

A TRUE RENAISSANCE MAN

The visions of R Murray Schafer
by GORDON RUMSON



R Murray Schafer is best known as one of Canada's foremost composers. He has composed many works in all forms such as his giant Patria cycle of operas (for lack of a better term) including the 12 hour long RA and The Princess of Stars which is staged at a wilderness lake. Schafer is also the world's foremost acoustic ecology theorist and a prolific author. In addition this true renaissance man is also a visual artist of considerable attainments.

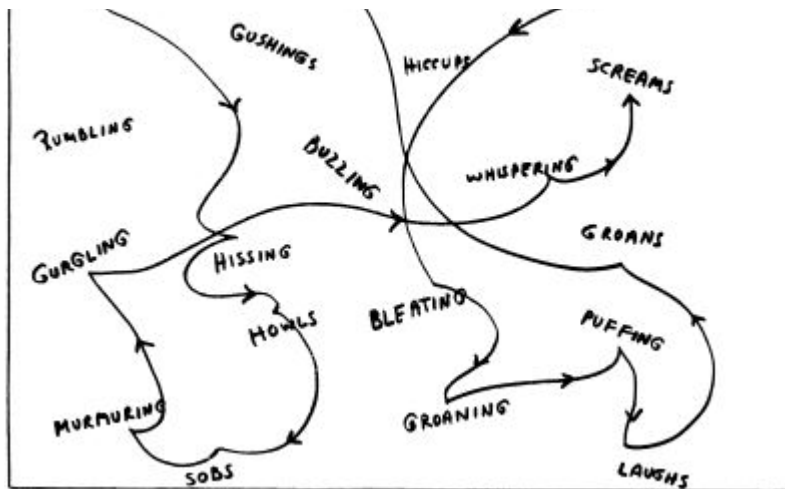
Schafer's musical scores are frequently attractive in and of themselves with beautiful script and layout, so much so that they have been exhibited in visual arts museums. Sometimes the notation is quite conventional, other times the design is artistic and suggestive.

For Schafer the visual aspect of the scores is of two essential kinds: first, the representation of sound events that otherwise could not be notated conventionally. Second, the use of decorative images not strictly related to the musical expression, though clearly intended to interact with the performer and the interpretation.

Conventional notation is flexible enough for certain practices and Schafer's scores are elegant and refined.

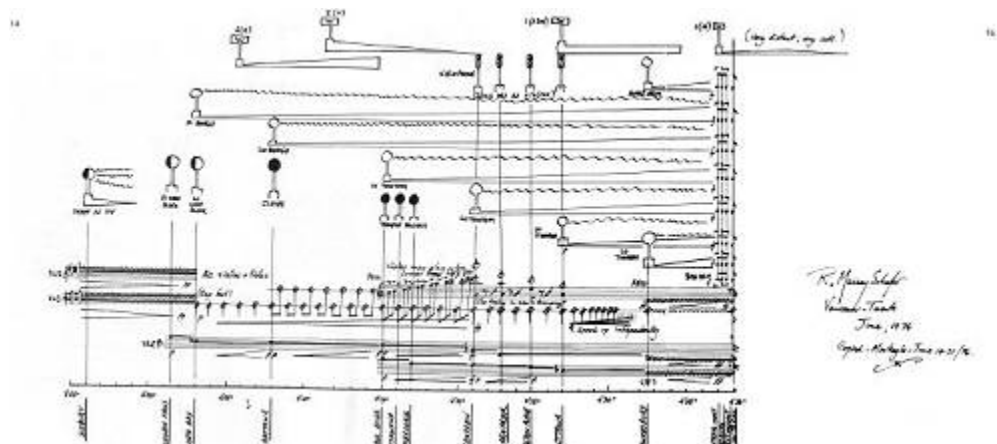
The image shows a handwritten musical score for the opera 'Beauty and the Beast' (French version) by R. Murray Schafer. The score is on page 33 and features staves for Voice, Violins I and II, Viola, Violoncello, and two vocal soloists (La Belle and La Bête). The lyrics are in French. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. There are also handwritten annotations and decorative elements, including a small sketch of a face on the left margin.

Example 1: *Beauty and the Beast* [Opera for solo voice, masks and string quartet], libretto and music by R. Murray Schafer, after Madame Leprince de Beaumont, French version by Gabriel Charpentier (Indian River, Ontario: Arcana Editions, 1983), page 33. Reproduced here with permission.



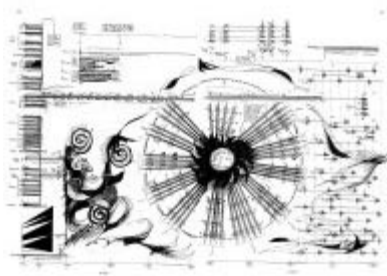
Example 2: 'When Words Sing', from *The Thinking Ear*,
(Indian River, Ontario: Arcana Editions, 1986) p. 197.
Reproduced here with permission.

To the more elaborate:



Example 3: *Train* [for Youth Orchestra], (Berandol Music: Toronto, 1977), p. 14-15.
Reproduced here with permission. Click on the image for an enlarged view.

