

*But at my back in a cold blast I hear  
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.*  
(The Waste Land, lines 185 - 86)

When Sean and Liam first contacted me about the project, I had only a vague idea of who T.S. Eliot was, and what *The Waste Land* stood for in the history of literature. Several month later, I almost know by heart each line of the poem, and feel very intimate with its numerous details, its opacities, its bursts of dark humour, its secret beauties, and its very moving moments. Rather than 'set' the poem to music in a traditional way, with singers and instruments, the intention of *Ear to Ear* was to create an intermediate form between audio drama and electroacoustic music which would do justice to the polyphonic dimension of the poem and blur the distinction between word and music. The poem is read by a cast of 10 people we recorded separately: male and female, young and old, actor and non-actor – we tried to make this 'chorus' as 'various' as possible, and to make it reflect the 'European-ness' of the poem by including French, German and Italian natives. Most of the musical material of *Ear to Ear* was directly derived from those recorded voices: either I created electroacoustic deformations of vocal sonority, or I imagined musical events closely related to the melodic patterns of speech: imitations, accompaniments, canons, loops... By contrast, the very short fourth section, *Death by Water*, marks a brief detour towards a more classical setting for soprano and harp. Then, in the final part, *What the Thunder Said*, word itself becomes music, the very famous last line in Sanskrit becoming a mantra which runs all over the section and gives its rhythmic structure, along with a very regular low B natural played on the harp.

*Who is the third who walks always beside you?*  
(The Waste Land, line 359)

But between the ear of the poet and my ear, there's a third one. As I got more deeply into the composition of the piece, a response by singer/songwriter Scott Walker (1942-2019), a strong admirer of Eliot's poetry, popped back into my mind. When asked how he conceived and wrote the crazy music of his later albums (from *Tilt*, 1995 to *Soused*, 2014), he invariably replied that, in order to compose, he simply put himself at the service of his texts, like a slave. This statement remained very much with me as I composed my piece, and it seemed to me that to some extent I was putting it into practice. I made myself a slave to Eliot's poetry, patiently weighing each decision against its effect on the understanding, reception, or feeling of the text. But by doing this – dialectic reversal – I felt that this restraint opened my music to a world of ideas and sounds I would not otherwise have imagined.

## **Biography**

Pierre-Yves Macé's music stands at the nexus of contemporary classical, electroacoustic composition and sound art. His first recording, *Faux-Jumeaux*, was released on Tzadik, John Zorn's label, in 2002. It was followed by several records

on Sub Rosa and Brocoli labels. His music has been performed by Ictus, Ensemble Intercontemporain (under Matthias Pintscher, Enno Poppe), Cairn, l'Instant Donné, Orchestre de chambre de Paris, Hong Kong Sinfonietta (under Gábor Káli), Les Cris de Paris (under Geoffroy Jourdain). He has been invited to perform or commissioned to write new work by the Festival d'Automne à Paris, Villette Sonique (Paris), Wiener Festwochen (Vienna), Ars Musica (Brussels), Les Musiques, MIMI (Marseille), AngelicA (Bologna), Santarcangelo (Rimini), Akousma (Montreal) He very regularly writes scores for dance and theater shows. As an accomplished scholar of musicology (University of Paris VIII), Macé has published the book *Musique et document sonore* ("Music and Sonic Documents") which describes his studies of the relationships between documentary sounds and musical composition.