

premiered in 2022

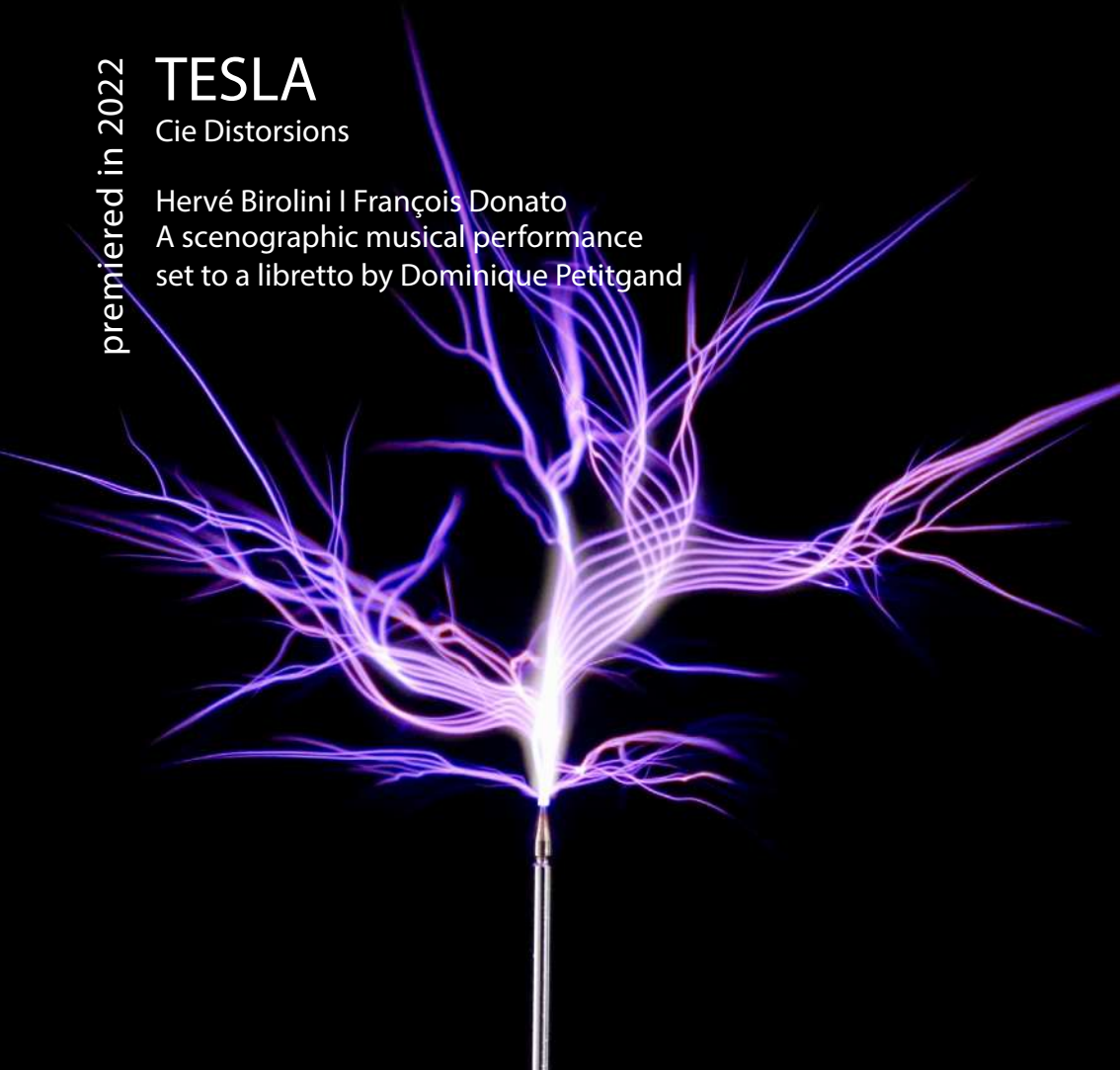
TESLA

Cie Distorsions

Hervé Birolini | François Donato

A scenographic musical performance

set to a libretto by Dominique Petitgand



TESLA

Hervé Birolini | François Donato

[TEASER](#)

