

Gianquinto, Sbordoni - A leap in the music

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Sbordoni - A "LEAP" IN MUSIC [excerpts from "Sbordoni, musica come fare"]

(english translation by Nigel Jamieson)

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In the first of Duineser Elegien Rilke asks himself: "But who, if I shouted, would hear me [...]. What is listening [...] is the uninterrupted message that is created from silence". These are apt words for understanding the source, the meaning and the theoretical value of Sbordoni's music: the theme of silence and the special message that springs from silence is the point in question today; shouting is not listened to. And Rilke's poem is "innovative" precisely because of its search for new semantic values for the word; renewing, also, in its awareness of the weight that search brings to bear on syntactical structures.

Semantics and syntax as a new, more profound approach to the theme, the classic theme, of the content-form relationship. It is necessary to regenerate the condition of silence and, in it, as has been said of Rilke, give "a 'glance' so intense that it would bring a puppet to life". Unity of lexicon and of grammatical and syntactical innovations, such as to guarantee against slides into the structuralism of radical expressionist choices or, in terms of sound, against the sterility of the search for pure lexicality-sonority.

From silence, as a point of arrival of the Webernian "emotional dimension" and of contemporary music, the path opens up – in Evangelisti's theoretical intuition – to a new sound-world, the obligatory path to avoid falling into what Sbordoni refers to as the "Viennese syndrome": the need for an Absprung, for that rilkian "leap" whose meaning we want to investigate.

Goethe tells us that memory and imagination generate the past and its experiences by means of procedures which, we would say nowadays, are possible in that they set in motion needs to adjust to a state of mind, through an appropriate, parallel semantic search that fits the "idea", or rather the object of the imagination or the memory: be it a sound-"image", or a visual or eidetic one.

Semantic choice (in sound-space) is put to use in a syntactical context (i.e. in the tempo of the music), in accordance with it. The syntax, unfolding within the objective tempo, generates its own tempo – the tempo of the syntax – within the objective tempo, and is a function of the different disposition of linguistic elements. Musical language is either semantic and syntactical together or it is nothing.

We know that there is no reducibility between syntax and semantics, from one to the other; but we know that it is semantics which generates or recognizes an interpretation of a statement, depending on whether it is appropriate to the content to be grasped (something "symbolized", which is of a different order from the symbol: on one side are functions of the psyche – memory, imagination – and on the other sound-images: two levels which cannot be compared). The fundamental point is: what lexicon? What new semantic value to assign to a word (or sound or other sign) already used in a thousand contexts?

All the "mystery" of art lies in its syntactical-semantic appropriateness to its affective world: in the power of the passage from the imagination (and from the mnemonic act) to the memory-image (sound). Here there are no "rules".

Now let us return to Sbordoni. In all his work the element influencing sound-structure is the spectrum of the sound, its decomposition into elements, not in its strict "spectral" value but inasmuch as it is a sign correlated to the product of an act of the mind. And it is not the presumed temporality and seriality of memory that generates syntactical unity; it is the imagined object – the content of the mental structure – which becomes the "signified" referent, which a parallel operative activity of the (creative-artistic) mind aims to reach by means of significant sound and its

spatial and temporal connections with other sounds. The quality and the origin of the sound, only inasmuch it is a significant sign, in operating on timbres operates also on harmonic and constructive aspects. To sum up: in Sbordoni's work formal-constructive technique originates from within, from the need and the effort to make significant signs appropriate to mnemonic-imaginative meanings; not from the rules of any school.

So here, in "...durch die Lieb'allein", is the E flat, with all its expressive significance, on which the whole piece is constructed, with a yearning evocation of the E flat of The Magic Flute. An E flat which returns in Agnus I, the sound of a Tibetan Om, an allusion to the Urklang of the Romantics: an E flat slowly opened to the voice of the soprano, which throughout the whole piece dies away in a sound between E and F and, after a long pause, starts again on G: "O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig" quotes a chorale, used also by Bach in the Leipzig chorales, and is introduced here like a graffito, a strongly dramatic exclamation in its pure allusion (E-G and then F sharp-G): two cries suffocated immediately, two tragic flashes, reiterated with different intervals, which no host of angels will be able to hear unless there is a move from silence and from a different way of listening; and an insistence on D, on which this evocative piece ends.

