



Dear friends,

You were only expecting bottles of wine and you are holding this object in your hands with a certain perplexity. What is it? A booklet, a disc, a film? What is it doing here? What does it have to do with wine? Let's try to find out together.

What do we love, what are we looking for in wine?

In this era when the clamour of the world reduces us to despair, one might forgive an urge for self-intoxication, but that's not what we're talking about here.

When the vintage is rare, the bottle itself can already be the object of a long and passionate quest, but, precious as it is, it remains a sad and inert glass object condemned to the darkness of the cellars.

The bottle is not the wine. The bottle is only the promise of that wine, nourished by the memories of all the wines shared and drunk, the faces and voices of friends, the landscapes of vineyards, docile or wild, the myths and legends of the winegrowing lands.

Wine is not something you possess. Wine is something you live. Wine is a spirit, wine is a moment. After the quest, after the long patient wait, once the bottle is finally opened, the wine escapes, comes to life, unfolds, like music in concert. The fragrances, the textures, the harmonies, and even the subtle dissonances will awaken dormant recollections in the memory. And when the wine is a great one, it is infinitely prolonged, without our quite knowing when the wine stops and when the memory of it begins.

These are the three stages of wine, and of the concert: between waiting and remembering comes emotion, unique, fragile, so brief in itself, but which nevertheless gives meaning to a slice of life.

I first met David Grimal one evening when he had played the *Pastoral* Symphony with 'Les Dissonances'. This enthusiastic and luminous interpretation had touched me. We shared an 'Amoureuuses' 2006, still very young. He talked about music, I talked about wine, or maybe the other way around, and the same words sprang to our lips: sincerity, intensity, tension, lightness, depth . . .

This orchestra without a conductor is an adventure that challenges every preconceived idea and has therefore come up against every kind of scepticism and a great deal of hostility. How can we imagine that one can even dare to question the role of the maestro, the very icon of symphonic music, the personification of the orchestra?

The conductor is the only musician who has the whole score, the inspired medium who possesses the legitimacy to decide on the direction of the interpretation, the captain of the ship who orders a crew to implement his vision (and who, to underline his standing, sometimes likes to be photographed for magazines at the helm of his sailing boat or the controls of his plane). Without the authority of the conductor, how could the musicians of the orchestra share the same understanding of the work, and simply play in time and in tune?

And yet they can, and the orchestra without a conductor works, wonderfully. The proof is in the recordings you have in your hands. And, thinking it over, that shouldn't surprise me.

A few years ago, at a traditional feast of St Vincent (the patron saint of winegrowers), after a few good bottles, I invited all the members of my team, seven *vignerons* without any particular attraction for classical music, to attend a rehearsal and a concert by Les Dissonances at the Auditorium de Dijon. I knew that some of them with particularly inquisitive minds would not fail to turn up, but I was very surprised to see them all following me with sincere interest.

And, after that concert, this meeting between musicians and winegrowers suddenly took on a meaning that I had not expected. The parallel between the Dissonances project and that of my estate became obvious: the orchestra without a conductor corresponded to the winegrowing estate without a director.

We're not talking here about satisfying an anarchistic impulse to refuse authority. In the estate without a director, there is still a leader who takes up his mission to inspire and decide when that is necessary. But leaving a significant margin of freedom and responsibility within and around the members of the team obliges each of them to get more involved and to call upon their full capacities. And that imposes certain conditions.

First of all, one needs an extra degree of competence, whether we're talking about musicians or winegrowers. Everyone must not only be aware of and know how to carry out his or her task, but also master it and see it as part of a more elevated project.

Secondly, one needs a shared pride in building a remarkable project together. It is the desire for accomplishment rather than the duty of benevolence that leads each actor to make the effort to listen to and understand the other person's score and take account of it in order to enrich his or her own contribution.

Finally, one needs a musical material, or a terroir, with character and without weakness. When the orchestra plays the masterpieces of the great composers, there is no need for a megalomaniac conductor to invent an innovative interpretation. Scrupulous fidelity to the work, shared by committed and honest musicians, will make the music shine with much greater and constantly renewed lustre.

The analogy is unexpected, but striking. I have chosen a vinification that is as simple and transparent as possible. I don't impose a style on my wines; I have no other project than to allow them to express a faithful resemblance to the character of the place where the grapes grow. On an ordinary site, that would not produce a very interesting result, and it would be necessary, as when one cooks with commonplace ingredients,

to use all the spices of the Orient or all the artifices of technique to give the beverage a little taste. But when a winegrower is, like me, lucky enough to have in his hands some of the finest winegrowing terroirs in the world, the challenge of fidelity, of authenticity, is far more exciting than any fantasy of oenological creation.

All the changes I have made to my vinification since I started have consisted in simplifying the method, abandoning interventions that people have recommended to me, taking more care and controlling less. I have learned to accept that I don't master the transformations of the wine, to abandon its creation to the forces of nature, just as the orchestra (or conductor) must serve the work and not use it.

To the east, to the west and all around us, the barbarians are gaining ground. We see men who shamelessly display their ignorance and hatred seducing hordes of supporters with promises of brutality, and revelling in their only power, the power to destroy and degrade.

If words of wisdom seem powerless, it may be that we do not believe them enough.

To regenerate ourselves every day, we must open our eyes, ears and hearts to the wonders this world offers us. A tree, a book, a piece of music, a bottle of wine, a smile. Nothing is more urgent today than to take the time to love and share all such beauties. That is what David Grimal and I modestly have tried to do with these recordings. I hope you enjoy them.

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