And to the most complex:



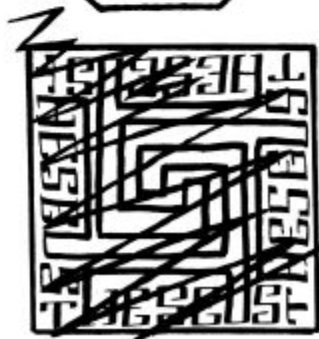
Example 4: *Divan I Shams I Tabriz* [for Orchestra, seven singers and electronic sounds], (Indian River, Ontario: Arcana Editions, previously published Universal Edition, 1969) p. 30-1. Reproduced here with permission.

Click on the image for an enlarged view.

In each case the visual component is intended to articulate some aspect of the sound and most significantly some aspect of the sound reproduction process. For example in Example 4 the swirls correspond visually to the electronic tape sounds. A superficial comparison might be made with some of the scores of George Crumb, though Schafer is much more rigorous, artistic and precise in theoretic underpinnings. Needless to say Schafer has written extensively and profoundly on the nature of the visual score to its acoustic realisation.

As evidenced by Schafer's long-standing commitment to dramatic and theatrical music, the images that appear in some of the scores are clearly intended to awaken or inspire certain emotions and ideas in the people who are making use of the scores.

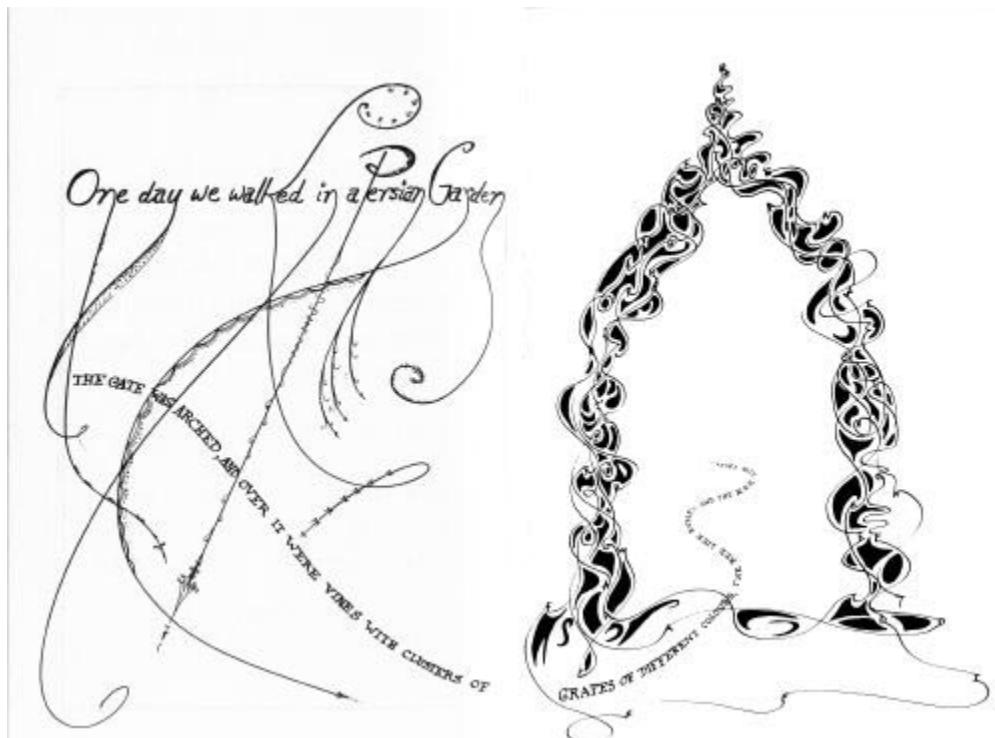
Dicamus and Labyrinthos which is designed as a journal describing investigations into ancient inscriptions purportedly concerning the Minotaur and Labyrinth is prime example of the range of Schafer's imagination. Neatly written text jostles with sketches of the inscriptions, quotations for sources, blotted ink and diagrams of mazes. At times the book must be turned this way and that to be read!



And forget the turf,
topiary & hedge
mazes of later times.
Only toys. Amusement
parks without the
nobility of terror

Example 7: *Dicamus and Labyrinthos*, (Indian River, Ontario: Arcana Editions, 1984), n.p.

In *Ariadne*, Schafer tells the story by means of suggestive sketches, designs and layouts. Text shivers on the page, lines droop with the emotions, words jostle in confusion and then evaporate into thin air.



Example 8: 'One Day we walked in a Persian Garden', *Ariadne*,
(Indian River, Ontario: Arcana Editions, reprint of 1977), n.p.
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These novels (and others such as *Wolf Tracks*, which is not technically for sale but must be found in used book stores where Schafer's agents have secreted them) firmly place Schafer among the best of Canadian writers.

It comes as no surprise that R. Murray Schafer had aspirations to a visual artist's career, sadly cut short by the loss of one eye. Undaunted, Schafer has become one of the most important composers and acoustic creators of our time with a vividness of imagination that pours over into the visual field as needed. Each image is part of the remarkable creativity of R. Murray Schafer.



Example 9: 'The Presenter', from *The Princess of the Stars*,
(Indian River, Ontario: Arcana Editions, 1986), p. 20.
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