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A scenographic musical performance
inspired by the story of the electrical genius Nikola Tesla

Artistic direction & music: Hervé Birolini

Music: François Donato

Recorded voice: Denis Rey

Original libretto: Dominique Petitgand

Duration: 40'

Coproduction: Cité Musicale, Metz (57) / Césaré – CNCM, Reims (51) / La Muse en Circuit - CNCM, Alfortville (94) / Éole Studio, Blagnac (31)

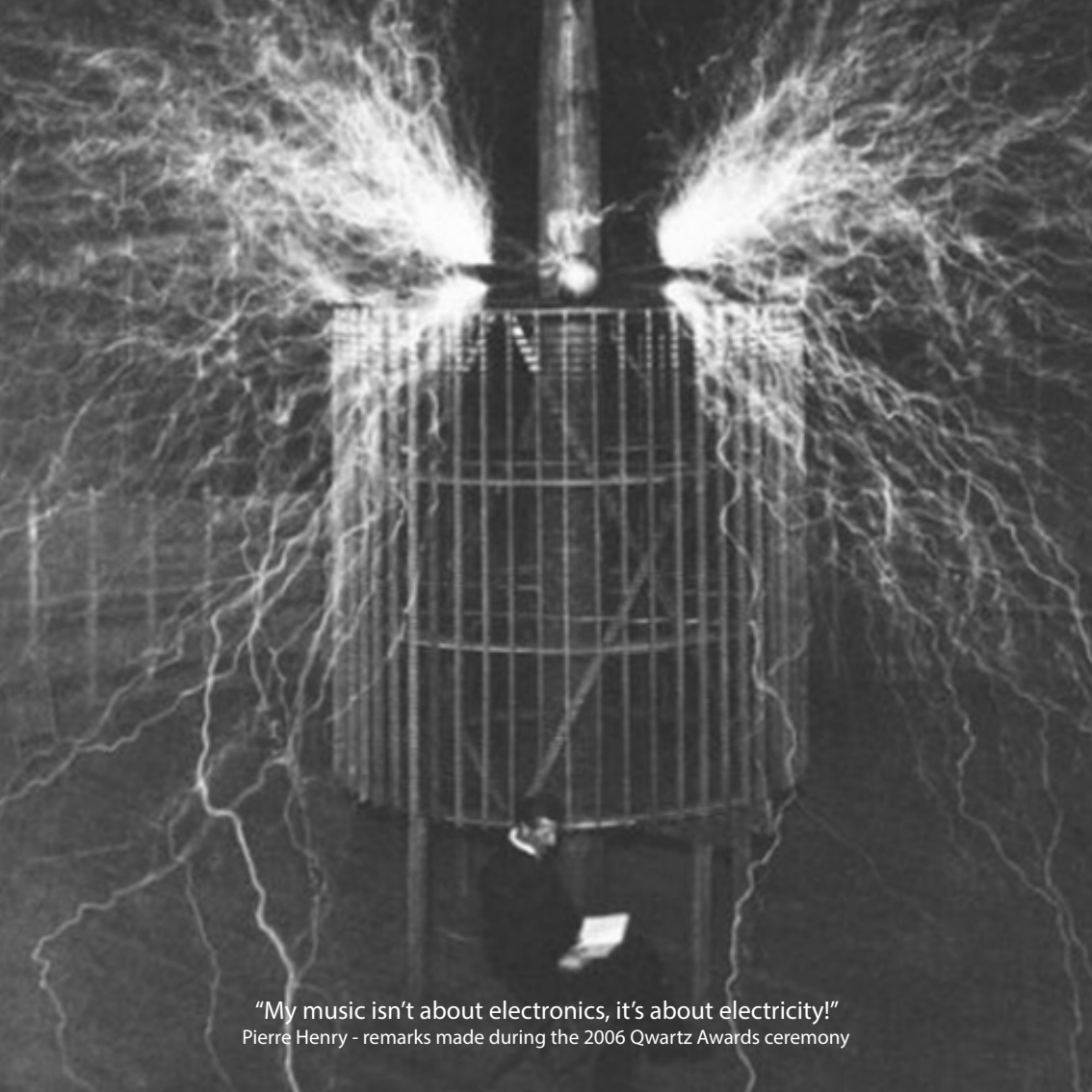
Financial support: DRAC Grand Est / Région Grand Est / City of Nancy – résidence at Théâtre de Mon Désert

