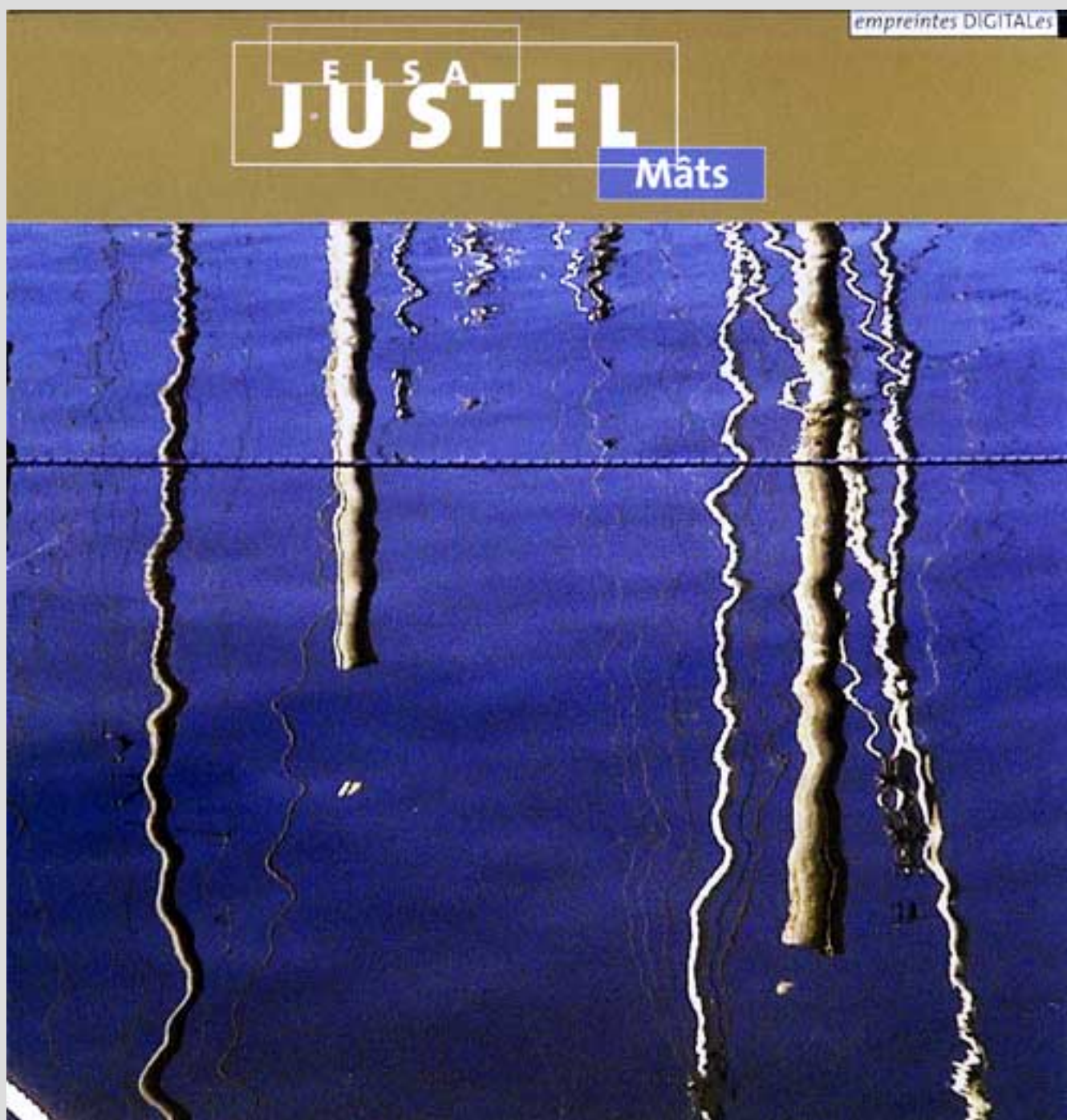


Elsa Justel - Mâts



Elsa Justel – **Mâts**

Empreintes DIGITales IMED 0785. Duration: 78:25

Elsa Justel was born in **Mar del Plata, Argentine** in 1944, coming of maturity in a generation famous and infamous for its gallant force of creativity just in time for some exciting and useful scientific discoveries and technical inventions; a lucky generation!

Justel is a Professor of Music Education and Choral conducting at **the Conservatory of Mar del Plata**. She continued studying composition, and also electroacoustic music with José Maranzano and Francisco Kröpfl.

