

BBC Radio 4
The Last Goodbye
October 13, 2003

A moving and inspirational feature about an extraordinary humanitarian project to create a musical and artistic space in a hospital morgue. Sound artist Scanner (aka Robin Rimbaud) embarks on a remarkable personal and artistic journey of discovery.



The Hopital Raymond Poincare in Garches, near Paris, is famous for treating road injury victims. Every year 450 deceased people pass through its morgue, and after 40 years of conducting autopsies and talking to bereaved families, chief pathologist Professor Michel Durigon decided it was time to create a Salle des Departs, a place where families and friends could come to say goodbye to their loved ones without, as he says, "having to suffer sickly background music and a red carpet".

The result was a commission for a ground breaking piece of art: first a room designed by Italian artist Ettore Spalletti, and now a musical sound scape, commissioned from British artist Robin Rimbaud (Scanner) and American composer David Lang.



Stage one, Spalletti's exquisite azure blue Salle des Departs is now complete, and it was the luminous impact of this space which proved a catalyst for Scanner, when he was invited to Garches by Michel Durigon. For Scanner found himself moved beyond all expectation by the project. His brief was daunting, but Durigon felt that the hospital needed an artist whose

sensibility would be a source of sustenance to mourners, help them through their pain and suffering, and fully respect the memory of the deceased.

It was this last thought which triggered a painful series of memories for Scanner. As a teenager, he lost his father in a terrible motorcycle accident. The death was a blow which left his family unable to deal with the magnitude of the loss and of their own suffering. This lack of formal mourning came back to haunt him when he met Michel Durigon. Fate has presented him with a unique opportunity to mourn his own father's death at last, by using his gift of music to help ease the pain of other bereaved families.

The programme follows the progress of his work on the project, from his fledgling musical compositions, to the final 'unveiling' of the completed piece in Garches.