

Acceptance address (In English) by Régis Campo upon the occasion of becoming a Member of the French Academy of Fine Arts on Wednesday, April 3rd 2019 (Institut de France)

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Video of the Ceremony (in French language):
<https://player.vimeo.com/video/345678884>

Now I must surrender to this terribly obvious fact : the great moment has come!

No more time to escape! To hide right at the top of the Cupola!

The Republican Guard, with the help of my very honorable Permanent Secretary, will soon find me out!

And here I am, launched on a nearly impossible stylistic composition!

Praising one's predecessor, so much admired!

One feels somewhat impressed and must make several attempts at such a vast subject.

So I made several attempts.

In various styles: Comic? Tragic? Academic? Astounded?

Or also: Joking? Bombastic? Nevrotic and Petty?

Alcoholic and unmanageable? Jupiterian or Elysian-style?

None of that.

I chose simplicity.

The simplicity one finds when facing to a truly great man one

loves.

I have the honour of succeeding Charles Chaynes, and I particularly remember the way he looked at you:

Yes, just his eyes, his large eyes.

Composers and their mothers

In his native city of Toulouse, Charles Chaynes's mother was a pianist and an organist.

She guided the young musician's life.

“My mother, Charles Chaynes used to say, played the church organ. I remember those Sundays as something quite extraordinary, even a little unreal.”

I imagine him, perched high up on the organ loft as though on top of a ship's mast.

Little Charles would dream of fantastic things: his child's imaginative world was on the move.

That magical period of childhood by his mother's side will remain imprinted all along his life.

Composers never forget their mothers' voices.

In their wombs, our mothers already give us the first beats of our music thanks to their own heartbeats.

Learning

As early as five years old, Charles Chaynes learnt to play the violin with his father Irénée Chaynes who was a brilliant violinist. His father induced him to study harmony and counterpoint at 12. It was the time of his first compositions. Our fathers have guided us with so much genius all along our lives as artists and as men.

Indeed, as a child, I was fascinated by one of my father's paintings : a copy of *the Man with the Golden Helmet* by

Rembrandt. That painting represented a soldier with a menacing look in a dim light. I was persuaded the painting was alive and that his eyes moved. I would sometimes like to look at the painting to get a kick out of being scared.

An imaginary world was thus entering my life.

A long time later, I discovered at Amsterdam Rembrandt's original painting: it was only a pale copy of my father's painting!

Because the eyes of *The Man with the Golden Helmet* did not move !

It was an enormous disappointment!

Rembrandt had made a very bad copy of my father's painting!

I then understood that since our childhood, we have taken possession of the works of art we love. We transform them into new works we keep creating all along our lives.

At 17, Charles Chaynes continued his studies at the Paris Conservatory. He worked as a violinist in famous orchestras but also in cabarets and operettas.

It is at that period that he became a master in the art of orchestration.

I quote him : "As a violinist in an orchestra, I learnt so much during the years of studies and of war that I never needed to open an orchestration treatise again."

In 1948 Charles Chaynes became a pupil of Darius Milhaud, a composer from Marseilles whose music is so warm and colourful.

During his studies, one of his Conservatory teachers told him: "you will only do exactly as you please!"

What a marvellous defect for a composer!

Indeed, if we are all gathered together today under this prestigious Cupola it is because "we have been doing exactly as we please" since our childhood!

Roman Light

In 1951, Charles Chaynes won the prestigious Prix de Rome. He left for Italy and became a resident at the Villa Medici for three marvellous years. Rome was essential for him: It was the center of his Mediterranean influences, the city of freedom and of light par excellence.

Then he discovered Italy: with its nearly middle-age Italian villages in after the war years, the cities of Tuscany, the Etruscan museums, and the pre-Renaissance painting.

Painting will have a major influence in his work as a music composer.

However, I am principally disconcerted by his admiration for the art of Douanier Rousseau. Charles Chaynes saw in it (according to his own words) a great emotional impregnation hidden by the painter's talent as a colourist.

Let us not be misled by the false simplicity of creators such as that of Olivier Messiaen, Erik Satie or Miró, the painter. That simplicity often hides very deeply a blunt, violent and penetrating look on life and death.

His work on the radio

In 1957 Charles Chaynes became a producer at the RTF (Radiodiffusion Télévision française - the French Television and Radio Broadcasting Company, now called Radio France). The directors of Radio France are poets and composers : Jean Tardieu, Paul Gilson, Henri Dutilleux and Henry Barraud. With his lifelong friend, composer Marius Constant, he is responsible for the musical programme of the great radio station "France IV" later to become France Musique.

