

LUC FERRARI **LES ARYTHMIQUES**



- 1 5:30
- 2 8:07
- 3 7:54
- 4 5:18
- 5 5:20
- 6 4:30
- 7 3:46

Arrhythmia

One of the last times that I saw Luc was in the summer of 2003. He had recently been hospitalized with a cardiac arrhythmia.

When the conversation turned to his work, I recall him gesticulating somewhat impatiently—it had been a long and not necessarily fruitful day in the studio. “You know how it is,” he explained. “Sometimes you work for several days to make one sound.” This offhand remark confirmed something that I had always heard in Luc’s work, but that we had not previously discussed. I remember vividly how unremarkable he took it to be that one spends days crafting a single sound.

What sound had been thwarting him that day? In the hospital, he had been given an electric shock to treat his arrhythmia. The sound that he was doggedly trying to create was that of a jolt of electricity, sent across the heart. I didn’t know until reading Luc’s notes for *Les Arythmiques* several years later that he had been unconscious during the procedure, and that he was engaged in creating a sound from his imagination. The sound that he finally crafted to his satisfaction is the crackling, vaguely terrifying one that jolts *Les Arythmiques* into life and reappears throughout to interrupt the proceedings at the most unlikely moments.

The sound environment that the electrical shocks interrupt is that of the EKG’s regular beeps, the distant tolling of a church bell, and even more distant sounds resembling birds. In other words, it’s the sound of enforced rest, of a patient immobilized. This relatively small repertoire of concrete sounds is examined with a disorienting repetitiveness that brings to mind the mobile-like quality of many of Luc’s electroacoustic works, but that is here combined with the lightning-quick stabs that I associate with Erik M and Otomo Yoshihide, two artists with whom Luc collaborated in his final years. *Les Arythmiques* ultimately moves beyond the hospital room by delving into an archive of remembered sounds. Murmurings in Italian give way to the English-language interjection “Are y’all familiar with the parts of a saddle?”—the composer’s reflection on material gathered in the American Southwest for his *Far-West News* series.

I can’t think of any of Luc’s other works that are stamped by dread in the same manner as *Les Arythmiques*. Luc’s characteristic humor is here, particularly in the superimposition of diverse sound environments. But *Les Arythmiques* also possesses a nagging unease, a persistent gravity that both listener and composer cannot shake.

David Grubbs
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