Dear Johann Sebastian

For many years now, I’ve been playing and playing *with* your music,

following you on a path right next to yours

fingers flying madly up and down the keyboard,

breathless with the joys and rigours of your work

clenching and relaxing my muscles to express my rage and passion

Playing (with) your music, page after page,

I feel as if I were sculpting an invisible world

I can feel my joints cracking, my skin bursting and my fingernails

clicking as I knock at the door to your sacred kingdom,

I’d give anything to get my whole body into your sensitive world

For the moment, my ancient wounds still grab me by the feet and hold me back

but as I go on seeking in the darkness and the luminosity of night,

I very gradually recompose myself, piece by piece.

Each of your inventions makes me more alive, more present, happier.

One day, the piano keyboard spoke to me.

Listening to it, I drowned in its waves of sound.

Relinquishing consciousness for a moment, I thought I saw you

drinking good wine as you improvised.

Since that day, I’ve known I had to be a musician every second of my life

allowing myself to be wafted away on beauty of sound

incandescence of rhythm,

subterranean melodies.

I don’t want to lock myself up in music to protect myself from unhappiness

I want music to be the door I open wide in order to love.

Édouard Ferlet

1. OVES

*Prelude in G major, BWV 884*

*Oves* has the character of an overture, like the mad rush of an unstoppable train. But there is nothing catastrophic about it: a generous piece, it has a smile, sunny, like the music of Bach. Around the second interval and the rhythmic ostinato borrowed from the prelude in G major BWV 884, the fabric of the piece develops, enlarges, transforms itself. As with all the pieces on this CD, I first immersed myself in the original work – a sensitive absorbtion both intellectual and physical – to then knit something from a detail, as if developing a line in a drawing. The shaping of a piece is for me a long work of maturation in order to summon the memory of the gesture while alternating, without any detectable boundaries, written and improvised parts.

2. ANTHÈSE (Anthesis)

*Ich ruf zu dir Herr Jesu Christ, choral for organ in F minor, BWV 639*

*Anthèse* is the music of the missing, the deceased, the voice of the absent, the invisible presence. Music is able to connect us with our ghosts and the ‘hurdy-gurdy’ of the pianist comes to summon the spirits of our ancestors. The ghost of this piece is the bow that I slide directly between the strings at the same time as I play on the keyboard. The piece is written according to the principle of disappearance: from the famous organ chorale *"Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ", BWV 639*, I erased certain measures in order to reassemble and interlock the harmonic sequences. *Anthèse* is one of the pieces that reached maturity on the day of recording. It contains many doubts but is today one of the most profound.

3. MIND THE GAP

*Prelude in C sharp major, BWV 872*

I have always tried to compose according to very different modes: with the aid of a computer, at the piano, through singing, facing a blank page... For *Mind the Gap,* I mixed the approaches. First of all I identified the four melodic lines of *Prelude in C sharp major BWV 872* in order to treat them separately on the computer. Then, empirically,I modified the pitch of these four voices to the octave above and below, moved each of the four phrases a fraction of a beat compared to the original score. Finally, to create a contrast and give back some swing to this piece that was becoming too static. I associated it with the Graj rhythm of the Guadeloupean tradition, that led me to meet up with Sonny Troupé.

4. ET SI (And what if)

*Adagio ma non tanto, from* Sonata for violin and harpsichord no.3 in E major, *BWV 1016*

*Et si…* comes from the *Adagio of the Sonata for Violin No. 3 in E major BWV 1016*. The discourse is very free from it, nourished by questions, experiments, improvisations. Nothing is ever finished, everything is always to be renewed. This piece begins with an improvised part – so, in concert, different each time. The theme is there, but I go further by improvising on the form, as one would with aleatory music: the written or improvised modules follow on from one to the next according to my whim, without the order being fixed.

5. ES IST VOLLBRACHT

*Es ist Vollbracht, aria from* St John Passion, *BWV 245*

It is difficult to transform works as perfect as *St. John Passion Aria.* We are afraid of spoiling, of going too far. How to succeed in opening another radical direction? I have searched a lot, experimented to come to this piece, letting myself be guided by my heart. I went through different stages of composition, which I finally abandoned to return to a much more pared-down version. I found in this another space to re-read this work with a new eye. I almost gave up trying to explore this work, which started in a too Oriental colour and enclosed me in a too stereotypical style. Then, allowing myself to be guided, I agreed to let it live according to my interpretation.

6. LES BACCHANTES

*Chaconne, from* Partita no.2 in D minor, *BWV 1004*

*Les Bacchantes* is inspired by one of Bach’s masterpieces: the *Chaconne*, from the 2nd partita for solo violin BWV 1004. Since the *Chaconne* produces by definition its own variations, I sought to formulate something else. I chose a module of four measures, which I developed by quoting Bach’s original phrases with my right hand and by mirroring, with my left hand, my own responses. The form did not impose itself right away. I had to coordinate all this in order to find a unity and above all to underline, always, the dance aspect. At the very beginning of the piece I play in the belly of the piano, in direct contact with the strings, to bring out the harmonics. In this I become closer to the original version for solo violin, which remained, throughout the composing, the muse of this piece.

7. MECANIQUE ORGANIQUE

*Prelude in B flat major, BWV 866*

I have sought here to transform the repetitive patterns of the perpetual rhythmic cells of the *Prelude in B-flat major BWV 866* into an organic movement, with an interior phrasing. Like *Hop-o'-My-Thumb*, I wanted to find Bach’s melody note by note, one by one, with each re-exposition of the theme, in order to arrive at its almost definitive exposition: along the way some notes would go astray, giving rise to a new seven-beat bar guided by an infernal bass line.

8. CONCERTO No.5 in F minor

*Largo, from* Harpsichord Concerto no.5in F minor, *BWV 1056*

I wanted here to celebrate the art of melody mastered by someone more readily considered a genius of counterpoint and polyphony. The art of the line, the art of the stroke, the art of the gesture, the phrasing of the sound. Since I started working with Violaine Cochard [*Bach Plucked Unplucked*], I have spent more time with the harpsichord and Baroque music, which has modified my use of the piano pedal and the way I consider the volume of sound produced by the instrument. Working on a harpsichord or clavichord teaches you how to return to primitive sound, more tenuous, and to a dynamic generated outside any notion of nuance. It is a bit like suddenly finding oneself in the dark: the points of reference, lost at the beginning, are perceived differently, amplified, once the pupils have dilated.

9. CRAZY B

*Variation no.1, from* Goldberg Variations*, BWV 988*

With Crazy B I try to let go as much as possible. I wanted to allow myself this piece without limits, this sort of rhythmic madness. The phrase I chose from the *Goldberg Variations* is for me a gateway to my own path. I often find myself playing a piece of Bach and prolonging it by improvising: I feel inspired to connect with my musical intimacy. This was the case here. Between the beginning and end of *Crazy B*, the listener hears numerous transformations, but is not aware of it, as if going through several decompression chambers to reach a final situation unattainable at the outset. I wanted to titillate listeners, but not to violate them. So I progressed from one stage to another as in a sort of sound morphing effect.

10. MISS MAGDALENA

*Prelude in C major, BWV 846*

*A Welsh musicologist maintains that Anna Magdalena Bach was the composer and author of several of her husband’s major works. This theory inspired this piece. More than a nod, this is a real tribute to this woman in the shadows who may well have had more to say than Bach allowed her to. I strove here to explore in my mode of playing the female part of myself – we all have one, men and women. At the end of Miss Magdalena, I whistle along with the piano, creating a somewhat supernatural atmosphere, a melody written in the high register of my whistle.*

Édouard Ferlet