

LIBRARY MUSIC

Lucia Ronchetti in conversation with Elena Garcia Fernandez

Elena Garcia Fernandez As source material for your new music theatre you chose Ermanno Cavazzoni's novel *Le tentazioni di Girolamo*. What is his novel about?

Lucia Ronchetti The original novel is mostly focused on the solitude of the researchers and intellectuals, in the Italian permanent sense of crisis, with the library seen as refuge for different forms of silent flight from the human environment.

Elena Garcia Fernandez In Cavazzoni's novel the library often seems similar to the underground of a city. There are tramps living in it and from time to time a metro train passes by. Can Cavazzoni's library also be understood as a sort of underworld?

Lucia Ronchetti In the libretto the original idea of the nocturnal library is further developed, being the habitat and repair for a crowd of unknown maladaptive people: insomniac, asocial, borderline poor people having no other place to sleep, as well as people who were researchers, professors, writers and are now living as refugees in the library, a composite ensemble of failed people, that can hardly have a life in the open-air side of the city. The dreams and hopes of the readers are protected in the reading rooms, they are symptomatic patients. The library is also a vast cemetery where every book is a lonely voice, a soul waiting for someone to read it as a last residue of the life of authors.

Elena Garcia Fernandez In vain, for none of the readers is interested in them. Beneath the funny and grotesque surface the libretto shows a pessimistic view of a world which has lost its historical and cultural awareness. Would you say that this is a description of the world we are living in today?

Lucia Ronchetti I don't have any pessimistic vision, the opposite, the »real world« we are facing for me is fascinating and undecipherable. The nocturnal library of the opera is referred to the Italian rusty and crazy bureaucracy machine, destroying our daily life and killing ideals and potentials of people.

Elena Garcia Fernandez The libretto has an open ending: Giro gets on the plane, the door closes, then there is silence. We don't know where the flight leads him. How do you interpret this ending? Is there already an interpretation through your music?

Lucia Ronchetti Music is never interpretation, especially of a libretto. Music and text are in the end of the opera in a parallel fugue-system, representing the »a rebours« energy generated by the closing of the library at 8 o'clock in the morning and the flux of the people there, trying to escape. The flight of Giro Lamenti is a final confirmation that all we have seen was only a vision of Giro himself. As in his dream everybody is there all the time, close to Giro and they just materialize when he is imagining them. His dream is a dream of formation, an unseen before-life, built exactly for him, the formation of a DNA-code ending with the departure to a more concrete life, his real life, maybe. Giro doesn't want to forget the library, as the Er of the Plato's myth, he doesn't accept to stay there forever (as Natale) and doesn't accept to put the metallic hat on his head, so he will remember his pre-life and will be fully influenced by this experience.

Elena Garcia Fernandez For Cavazzoni's text you chose the genre opera. What is your interest in composing an opera?

Lucia Ronchetti For me it's a social experience, a musical form that forces me to go out of my room and search for productive interactions and exchanges with the many professionals involved in it. When a singer has to memorize such a long and articulated score, entering a character, I think the score is only the beginning of a process of musical creation that is made together, searching, adapting, interpreting musical signs. For me it is also important to speak and to observe the people realizing the scene, displacing lights, holding ropes, connecting cables, all that is really influential for the score and I still consider it just a first version of my idea, hoping the mass of involved people will make it better than conceived by me, making it meaningful.

Elena Garcia Fernandez Which possibilities did the medium opera provide when adapting Cavazzoni's story?

Lucia Ronchetti The language of the novel is a continuum given by fragmented autonomous stories related to characters that are not interconnected, it is a superposition of different solitudes captured by a principal process: the life and times of the nocturnal library. Each vocal and instrumental voice is a sort of stand-alone entity and presence. The form of *Esame di mezzanotte* is somewhere between opera and concert, giving the possibility of a suspended operatic time's concept and at the same time a dynamic counterpoint of superimposed concerts.

Elena Garcia Fernandez How was the compositional process of *Esame di mezzanotte*? Did you start with the text or with musical ideas?

Lucia Ronchetti The compositional processes for an opera are many and often parallel. The composition takes a long time, often lapsing into chaos and influencing and being influenced by the many events of the daily life. I wanted to realize it in a chronological way but it proved not to be possible, being the libretto also written step by step and the confrontation with the librettist generating eternal revisions of the already written areas. I was faced with a pre-existent book that I have carefully analyzed and with a completely new and original writing of the libretto, with the evident metamorphosis of the different characters, conceived as soloists and as voices. So, the text came first but then I have often waited for the poetical generation of dialogues and textual »solos« of the characters. The form of my waiting for the text or for new versions of it became part of the score somehow, generating orchestral interludes or chamber music fragments that are musical projections of what I was expecting from the librettist.