"...durch die Lieb'allein" is a transformation of E flat from low to high, in accordance with a structure of transformation that is also adopted in Alba. [...] A relationship between the duration of the whole and the parts, and then between the parts themselves, achieved by reducing geometrical forms to sonic forms, decodable as designs of ascending, descending and horizontal strokes. Here is a new, different, evocative approach to "form".

This quest for a relationship between memory-image and sonority is omnipresent; as, for example, in *Il profumo di Euridice* (The perfume of Eurydice), with its extremely simple play on C and E flat and then on F and A flat, a generator of semantic clusters with echo and reminiscence effects in an undulating syntactical structure; likewise in *Fantasia della lontananza* (Fantasies of distance), with the cluster F-A flat-B flat-C and the B flat on which the piece comes to an end, or the B-C-E flat-E at the beginning of *Sopra un arco di bianco* (Above an arch of white).

Sbordoni follows neither the path of the Romantics nor the structuralist one of the Second Viennese School and later of the Stuttgart experimentalist. His is a musical reflection on music, on the semantic problems inherent in it: almost a theoretical manifesto.

For this reason Adorno's general thesis about the meaning of modern music is not acceptable, the meaning of a Schönberg who is progressive tout court (and progressive for the same reasons for which Schönberg himself classified Brahms as a progressive) and of a Stravinsky who is a restorer, entailing an abdication of music, which would throw Stravinsky, a pseudo-cubist, back to the Impressionism of Debussy.

The dichotomy between semantic content and syntactical form is generally resolved in terms that are vague and obscure. When Sbordoni, on the other hand, develops musical languages in which sound and structure are open to the imagination, he intends, in my opinion, not only and no most importantly that the imagination should be the "creative" source, but above all that it should be also the "signified" object of those operations which, at the linguistic-musical level, are intended to signify: an incomparability between the two operative levels, which is at the root of the insoluble tension and the perennial dissatisfaction the composer feels in the quest for appropriateness between symbol and symbolized. In short, for the "progressivity" of which Schönberg speaks in connection with Brahms, it is not enough to signpost the direction of a musical language that is not limited, in itself and for itself, by form: the term must point in the direction of forms that break the limits interposed between the products of memory and imagination.

Sound in Sbordoni's work is not "objective", but is the lexical element of a signifying-semantic act. It is in this context that he identifies what he calls "liuteria" ("lute-making"), necessary for the production of sonorities and their decomposition into a "spectrum", in order to integrate it and

therefore to configure it in a configuration appropriate to that particular sonority, to that sound. This means be guided by the sound's own force in "organizing" the composition: frequency range, intensity, timbre, harmonics and semantic "context", the generator in its turn of syntactical contexts: not blocked by melodic-harmonic and tonal-modal schemes.

In this theoretical structure, the key point in Sbordoni's thinking become his reflection on intermediality. His progressivity, in this sense, lies in the simultaneous presence of the expressive means of several systems (tonal and non-tonal music, classical and electronic sound). Here the concept of the "leap" is relevant again, new as interaction between expressive systems. So progress, new fields of exploration, no longer conceived as variation in Beethoven's sense, nor as openness of form in Brahms' sense, nor as freezing of form in the spatiality of ambiguity and reiteration in Wagner's sense, nor as quantitative equivalence of semitones in Schönberg's sense of critique of tonal system, but as exploration of the sound-quality of intervals and duration, and as a correlation of expressive forms, as a "counterpoint of different formal articulations" (Sbordoni). This is the project for a new quality in contemporary music. *Il fiume e il mare* (The river and the sea) and *Sull'orlo della tua memoria* (At the edge of your memory) also fit into it: in other words, a new form of metamusical research, because, through these works, a constructive reflection on the new face of music is being elaborated.