

## LIMES

*Listen. You still know how to listen.*

In 1938, the German philosopher and musician Theodor W. Adorno already warned: "Cultural industry's main purpose is to sell music to the largest audience possible, mostly in the form of records, yet without any regard for the artistic quality. As a result, this causes a regression in the listening". Such a regression has unfolded.

Nowadays, in a recent essay about listening, which was included in a volume of the Treccani Encyclopedia, Alessandro Cecchi tries to explain: "Everyday musical experience has changed as a whole, since it now goes mostly through small portable devices. The widespread diffusion of smartphones is bound to further increase the impact of streaming, which still entails data compression and a lower audio resolution. Even downloading involves mainly compressed formats entailing a considerable data loss (i.e., lossy compression), such as the notorious MP3. This last backed the spread of iPods and is now integrated *de facto* in any smartphone".

We are living in a state of schizophrenia and phonolatry. We listen too much and badly. We are subjected to music, that is often obsessive. We idolize not the content of sound, but what contains it. Yet, maybe we started to react.

The new record by Samuele Telari originated in such a context, sharing considerations with Igor Fiorini, musician and sound director. According to Igor, "the newly developing methods of listening reconcile technology and quality. While we wait for high-definition streaming, there are high-definition dedicated websites. Thus, market is changing. Our purpose is also to bring back the desire for a natural listening, such as to convey the details of style, phrasing, timbre, resonances. Elements which reproduced listening often makes impossible to perceive now".

This recording was done all the way from the beginning to the end, with no pauses during the execution of every piece, with no subsequent cuts throughout the editing nor interventions during the mixing process. As in a live concert, but it was recorded in a dedicated room. The studio working and the execution process, together with the performer's interior attitude, were those needed in a live recital, not for a studio recording session. This difference is drastic and, along with the other parameters, is aimed at creating a prototype, which also carries on a strategy of commercial remuneration, something particularly problematic for such products as CDs. Technology, art and market.

The choice of the pieces reflects the personality of this young performer. Telari is a total musician, a quiet, thoughtful and elegant artist, often absorbed in intangible listening practices. The CD starts off with a magnificent version of *Prelude and Fugue in B minor, BWV 544*, one of Bach's few organ works not belonging to a cycle and of which the autograph has survived, the pedal part is written down below the staff, in red ink. An exuberant work, combining organ monumental sonority with intensity of expression, respecting the strictness of counterpoint. Harmonic support and melody, the two hemispheres in the Kantor's universe, emerge clearly here, thus emphasizing the affinity between the two instruments. "This is hardly a transcription for organ of the original. It is rather an adaptation. I just divided the voices between right and left", Telari said. As hands slide over the two keyboards of the bayan, we can feel and see the solo instrument engaging a self-talk, questioning itself, multiplying into a polyphony of voices, dynamics, echoes upon echoes. The achieved balance between vertical architecture and linear narrative, between rhythmic pulses and contemplative pace, is performed with an exemplary limpidness of contours.

*De Profundis* was the first work for bayan by Sofia Gubaidulina. For the first time in the Russia of that period, this instrument took a leading role in the symbolic-religious field of expression, while being taken away from the folk tradition, for which it had been destined until then. This piece had a great success among performers and introduced a new potential literature for bayan. It was composed with the collaboration of the accordionist Friedrich Lips, who first performed it in Moscow in 1980.

In the beginning, sound is a faint blow, as the air comes out of the bellows like a wind, a breath, a sigh, a moan. The piece develops along one uninterrupted arch, while the spectrum of bayan's most peculiar expressions is constantly at the service of functional expressive purposes: tone clusters alternate with colder, synthetic resonances, celestial vibrations with dark rumbles. Invocation alternates with plea, and suffering with hope, while the anxiety of waiting is shaken by accelerations and even explosions in the dynamics and variety of the registers. The enduring predominance of a visionary aesthetics leads to a bright ascension, after going through the depths of pain and many worries. The executive virtuosity does never triumph over the control on the author's narrative project. After a first stormy expressive peak — like a farewell from the anxieties of life, there is an episode of silence and renewed waiting. The opening blow recurs, from now on riding the bliss towards a final reconciliation with death, disclosing the eternal salvation to whom believes in resurrection, through the eternal rest.

The *Messa da Requiem* (1982) by Ukrainian composer Volodymyr Runchak has further enriched bayan's repertoire towards a spiritual and mystical dimension, which now represents the predominant expressive figure of this instrument in the high literature. In this Requiem, Runchak shows a theatrical, even melodramatic sensibility, combining moments of strong emotion with isolated parts of suspension and mystery.

