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# **Around Yantra beyond Darmstadt**

Written for the Open Ears Festival 2009 in Helsinki

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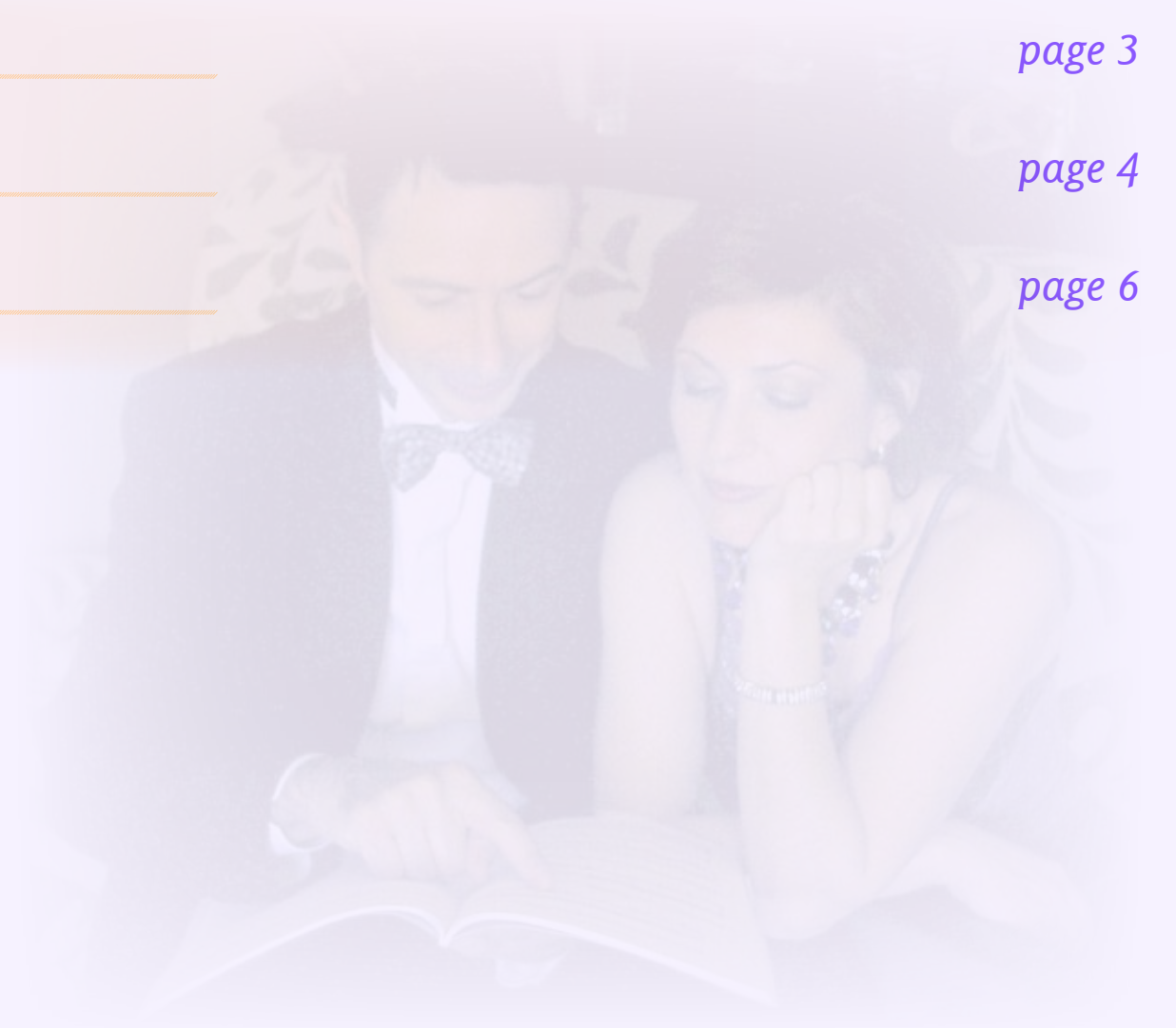
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# I. Baby Yantra

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In August 1988 I was pilgrim in Darmstadt, where I met Klaus Huber, Bryan Ferneyhough, Harry Halbreich.

