

BROKEN SHAKE

Essentia is what is left when the two protagonists of this sound itinerary, the clarinet and the accordion, “strip off their clothes” (namely what they usually mean in the repertoire), returning to be pure instruments: essential, in fact. When the two instruments feed on the same, totally *aerial* substance, the blank page in front of us can only become a territory of new discoveries and fascinations. A particularly intriguing trail, when composers of different schools and generations accept the encounter with an unpublished and yet extraordinarily effective and rich repertoire. The first think that comes to mind, in front of a clarinet/accordion duo, is their being, after all, a *hyperinstrument*. They are nourished by the same aerial matter: they are tonally homogeneous, but there is a vast range of possibilities in which the two (very different) instruments become one. In continuous hiding from and revealing to each other, the search for sound becomes *the trait d’union* of the experience. Only the techniques, structures, references, inevitably different intentions come into play, given the wide (generationally, but also geographically speaking), context “our” composers come from.

A common ground is established, and essentiality is its assumption. Traditions are just quoted here and there, mostly implied. Even renegade, you might say. Two somehow opposite paths, those of the two instruments. On the one hand the clarinet, noble by birth, baptized by his majesty Mozart in the century of Enlightenment, which passes then into the hands of Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Woody Herman (and also into the hands of another Woody: Allen... and even into those of Dylan Dog), destined to become a protagonist in *jazz*, without neglecting the *klezmer*, or (why hide it?) the ballroom music experience. On the other hand the accordion, a traditionally “proletarian” and “vagabond” instrument, in the words of Gabriel García Márquez. It has only recently found place in the “classy” repertoire, after being under the spotlight in the “*Sequenza XIII*” by Luciano Berio (1995) and having already sporadic but significant appearances in the twentieth-century cultured repertoire (Berg, Hindemith and Creston among others). Here the meeting between the two instruments necessarily takes place outside of these traditions and away from the collective imagination, passing through the hands of five Italian composers – four out five born in Rome – of three different generations, of a Finnish and a Japanese, born over a broad span of almost fifty years.

To Marcello Panni the (due) honor of the opening piece. **Nocturne 3**, written for Duo Essentia in this third version for bass clarinet and accordion in 2017, transports the two instruments into a soundscape that smacks of Mediterranean and archaic. In fact the initial element, in its imploring oscillation around a semitone, derives from a Greek – Calabrian lamentation already used by the author in the incidental music

for an euripidean *Alcestis* in Syracuse. Entrusted in that case to the bassoon, then passed to the bass clarinet and, finally, to our duo, the *melopea* becomes an opportunity for a sort of a mirror game, a *discanto* in which the two instruments are reflected in each other, in a substantial incantatory homorhythm, broken only by some rhythmic “ripples” (staccato, ribattuto), before the “esile, quasi da lontano” reappearance from the painful *incipit*. A “dual” piece, born not by chance in the shadow of that Greekness which gave a linguistic specificity to “being two”, and which underlines the element of the double in the light of the *Dialoghi tra il Grande Me e il Piccolo Me* by Pirandello, from which it is reborn as a commentary on the reading, somehow returning to its “magnogræca” ceadle.

I *Tre Aforismi* (2008) by Domenico Turi, one of his first compositions, also marks the meeting between the composer and the performers. The first two pieces have been compulsory pieces at the 2013 edition of the Castelfidardo International Accordion Prize, won by Telari. The triptych, for B ♭ | clarinet and bayan, is a pure reflection on sound: two meditative pages (*Liberamente lento e sognante* and *Misticamente lento*) which play on minimal materials (the superimpositions of fifths, unisons, the augmented fourth interval, the pedal) and frame the central aphorism *Come in un soffio, molto veloce*, all crossed by the “gusts” of rapid semitone oscillations. “Three small thoughts suspended in time” – as the author defines them – which, in the very simple and definitive melody of the five final bats, reaffirm an exquisite singing idea of the clarinet supported by the accordion’s wide tonal palette.

Plus I by Jukka Tiensuu dates back to 1992. Finnish composer and keyboardist, he divides his activity between the avant-garde and the historically informed performance practice in the ancient repertoire. The piece, of which four variants are possible “for each duo or for B ♭ clarinet, accordion and cello trio”, is clearly divided into two sections. The first section is based on an echo pursuit between the two instruments, one to be the *leader* and the other to be the *follower* on the same material, leaving the choice of which role to play in some interventions to the interpreters themselves. The imitation becomes than impromptu and playful, the result depending on the initiative and imagination of the *leading* performer (to whom is demanded of choosing dynamic, character and articulation of the sound) but also on the speed and reaction capacity of the *follower*. The second section, in turn divided into two parts by a static central area, is a large and virtuoso “invention” (in this case for two voices).

The clarinet and accordion versions of the two pieces by Matteo D’Amico and Fabrizio De Rossi Re are born for Duo Essentia. The first one, written originally for clarinet and bayan, is an *Impromptu* (2017) that the composer articulates on a double level: the level of the relationship between the two instruments, which “at first they study, smell and like each other and, little by little, they finally find common ground” – writes the

author – and the level of the form, very free, which is born from this relationship, like a panel series of rich invention. Among virtuosic gestures, episodes, of contemplative suspension and some reminiscences, there

is also space for a dazed waltz, a small *homage* to the common past of the two instruments, in a reinterpretation *à la Satie*.

The second one, ***Busoni Gespenst*** (*Busoni's Ghost*, 2015), was born for clarinet and piano, starting from the *Sonata in D major BV 138* that Busoni composed in 1880 for the same ensemble; youthful and brilliant attempt and at the same time exclusive *Hausmusik* (clarinet and piano are the instruments played by Busoni's parents). The original materials are used literally or are subjected to procedures that sometimes make their outlines no longer clearly perceptible. Thus, as in a dream dimension, Ferruccio's ghost peeps out, sometimes indulged, almost lulled, sometimes disturbed and interrupted by the accordion *clusters*. The lyrical dimension is then transfigured and suspended: other registers intrude through a vocabulary that is both playful and affectionate. A dream in the dream.

Dai Fujikura is a leading name on the international scene, which he has been part of since the early 2000s with the "blessing" of Pierre Boulez. Japanese born and yet trained and residing in London, Fujikura was awarded the *Leone d'Argento* at the 2017 Venice Biennale; in the motivation for the award, his music has been described as "mobile, inventive and surprising. It floors the listener for the unpredictability that the musical discourse presents at every moment, even if it is based on a formal logic of extreme clarity and originality". A reading that is also well suited to ***Broken Shackle*** (2001), for bass clarinet and accordion, a wide page of timbral virtuosity (multiphonic sounds, dynamics and extreme extensions) in which the construction escapes perception, attracted instead by the elastic and very free playfulness the materials are treated with.

Last but not least, ***Exaptation*** by Simone Cardini (2016), dedicated to Duo Essentia. The piece, as the author writes, "lives, with its rhapsodic attitude, in a sort of constant dialectical negation of a teleologically understood vector structure". The initial micro-cell, in fact, is not properly developed, but passes through an initial lyric section, a rhythmic section and its final transfiguration, undergoing variations, contractions, dilations and taking on a different function each time ("*exaptation*", in fact). From *mèlos*, to rhythm, dissolving... and finally, to the "dialogue and breath of reeds in vibration". An *essential* gesture, full circle.

Silvia Paparelli (*breaking shackles...*)