

A Few Notes on the Piano Works of Luca Lombardi

After forty years of passionate and assiduous involvement in the multiple worlds of contemporary music, including those of the most extreme sort, I think I have arrived at a point of clarity as regards certain fundamental problems that have been bothering me for some time.

In just a few words, I would like to say that a certain rigidly “poietic” way of composing, abstracted from requisites of perceptibility, is no longer sustainable, also because certain ways of organizing material (wrongly viewed as outmoded) have definitely re-emerged in much of contemporary production, such as “the recognition of repetitions, of periodicity, of parallelisms, determination, by hearing, of distinct autonomous entities by means of contrasts, silences or section indicators, perception of continuity and prolongations” (Jean-Jacques Nattiez, in reference to Boulez’s *Répons*).

Also significant are these remarks by Foucault: “Listening to music becomes more difficult in proportion as composing frees itself from such stratagems such as formal schemes, signals, and tangible signs of a repetitive structure”.

Obviously there are various ways of bringing back certain worn-out traditions, while at the same time keeping in mind that what counts is the quality of the product and not its “tendency”. However, I think Luca Lombardi’s “way” is one of the most valid: making the new languages of the vanguard coexist in equilibrium with certain formal, harmonic, constructive elements of the past.

Already in *Wiederkehr* of 1971 (surely one of the masterworks of contemporary piano literature) Lombardi’s position was clearly delineated in this direction. Thus, preeminence to harmonic material (note the statement by Adorno placed as a motto at the beginning of the score), differentiation of the formal unities and their readability (Introduction, very beautiful and

almost Mahlerian in its suspended atmosphere—see the beginning of the First Symphony, the faster sections, strewn with *glissandi*, alternating with slow sections based on chords, and a percussive finale), adaptation of chromatic and diatonic elements, large-scale use of recurring material.

On the issue of harmony, I would like to point out the sharpness and clarity with which Lombardi, in the slow sections, constructs and links together his chords: indiscriminate chords of varying density, both in the number of tones involved and in the internal quality of tensions and relaxation. These subtle alchemies are also to be seen in Lombardi's other great piano work, the *Variazioni su "Avanti popolo alla riscossa"*. Here the transformative treatment of the theme achieves results of great harmonic fascination, whose high point in my opinion is reached in Variation VI and VII, both worked out above a formal web made up of chords.

The first of these, sensitive and lyrical (definitely my favorite), is a finely chiseled miniature in which the chordal unities—microscopically varied in their harmonic identity—are reiterated with soft insistence and with perfect individuation with regard to timbre and register (middle-high and middle-low of the instrument). Variation VII, of larger dimensions and subdivided into short episodes, displays a character somewhere between pensive and epic, and exploits best its qualities of timbre—exalted by a percussive pianism—in the extreme registers. Especially noteworthy seems the section composed of powerful perfect major chords that alternate with each other in an associative, felicitously unpredictable logic in which the organizational strategy of the artifice has succeeded in giving the curious sensation that such chords coordinate in complete liberty, without any restrictions imposed by any entity (the composer) outside of them.

It is also worth pointing out here the extraordinary Variation VIII, an example of how one can write great music with extremely reduced material and in an extremely compressed format.

And a final remark to emphasize the peaceful and even harmonious coexistence of disparate elements in this composition: avant-garde, neoclassical, “popular”, all melded and amalgamated into a language which has become, in the end, unitary.