Elsa Justel moved the long haul to **France** in 1998, studying with fellow Argentinean **Horacio Vaggione**, receiving a Doctorate in Esthetics, Sciences and Technologies of Arts. Furthermore, **Justel** has spread her graces in wider artistic areas, but we'll remain with the electroacoustic music in this review, since our reason for paying attention to her now is her new disc on **Empreintes DIGITales**; the world's prime series of new electroacoustic music.

As I float through a pre-listening hour, just letting all the pieces on the CD play, unconsciously, without aim or 100% attention, easing around the apartment, I feel a familiar joy come face to face; that same feeling of richness and invention that I often experienced in the 1980s, when I discovered so much new electroacoustic music, especially in **France**. **Elsa Justel**'s new CD makes me feel that same way, opening an atmosphere of great possibility and long wonders to my perception!

Track 1. Gwerz [to **Horacio Vaggione**] [2002] (11:40)

The title is explained as a Breton word, meaning ballad or lament. This is funny, since it sounds so much like a Yiddish word pronounced “kvetch”, which also has to do with lamenting, meaning someone who complains a lot; a real kvetch! My Baltimorean Mother-in-law used it frequently! This in turn makes me think of a Swedish/French electroacoustic highlight from the 1980s, **Tommy Zwedberg**'s **Bavarde** (“Chatterbox”; someone who talks a whole lot!) – but now I'm veering off too far...

Horacio Vaggione wrote the introduction to **Elsa Justel**'s sound art in the booklet, and here he is the dedicatee of track one; **Gwerz**. Of course, **Vaggione** is a very important name in Argentinean art music, and his importance is by no means limited by national borders. I recall my own enthusiasm at some of his works that I discovered in the 1980s, like **Tar** with its tapping of vaults, which really blew me away. Round about the same time, other Argentines became well-known through art music, and especially through electroacoustic art, like **Francisco Kröpfl** – with **Orillas** on one of the **Cultures Électroniques** CDs – and **Ricardo Mandolini** with **Microrreflexiones** on another one of those **Bourges** CDs, and also **Eduardo Kusnir** – with **La Panaderia**. Argentina has a rich tradition of electroacoustics, and now we get the chance to measure the art of **Elsa Justel**.

The piece hits home without any false modesty, with a bang and a bounce, but shortly the surroundings turn grainy, and then spooky, reverberant... and even rubbery. The ambience changes speedily. This is one of the effects that you can play with in free art music, but it's not done too much. Justel knows how to wring the best out of the moment, out of the ambience of the moment, and like a blind man you hear the distance to the walls or the ceiling. You get locked in tight for a moment, before the cave opens into ominous distances.

At times I can't decide whether I hear balloons being rubbed or bacon being fried... Small sounds – now and then extremely short instances of thin rain sprinkling across tin surfaces – makes for a certain atmosphere, which is, however, lost in some more violent event; a mud flow or a wall of rocks tumbling down a geologically active slope... The question is how the music makes me feel. I get a rather anonymous feeling, but sprayed with lust and curiosity!

Justel keeps shifting perspective from the close to the far, daring your adaptation and adjustment! She allows for brief breaks too, in which you sail across breathless gaps in time. A shower of grains rattles down on the other side, getting in your shoes...

Track 2. Du libe tu? [1996] (2:14)

I'm not sure what to make of **Justel**'s own introduction to this brief instance, but she offers an explanation into the title, anyway, which is an anagram on the title **Pierre Schaeffer**'s piece **Bidule en ut** from 1950, actually created at a concert at **Amphiithéâtre Richelieu** at **Sorbonne** on 16 March 1950.

It is a brief, playful whip of cream, smack dab in the middle of a joyful and skirmish kind

of sound art, arrived at on a whim, perhaps, albeit bringing some of the best mood of artisanship into the fore; twanging, springing cartoon illustrations a la **Disney** – or **Spike Jones**... or, for that matter, **Pierre Schaeffer**!

Track 3. Mâts [1999] (10:57)

Elsa Justel dedicates this to her husband. I don't mean to be nosy, but is **Mâts** perhaps a Swedish name? **Mats** – without the broken roof – is a common Swedish male name.

Perhaps it means something quite different here?

The onset is a mystical one – nature mystery; that of landrails ticking along inside late summer nights of **Scandinavia**... perhaps... The sounds are short, brief, chopped about, but manifold, presenting an unfinished set of circumstances in this ever-changing mind of ours. Sounds are dark, grey, perhaps military green, and small, fragile moments are scooped up and shoved aside, only to fall back in place in a vain kind of effort.

Later you start to hear chordal sounds resound, and the atmosphere gets reverberant. The whole tendency inside this fastidious, moving event is prickly and fast, if you have to define it as anything. Further on the sounds could be the isolated scrapings of a wooden spoon inside an **Häagen-Dazs** ice-cream container purchased on **Lower Manhattan** or in a village in **Somerset**, in **Yeovil**... (lots of fairies and small wonders there, along the arborist dwellings!)

