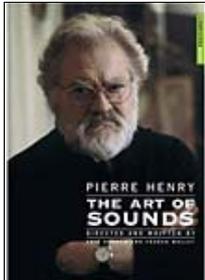




## Pierre Henry - The Art of Sounds (2007)

*A must-see if you're a devotee of musique concrete, in spite of faults*



### Pierre Henry - The Art of Sounds (2007)

**Directed and Written by Eric Darmon & Franck Mallet**

**Studio: Juxtapositions/Ideale Audience 11 (Distr. by Naxos)**

**Video: Enhanced for 16:9 widescreen color**

**Audio: DD stereo**

**All zones regional coding**

**Extras: Both concert and rehearsal videos of *Veil of Orpheus* (a 1953 work by Henry), *Le Candidat* - 1966 B&W short film with soundtrack by Henry**

**Length: 109 minutes**

**Rating: \*\*\***

I was quite excited to know there was a documentary on the co-inventor of musique concrete since I had thought he was completely forgotten in today's world of electronic and computer music. But instead a number of young DJs and electronic creators of noise and ambient music today regard Henry as their guru who showed the way.

Even before the advent of the tape recorder after WWII, Henry and Pierre Schaeffer were mixing natural sounds together using various turntables and disc recorders - changing speeds, direction, and so on to achieve entirely new sounds. One of Henry's radical works was titled *Symphony for a Door and a Sigh*, and it was constructed from just those two original sounds, transformed in a multitude of ways as the main themes of a traditional symphony would be.

So it was disappointing to find no attempt to show exactly how the creation of musique concrete came about. Henry is shown taking around a pair of stereo mics on a pole and his assistant coming behind with the recorder, but nothing is shown of his taking those original sounds that he collected and modifying them to fit into a work of musique concrete. There are some video excerpts showing the "lying down" concerts of his works he had given, and one of the concerts he gave in his own home, surrounded by collage art on the walls that Henry had fashioned from outdated electronics and the gear he had used in earlier sound work. Short excerpts of some of the ballet projects he has scored are displayed. The crusty old innovator is shown assembling photos and sounds for a public presentation, but not in constructing a new work.

It is also unfortunate that the soundtrack for this DVD is only in stereo. Henry was a pioneer in the spatialization of music, similar to Henry Brant, and hearing some of his works in surround would add a great deal to their appreciation. *The Veil of Orpheus* of 1953 is I feel a landmark work, with 100% more emotional impact than any recent electronic or computer music I have heard. However, the sound is quite poor on the two videos; I would recommend the Philips CD of the work, which is still available I believe. One would think the short B&W film about a political candidate would be right on the mark at this moment in time, but it is a dated-looking copy of Antonioni and Welles and Henry's often-disturbing sounds seem over the top trying to impart some suspense or interest to the often static images. I believe without any prior exposure or knowledge the average viewer would have little empathy with Henry's radical reshaping of our sound landscape. At least he seems to be maintaining a sensible artistic path in his continuing exploration of new sound worlds. Unlike another innovator of new sounds - Karlheinz Stockhausen - whose bizarre series of cosmically-inspired operas he was working on before his recent death demonstrated an egotistical mental imbalance not unlike the later ideas of Alexander Scriabin.

- John Sunier

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