

Fata Morgana

Fata Morgana is a piece for solo tenor saxophone plus an array of six wireless speakers with recorded cello performed by the composer. The title comes from a type of mirage experienced as a narrow band right above the horizon that can distort the object on which it is based.

"...An Italian term named after the Arthurian sorceress Morgan le Fay, from a belief that these mirages, often seen in the Strait of Messina, were fairy castles in the air or false land created by her witchcraft to lure sailors to their deaths." Wikipedia: Fata Morgana (mirage)

The cloud of ethereal cello sounds emanating from the speaker array, amplified upwards from the ground, create a hazy and fragmented soundscape in which the tenuous tones of the saxophone can meld and float along with. At times the two instruments seem part of the same organism, with the saxophone being subsumed into the delicate mass of cello recordings. At other moments the two are distinct from each other, illuminated by their differing resonances and timbres.

Demanding in its use of extended techniques, the piece challenges the performer to explore volatile nodal territories in the uppermost region of the saxophone, mirroring the methods used on the cello recordings.

Initially Alex and I met so I could get a sense of what he was capable of and comfortable with on his instrument. After a frustrating Zoom session where the interesting sounds he was creating were being cancelled out as noise by the Zoom algorithm, we decided we should work the other way around. He would adapt to the cello sounds that I created and I would notate a kind of blueprint of tonalities and timbres I wished for him to explore. Our second meeting consisted of Alex interpreting my notations, confirming the overall atmosphere of piece and getting a sense of my expectations. We also rehearsed the somewhat complicated procedure of operating the six wireless speakers I mailed him earlier in the month.

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