You have to give **Justel** great credit for really exhausting the possibilities of these harsh, grey sonorities, making you stay on your toes not to miss the briefest flyby!

Track 4. Midi de sable [2000] (9:47) [to **Joan Izquirodo**]

(alto recorder / tenor recorder / basset recorder / contrabass recorder / tape)

Joan Izquirodo [recorders]

This is an incredibly beautiful work, shining and squeaking with candy bar lights and sweet nothings! All these recorders are utilized in their smallest constituents, as well as amassed and dense. Recorder light is finding its way in and out of the iron bars of everyday, embellishing existence for what ever it's worth!

This kind of treatment of a set of instruments does carry a tradition from **Vaggione's Tar**, for example, and Justel brings this artistic streak further, placing glass bowls of recorder candy – red and green and tan – at various levels of the human room. Wonderful!

Track 5. Alba Sud [1997 – 98] (9:48) [to **Beatriz Ferreyra**]

Elsa Justel says that **Alba Sud** is an homage to musique concrète as well as a reverence to synthetic sources of sound, of both digital and analog origins. She says that she was too young to directly experience **Schaeffer's** heydays, but he has had a great influence on her nonetheless.

I get an ancient Australian feel in here, perhaps induced on me by the likeness of dijeridoo murmuring deep, emphatically, as black water seeps up around tree stems or crocodiles inside my imagination.

Like in earlier works by **Justel**, you're entrusted to details, a myriad of details, which eventually render you an atmosphere of something more over-arching. In this case of **Alba Sud** the general impression is muddy, moist with black iron-rich soak-water, filling your socks with shockingly cold fluids as you're inching through one of your turned-away nocturnals.

Justel manages to rhythmize these precarious moments in a frantically corrugated pattern, as a simple unexpected ingredient of a female “huh?” appearing without warning in a misplaced section of understanding gets me off balance!

A piece like **Alba Sud** is nothing to speculate about really. It is clear that **Justel** has a brilliant knack of taking the simplest origins, creating mysterious sonic landfalls – and in this case I'd just recommend listening loud and brave, rock n' rollish!

Track 6. Au loin... bleu [1997] (11:26)

For the first time a purely lingual progression from the start, unintelligible morphemes, male and female, tangling down like ends of old rope from the ceiling, eventually losing meaning altogether, adhering more to whistling reverberations in the shape of voices, than original voices. Guttural echoes of more real vocals spring forth like ticks on the closed face of time, somebody wiping sweat from a forehead. On the backdrop of alien space sounds on distant horizons, syllables appear like Mene Mene Tekels, while sound poetic saliva spittings a la late **Henri Chopin** occur, visioning **the Dying Dandy** stretched out in a full measure of bewildering vocal sonorities, losing his composure down the ages of putrefaction...

Yes, shreds of conversations (or monologues?) deviate and flap off like the flickering wings of jackdaws.

Track 7. Puntos, comas y refritos [2002] (11:41)

Justel lets on that she utilized a number of clichés in this bit, to recreate a certain nostalgia.

These clichés include the sounds of water, birds, footsteps – but as I ride inside this enchantedness, I don't feel disturbed by clichés at all. Instead I enjoy the usual delicacy of sonic composition that surely belongs to **Elsa Justel**. All these small sounds, offered in rich offerings, are bound to associate your mental faculties certain ways, into various rooms at the end of your own frames of reference. Ok, perhaps the breaks are a bit wild at times, from the frantic sawing of wood to a high-pitch interstellar drone into the pouring of carbonized water over cubes of ice... and the familiar brushing of teeth!

Track 8. Bastet [2004] (10:37)

Bastet is the Egyptian cat-god. **Bastet** served as the god of fire, pregnant women and the home. Here she has lipped into the piano box!

To begin with you just notice a lofty, soaring and slightly plucking sound, and a certain motion not unlike the swirling spirals of cotton candy. You hear the flourishing overtone patterns of stroked piano strings and the **Pierre Henry** rumble of grand piano hulls, shifting like icebergs on northern horizons. The prickly metal crackle comes across like crystals of ice in slowly freezing winds dying down.

As much as I feel the presence of a piano, I sense the chilling gusts from rocks of ice. Short units of time shamble by across cold and reflective surfaces, through a nocturnal crystal world.

This is perhaps the most careful and delicate electroacoustic course of events on **Elsa Justel's** CD, bringing her art ascending into a truly brilliant sound art of a kind that you seldom may experience. Spellbinding!



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