Residencies: Césaré – CNCM, Reims (51) / CCAM – Scène Nationale de Vandoeuvre-lès-Nancy (54) / Éole Studio, Blagnac (31) / NEST – CDN transfrontalier de Thionville (57)

Electronic design: Interface-Z

Stage manager: Floxel Barbelin

World premiere: January 2022, Arsenal - Cité Musicale, Metz



"My music isn't about electronics, it's about electricity!"
Pierre Henry - remarks made during the 2006 Quartz Awards ceremony

1. INTENTION

Tesla: a work at the crossroads of radio drama, live electronics and futuristic cinema.

Nikola Tesla devoted his life to exploring the many ways in which electricity could be used. He saw the extraordinary potential of this energy for humanity, but somehow got lost in the infinite web of its possibilities. An inventor and engineer of genius, he was the driving force behind countless tools used in modern civilisation and remains one of the greatest minds humanity has ever known.

We are not interested in telling the story of Nikola Tesla. Our aim is to uncover the raw material, to bring to light some of the everyday ideas of this brilliant inventor, to enter - poetically - into the story of what his thoughts might have been. The set-up: a mixed array of 16 omnidirectional loudspeakers with Tesla coils on top, a few discreet spotlights to guide the ear, and Dominique Petitgand's original libretto which conjures up the world of this tireless innovator.

Nikola Tesla



« (...) the background noise
that carries the voice
the breath I feel in the silence between
sentences
and that feeds off the piles of interference
from the phone line
speaks to me of the distance
and gives shape to the vast space between us
(...)

today the future
everything lights up (...)

it is not the angular velocity
it is not the cylinder pressure
but the keylock switch (...)

»

Dominique Petitgand



2. THE TEXT

electricity **power** energy mechanism **remote action**
imitation hydrodynamics **attraction** electrodynamics **hertz** wave repulsion

alternating

magnetic

field line of force entrainment of light ponderable matter

optics refractive index **actino-electric phenomena** circuit
dielectric strips **steady state current** flow direction static electrification

solar light **atmosphere** cloud altitude secular variation **lightning**

There are many pieces of electroacoustic music that use text in some way, but almost always it is text that already exists in literary, poetic or theatrical form. In such cases the text provides the inspiration for the work and generally drives the narrative. The text often exerts a certain power over the musical work that is difficult to break free from. Even if the text is written especially for the occasion, it infers either a kind of dominance, as in radio drama, or else a form of subordination or subservance, like a background, or décor. In this piece we look at things in a different way. First of all, we commissioned Dominique Petitgand to write an original text so as to have new material to exploit, but also because we know the precise relationship that Dominique has with the text in his own works. As he himself explains:

"[I] compose and perform sound pieces that are spoken, musical and silent. Works where voices, noises, musical atmospheres and silences are assembled in such a way as to create micro-universes in which ambiguity is constantly in play between a reality principle and a projection into a possible fiction that is out of context and timeless."

In some ways, for us, Dominique Petitgand has written sound.

