

Christopher Stark

RED OCHRE

A MEDITATION ON THE CHAUVET-PONT-D'ARC CAVE PAINTINGS

for violin & electronics

(2012)

*Commissioned by Mayfest - Cornell International Chamber Music Festival
for Ariana Kim*

S O M M E R S O P U B L I S H I N G

PROGRAM NOTE

There are, of course, many theories about why our prehistoric ancestors pursued figurative painting in the caves of France and Spain. Early on, researchers believed the paintings must have played a significant role in hunting rites - the almost pervasive use of animal forms lent itself nicely to this idea. Some contemporary research has proposed shamanism as an alternative to this model. This view, supplemented by neuropsychological studies and geographical comparisons of shamanistic trances, shifts some of the focus to the geometric images often found in these caves, as well as the handprint images, whether created by pressing an ochre-stained hand to the wall or by placing a hand on the wall and spraying it (the so-called “negative” hand). At this point neither side is completely convincing, and the debates continue.

The handprints are of central importance to Christopher Stark’s piece, and these paintings are some of the most eerie and inviting of all those in the caves. We can comment on the artistic style and breadth of the animal paintings and the similarity between certain common visions produced by states of trance in the geometric shapes, but the hands are so completely human that we feel an immediate response welling deep within us when we encounter them. The artist, whether shaman or hunter, placed her hand there, as if reaching out to us, as if reaching to some other world. We are of just such another world. Her hand is the emblem of what we share: our need to touch, our need for others and to communicate that need to them, our humanity, and our animality.

The painted caves are for us a marker of such great cultural significance that that significance is difficult to calculate. Georges Bataille was certainly correct when he titled his work on the Lascaux cave “The Birth of Art,” even if that birth at Lascaux was preceded by fifteen thousand years at Chauvet. And while we may not be able to explain what precise role the painting in the caves played for our ancestors, we may do well to remember that we cannot explain the precise roles religion or art play for us today. What is important is that we engage this art, that we look to that huntress, that shaman, whose hand touched that cold stone wall thirty thousand years ago and reaches out to us today, and we see ourselves - our familiar and alien selves. We still question. We still seek others. And we are still wild animals.

So, “Red Ochre” it is. Contemporary art engaging the oldest art. There may be no better way to begin to understand this other art of the caves than to engage it on our terms. After all, those terms were first laid down thousands and thousands of years ago, by fire and torchlight.

-Clark Chatlain

ELECTRONIC REQUIREMENTS

- Laptop with Max/MSP 5 software
- USB or firewire audio interface
- 2 powered speakers
- Pick-up or microphone for the violin
- Necessary audio and data cables

DURATION

ca. 7’30”

PREMIERE PERFORMANCE

20 May 2012

Ariana Kim, violin

Mayfest - Cornell International Chamber Music Festival

Milstein Hall, Cornell University

Ithaca, New York

*dedicated to Xak Bjerken,
for being a wonderful friend and an inspiring musician*

22 *pizz.* *mf* *arco* *pizz.* *p*

7 - Harm 0.125 *ppp* <>

6 - Harm 0.25

26 *arco, ord.* *molto sul pont.* *ord.*

8 - Harm 0.25 *ppp sempre* 9 - Harm Off

Profound, with devotion (♩ = 52ca.) *ord.*

31 *sul G* *pp* *mp* *pp sub.* *mf* *pp* *mp* 11 - Harm 0.875 12 - Harm Off

10 - Harm 0.25

36 *mp* *pp* *<mf> p* *mf* *pp* *<mp> pp* *f*

13 - Harm 0.125 14 - Harm Off 15 - Harm 0.6875 16 - Harm Off

41 *mp* *< f* *< ff* *pp* *< mf >* *pp* *< p >* *< mf > p*

17 - Harm 0.30625 18 - Harm 0.25 19 - Harm Off

45 *mp* *p* *mf* *f* *pp* *< f >* *pp* *f* *pp sub.*

20 - Harm 0.22 21 - Harm Off

slightly too long
change bow as necessary

Out of body, trance-like (♩ = 52ca.)

49 *< p >* *pp* *mp* *pp* *< p >* *pp*

22 - Harm 0.55 23 - Harm 0.5 24 - Harm 0.5714

52 *mp* *pp* *< p >* *pp* *mp* *pp*

26 - Harm 0.58 27 - Harm 0.5 25 - Harm 0.5

55 *< p > pp*
cresc. poco a poco (maintain volume swells within each bar, while gradually increasing overall volume until measure 75)

58
28 - Harm 0.25

60

62

64
29 - Harm 0.125

66

68
30 - Harm Off

poco a poco accel.
repeat ad lib., becoming increasingly frantic

71

Senza misura, hysterical

75
molto vib.
8va
ff
loco, sul E
gliss.
loco, sul A&E
pp \leftarrow *fff*

79
sul A
8va
loco, sul D&A
sul D
pp \leftarrow *fff*

83 *8va* *loco, sul G&D* *sul G* *8va*

pp *fff*

Transfigured (♩ = 52ca.)
loco, gliss. sul G

87 *p* *repeat until previous material fades out* *simile* *fff* *p*

31 - Harm Seq **32 - Harm Off**

92 *repeat until G is almost gone* *fff* *p*

33 - Harm Seq **34 - Harm Off**

98 *fff* *p sempre*

35 - Harm Seq **36 - Harm Off / Delay Fade Out**

100

103

106

108

110

112 *lunga*