

Language ,as a music
six marginal pretexts for composition

1. Thesis
2. Argument
3. Spec Sheet
4. Red Hook
5. Ivy
6. Epilogue

" ... something that only a composer could have written " was how Jim Randall introduced Compose Yourself to me, to suggest why it might be relevant to publish it in a composers' magazine. My revelation was: there are things you want to say, anxieties you want to engage, arising from anything in your life, arising in your perception from your perspective as a composer, that are not music itself (because they're explicitly about something(s)) or poetry either (because that's a different perspective of saying), and cannot be discourse (because that's a closed world in which some things are unsayable, or even indiscernible except as composite masks) - but such things may, still, be composable as something - not as music, but as music is composed, as something being what it is about: as languagemusic, composed out of the specific sensibilities which belong to you as composer, listener, reader, writer, player, speaker. To engage your reading in your writing as you engage your listening in your composing. Even though - maybe even because - my preoccupations, my compositional habits, my literary habitats are distinctly different from Jim's, Compose Yourself did not just open the enormous creative space it inhabits fully by itself, it gave me the means to transform my own mental universe, liberating thoughts, awareneses, images (" ... resurrecting a new world ... a new way of constructing, of

imagining ... " [Compose Yourself, pp. 11-12]) - and, inevitably, texts: first, "In Quest of the Rhythmic Genius"; ultimately, Language .as a music:

April, 1979: Barrytown, New York; August, 1979: San Diego, California: Part of Kenneth Gaburo's extraordinary generous Lingua Press project is to propagate essays in 'extended composition'; in particular, he's gathering ideas for his monster 'whole-language' collection Alias consisting of texts about language mostly by composers; so, after publishing our twin piano pieces in a gorgeous album, he invites Jim and me to produce Language .as a music and (Jim's) Something Medieval in the Lingua "Collection Two" series. Typesetting Language ,as a music becomes my first move into hands-on type composition, which eventually becomes a normal practice for my work. Susan Quasha, who is principal artist-designer for the uniquely artist-supportive small press called Station Hill in Barrytown, works tirelessly and meticulously with me to refine every graphic detail of the text. We're using an early programmable (pre-computer) typesetting system called Alphacomp; cumbersome, but its output is controllable and good-looking, and it's totally accessible to my input as no commercial composing-room is. When we're finally done, I deliver the output by hand to Kenneth Gaburo in San Diego - Alphacomp makes no duplicates, and saves no files after spitting out galleys (they have to be cut and pasted by hand like sounds in a tape studio). The book, with a surprise hard cover designed by Kenneth, is a magnificent token of Kenneth's interpersonal largesse, and of his dead-serious pursuit of publishing as a medium of creative composition (see his and David Dunn's Publishing as Eco-System).

November, 1979: A Faculty Seminar at Brook House, Bard College: The fortress of audio-reinforcement gear, speakers, table lamp, bookstand, piano that minimizes the speaker/player's visual presence ensures that what's 'live' in the performance is just a voice: my voice, placed at people's ears rather than coming at them from

where my body sits. It's also a comfort zone for me to be able to speak and play for an hour and fifteen minutes sustaining focus on an unbroken continuity of utterance. Afterward, everyone assumes that the voice of the character portrayed in Part V is my 'real' voice, putting out my 'real' message. And everyone tells me how much they enjoyed the Irving Berlin song in Part IV.

May 4, 1980: Center For Music Experiment, UC. San Diego: C.M.E., directed then by Virginia Hommel Gaburo, inhabited by a credible collection of intense people in a variety of intense ways; Jean-Charles Francois and John Silber in particular interacted so intensely with me that we practically laminated; but almost that much intensity was routine for the typical interactions with and among the citizens of that community: Warren Burt, David Dunn, Virginia Hommel Gaburo, Diamanda Galas, Jonathan Glazier, Ron George, Anne Hankinson, John Mackay, Will Parsons, Ron Robboy, Isobel Terceo. Richard Zvonar - the ones I can remember. My self-invited performance of *Language*, as a music surfed on these intensities - it was effectively conducted by the (- intense! -) body language of Diamanda Galas glaring furiously from the front edge of listeners. The giant gamelan hanging on the wall facing me sang back whenever my voicesound crossed a certain resonance threshold. I implicate them all in the performance - they're all present and tangible on the CD. (The pianomusic movement (Part II) is borrowed from Sarah Rothenberg's performance of the long piano piece on *Open Space CD 1* - C.M.E. had no piano so we had to roll it on tape there too.) Right after (it seemed way too soon after) I got intensely lectured on the manifold deficiencies of the performance and the piece - one colleague assigned me to remedial attendance at her next-night concert of extended-vocal-cum-electronic screaming; another assigned me to remedial study of Bunraku puppet theater. Personally, my only regret was the unscheduled (and still unfortunate) crescendo/decrescendo toward the end of Part I. Otherwise, my event felt to me like an integral piece of an average C.M.E. week of way-of-life practices (including

crucially playing/movement sessions with the intrepid KIVA techno-exploratory ensemble). C.M.E. was so promising a model for musicintellectual-creative-performance experimentation that I was scarcely surprised when it disappeared soon afterward.

Compose Yourself, C.M.E., the C.M.E. community, KIVA, the gamelan are, for me, embedded in the sounds of this performance, the looming spectres bonded inextricably into the identity of this piece.

B. A. B., 6.99
Barrytown, New York

Language .as a music (the score) is published by Lingua Press; to be reprinted by Open Space as part of Being About Music, a collection of printtexts by Benjamin Boretz and J. K. Randall, scheduled for publication in 2000. Intimacy wil appear in the same collection. Compose Yourself is published (with B.A.B. 's Meta · Variations) by Open Space.