On two occasions, the performer is asked to turn into a voice-over and read two quatrains by the composer himself, in a clear voice and without any voice stress or emphasis:

*Where there is Sky – Clouds.*

*Where is Crime – Punishment*

*Where there are Rocks – Mountains*

*Whitout God – Grief.*

*Where there is Illness – Remedy*

*The Road from the Precipice upward.*

*Where there is Rain – Rivers*

*Birth and Death beside me.*

“Birth and death beside me”: the final line accurately explains the double, parallel main theme of the piece. Such a theme demands the interpreter to follow the frequent alternation between concentration and inwardness and to comply with an extroverted emotional charge. This is expressed through the prominence of the most 'organistic' registers of the instrument and the rising of a vital, catastrophic fury, such as a *Dies Irae*. The second quatrain calms it all down, though. The commiato — one last, long-held note — is like an aurora of light, gently invading and enduring in the space and time dimension of the listening.

*Ombra* ("Shadow") by Domenico Turi was composed in 2013 as a homage to the Roman painter Lorenzo Indrimi, an artist so sensitive to music that he dedicated a series of paintings to John Cage. Lorenzo was sick with tumor, but he refused to be operated by the surgeon treating him — a friend. He decided the therapy to be his art itself. He started painting monochromes that were crossed by a narrow, yet sharp and darker line; a shadow, indeed.

That same shadow which often reveals the presence of illness through X-ray examination. On a summer night in 2013, during the summer season at Roman Philharmonic Academy, Lorenzo exhibited some of these paintings in "Sala Casella". The one he loves most was propped against an easel on the stage, thus becoming an integral part of the execution of Domenico Turi's piece, which he composed after hearing about this unusual illness experience. Painting activity was turned into a seven-year therapy: “Extremely slight lines chase and caress each other in between distant, inaudible sounds. A shadow-like voice, soft and painless only at first, then plunges its claws, pushing music into an abyss. A low, yet tense cluster dims any hope, but life is ready to return and rise again, at any time”, the composer wrote.

Even in its brevity, the piece traces a complete path, that covers listening, vision, presence and catharsis of the illness. Knowing about the background story, the audience of that unforgettable concert understood and

internalized it, as one unique emotional experience. After one month, the disease defeated Lorenzo, but that night he was able to play it out on stage and happily perform his farewell.

On that same occasion, Turi also offered his bayan version of the *Andante con moto*, from Quartet no.14 ("Death and the Maiden"), Franz Schubert's second to last one. Such a prelude was definitely not out of context that night. "During the transcription, I tried to actualize the idea that a work for quartet must strive for unity. This was possible by using bayan, as bellows ensure expressive unity, while the two manuals ensure the voices autonomy and differentiation. I remained faithful to Schubert's work, making the transcription as much instrumental as I could, trying to explore the executive possibilities of the instrument itself and enhance its technical-expressive characteristics; for example, the use of free and standard basses, the distinctive "bellow shake", the alternation of manuals and the equally important indication of registers".

"Give me your hand [...] I am a friend [...] Be of good cheer!", Death tells the Maiden in Matthias Claudius' poem, that inspired Schubert's Lied, whose theme goes through the second movement of the quartet. Turi follows the pace and thematic variation of the original structure, adorning it with vibrant passion and letting heartbreaking, popular echoes stand out through the sound of the bayan. It goes *piano* then *forte*, more piano then more forte, slowing down then speeding up, thus highlighting the unpredictable, intrusive seismographic profile of the psyche, which is so frequent and typical of the mature, unmistakable Schubert. At the end, Death's words reverberate through a major mode, which is appeased rather than affirmative: "I am not fierce / Softly shall you sleep in my arms!".

*Danse Macabre* by Camille Saint-Saëns was first performed on January 25, 1874 in Paris and was heavily jeered at the time; today it is a well-known piece. As tastes change, so does the fortune of a work. The composer was inspired by a poem by Jean Lahor, pseudonym of Henri Cazalis. "Zig, zig, zig, Death in cadence / Striking with his heel a tomb [...] The bones of the dancers are heard to crack". The nocturnal sabbath scene finally ends at dawn: "But hist! of a sudden they quit the round / They push forward, they fly; the cock has crowed". Soon after this Parisian work, from the original for orchestra, Franz Liszt made a piano transcription, which would enjoy uninterrupted success. The transcription for bayan by Yuri Shishkin follows the parody and grotesque of Saint-Saëns' composition. It enhances the spirit of festive, overwhelming folk dance, that played a major role in the universal rise of the accordion instrument family.