

Interview with Arno Lückner  
In Programmheft Konzerthaus Berlin 2-2011  
On *Lezioni di Tenebra*  
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A.L.-Your new music theatre »Lezioni di Tenebra« relates to Francesco Cavalli's famous opera from 1649 »Il Giasone«. How did this idea occur?

L.R.-Giasone is one of the most interesting Italian operas, object of my analysis since ever. Here the "drama" is primarily represented through musical conflicts, the dramaturgy is based on the counterpoint of very precise vocal styles, defined for each character, and the *fabula* is just a shadow behind the musical representation. The text itself is more a demonstration of a conceptual thesis than a dialogic "intreccio". And the thesis seems to be that the voluntary blindness of the couple of Giasone and Medea, their meeting only in the dark without knowing each other, was the only chance for them, due to the blindness of human beings and the progressive darkness of their destiny: the plot proves it.

A.L.-Why do you think the issues of an opera from 1649 can interest us in a very new music theatre work?

The experimentality of the baroque opera writing concerning the treatment of the voice and the musical "amplification" of the visual spectacularity is an unexplored mine. The principal characters of the "Giasone" are identified by Cavalli with the help of distinctive vocal styles, a different timing of communication and emotional expression, and a different organization of harmonic sequences. The result is a very rich theatre of timbre patterns, a ferment of various and distinct compositional ideas, where the organization of sounds clarifies the dramatic action and the plot.

For each character Cavalli built such a well-defined and unique musical sculpture, so vivid and unmistakable, that the character is always identifiable, even when the complexity of the labyrinthic plot rises doubts and causes possible mistakes. They all have or act different forms of blindness, having trouble in recognizing each other or even themselves.

The timing of the musical structure is exemplar as well. While the libretto by Cicognini is full of prospective or retrospective references, the Cavalli's music sculpts a sort of absolute present, completely detachable from past and future. This "composed present" neutralizes the plot and forces the "re-presentation", the hyper-presentation of the voices, the immediateness of the character. L'*opus compositum* acts the *fabula*, a miracle occurring in very few occasions in the history of music theatre.

A.L.-Could you describe how you worked with the »Cavalli material«? Can we hear Cavalli in the original form or did you assimilate his music into your own?

L.R.-All the main characters will be interpreted by the two singers, with the countertenor impersonating the delicate and fragile figures, Giasone, Isifile, Oreste and the soprano representing the more agitated, violent, buffo and extreme characters, Medea, Egeo and Demo, independently from their

original gender.

The reduction of the entire cast to two vocal timbres, in the darkness of the scenic situation, heightens the dramatic play of non-communication, misunderstanding and doubtful inquiry, conveyed by the different voices: I would like to have this entire galaxy of events absorbed and concentrated within the tension of a chamber duo.

I consider my revision a compositional analysis focusing the ability of Cavalli's music to give voice simultaneously to antithetic sentiments in a concertato, which urges the specific material to the extreme consequences. The simultaneity of the heterogeneous, the plurality, the intermittence of different compositional patterns is still working when the character is alone as well. The succession of short hyper-differentiated arias keep the sense of disorder of sentiments for the listener. And this disorder is spectacular because it is connected with a libretto based on the impossible communication between people, also or even especially in love.

I selected from Cavalli's original work the most extreme parts and I re-compose the sound scenario evoked by the special connection between Cicognini's words and the music.

If there is a possible matching between the timbric prints generated by a word and its meaning, Cicognini and Cavalli did their best to create areas of maximum homogeneity among the many souls of the word: rhythm, timbre and specific andamento. The word becomes like a sound and conceptual engine which generates and unleashes the melody.

Delays and removals I impose to the original by my compositorial reading are inspired by the "verticality" of the scene depicted by Cavalli and Cicognini, proceeding from Gods' supreme sphere, and going down to the earth, or even underground (Medea, Egeo, Demo are in three different occasions under the sea, speaking from the water).

A.L.-When you are writing a theatrical work: do you have special ideas of scene, light, stage - or is your way to compose a very musical one and the stage and acting things the field of the director?

L.R.-The viscosity is for me something growing very slowly during my composing. I am like a blind person that can see and discover aspects of the world through writing sounds. This is also why I liked the "*Toccar con gl'occhi e rimirar col tatto*" (feeling with one's eyes and seeing through the touch), the line from one of the most celebrated arias of Giasone. I try to realize my visions into the sound landscape and hope the director can do the opposite process, to press the perceptual realization of his scenario into my music. In "Lezioni di tenebra" this tendency is esaperated, since the original dramaturgy is based on an impossible visualization of reality. Everything is in form of "teiscopy", (look from behind a wall), an escamotage of the Baroque period to let the public know about an event that is not visible in the scene. The scenic presence of the characters is not coincident with their absolute present. Every apparition is meditative. They are ghosts of themselves and their acting is somehow isolated from the plot. Here the director is called to represent this invisibility!

A.L.-You know that the new and the old music scene seems sometimes very apart from the »normal« circle of classical music. Isn't there a danger to »connect« old music with new music? Or do you think it could be a big chance?

L.R.-I don't think there is something like a "normal" circle of classical music. From the age of Cavalli until the second half of the last century there was virtually no chance of hearing Giasone in a theatre, while now it could be possible, even if not usual. Connecting the past to the present is one of the most important issues in music history but this process is never regular and express the dominant estetic of a period. I think the repertory played today, the selection we do from the vaste oceanic repertory of written music, is not at all "normal" but extremely capricious and decadent.

A.L.-In »Lezioni di Tenebra« you use different types of »emotionalizing sounds« like breathing etc. Do you think that in new music sometimes could be more authenticity, more emotions, even more pathos?

L.R.-I don't believe that musical language can be somehow transliterable into spoken language or that emotional human sounds can be assimilable into a musical structure. The level of formalization in music is so high and so cryptic that the hermeneutic declarations of the composer himself are often not considered by analysts. Nevertheless the extra-territoriality and extra-corporality of musical language, its fragility of "ars moriendi", art destined to decay in time, can offer a deep freedom of interpretation and the pathos derives from the openness and the freedom of the interpretation. I tend to include in my treatment of the voice all the nuances from spoken and sung text and all the uncontrolled and unexplored sounds the "human machine" is involuntarily uttering, because I need a large timbric palette to define vocal character, and also because the long collaboration with the Neue Vocalsolisten virtuosity made me a morboous sound detective.