# Mana — Program Notes by the Composer, Christophe Bertrand

According to the primitive societies of Oceania, "**Mana**" is a superior force spread throughout nature, inhabiting certain beings and things to which it confers the power to dominate others by their great physical power, their quasi-supernatural gifts holding both sacred and magic; it is a sort of electric fluid, which warriors seek to possess in particular when they engage in rites of anthropophagi.

**Mana** is thus entirely placed under the sign of energy, if only through the writing itself: indeed, the term orchestra is not quite appropriate, one should rather speak of a piece for seventy-seven musicians, or of a gigantic piece of chamber music, since the writing of all the parts is extremely virtuoso, as if to achieve a sort of collective frenzy, without respite from the beginning to the end of the work. Without denying that the writing is sometimes in blocks of sound, one could say that each instrumentalist is a soloist in **Mana**. The difficulty of the parts has no demonstrative purpose, far from it: it requires an investment of each one which takes part of this frenzy wanted by the piece.

In terms of architecture, the piece could be divided into four sections, each of which, in its own way, tends to develop a model of "*arpeggio*":

1) flowing *arpeggios* intertwined in a kind of more or less dense spider web, and fighting against the irruption of patterns consisting of repeated notes, all supported by a microtonal carpet. These two archetypes (*arpeggios*/repeated notes) merge in the space of a short sequence during which the *arpeggios* become more rhythmic and are out of phase so that one hears more a succession of chords than a network of *arpeggios*.
2) rhythmic and convulsive blocks giving way to colored "rockets" in the manner of a harmonizer (by diatonic chords of three or four tones, quite typical of the general harmony of the piece) or chopped and very rhythmic tumbles, taken up by an increasing number of instruments up to the *tutti*.
3) an *ostinato* from which escape held sounds, sort of resonances of violent attacks (even of laughter with the mutes of the brass) and unceasingly changing, passing from an instrument to another in a more and more whirling way, to finally make their harmonic sense appear, leaving the place to the development of the idea of the "rockets", disseminated further in the orchestral space.
4) finally, scales mixed in such a dense way that one can only hear a global ascending movement, colored by *celestas*, *crotales*, *glockenspiels* and harps in a diatonic and vaguely metallic halo.

There are a few other elements or sequences, though less related to the *arpeggio* variation model than to the need for formal perception or process completion: the numerous bass drum rolls foreshadowing the devastating final gesture; the ascending whirlwind preceding the short sequence where each instrument plays a different note, wildly repeating this telluric aggregate; the two passages where certain groups of instruments howl their diatonic clusters, suspended, strained. Harmonically, **Mana** is much more changeable than in my previous pieces: if the harmonic fields are still relatively diatonic and colored by micro-intervals, the aggregates follow each other at an often crazy speed, as shown by the second section, certainly the most harmonically mobile. Moreover, the arrangement of the instruments on stage, dividing them into two stereophonic groups surrounded by percussion, allows the sounds to travel across the stage.

This piece lasts only about ten minutes, but the energy contained in it does not allow for a more important development: the tension without relaxation generated by the virtuosity would dwindle in the listener and the piece would lose its meaning.