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**Edgard Varese's "Poem Electronique," premiered at the World's Fair 1958
comments from Professor Chou Wen-chung
(composer, literary and musical executor of the Varese estate)**

This was one of his only purely electronic pieces and it represents what he had been working towards for years - he had been imagining a composition that was made by unconventional means. In a way, it was the culmination of years of work in his attempt to capture sounds and ideas that couldn't be done with traditional instruments.

Although you don't have the sense of the way it was presented originally at the World's Fair with 400 speakers, it still presents itself as a very poetic piece with a large variety of sound sources that are combined in an exciting way. You can also experience how these sounds move through space in a way that had never been attempted before.

Varese talked abstractly about his music. He didn't talk about it too specifically. He was more concerned about principles and aesthetics. He was concerned with the kind of sound he had in mind, the specific compositional goals. In reference to the piece, he was talking his need for adequate equipment to project the kind of sounds that he had in mind. He was unhappy about his experience with "*Deserts*" so he talked about what he wanted to achieve through adequate electronic means. He was very hopeful at that time that the laboratory in Eindhoven would be able to provide him the opportunity of realizing the sounds he had in mind. He was thinking of the sound being set free in space and very much concerned about how sound can move, interact, collide and integrate with sound. He talked about sound masses.

In his conversations, he would talk about poetic implications, a kind of music that would emerge out of realizing the natural attributes of sound. Subsequently, he became more and more disillusioned with the environment in the studio. He had to deal with the scientists and engineers there at Eindhoven and they were very difficult. He said "we thought we were getting rid of prima donnas in music but now we have prima donna engineers!" (laughs) That really reflects his frustration.

Then there was also the controversy about the premiere performance. Le Corbusier fought for him to be the composer but the board members wanted someone more conventional. So there was a struggle going on. Some of the engineers and technicians were very good to him and others weren't. He felt very frustrated to convince people and tried to convey his ideas to people. He really did a lot of work there. He brought along some sketches of some pieces and had a chorus and percussion part for "*Deserts*." He made revisions of the recordings to be used in "*Poeme Electronique*." He also used organ music that I had to transpose in different ways which had been used for "*Deserts*." You can recognize these things in "*Poeme Electronique*," although transformed.

There's a continuity of the past there, the musical ideas that he began to conceive since the 1930's. He gradually evolved "*Espace*" as the word implies (French for "space"). He had the idea of how sound would travel in space. At one stage, he was talking about having the piece performed in different parts of the world and then received in a concert hall using radio transmitters and capturing all the static interference and other sounds there. You can see how lively his mind was and how he was really thinking of the space in all the senses of it.

He was not a scientist although many people accuse him of being too scientific. Not at all. When he wrote about "*Deserts*," when he was talking about 'space,' he said "I don't mean space in the universe, it could happen in your mind." Ever since his childhood, he was attracted to various types of exploration, especially through science.