

A garden

1998 - Duration: 18', for wind quintet
Commissioned by Ictus ensemble

- I. Ground
- II. Lili Marlene
- III. Huitzilopochtli
- IV. Chrysanthemum haradjanii
- V. Microcosmos

May Death find me planting cabbages, undisturbed by him and even more so by my imperfect garden. (Montaigne, Essais, I, 19).

For the first time in my work I have deliberately composed this piece, A garden, without a preconceived form in mind. In total contrast to my previous approach to chamber music — as can be seen in *Neurosuite* (piano trio) in particular, where my attempts at formal integration led me to define non-serial conditions for equating micro and macro structures — A garden is written in an associative style, applying simple processes with limited versatility to material chosen purely for its sonorous qualities. The result is five short pieces; by short I am referring to their formal immediacy, regardless of their duration.

This has not kept the composition from being set out according to a precise plan that becomes clear once one knows that Lili Marlene also is the name of a rose and that Huitzilopochtli is the Aztec god of the midday sun. In a sense, this is a free gardening autobiography, *ante mortem*: From soil to verse, passing by coloured efflorescence under the burning sun. It will be clear, I hope, that the idea was not to be descriptive (!), but that a certain esoterical symbolism, which I will not deny, may appear in the course of this line of thought with its moments of black humour.

The potential heterogeneity of the timbre, dynamics, and technical possibilities of the various instruments making up the wind quintet has, despite the initial restrictions it imposes, been a great source of inspiration and research. I have increased this instrumental palette by starting the piece with the lowest sounds (flute in G, english horn, and bass clarinet), progressively to move out into broad daylight (but keeping the use of the piccolo for the very end). Without constituting actual accompanied solos, the different movements each in turn favour at least one specific instrument, which can be either clearly set off against the others, or form the basis for the writing for the ensemble. To take the most obvious example: the fourth movement is not only a long melody played by the clarinet, but it also demonstrates a spectral harmonisation modelled on the timbre of this very same instrument.

Finally, I would like to provide a few supplementary keys or puns that may clarify the articulation of the piece further. Ground, apart from being the surface of the earth, also indicates a musical form making use of an obstinato bass. The end of Lili Marlene contains a hidden quote of the song immortalized by Marlene Dietrich. The chrysanthemum haradjanii is a flower with incredibly divided leaves of an almost intangible silvery greyness; its Hindu-sounding name and the rituals in which it is used are not irrelevant to its place here. Microcosmos may be a reference to Bartok, but rather more deliberately to the film by J. Perrin: insects, after all, is where our future lies.

Jean-Luc Fafchamps

A Garden has been premiered in Brussels by Ictus Wind Quintet in 1998.