This commissioned text is treated in the same way as the instrumental fragments that we ask of an instrumentalist in the studio. Sometimes these are very precise things, musical samples, phrases, sometimes a series of musical phrases (which some people call text) that we are free to use as they are or to fragment them even more to obtain new material for composing.

Our approach thus reasserts the idea of treating the text as an equal partner in the composition, in the same way as the musical material.

Power of the Peaks

Dominique Petitgand

*.../... electricity looms
power smiles at us
when energy comes crawling slowly*

*the mechanism gives in to the highest bidder
the action stands out from a distance*

but the convection?

*imitation doesn't look like my mother
attraction runs away
and movement learns the game*

the wave reflects

*the repulsion gets ready
the magnetic field is unfazed*

motive power again?

*the phenomenon tires
then the circuit corrects
the blade wonders after all
if the steady state current might not be able to
dot the output .../...*



3. SCENOGRAPHY & SOUND

The starting point for the scenography:

An array of 16 omnidirectional speakers fitted with LEDs is placed on the floor. This setup provides the basis for our thinking on the idea of the «field». This field of loudspeakers will help the listener to experience the idea of an electrical field, a magnetic field and also an acoustic field. The LEDs that are fitted to each speaker will produce a light that sometimes relates to the spatialisation of the sound, and which at other times will simply serve to reveal the presence of strange objects.

Plasma arc speakers (Tesla coils) have been specially designed for the piece.

The sound content:

- Recorded voice, with special care given to its processing (spectral modifications, spatialisation).
- Sound recordings of electrical phenomena: electrotherapy devices, ovens, electric arcs, Tesla coils.



Scenography in progress/ Residencia at Théâtre de Mon Désert (Nancy) Septembre 2019



Finale scenography / Cité Musicale (Metz), premiere in January 2022



Hervé Birolini continues to roam across landscapes that blend lightning, sounds and images, both real and imaginary. Presented as a work that stands at the crossroads of radio drama, live electronics and futuristic cinema, *Tesla* is a journey into one of the greatest minds of modern civilisation: the inventor and engineer Nikola Tesla. Like the genius who spent his whole life exploring the infinite possibilities of electrical energy, Tesla uses sounds, systems and poetry, not to tell the story of the man but to imagine the narrative arc of his inner thoughts.

For this, Hervé Birolini draws on the words of author Dominique Petitgand, whose text here is sound material in its own right. Between the abstract and the almost quotidian reality, the structure of the sentences, the words and their inherent musicality are as evocative as the symphony produced by Hervé Birolini and François Donato. On stage, sixteen omnidirectional speakers fitted with LEDs display a light that is sometimes coupled with the spatialisation of the sound, and which at other times reveals the presence of strange objects. The controlled bursts produced by a field of Tesla coils, the plasma arc loudspeakers designed especially for the piece, the sampling of electrical phenomena and the recorded and modified voices all merge into this dreamlike world where sound and light become almost concrete. After having used acoustic instruments in *Exartikulations* and the movement of the dancer and choreographer Aurore Gruel in several of his works, Hervé Birolini proves once again that it is the human element that is central to his universe, rather than just the presence of technology. The entirely new text by Dominique Petitgand and the recorded voice of Denis Rey, present on stage alongside the musicians, inject powerful resonances into *Tesla*, in harmony with those produced by the devices.

Benjamin Bottemer
journalist



TESLA: THE MUSIC ALBUM

With the album, we move from the experience of the show to a record listening.



