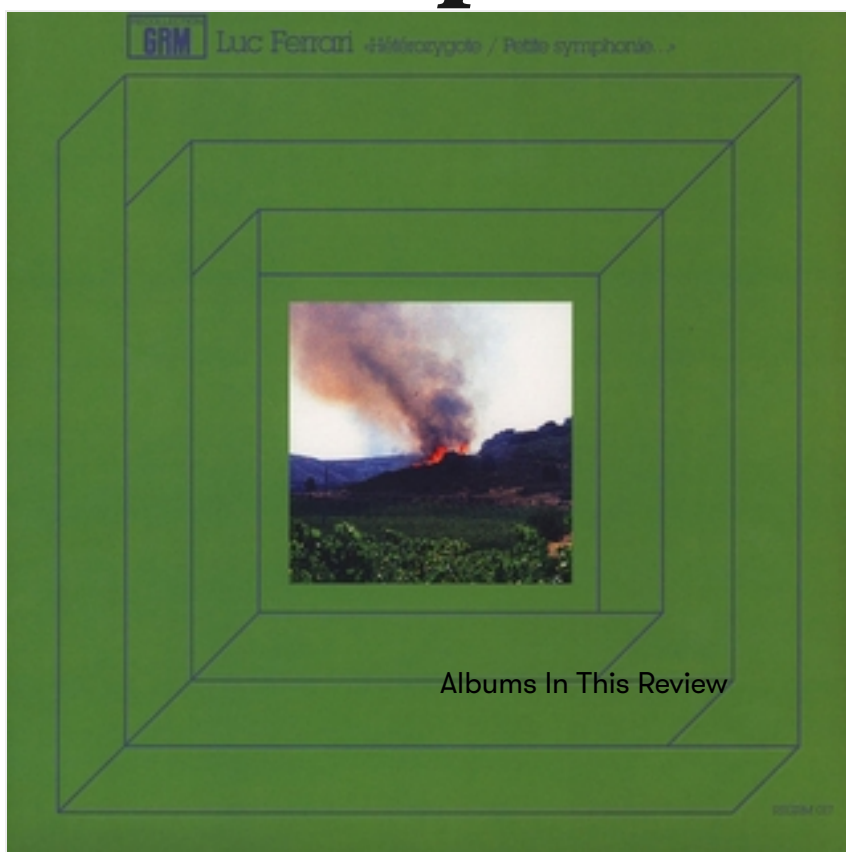


# *Hétérozygote / Petite symphonie intuitive pour un paysage de printemps*



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Two of the most famous pieces of musique concrète by French composer Luc Ferrari are reissued in all their aleatory and surrealist clamor.

“It’s a sculpture, it’s a picture, it’s an accompanist, it’s a poet, it’s

decoration—this machine is a situation.” So Swiss artist Jean Tinguely described one of his large kinetic sculptures, art pieces that recycled metal scraps and mounted them in chunks of wood, cement blocks, or oil barrels. When triggered, these motorized sculptures shivered to life in art galleries, making a clamor not unlike musique concrète, the post-war sound conceived by French composer Pierre Schaeffer in a studio that during the war served as a center for the Resistance movement in French radio. It was a sound as malleable as Tinguely’s descriptor and none of the composers responsible for such music pushed the definition more than Luc Ferrari.

Ferrari encountered the likes of Olivier Messiaen, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and John Cage in the early ’50s before joining Schaeffer at the newly established Groupe de Recherches Musicales near the end of that decade. Musique concrète could manipulate recorded sound, the human voice, musical instruments, or synthesizers, but while Schaeffer and his fellow composers favored a more academic approach, Ferrari’s music was impish. His most famous piece of musique concrète, 1970’s *Presque Rien*, replicated dawn in a Yugoslavian fishing village, which Matmos’ Drew Daniel once described as “a letting go of the standard purposes of musical sound...in favor of a quietly focused experience of listening to the sounds of the world on their own terms.” But he also did fidgety orchestral minimalism and a Sapphic encounter set to African drums and his own whispers.

*Tinguely 1967* reveals two previously unreleased soundtracks from the first decade of Ferrari’s output, including one rendered from recordings

made of Tinguely's epileptic sculptures to soundtrack a 1966 television piece on the artist. "Tinguely" clangs to life, sussing out a rhythm from a sound like a screen door slamming against a bird cage over and over again. What scans as just an unorganized din, slowly reveals a peculiar sensibility making sense of it all. There are staccato outbursts of typewriters, looped voices, whirring motors, metallic scrapes like picking at a lock, and what might be a tuba burbling. At one point, Ferrari combines some of them in such a way so as to suggest strolling through Tinguely's workshop, though a blast of heavy alien reverb reveals it to be a sonic construct.

"Dernier Matin d'Edgar-Allan Poe" dates from three years prior, a piece for a short 33mm black-and-white film. It's the subtler of the two and rather than Ferrari's telltale slyness with musique concrète, it sounds more like a free improv trio: a bow scratches against strings, a drumstick moves across a cymbal, a chord organ lurches. It grows even quieter to include the small sounds of a creaking chair and what might be the man himself humming into a kazoo. Both pieces reveal different iterations of Ferrari, but they aren't the best entry points into the man's peculiar sound-world.

A recent reissue on Mego's vital Recollection GRM series is a better introduction to Ferrari, presenting two of his more important sound-works. "Hétérozygote" dates from around the same timeframe as "Dernier," but it's the more masterful piece, what Ferrari in the liner notes deems "anecdotal" music, wherein "the listener is then asked to imagine their own story." Sounds arise, their source scarcely identifiable

before changing and roaring past. Bell-like notes distort into something eerier. Whistles and brass are sounded, but Ferrari breaks them into small fragments and reconfigures them, not like a *pique assiette*. A woman whispers as she walks along the shore and flutes get stretched into coyote howls. A rocket roars across the stereo field. Party laughter and goat bays intermingle with electronics. Ferrari provides distinct scenes, though just what that story might actually be is evocative if inscrutable, a Donald Barthelme short story filmed by Luis Buñuel.

“Petite symphonie intuitive pour un paysage de printemps” comes a decade later and finds Ferrari seamless in his blending. He calls the piece an “imaginary soundscape” and it’s as luminous as anything in his catalog. An aural approximation of sunset in the Gorges du Tarn in southern France, Ferrari approximates a walk through the countryside: voices arise and move off, crickets, birds, and dogs sound, Ferrari placing some in the distance, some near the ear. All while a few flute loops around at the edges playfully, though over the course of its 25 minutes, it slowly takes over the piece. First encountering the piece many years ago, with its snippets of voices, hazy melody and increasing density, it struck me as what Boards of Canada might sound like had they ever made a sidelong track. Returning to it now, it feels more complex than that. For as alien as musique concrète can be, in the hands of Ferrari, he was able to render it into something that felt warmly familiar. Here he paints a stunning vista at dusk, capturing the expansive horizon with sound rather than sight.

