
Jean-Claude Risset: In memoriam

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Jean-Claude published many articles, often the result of his lectures across the world, but sometimes appearing in hard-to-find journals. Fortunately, a large number of his writings have recently been collected and published, thanks to musicologists Marta Grabocz and Pierre Michel.¹ Opening this book takes you through an impressive journey into some of the most significant landmarks of computer music. When musicians had to adapt to the new digital technology, Jean-Claude, through relentless research, investigated the very nature of musical sounds. His discoveries have transformed the fields of musical acoustics and psychoacoustics, and he received a gold medal, the highest award, from the CNRS, the French national research centre. Fifty years after his first investigation at Bell Labs, where Jean-Claude introduced us to both how musical sounds behave in time and what to look for when we perceive them, his findings have become ingrained in our culture.

In turn, young musicians were so inspired by his work that they invented a new form of music, later called 'spectral music'. The influence of Jean-Claude's research on Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail was indeed determinant in the creation of spectral music, and these young composers, at the beginning of the 1970s, recognised the role of Jean-Claude's discoveries on their musical thought.

Jean-Claude was a generous man and I had the chance to experience this first hand. Whilst still a young researcher when he was at IRCAM as head of the computer department, he entrusted me with the co-organisation of the 1978 Unesco computer music workshop, which was shared with Barry Truax and held in Aarhus, Denmark. Barry and I oversaw the scientific and artistic organisation of the international workshop, at a time when the computer music community was beginning to structure itself. This was an extraordinary act of generosity and trust on his part. At the same time, I was one of the few composers invited to produce a piece using the MUSIC V program that he had installed in the acoustics laboratory of Marseille, at a time when such tools as MUSIC V were almost non-existent in France. Indeed, many others have experienced his kindness and altruism.

Of course, many people have first known him through his unique musical works. A point of convergence between his research and his deep knowledge of contemporary music, including electro-acoustic music, his works are above all the result of a true artist. They will remain amongst the most convincing and artistic pieces of the late twentieth century repertoire. For this, as much as for his research and discoveries, and also because he was such a gentle and friendly human being, Jean-Claude Risset will continue to live in our memories.

¹Jean-Claude Risset. 2014. *Composer le son. Repères d'une exploration du monde sonore numérique. Écrits, vol. 1*. Paris: Hermann.