

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 page of handwritten musical notation for the opera *Beauty and the Beast*. The score is for page 33 and includes parts for the following instruments and voices:

- VOICE:** BEAUTY (English lyrics: "OR NO! NOW COULDE I... YOU ARE A BEAST!"; French lyrics: "OU NON!... OU! NON!... VOUS ÊTES UNE BÊTE!..."), BEAST (English lyrics: "THEY... ACCORDING TO FOOT..."), LA BELLE (French lyrics: "OU NON!... OU! NON!..."), and LA BÊTE (French lyrics: "ALORS,").
- VIOLINS:** VI.1 and VI.2.
- VIOLA:** VI.A.
- VIOLONCELLO:** VI.C.
- VOICE:** LA BELLE (French lyrics: "NE VOULEZ-VOUS PAS RESTER ICI?"), LA BÊTE (French lyrics: "JE VEUX VOIR MON PÈRE... OÙ EST-IL?").

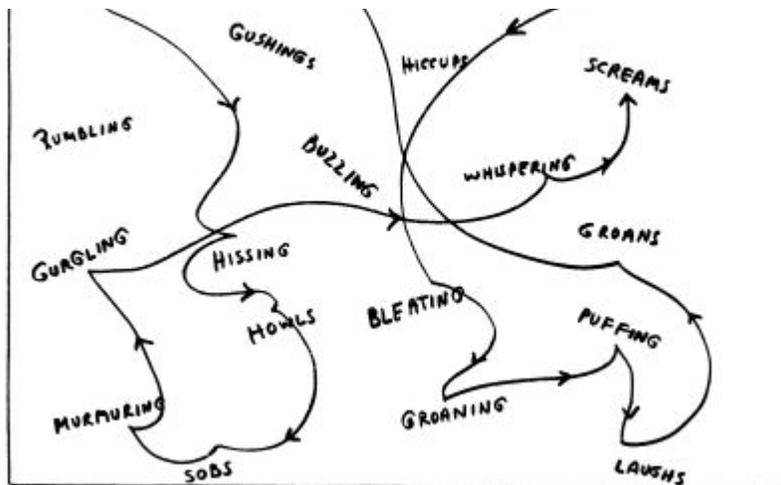
Performance instructions and annotations include:

- ALARMED** (above Beauty's first line)
- QUICKLY** (above Violin I)
- PUSHING FORWARD** (above Violin I)
- SAVAGELY** (above Viola)
- ALL STRINGS INDEPENDENT FOLLOWING VOICE** (above Violin I)
- PUSHING FORWARD** (above Beauty's second line)
- NORMAL** (above Beast's line)
- FLUTE** (above Violoncello)

Handwritten notes on the left margin include:

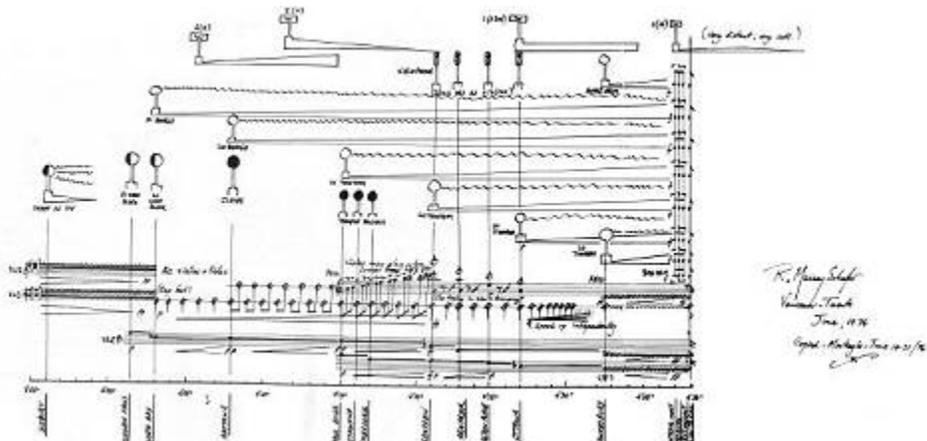
- "P..."
- "NO!"
- "NE?"
- "AND?"
- "NOISE?"

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.



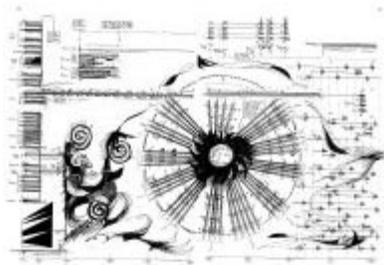
Example 2: 'When Words Sing', from *The Thinking Ear*,
 (Indian River, Ontario: Arcana Editions, 1986) p. 197.
 Reproduced here with permission.