[listen on bandcamp](#)

VIDEO REPORTS

« On stage the sounds and visuals are shaped and sculpted by 16 modules that weave their magic under the masterly control of the two musicians .../... A tangible current in this immersive composition »

France 3 Grand Est, 12.01.2022



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=n7B-h6hUYQ8&feature=youtu.be>

Moselle TV, 13.01.2022

« The Transverses Festival, cancelled in 2020, celebrates its first edition at two venues in Metz, the Arsenal and the Trinitaires, from 13 to 22 January. Among the featured artists, Hervé Birolini and François Donato will be performing their piece 'Tesla' this weekend, an exciting live electronics work created by the Compagnie Distorsion. Total immersion guaranteed as ears and eyes take in the poetic hypnosis of the repetitions... »

Moselle

MOSELLE
INFO

CULTURE : « TESLA », UN LIVE ÉLECTRONIQUE ÉLECTRIQUE

https://moselle.tv/culture-tesla-un-live-electronique-electrique/?fbclid=IwAR3qKhNAzcJFLKLRh9jbj2FcWdfTSZmW0eVOflitchK0FhNcpuGRO2_bQeo#prettyPhoto

HERVÉ BIROLINI

Composer, performer

www.hervebirolini.com

Hervé Birolini explores all the areas of sound. From concert pieces to installations, from electroacoustic performances to incidental music for films and drama, from radiophonic art to mixed music, his different experimentations enrich each other and constantly question his role as a composer.

Essentially electronic, his music is produced with physical, concrete or instrumental materials but is also based on sound objects produced through virtual instrument-making, personalised and in constant reinvention. In his work, technology is a tool as well as a way to question the contemporary production of the sensitive. His taste for performing arts, and particularly his connection to dance, leads him to create musical pieces which engage space, the body, gesture and scenography.



© Arnaud Hussenot

His music borders on electronic, concrete, experimental and contemporary music in its broadest sense. His creations have toured numerous festivals in France and abroad, such as AKOUSMA, Live at CIRMMT, Signal and Noise (Canada), Présence électronique, Reevox, Electricity, Futura, Entre cour et jardins, Musique Action (France), Archipel (Suisse)...

FRANÇOIS DONATO www.struzz.com

Initially self-taught, he went on to study music at the University of Pau, the Conservatoire de Gennevilliers and the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Lyon. He was a member of the Paris-based GRM (Groupe de Recherches Musicales) from 1991 to 2005, and of the composers' collective *éOle* (Toulouse) from 2005 to 2017.

He also taught sound and interactivity techniques at the University of Toulouse (Visual Arts and Applied Arts department) from 2007 to 2012.

Today he works as a freelance artist. His creative work focuses on sound and digital arts, from *musique concrète* to interactive sound and audiovisual installations and radio productions.

He has received commissions from the GRM, the DAAD in Berlin, Studio *éOle*, the French Ministry of Culture, and many others. He regularly works with professionals from the performing arts (theatre and dance) and the visual arts



(interactive installations and audiovisual performances), most notably the Imaginary Systems partnership he created with the visual artist Golnaz Behrouzia.

For the last few years he has also been involved in live electronics performance with the composer Hervé Birolini (*Arrays*, *Tesla*) and has been working on a series of interactive multimedia installations called «Time Leaks» designed for specific locations.

DOMINIQUE PETITGAND

<http://www.gbagency.fr/fr/14/Dominique-Petitgand/>

Since 1992, Dominique Petitgand has been making sound pieces in which the montage and the cut up of voices, noises, elements of music and silences produce a series of micro-universes that over constantly between the reality principle and immersion in dream-like fictions free of context or the sense of time.

He defines his work as “mental landscapes and stories”. He develops his work from recordings of words, rests, breathings, sounds and musics that he records, composes, uses, breaks up and cuts. He makes an inventory of voices, gestures, humors in an obsessional way printed by musicality in order to consider a speech, a state or a lack. He plays on the articulation of components making mental images appear. In this mental space repetition combines with the emptiness and the instability of identities, places and temporal structures to evoke the very movement whereby memory or thought are constructed or destructed. Through his spoken and melodic sound pieces, Dominique Petitgand offers an original story who belongs to the auditors.

Petitgand’s use of sound places his work in a singular, shifting artistic territory. He presents his works in records, at performances which are rather like listening sessions given outside or in the dark, but also and mainly in the form of sound installations in exhibitions, in museums, art centers or galleries.





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Hervé Birolini