

There are no labels that fit Lombardi. Even if by now he feels a stronger kinship with Nono and Rihm than with his earlier model Eisler, he cannot be cast in the narrow mold of New Subjectivity and Simplicity.

Wolfgang Rihm:

Lombardi's music [...] is of great formal vitality and full of insightful imagination. In that respect, Lombardi stands in the Classical tradition of the Mediterranean cultural orbit. But what makes his artistic endeavors so special, so exciting, is the fact that Lombardi is, to the same degree, deeply influenced by expressive ideals and philosophical aspects of German culture. [...] At the moment there is no other author who is as deeply familiar with two cultures (in this case, the Italian and the German) as Lombardi. Because due to biographical circumstances he was shaped by both, Lombardi can stake for himself an artistic position which is singularly his own.

Kerstin Schüssler

COMPOSING AS DISCOVERY

The Composer Luca Lombardi

For ages Germany and Italy have cultivated fruitful exchanges in terms of music. Already Heinrich Schütz undertook in the seventeenth century an "Italian Journey" into a country which had invented opera. The young genius Mozart celebrated his first successes there, and so did Giacomo Meyerbeer and Otto Nicolai.

A journey in the opposite direction was undertaken in 1968 by the Italian Luca Lombardi (at that time, 22 years old). His studies in Germany, however, were not the first contact he had with German language and culture. Already as a child he went to the German school in his native city Rome. It certainly was not self-evident for someone of his generation to get closer to exactly this country. Lombardi was born on December 24, 1945; his father, the philosopher Franco Lombardi, was involved in the anti-fascist resistance, his mother had a Jewish background. Nevertheless, Lombardi's parents decided, farsightedly, to open up a European perspective for their son. He took advantage of the opportunity, continued in Vienna the pianistic studies he had started in Rome and Florence and in 1968 settled in Cologne, at that time the mecca of New Music. There he matriculated as a composition student of Bernd Alois Zimmermann and Vinko Globokar and picked up additional stimuli at the Cologne Courses for New Music where he was taught by Karlheinz Stockhausen, Henri Pousseur, Maurizio Kagel, and Dieter Schnebel.

An excursion into electronic music was inevitable in the 1960s. Lombardi worked in the electronic studios in Cologne with Herbert Eimert and in Utrecht with Gottfried Michael

Koenig. But soon he turned away from it: 2Electronic music appeared to him as “sound without soul.” Since then Lombardi uses in his compositions the entire palette of classical instruments as well as the human voice.

“Not interested in music for specialists”

Lombardi was drawn away from the ivory tower of the avantgarde already during his student years. His basic conviction that New Music needs to reach out also to the average listener has not changed since. “I am not interested in music for specialists. I prefer my music to be apprehended by general audiences,” is his creed, repeated in many statements and interviews.

His standpoint was linked in the 1970s with a certain political idealism. Like many artists of his generation, Lombardi sympathized with communism and concretely contributed his share in terms of social engagement. The musicologist Albrecht Dümling notes: “As a contrast to the narrow confines of the nighttime radio studio [with its broadcast of serious music] Lombardi turned to the openness of everyday life and of the street.” He conducted workers chorusses, wrote radio plays and Lehrstücke and concerned himself with the work of Hanns Eisler. In 1973 he moved to East Berlin to become a student of Paul Dessau; in the same year he was offered a position as a composition teacher at the Conservatory in Pesaro, where he became professor in 1974. His interest in the political music of Eisler found an outlet in a dissertation (he received his doctorate at the University of Rome in 1975) and also in compositions such as *Non requiescat: Musica in memoria di Hanns Eisler* for 13 instruments. By that time he already had surpassed his radical left-wing phase. It needs to be mentioned that Lombardi, already in this work, distanced himself from all kinds of compositional dogmas, keeping his options open to a broad array of multiple styles which has informed his work, among them three symphonies, right up to the present day. Sweeping simplicity stands next to highest complexity; strict asceticism and entertainment, high-brow and low-brow passages intermingle. In today’s terminology this is called a “polystylistic manner:” Lombardi was already pursuing this path at a time when it was anything but fashionable and when the dogma of serialism prevailed.

