

Biography and Portrait of Edith Lejet

(Version 2011)

b. 1941, Paris, France
Composer and Specialist in Twentieth Century Music

Biography

CURRENT POSITION

- Emeritus Professor, Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris (Cité de la Musique)
- Professor of Composition, Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris Alfred Cortot
114 bis, boulevard Malesherbes, 75017 Paris



With Maurice Ohana and Odile Marcel, 1974

EDUCATION

- Baccalaureate in Mathématiques, 1958, Lycée Molière, Paris.
- CAEM (Certificat d'Aptitude à l'Enseignement Musical, Education Nationale), 1965.
- Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris (CNSMDP), 1958-1968.

FIRST PRIZE HONOURS AT CNSMDP

- Aesthetics (class of Marcel Beaufils)
- Harmony (class of Henri Challan)
- Counterpoint (class of Marcel Bitsch)
- Fugue (class of Marcel Bitsch)
- Composition (class of **Jean Rivier**, then **André Jolivet**)

At the Conservatoire, she studied Composition with **Jean Rivier** and **André Jolivet**, whose classes were frequently augmented by the outstanding teaching of **Henri Dutilleux**. She credits her friendship at that time with composer **Maurice Ohana** to be an important contribution to her training.

- Trainee with the Groupe de Recherche Musicale of Radio-France (GRM), 1966
Concurrent with, but outside her studies at CNSMDP, she participated as a trainee in introductory courses to electro-acoustic music organized in 1966 by the group under the guidance of **François Bayle**.
- Summer Scholarship :
As an undergraduate, she was awarded a scholarship by the French Foreign Ministry to two summer courses in composition with composer **Virgilio Mortari**. Virgilio Mortari is co-author with Alfredo Casella of the well-known "Treatise

of Orchestration". The courses were held at Chigiana Academy in Siena in 1965, and in Venice at the Conservatory Benedetto Marcello in 1966.

OTHER HONOURS

- « Grand Prix de Rome de Composition »
- Fellowship holder of Artistic Section of « Casa de Velazquez » in Madrid, 1968-1970, where she attended concerts and conferences organized by the Alea Group, and had contacts with **Luis de Pablo** and **Cristobal Halffter**.
- *Prix Bleustein-Blanchet pour la Vocation*
- *Prix Florence Gould [Académie des Beaux-Arts, Paris]*
- *William and Noma Copley Foundation Award (Chicago)*
- *Prix Hervé Dugardin [SACEM, Paris]*
- *Grand Prix de la Musique de Chambre [SACEM, Paris]*
- *2003 : Prix Nadia et Lili Boulanger [Académie des Beaux-Arts, Paris]*



Georges Auric makes the presentation of the quadrennial award for composers "Prix de la Confédération des travailleurs intellectuels", to E.L., 1967

COMPOSING CAREER

Lejet has composed numerous works which were published by Amphion, Lemoine, Billaudot, Transatlantiques, Eschig. These published works have been performed by orchestras or instrumental groups such as the New Philharmonic Orchestra of Radio-France, Ars Nova, 2e 2m, Musique Vivante, in festivals such as Royan, the Festival of Nordic Music in Oslo etc. , and in concert series such as les Mardis de Radio-France, les Concerts-Lectures de France-Musique, Espace Contemporain etc.

They have been frequently featured, including a few programmes entirely devoted to her work with interviews, in broadcasts over Radio's France Culture and France Musique. In addition, her compositions were broadcast on foreign radio stations in Japan, Canada, Israel, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, and Yugoslavia, to name a few.

Six of her works for instrumental groups have been recorded on a CD released in November 2004 (Mandala, distributed by Harmonia Mundi).

Lejet's works, which are not aesthetically linked to any particular trend or school, are characterized by conciseness and carefully-selected material with meticulous research about the form.

ACADEMIC CAREER

- Paris-Sorbonne University (Institut de Musicologie)

- **Sept. 1970** : Taught written harmony until June 1972.

- At Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris (CNSMDP)

- **Jan. 1972** : Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris (CNSMDP). Professor of Theory in the Voice Department (sightreading), replacing Janine Rueff.
- **Jan. 1975** : Granted tenure at CNSMDP.
- **Oct. 1987** : Taught the class "Instrumentation et Orchestration" in lieu of Marius Constant for one academic year at the request of Alain Louvier (then Director of the CNSMDP).
- **Oct. 1988** : Named full professor at CNSMDP for *Écriture*, (a course that offered musical composition theory using several styles), replacing Marcel Bitsch, teaching Fugue.
- **Oct. 1992** : Placed in charge of a new class focusing on modernist styles of the twentieth century. The class, "*Écriture : Musique du XXème Siècle*", had just been created by Xavier Darasse (then Director of the CNSMDP).
- **Sept. 2005** : retirement from this activity, Alain Mabit takes over.

