

LUMINAIRE – Ellen Southern on the composition of the piece, September 2013

Luminaire was inspired by hearing Scott de Martinville's reverse-engineered 1860 recording experimented with at different speeds, having been originally created with a mechanical hand crank. To me the audio-noise on the tracks become a form of percussion which accompanies the distorted voice, and this informed the instrumentation and sonic textures of my response. Taking the melody *Au Clare de la Lune* as a found object, I composed a live work which, when digitally reversed, reveals the melody in ways which are shaped by performance processes, spatial arrangement, and technical and vocal idiosyncrasies. I treated the melody itself in a material way, separating out the vowels and consonants and having them inhabit the same space but occurring separately. My approaches to encoding and decoding aspects of the material are re-interpretations of conventional compositional techniques found in polyphonic vocal writing (augmentation / diminution, retrograde / palindromes, antiphonic, micropolyphonic and polychoral). My experiments with micropolyphony were inspired by Ligeti's *Lux Aeterna*, yet aimed to reinterpret his technique by generating layers of simultaneous speeds and microtonal harmonies through vocal and technical glitches.

Version I (live ensemble performance) exists in the memories of those who were present, and is documented in the above photographs and audio. The audience were free to position themselves wherever they like in the theatre, creating their own individual experience of the work. The singers performed with their recorded selves in antiphony ('call and response').

Version II (online video) is part composed / defined by the fragments the cameraperson chose to film. While in the first (live) version, an unfamiliar melody builds and emerges over the duration, in the second (video) version, the melody, now reversed and revealed to be *Au Clair de la Lune*, unravels into fragments.

In **version III** (live solo performance), the previous two versions are played out in the world. The real-time audio from the live performance is audible from a dictaphone, while performance elements are recreated and improvised in solo variations in the reversed sequence of the video. The ambiguity of which, if any, is the 'ultimate' version is deepened as the sonic ghosts of versions I and II cross each others' paths in opposite directions, dispersing and decaying amongst the sounds of the street.

Audiences were invited to film and contribute footage from the live performances as seen from their perspectives, further allowing the 'composition' of version II, and the documentation of version III, to be defined by the audiences.

All of the musical, visual, performative and sound-making elements relate to the story told in the lyrics:

By the light of the moon, my friend Pierrot, lend me your quill to write a word. My candle is out dead, I have no more fire. Open your door for me, for the love of God.

By the light of the moon, Pierrot replied; I don't have a quill, I am in my bed. Go to the neighbour's I think she's there. In her kitchen someone is using the lighter (striking stones to make a spark).

By the light of the moon likable Lubin knocks on the brunette's door. She quickly responds; Who is knocking like that? He replies; Open your door, for the God of love.

By the light of the moon, one could barely see. The quill was looked for, the light (source) as looked for. With all that looking, I don't know what was found. But I do know the door was shut behind them.