In the months immediately before, I read two extraordinary books suggested by my old teacher and friend Franco Donatoni: Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Selected papers – Traditional Art and Symbolism* (Princeton University Press, 1977); and Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel Escher Bach* (Basic Books Inc., 1979).

From the first book I deduced the term “yantra” and several suggestions on the ancient Indian Art, so far from our aesthetic complacences; in the second book I found new ideas for new formal elaborations, such as “forms nested in forms” (very beyond Mandelbrot fractals).

In Darmstadt, with these books in my heart and mind, I started to write my baby *Yantra* for solo guitar, and listened to the first performances of two my recent pieces titled *Recherche II* and *Recherche III*.

After the double bar of *Yantra*'s score I glossed:

«*Yantra* (from Indian, “geometric emblems”) is a dazzled play of deformative mirrors. Basically the intention is to generate, through insisting on a prearranged grid of frequencies and durations and also the partial and progressive becoming of them in order to quite specular interdependent processes, a state of dominant neutral hypnosis. The performer, as he likes, will correct eventual gaps in relation to the original intention of the composer».

## 2. Perspectives TSR

Reading today – 21 years after! – the words written at the end of *Yantra* and thinking both to the specific context of Darmstadt and to my loved books by Coomaraswamy and Hofstadter, I like to remark three considerations that never left me in my composer activity.

The **first** consideration is that **every musical piece has at least Three composers**. The second one is the performer, a very special kind of “copilot” even in the most structural music. He will try to make better what the first composer made worst. So it is greatly important that the first composer trusts and learns from his precious copilot, the second composer, and vice versa.

I do not think it is easy. I discovered this double point of view especially when I opened again the lid of my piano (nine years after *Yantra*) to perform as **Duo Alterno** either music of mine or music of other colleague composers. Different complementary perspectives for same objects! So every artistic object becomes twice rich and intriguing.

And the third composer? It is each one of the people who participate to the performance and actively filter the first two composers. With his ears, his sensibility, his culture and musical intelligence, also his personal sounds during the performance he recomposes every piece.

The **second** consideration is my **irreducible passion for numbers and Symbols**, untouched yesterday as today. This is not properly a passion for Math, at least for me, but a persistent love in applying numeric proportions to the micro and macro form of my pieces, often using logical strings of numbers converted in sound parameters.



*Perspective of an Indian garden with symbols and workers (my photo © 2004)*

In the first 90s, with pieces like my *Lyrliche* for voice, bass clarinet and electronics I found a new strict relation between numbers – apparently abstract until you do not pragmatically apply them! – and other kind of symbols, not only “geometric emblems” like in *Yantra*, but powerful figurative symbols, including typical sound symbols: various sounds of water (sea, rain, fall, etc.), of wind, of human voices in daily contexts (popular markets in different world countries, public squares, public foyers in airports, etc.), of subways, trains... and so on.

In 1999 my “foto-musica con foto-suoni” could be born for social situations like music in museums: musical symbols applied to specific symbolic contexts. The first piece was *Musiche dell’aurora [Dawn Music]* for voice, bass flute, and foto-suoni recorded all around the world. I have to thank the complicity of my wife and artistic partner the soprano Tiziana Scandaletti.

The **third** consideration is that music is always culture and culture is always **R**esearch. So music is research, intimate research much more than external show. It seems simple to approve it, but it isn’t. My pieces titled *Recherche*, performed first time in Darmstadt, written in the same spirit (and period) of *Yantra*, look for new formal musical situations and tell about one my strong conviction, that it is important for every composer staying beyond an easy routine and always trying to change the foreseeable routes.