Elena Garcia Fernandez The special atmosphere of the shabby library is only partially described through the monologues and dialogues. Especially the instrumental prelude of the third scene seems to musically reflect the architecture of the library. How did you invent sounds for a library which is normally a silent place?

Lucia Ronchetti Having spent much of my time in libraries, I can say the opposite: the silence in a library is just a pretended absence of dialogue and noise that allow the reader to listen better, in an exasperated way, to every whispered word, to the librarian explications and fragmented dialogues with the readers and to the structural

noises of the scaffolds full of books. This was for me a real Cagean [referring to John Cage] experience and transposing it into music, collecting my acoustical memories of such an oceanic mix of subliminal sounds, has actually been my compositional dream since a while.

Elena Garcia Fernandez In your conception of *Esame di mezzanotte* the conventional separation between musicians in the pit and singers on stage is suspended. A part of the choir is singing from the pit and some musicians are placed on stage as actors.

Lucia Ronchetti I wanted something like the opposite of the Wagner's theater conception. I dreamed about having the voices in the pit and the orchestra outside, showing its visual force and impact. I feel very lucky because Achim Freyer has found a solution that realizes my dramaturgical impulse and gives back to the voices special symbolic positions as in the baroque opera: he did conceive it as a gigantic »Nature Theatre of Oklahoma« (from Kafka's *America*).

Elena Garcia Fernandez The choir is divided into different ensembles: the choir in the pit and the choir of the readers on stage. What different functions do the ensembles have?

Lucia Ronchetti The choral ensemble is divided into different realities: from the pit they are the voice of the library itself, the noises and the cries and callings of the many animals hidden inside and also the resonant chamber of the fears and hopes of the inhabitants, readers or suspended souls. When they are on stage the choral ensemble becomes more explicit the voices of the readers in the reality of the opera, during the night Giro Lamento spends inside it. A Part of the choir is interpreting the ensemble of failed writers that have a life in the underground of the library, and the more pure and uncontaminated part of the choral voices, represented by treble and very young voices, are giving voices to the more abandoned and lost books, because of the innocence of them (the not read books) and they imminent sacrifice given by the disorder in the catalogue. For me the choral ensemble is a single entity, constantly present as the library, all together they are my musical representation of the old library.

Elena Garcia Fernandez You are working with different quotations from musical history from renaissance to pop music. How do you compositionally handle the foreign material?

Lucia Ronchetti I only refer to music I know so deeply that I can write in the same style, so it's never a quoting attitude for me, an extraneous fragment falling down into the score. I do it especially with Italian music of the past I can better understand, doing a compositional analysis, when I need it to sustain and reinforce aspects of the dramaturgy or vocal style characterizing personages.

Elena Garcia Fernandez How do you choose these compositions? Do you have certain criteria or intentions by which you make your choices?

Lucia Ronchetti I wanted to create a traditional »Italian sound environment«, an overall musical structure representing my musical nocturnal library, where the characters and the events could be set. I refer to Verdi's Requiem because for me it

represents the subterranean musical blood of every Italian composer and to his *Don Carlo* because it's the grand opera presenting conflicts, disillusion, fights and tragic misadventures inside the family, the Italian secular inferno. This opera meant 20 years of doubts, revisions and re-organisation of the material for Verdi and I find the result turbulent and rocky, the dramatic effect being close to an exasperated comicality.

Elena Garcia Fernandez How exactly does Verdi become Ronchetti?

Lucia Ronchetti Some tragic moments of the dramaturgy are expressed by Verdi through accelerated timing, textures involving short fragments of repeated timbres, conglomerations, like splinters escaping from the regular tactus. Some of the *Don Carlo* tense textures are in *Esame di mezzanotte* transformed into comic excesses, tragicomic visions, connected with the past. The eternal existing of the nocturnal library and their creatures are supported by the old colors of Verdi's musical routine and every listener of opera may recognize it, though treated with different orchestral textures and cut in a way to pass through so fast to become a sort of musical »déjà vu«.

Elena Garcia Fernandez The process of staging a piece is always a process of interpretation, of adding new ideas and removing others. How does Achim Freyer's staging go together with your idea of the piece?

Lucia Ronchetti Achim Freyer is a free thinker, he does encounter my score with his deep freedom and his dialectic ideation, searching for his own enjoyment and contentment, as great artists do, knowing that a score is just a petrified forest of hyper-codified signs, which needs life and warmth to grow into an opera, exactly what I have wished for this work.