

[ from: "**Mars & Other Stars**",  
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Every year, in the afternoon starting at five, there were the master's composition seminars.

He would march up to the stage and sit down behind a wooden table, install a small alarm clock to keep track of time, then put on his reading glasses, glancing at papers and the score that lay spread out before him. Then he would look at us looking at him.

Waiting.

And he would speak.

"What I am explaining today is to a great deal concerned with numbers," the master would say.

"I remind you, that whenever you want to know something about astronomy, you have to deal with numbers. Light speed, light years, light seconds. Speed of rotation, speed of revolutions around the sun, or of the solar system around the galactic center. Et cetera."

He'd take off his glasses, then wait for a few seconds before to continue.

"And the same applies if you have an interest in the literature about atomic composition. You will have to deal with numbers. Sometimes we help our understanding with pictures. Naturally, music is something else. An extremely non-verbal experience. So we do not experience in terms of numbers, though we hear... nothing but numbers."

He paused again, for his words to settle down.

"But when we have a musical experience the numbers are transformed by our psyche, the way we are, into something else, into a very complex ... sensation. Nevertheless, I'm obliged to speak about numbers..."

Well, yeah, so what's new, I thought.

It had been like this year after year.

Pretty senseless, really. Pretty dull.

Day after day, for hours on a stretch, he would be rattling on, the master, he would.

About how this piece or that had evolved out of the superformula for Light.

He would go through the pitches, he would go through the tempi, go through the timbres.

Every now and then would he would lose himself midway some addition or multiplication, and sometimes things just simply did not seem to fit in. Because, surely, there were always exceptions.

Yeah, thank god for exceptions.

"Of course!" the master would say, after many seconds of tensed silence.

"This is very interesting! Have a look at page nine. Yes ... there ... well ... sometimes, somewhere in a piece ... I just open up the window ..."

Some would start giggling, but then soon we all would listen, and, yeah, it would be wonderful, a real thrill.

But what could all of these numbers possibly teach us?

The master's numbers, yeah *any* bloody composer's numbers, they just come with the sounds.

When they don't, there's no music.

They're like my words used to be.

Yeah, words are sort of like numbers.

Without them we're lost.

Drifting.

I'm sure the master has a profound horror of chaos, sounds without numbers.

His worst nightmare, it must be.

Maybe in the course of the years I have learned to fear it less.

Maybe.

Or maybe not.

But then, well, numbers and words in the end do not explain, do they?

At best they may tame.

But he talked to us, endlessly, he did.

How he derived all of each and everyone of Light's bits and pieces - with due exceptions - by scribbling and calculating for many years, from his ... superformula.

It was all in there already, is how he'd like to put it, and all that comes after: mere evolution.

Lawlike, pretty much unavoidable.

Well, yeah.

Of course not.

And then I never really have been able to understand where it is that the superformula came from.

Light's big bang.

Pretty close, that one, as an image.

If Light's the master's universe, the superformula is its big bang.

One can calculate and deduce pretty much all that comes after - one only needs to find the rules.

But surely, that's not much of a mystery either.

They're the master's rules. It's his universe. He does not need to find them, it simply suffices to state them.

But whence came the bang?

For all of its magic, for all of the music, his is in fact a pretty conventional idea of creation and art.

Natura artis magistra.

Nothing more. Nor less.

Ancient as the sun, that is.

During one of these sessions I was sitting in the back of the gymnasium, next to the professor, who had been nodding approvingly for most of the time.

Then, it was towards the end, he suddenly grabbed his crutches, with some effort managed to lift himself up from his chair, and with that deep resounding voice of his asked:

"As of course you will know, we have had the progress from composing with tonal themes, then with series, with formulas, and now with serial formulas. Is the next step ... will that be composing with eigenterms ... or something like that?"

The master looked disturbed.

"What? What is that?" he said.

"Eigenterms," the professor tried again. "You know, ... very complex..."

The master looked perplexed, then shrugged his shoulder.

"Sorry, but how could I ... I don't know. I haven't got the slightest idea."

While the professor, chuckling all over after this little surprise intervention, struggled down back onto his seat, the master continued his own train of thoughts.

"I have mentioned this already many times," he said, "that, ..., that the process to transform imagination into realisation is incredibly slow. Because humanity in general is slow in development. In particular what concerns the technical media for the arts. Now they go to Mars. And they will pay for that a fortune. A fortune that mankind basically can not afford. Yet they will do it. But not for the music."

Again he looked into the audience. Indignant.

"Because mankind has not yet understood that by experiencing in the most abstract way, through music, through sound waves and the way sound waves are arithmitized and organized in all parameters, the spirit of the beings ..."

Here he paused for a few seconds.

"... I say the beings ... who expose themselves to such compositions, and who listen to them a lot, again and again, many, many times... those spirits naturally will be transformed. They will change, they'll be transformed by what they hear. That takes several generations, but there's no other way. For, the most inventive music, the most esthetically balanced music, can become ... moral. Or can provide morals for training the minds and training the souls of people. And such people then certainly will be able to relate much better the construction of our

local universe, of our galaxy, of our galaxy cluster and more of that. And the micro elements of our bodies and of the matter of the earth. And then we will find that a lot of such rules and laws of composition were announced in our time already rather coherently... So, you see, man has only started to discover his own solar system, which, when seen from a little bit further away, is a, very small, ... composition. And I think music, fortunately, again is related, should be related to our knowledge of the universe in which we are living."

Here the master stopped.

He glanced at the alarm clock.

"Now you should excuse me," he said. "I have to rehearse."

The professor bent sideways, tapped me on the shoulder and then whispered in my ear.

"I was sure about it! I was sure he didn't know about eigenterms! But not for very much longer!"

He smiled, the professor did.

Boy, was he satisfied!

"As soon as he gets home, he'll look it up, yes!"

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