

Fake Music Re-Anticipations

Alphonse Allais – Marche funèbre composée pour les funérailles  
d'un grand homme sourd

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The French writer and humorist Alphonse Allais was not trained as a visual artist. An associate of Jules Lèvy and participant in *les Arts incohérents* movement, he contributed monochromatic works like *Première communion de jeunes filles chlorotiques par temps de neige*, a blank sheet of Bristol board, to their show at Galerie Vivienne in 1884. Allais was also not a composer, and in 1897 he published another work that emphasized his incoherence, *Marche funèbre composée pour les funérailles d'un grand homme sourd* (Funeral March for the Obsequies of a Great Deaf Man), a music manuscript consisting of twenty-four measures of silence.

Allais is known for his acid humor, and his funeral march is seen to be at first instance a joke: its tempo, after all, is marked "lento rigolando." When Victor Hugo died in 1885, he was honored with an enormous funeral cortège that flowed through the streets of Paris, and many members of the bourgeoisie commemorated their dead with similar processions that on their way to the Montmartre Cemetery would have passed by the Cabaret Chat Noir, one of Allais's purlieus. He was in conditions hospitable to mocking this practice.

But the piece has a short introduction claiming that "...great pain is silent. [And because] These great pains are silent, the performers must concern themselves solely with counting measures, instead of indulging in that unseemly din which robs the best funerals of their noble character."† Allais specialized in the holorhyme, in which two lines of text are phonetically identical but semantically varied. It seems to us that he would have been aware of silence's capacity for a range of expressions.

Allais did not record his *Marche funèbre*; there is no record of the silence he imagined. It would be entirely presumptuous of us to attempt an authoritative reissue.

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† Cat Hope's translation