “meditation music” is to be completely relaxed and open. It is a good idea to close your eyes or darken the room. Karlheinz Stockhausen talking about this work in a letter said « ... *the biggest problem is to find a suitable place for the audience to listen, where they can listen for the whole evening without any disturbance... You must close your eyes to listen. In my opinion there is no longer any need to see things... it is best to close your eyes, sitting in a relaxed position. The eyes have really no use...».*

The original version of “Shânti” was composed in the WDR Electronic Music Studios of Cologne in 1972-73. At the end of 1973, I added another part (“Shânti II; Meditation-memory”) for concerts, to used as a huge parenthesis straight after the first tape (side one of this record). Texts by Shrî Aurobindo, Mao Tse Toung in Chinese, Hindi words, and an interview with a young woman familiar with India are all heard mixed with electronic sounds. [...]

Due to the fact that the music is heard on records, there is an unfortunate interruption between sides, whereas the music should be listened to as a continuous whole. I have made sure however that each side corresponds as far as possible to characteristic musical areas, and that the end of each side is as smooth as possible, giving a result rather like a series of “Acts”.

Side I. The centre of interest in this section is a series of political slogans (French and American) representing the side of Rebellion ; any force contesting any given Order. First we hear some rather enigmatic high-pitched sounds as if with difficulty from a distant world (a type of morse- code anticipating the slogans).

Following this there is a mixture of extremely confused texts with strong continuous sounds. We hear the voice of Eldridge Cleaver (then leader of the “Black Panther Party”) recorded on the Berkeley Campus in 1968. As Cleaver's voice mounts in tension there follows a loud explosion of slogans. Later, after some aggressive high pitched sounds, the slogans become distant and transform into a sort of “crazy” mumbling. These become progressively softer and change to singing, distant choirs, with simple harmonic relationships. The memory of the slogans is recalled by a continual use of long and repetitive areas, obtained by feedback and filtered with wavelike material. The direction taken is toward Nature's forces, toward meditation, toward one's Self...

Here we have the first appearance of a very stable, low pitched sound or *meditation sound* (Shrî Aurobindo).

Side II. The “meditation sound” begins gradually to move. It becomes a deep voice, a slow invocation (the relationship between the treatment given to this sound and some Indian, Tibetan and Japanese voice forms is obvious).

Cosmic landscapes are created around the increasing tension of this deep modulating sound: shooting stars, tiny lights blinking slowly, impulsive material... A voice intones a list of the different names of stars in a mechanical way.

After a long development, the complexity of this section is slowly resolved, as if by a fixed point, whose timbre is warm and deep, rich and heavy. Stage by stage it increases until its presence is complete. This is the enormous “large octaves” sound! It turns around on itself, with a back and forth movement, carrying wisps of cries along with it, screaming sounds becoming thicker and thicker. The intensity builds up to an enormous slide up to the higher pitches, from where everything will overbalance into wild agitation. The entire forces of the Universe are let loose, punctuated by huge falling slides, soon to be followed by electronic sound of intense lamenting...

Side III. This is an extension of the preceding side, with an accumulation of voltage controlled figures, reworked in a multitude of ways with military songs interspersed from time to time. (in the concert version, a short two track tape with a sort of military parade ground farce is used as an “intermission”, and allows the changing of the large tapes on the four track recorder. It is not on this record, as the two reels were mixed directly).

After the military sequence (an impulse generator was used to make the singing off-key) we find a surrealistic but calmed scenery... The “birds” we imagine hearing are in fact electronic sounds. The “bells” we imagine hearing are also in fact electronic sounds specially treated. A few of the sound groups are moved by the outline of a slow undulation rhythm like the sea. Then comes the cracking fire, multiplied by feedback and filters.

Side IV. The “contemplation sound” (having been prepared at the end of the third side) is again heard, followed by a long meditative development gravitating to different places, ending with a few voices of children playing, then to silence...

The longed for Peace, or perhaps its beginning is hinted at in the deeply resonating sounds that follow the silence : just as silence reminds us of past events, or of things that will happen...

Snippets of souvenirs, recognizable but transformed fragments of the work are here mixed in with the long procession of accumulation. It amplifies, continues, and again intensifies violently (the special effects of the four track tape give the impression within the sound of “hammering” by the crowd) until the enormous “slide to infinity” which is intended to make the listener loose his sense of time (it should be listened to at a high volume). It is like the “Pralaya” of India, the final dissolution of all conflicts, mixed-up on a cosmic scale.

The whole of the end section returns to the extreme high pitched source heard at the beginning of the work, closing in on itself. In fact the cycle can be started again...

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More than six monthes of very intensive work in studio as gone into Shânti, only for its electronic production. I would like to thank the directors of the WDR for the indispensable technical facilities offered. The complete work is dedicated to Karlheinz Stockhausen as an expression of friendship and deep gratitude. In addition, each side of this recording is offered in homage to those having helped in the work. Side One, Peter Eötvös, composer and assistant at the WDR studio. Side Two, Luz Estella Santos, musician and assistant at the studio. Side Three, Volker Müller, chief engineer at the studio. Side Four, Françoise Campo, who happily performed the voice parts of Shrí Aurobindo.

But I would particularly like to offer homage to all those listeners, from Chicago to Tokyo, Kyoto to Sao Paolo, Rio de Janeiro to Berkeley and many other places, who have convinced me by their reactions, their remarks, that today's music can go beyond the simple concert hall, can reach the conscience more deeply, and stimulate and help the transformation toward that other, more universal man that we are becoming day by day.

Jean-Claude Eloy
Paris, May 1978

Translation: Andrew Mc Intyre.