In 1965 he became director of that station for ten years. Then he was appointed as head of the creation department of Radio

France. He realizes that a composer's life is to share in society, remaining aloof from parochial quarrels. I quote him: "Radio enriches me considerably for it allows me to live in an atmosphere of living music. It keeps me informed of everything happening here as well as elsewhere. Thanks to it, I feel constantly on the move: it avoids me from sclerosis and induces me to compose music!" Charles Chaynes believed in a free music, away from systems. He tells us : "The emotional element prevails over pure technique."

But even more, he admits in the course of an interview :
"I am romantico-lyrical!"

So Charles Chaynes is a romantic!

That is where we fatally come to an intimate aspect, though essential...

Woman

During his studies at the Paris conservatory in the fifties, Charles Chaynes met a young pianist: Odette Decaux. She was studying the piano, harmony, history of music and chamber music. Odette and Charles formed a duet of inseparable musicians.

Odette will be his wife for nearly 70 years.

In absolute and eternal love, one plus one does not add up to two but to infinity.

Odette and Charles were an ideal couple in which music, creation and love were for ever mingled.

Odette Chaynes was a great musician and a true sharp ear. She became a very prominent chef de chant for numerous operas such as *Le Grand Macabre* by György Ligeti or *Saint François d'Assise* by Olivier Messiaen.

Thanks to his wife, Charles Chaynes lived and breathed opera.

Odette was, according to his own words, “the luck of (his) life”: she accompanied all his great musical creations : his works for the piano (that were all written for her) and his operas.

He said about her: “She knows exactly all my thoughts, all I imagine, a music that includes emotional passion.”

Do you realize?

“A spouse who knows exactly what you think.”

Can you imagine the danger if such a thing is possible?...

A quote from Sacha Guitry about women comes to my mind:

“I am against women, *quite* against them.”

So, like Sacha Guitry let us be quite against women. Let us haste composing music quite against women. Let us do everything quite against women!...

But I am wandering, let’s get back to the subject...

Oriental period

I met Charles Chaynes for the first time when I was 22.

A great music festival at Saint Victor Abbey was paying a tribute to his works in the composer’s presence.

His wife Odette played his piano suite, *M’Zab*, inspired by a trip in the Algerian Sahara. I listened to that music: it was at the same time meditative, incantatory, powerful.

And that evening, I travelled in my mind.

I travelled to Africa as though the Abbey, so near the Old Port, was taking off and sailing away from the port to cross the Mediterranean.

Charles Chaynes describes this piece poetically as being “a faraway and fleeting remembrance of local sonorities, in a typically oriental perception of time, prisoner of an obsessional process.” He adds: “So, the dream is embodied, timeless in the music that flows according to its own time.”

Saint Victor Abbey may well have moved and sailed the seas. It may truly have transformed itself into a vessel carrying me away to some unknown country never to return from. It is perhaps any creator's lifetime oriental voyage: taking a single ticket and leaving for ever.

Another quote from Charles Chaynes:

“Leaving to seek magi, to find within oneself a part of the magic that is always part and parcel of artistic worlds.” In 1983, the great singer Christiane Eda-Pierre inspired him his first opera created at the Paris Opera. That lyrical work narrates the life of a Hungarian countess, condemned for having tortured and assassinated 600 young peasant girls in her castle undergrounds.

Quite a colourful and jolly subject!

The opera met with an immense success.

Though horrified by the subject, Olivier Messiaen came to congratulate him and admired the splendid music.

Encouraged by his success, Charles Chaynes will write four other operas: *Noces de sang*, *Jocaste*, *Cecilia* and in 2007 *My Amore*.

Four operas in which an unconventional woman plays a dominant part.

For Charles Chaynes admitted to being a “feminist” before time!

Mystery, the supernatural

In the act of creation, Charles Chaynes placed instinct above everything else.

The natural and brisk gesture of a child seizing an object spontaneously.

He confides to us: “Composing is opening up the secret part of oneself, the mysterious being, to someone else who seems to

us out of reach.”

Yes, “opening up the secret part of oneself to someone else.”

The musical work suddenly springs in an irrepressible surge of love.

Because a musical work is a mysterious gift of the heart.