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.

WHO IS FIT TO OPEN THE SCROLL,
TO BREAK ITS SEVEN SEALS?

FOUR LIVING CREATURES

THE LAMB WILL OPEN THE SCROLL
AND HE WILL BREAK THE SEALS

THE LAMB THAT WAS RANSOMED
FROM DEATH BY HIS BLOOD
AND HE WILL OPEN THE SCROLL
AND REVEAL THE DESTINY
OF THE WORLD

WHO IS FIT TO OPEN THE SCROLL,
TO BREAK ITS SEVEN SEALS?

12 GREAT CHANGES

40'

40'

40'

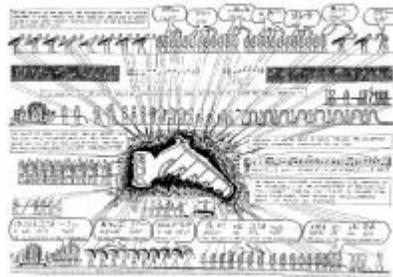
By a strange device of composition, obtained from the collage, collage with some sense the scroll of history composed of many strands is made into a single structure of broad strokes & broad curves.

Example 5: *Apocalypse, Part One: John's Vision*,
(Indian River, Ontario: Arcana Editions, 1977) p. 14.
Reproduced here with permission.

Or these images of Egyptian art which decorate the score of *RA*:

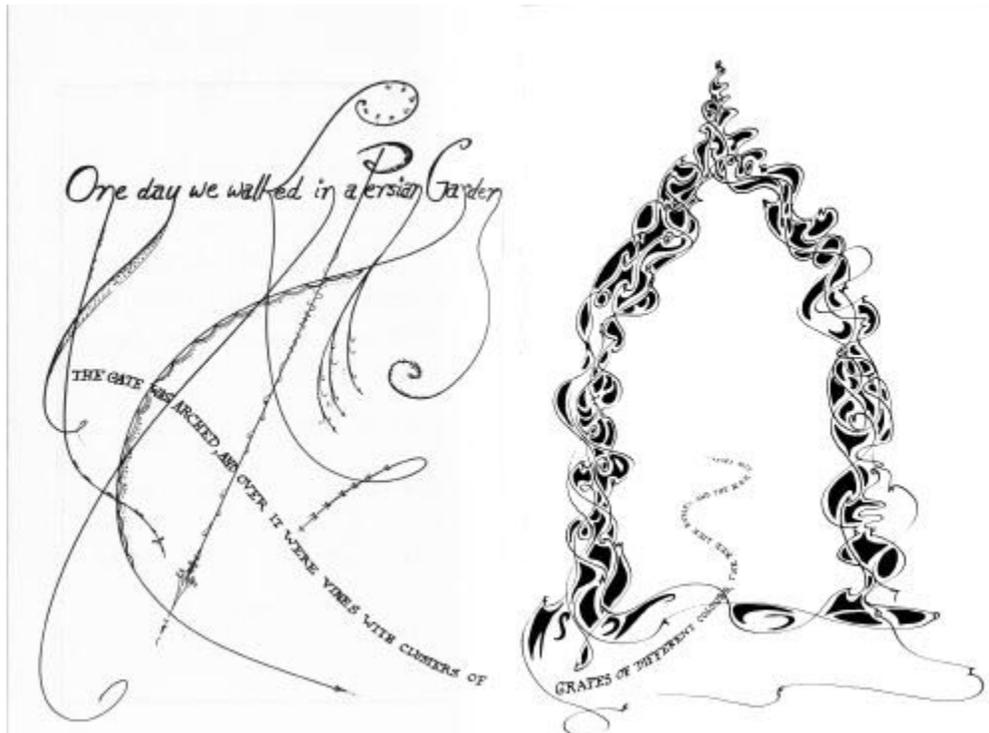
Example 6: *RA*, (Indian River, Ontario: Arcana Editions, 1989), p. 48.
Reproduced here with permission.

Click on the image for an enlarged view.



Along with these aspects of musical scores, their representations and performance, R. Murray Schafer has written several novels using graphic formats. In these works Schafer tells tales that could not be told in the usual linear typeface format, or he tells tales that have utterly different effects when placed in such formats.

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.
Reproduced here with permission.

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.
Reproduced here with permission.