- At Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris Alfred Cortot

- **2004** : appointment to a teaching post of Composition.

These teaching responsibilities, plus extra activities such as conducting a Composition workshop at the invitation of both the French Cultural Centre and Gutenberg University of Mainz, Germany, enhance her artistic creativity while leaving contemporary composition as her primary focus.

Portrait

by Pierrette GERMAIN

Excerpt from an article of the monthly review « L'éducation musicale », february 2002



Photo Philippe Beauvillain

Discrete, idealistic, reflective, ardent..., these terms may be appropriate to describe the personality of the composer Edith Lejet. They allow a good understanding of her thoughts, led by the need of finding her genuine expression, through a demanding inner research. The awareness of her vocation prompts her to transmit her intuitions faithfully : « I am deeply convinced, she says, that the authentic works of art pre-exist, and are totally beyond the artist's will ; the creator in art must remain humble, since his part consists in bringing to light some obscure forces, which are universal although they reflect a specific time and place. Giving birth to a work of art requires a careful, voluntary and patient unveiling of these « obscure forces ». They appear through the urgent need of creating and burst into the impulse which gears up the composer towards the unwritten page.

How did Edith Lejet become a composer ?

At first the blank page was drawing paper, and thanks to the inducement of her school teacher of plastic arts, who introduced her to modernism, she had a great temptation to become a painter. However she was obviously more gifted for playing the piano. So she carried on her school education to get the Baccalauréat, and in order to respond to her father's wish, she prepared herself for the profession which was the most adapted to her aptitudes : teaching music in lycées. She passed the examination to enter the official teachertraining-center of Lycée La Fontaine, and the same year she was admitted as a student of Harmony and Aesthetics at the Paris Conservatory. It was there she attended later the course of Composition. She got her degrees for teaching music, and taught for a few years. Meanwhile she was a laureate of the « Prix de Rome », of the « Casa de Velazquez », and in 1972, aged 31, she was appointed to a post of Professor of Theory at the Paris Conservatory.



Composition class of André Jolivet, 1968

What had she already composed ?

Several of her works had already been publicly performed at that time. One of them at the Festival of Aix-en-Provence, others by radio, such as « Monodrame » for violin and orchestra (1969) and « Le Journal d'Anne Frank » for female choirs and a small group of instrumentalists. In an intense musical thought the evolution of the tragedy is evoked, from childish unconcern to final peace. Recorded in 1970 at Radio-France, it was recently given in a concert in Douai (March 2001), as arranged by the local Conservatory, with the participation of the local primary schools and lycées, and the regional choir. The choice of dealing with this subject tallies with the intimate orientation she likes to give to her output, with a deep human message : « I find my genealogy, she says, where the music appeals to emotions. I feel rather strange to intellectual and speculative research. I put high value on spontaneity and intuition, which generate freshness ».



At Maurice Ravel's house at Montfort l'Amaury with Charles Chaynes and Manuel Rosenthal.

What are her roots and affinities ?

She acknowledges a filiation which dates back to Debussy, whose modal scales « leading to unusual chords » attract her. While Debussy escapes from the so called functional harmony, and makes use of material which « induces him to question the main basic notions of rhythm and shape », she finds confirmation of her own truths. She is very fond of the music of Ravel, the perfection of which she fully enjoys, and she speaks highly of Dutilleux and Ohana, who provided her with invaluable guidance and inspiration. The wonder and comfort she experienced in the contemplation of works of art -[music as well as architecture, sculpture, painting or literature]- shaped her faith in the high value of Art.

The uncompromising conviction that it must raise itself towards high ideals feeds her mind and helps her in the wish of playing a part to enrich the cultural heritage of our time.

These viewpoints and aims are clearly reflected in the style of her music, characterized by firmness, concision and an original application of musical rules in composition. Her mastery of counterpoint, her harmonic acuteness and her modal imagination found the specificity of her language. For each of her scores, the quality of colouring and the appropriateness of proportions may be listed among her main preoccupations.