Composer Henri Dutilleux also loved that *mysterious instant* in the act of writing music.

That *mysterious instant*!

All my creator friends present here very well know that quest for the magic instant. The exceptional instant when an unexpected idea springs up, then, we are engulfed in “an infinite sphere the centre of which is everywhere, the circumference nowhere.”

“An infinite sphere the centre of which is everywhere, the circumference nowhere.”

I do not understand that sentence by Blaise Pascal, but it is so beautiful...

Under this Cupola I have the feeling today, now that we are all gathered, that maybe, in an infinite sphere the centre of which is everywhere...

The heart is everywhere.

With his sense of wonder Charles Chaynes is in keeping with the great French masters: Olivier Messiaen with his idea of musical bedazzlement, Henri Dutilleux with his love for exaltation and for sacredness, then Maurice Ohana with his frenzied incantations.

Charles Chaynes also was a man of religious faith, as well as a Christian who fostered extra-european oral traditions: China, Northern India, Japan, Azerbaïdjan, Gabon, Burundi, and so many other African ones.

Above all, he will remain that creative man who climbed Mount Sinai to try and find the *Burning Bush* mentioned in

the Bible. That miraculous surge of the musical inspiration makes us quiver and carries us away into wonder. The very state of wonder we are on the lookout for, every moment of our lives.

The temptation of Joy

We all love creating.
Creating for other people.
It fills us with joy.
And we love to share that joy.
Joy has nothing to do with optimism nor pessimism.
Joy protects us against the temptation of evil and against the cruelties of life.
Joy is like a relationship of love for the world.
But we must work at it.
And it is a daily fight with oneself to keep it.

Joy is a little flame one must protect:
It may burn out very quickly.
I like this quote by Olivier Messiaen describing Mozart's smile:
"In spite of bereavements, sufferings, hunger, cold, incomprehension, and of close death, Mozart would always smile. His music, too, would smile." Mozart would tell his friends: "before I play something, tell me you love me."
"Tell me you love me."
I had promised you a very simple speech and here I am becoming sentimental!

And, to tell everything, I would have liked to write a more fanciful speech inventing impossible stories and making you believe they are true.

For today I am joining a Company of creative geniuses forever inventing. I would have liked to make up many a fantastic story.

Such as...

Making you believe I had found, when I was a child, his orchestral score *Transmutations* on a bench in a little street of Marseilles. And had deciphered his esoteric notations...

Or...

Having seen a magical number in a cabaret : Laurent Petitgirard dressed up as a maharajah wearing a turban, and causing a splendid Persian dancer to levitate in the air.

As a child I would also have liked to watch a balloon coming down and seeing Yann Arthus-Bertrand asking me to join him with my friends from the Academy, all settled in the balloon gondola on a mysterious trip in the skies...

We shall make that trip...

I would above all one day find him again on a far away island to tell him my faithfulness and my admiration.

That day will come too...

My dear fellow members, you have asked me to join you for ever.

I am leaving with you in the golden Cupola-balloon for this trip in the air.

Taking my place in the seventh seat in the musical composition section I succeed quite illustrious predecessors.

Olivier Messiaen, Marius Constant, Charles Chaynes.

To finish, let me tell you an anecdote:

On October 26th, 2017 I crossed the Quai Conti, I walked into the Institut de France and I met for the first time René de Obaldia of the French Academy, poet, novelist and playwright.

It was friendship at first sight!

We smiled at each other.

We laughed. Then we talked about fundamental matters: Port wine, flee races in a Polish prisoners' camp, Michel Simon and his special relationship with Zaza his female monkey.

Then I asked René de Obaldia "What is the secret of your longevity?"

He answered right away : "I wonder at life every morning when I wake up."

The French for "wonder" is "*s'ébaubir*", I love that word!

He then told me "I am under the impression that life is a dream. Isn't it?"

I answered "Yes, it may be true."

Yes, it may be true life is a dream.

I am now beginning to understand better what he wanted to tell me:

One has got to live one's life as though it were a dream.

That day, René de Obaldia gave me a great lesson of life I will always bear in mind : "keep wondering."

Yes.

Never forget to wonder.

S'ébaubir.

It is only a matter of training.

My dear fellow members, it is an indescribable joy to join your Company.

I am "*ébaubi!*"

And, today, thanks to you all, I am living an essential moment of my life, delightfully lost in a dream.

Thank you.

(traduction : Adrienne Méquin)