**Ludwig Wittgenstein**: «When we think about the future of the world, we always have in mind its being at the place where it would be if it continued to move as we see it moving now». And another “post-philosopher” who I like much, Richard Rorty: «[There is a big] difference between facts and rules», that is true for all artists and also composers: you have to make happening facts despite any human rule!

Of course music cannot be out of its own rules and also social rules. Anyway it has to be always surprising and truly inventive, going ahead without sleeping on comfortable reassuring rules. Invention is research of unforeseeable facts that generate unforeseeable rules.



*Perspective of an old mine in Traversella - Italy (my photo © 2004)*

### 3. Composing “foto-musica”

**T**hree composers... **S**ymbols as sounding semantic objects... **R**esearch as music and music as research...

Ten years after *Yantra*, in 1999 I wrote my first piece of “**foto-musica con foto-suoni**”, around *Yantra* and beyond Darmstadt. Around *Yantra* because of the three perspectives TSR. Beyond Darmstadt because I found, at my own risk, one my personal way in thinking and writing music.

This personal way, unbelievable without *Yantra* and all its world, bets that every sound, even the “less musical” sound, can become music: 360 degrees music.

I explored the history of Music and also the history of western Philosophy looking for a background to this my conviction. I found an ancient tradition coming from Greek pre-Socratic philosophies (**Misone by Chene**, and others, with their warning «things before words!») to **Friedrich Schelling** to the contemporary post-Philosophy (the theory of «abundance» by **Paul Feyerabend**, the idea of «therapeutic philosophy» loving «conversation» more than «confrontation» by **Richard Rorty**, the analysis on the «ethic of communication» by **Karl-Otto Apel**, some post-modern dart by **Francois Lyotard**, etc.).

So during my trips around the world I have archived and I’am archiving with my inseparable digital solid recorder a lot of “foto-suoni” – i. e. sounds caught by a microphone used like a camera lens by daily contexts

# Shahar

per flauto basso, con voce di soprano e supporto digitale ad lib.  
(1996, rev. 1999)

Nadar (1820-1910)Riccardo Piacentini (1958)

The musical score for 'Shahar' is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 1-7) features a soprano line and a bass flute line. The soprano part begins with a tempo marking of 66 and the instruction 'fluido, magnetico'. The bass flute part starts with a dynamic of *p* and includes a five-measure phrase. The second system (measures 8-14) shows the soprano part with dynamics *pppp* and *pp*, and the bass flute part with *ppp* and *fp*. Performance instructions include 'accel...' and 'rall...'. The third system (measures 15-21) continues with the soprano part marked *ppp* and *p*, and the bass flute part marked *fp*. A 'soffio' (breath) instruction is placed above the soprano line. The score concludes with a dynamic of *fp*.

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such as Asian popular markets, subways from America to Russia to Australia, squares, airports, falls... – using them in my compositions exactly as all other music materials, traditional instruments included.

So I go to end this presentation with two my brief excerpts from the first work of “foto-musica” that I wrote in 1999: *Musiche dell’aurora [Dawn Music]* conceived as music for the 8th International Biennial of Photography in Torino.

The first excerpt (2 minutes) is from the first part of *Musiche dell’aurora*. The title is *Shahar*, that in Jewish means “dawn”, for bass flute with voice of soprano and “foto-suoni”. These last were recorded by me at the Frankfurt airport and in the most famous popular market in Tashkent - Uzbekistan, the Chorsu Bazar.

1

from Shahar (1999)

Tiziana Scandaletti soprano  
 Annamaria Morini bass flute  
 Riccardo Piacentini foto-suoni

The second excerpt (2 minutes) is from the second part of *Musiche dell’aurora*. The title is *Chorsu bimbo* for voice of my son Leonardo at the age of 5, sampled sounds and “foto-suoni” recorded in Naples and again in Asia. In this piece my son plays also a set of spoons.

2

from Chorsu bimbo (1999)

Leonardo voice and spoons  
 Riccardo Piacentini foto-suoni