In 1978 Lombardi exchanged his professorship in Pesaro for a similar position at the Conservatory in Milano. Around 1980 the political euphoria gave way to sobriety. His *Mayakovsky Cantata* (1979/80) articulates, in the words of Hans Werner Heister, “melancholy over the failure of revolutionary hopes.” The disillusion resulted in skepticism, but not necessarily in pessimism and nihilism. Lombardi kept himself open for new experiments and impressions, as, in general, he likes to compare his compositional endeavors with a journey of discovery in which the goal becomes clear only during the trip.

In tackling the mythological figure of Sisyphus Lombardi found a mirror which led him to general reflections about the absurdity of human aspirations: “What does it mean to start again from the beginning? What rock is this which, over and over again, has to be

pushed up the mountain?” As material for his four Sisyphus works (1984, 1985, 1988/89) Lombardi uses a tone row whose pitches encode his own name—a step toward identification, perhaps even toward confession, by means of composition. Lombardi saw another possibility of identification in the figure of Faust. His first opera *Faust: Un travestimento* was premiered in 1991 in Basel, Switzerland with great success and, in 1993, also shown in Weimar, Germany, the city of Goethe and Schiller.

The Artist's Responsibility

Despite the different stages and changing perspectives, Lombardi's artistic development should not be viewed as a fracture but as a gradual process. In his early work he not only cultivated great stylistic variety but also addressed the issue of the artist's responsibility. The issue only underwent a transformation: Whereas the political vision stood in the foreground earlier, today the focus is on ethical questions which have become the topic of Lombardi's works. Musical-philosophical reflections about man's relation to reality, to the universe, and a discourse about the “big” issues of humanity are evidence of the profound and multi-faceted profile of Lombardi.

As an era draws to a close, the composer gazes back over the reality of an [entire] century. How did humankind use the opportunities, apparently as exciting as never before, which the century provided to its generations? These are questions also addressed by *Vanitas?* Quotations from the wisdom literature of the Bible and Classical Antiquity form the textual basis for *Vanitas?* Along with those a third voice is heard from [post-biblical] Jewish tradition. For a long time Lombardi was indifferent toward the Jewish heritage of his mother, but in the mid-1980s this third cultural orbit increased in significance. *Ai piedi del faro* (at the foot of the lighthouse) of 1986 was the first work influenced by this aspect. Several other works followed in later years, including *Unterwegs: Gesänge aus der Diaspora* (On the Road: Songs from the Diaspora) of 1996.

“On the Road” could also serve as the motto for Lombardi's biography. Lecture and concert tours have led him several times through many countries of Europe, North America, Latin America, and Japan. In 1988/89 he was a Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin. He gave up his professorship at the Milano Conservatory in 1993 in order to devote himself more fully to composition. Still, his activities which he organizes from domicile at Lake Albano near Rome remain diverse. In 1995 he founded CIRMI, a center for musical-interdisciplinary research, in 1996 he was a lecturer at the Darmstadt Ferienkurse für Neue Musik. He publishes articles and essays in several professional journals, is the author of several books and the co-author of a standard work on instrumentation in the twentieth century, published in Germany in 1985. He received commissions from several organizations, including West German Radio in Cologne, IRCAM in Paris, the Cologne Philharmonic Orchestra, the Saarland Radio, and the Vienna Festival Weeks,

In 1998 Luca Lombardi was a guest of the Artists in Berlin program of the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), in 1999 he was a Fellow of the Hanse

Wissenschaftskolleg in Delmenhorst near Bremen, Germany, where, early in the year, he composed *Vanitas?*, a work commissioned for the centenary of the Essen Philharmonic Orchestra by Stefan Soltesz, its chief conductor. Soltesz already conducted a Lombardi premiere in 1994 in Frankfurt, namely *Terza Sinfonia* and is also the dedicatee of *Vanitas?*

Quite recently Luca Lombardi completed his second opera, *Dimitri's Illness*, whose premiere is planned for the next year in Leipzig [Note of the translator: It indeed was premiered there in May of 2000]. The subject of the opera is the tension-filled relation between Shostakovich and Stalin, the relation between art and society. In short, Lombardi remains faithful to the theme of his life.