

## Music for Flute by Luca Lombardi

Luca Lombardi (born 1945 in Rome) is one of the most prolific and inventive Italian composers of our time. He has sustained his compositional creativity on a high level for more than fifty years and has received accolades for his music not only in his native Italy, but also in Germany, Japan, and Israel (countries in which he has lived at various junctures of his life) as well as in the United States. Lombardi is mostly known for large-scale symphonic works, including symphony-cantatas and secular oratorios, as well as one-movement orchestral pieces. And then there are four operas. (One of the operas, *Prospero*, has substantial connections with the performers featured on this CD, and several pieces gathered here originated in the context of instrumental compositions and opera.)

A great variety of musical styles, techniques, and forms informs Lombardi's works, and he composes for many instruments, including the human voice. Yet, a cursory glance at the *Catalogo delle opere di Luca Lombardi* (ed. Gabriele Becheri, 2005—and updated to 2017 in the online encyclopedia *Komponisten der Gegenwart*) reveals that Lombardi devoted a considerable amount of his creativity to composing piano music and writing for flute solo. The first is easily explained: Lombardi is a pianist and counts among his friends quite a number of notable pianists who premiered and performed his works, including Alessandra Ammara, Giancarlo Cardini, Alessandra Gentile, Roberto Prosseda, and Frederic Rzewski. (See CD: *Luca Lombardi Piano Works*, Continuo 2015.) The preference for the flute seems more of a surprise. The most obvious explanation is Lombardi's encounter with flutists whose artistry inspired him to compositions for this instrument: Mario Caroli and Arcadio Baracchi who premiered *Flatus* as individual pieces and as a cycle, respectively; Eckart Altenmüller (a Renaissance man dedicated to neurobiology and music therapy, and also a flutist) who premiered the transcription of the Bach chorale (the last piece on the CD). But most notable in this context is Roberto Fabbriani whom Lombardi met in the 1980s and whose artistry inspired many of his flute compositions. (The second of *Sei Bagatelle* and *Nel vento, con Ariel* are dedicated to him; and the *Echo de Syrinx* is inscribed "A Roberto" to celebrate the flutist's sixtieth birthday.) It may not be too far-fetched to speak here of a rich creative collaboration between composer and instrumentalist who gives voice to the composer, comparable to the one between Brahms and Mühlfeld (leading to an autumnal flowering of works for the clarinet in the 1890s) or between Stockhausen and the Kontarsky brothers (the *Klavierstücke* of the 1950s).

In Lombardi's opera *Prospero* (after Shakespeare's *The Tempest*), the flute is associated with Ariel, the spirit of the wind, whose servitude allows his master Prospero to engage in magic. In the premiere of the opera at the National Theatre of Nuremberg in 2006, the link between Ariel and the flute was underscored in that Fabbriani was constantly visible on stage, playing his "magic" flute (and invoking Mozart's last singspiel) whenever Ariel appeared on the scene in form of four female voices. *Nel vento, con Ariel* (In the Wind with Ariel), excerpted from the opera for concert performances, may be considered the apex, or most representative, of collaborative works for both artists.

In the last act of Shakespeare's drama, Prospero addresses Ariel (Act V, 21-24):

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling  
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,  
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,  
Passions as they, be kindlier moved than thou art?

Carrying the analogy of Ariel (spirit of the wind) and flute a step further, one might also think of the flute, an instrument whose sound is generated by vibrating columns of air and thus dependent on human breath, as a metaphor of life. "Life" is present in all its variety in all the pieces gathered on this CD in a most diverse collection of flute instruments played by Fabbriani with astonishing virtuosity (from piccolo to bass flute) and in a diverse selection of works, ranging from the earliest manifestations of Lombardi's muse to pieces with special sound effects giving voice to human expression.

The *Tre piccoli pezzi* of 1965 are inspired by neoclassical models with fanfare-like materials and perpetual motion prevailing in the outer movements and framing a lyrical second piece. Twelve years later, in the *Quattro piccoli pezzi*, the composer's language has changed: he has absorbed serial procedures and begins to include novel sounds on the flute, particularly noteworthy in the last piece of the set, where a single pitch is varied and inflected. (The slow movement harkens back to the equivalent piece in the 1965 set, and the third movement, a scherzo, already foreshadows with its scalar materials the playfulness and lightness of Lombardi's *Klavierduo* of 1978-79.) The *Bagatella* of 1983 (the second of a cycle of late summer pieces—*Sei bagatelle di fine estate*) continues to explore the characters of the earlier *Pezzi* (playfulness, lyricism, humor), while *Schattenspiel* of 1984 sounds a more ominous tone with the dark sonority of the bass flute, fleeting shadowy figurations, and ghost-like “pizzicato” sound effects on the instrument. *Flatus* of the late 1990s joins segments from two pre-existent compositions (*Infra*, a brooding chamber work for 11 players exploring dark sonorities and delving into the subconscious and *Lucrezio. Parte I: Natura*, a secular oratorio) and adds a third composition, *Ro'* (for bass flute) written in memory of Lombardi's father Franco Lombardi (1906-89), a philosopher and professor at the University of Rome. The title invokes a Neapolitan song composed by Franco (“Buongiorno Ro”) that served as a tune of recognition in the Lombardi family and is quoted in the piece. *Nel vento, con Ariel* and the *Einstein-Dialog*, both of 2005, are closely related in chronology and sonority to the opera *Prospero*: The sound of the solo flute is associated, as noted already, with Ariel, while Prospero's brooding character is captured by the timbre of a solo cello. The latter piece, a duo for flute and cello, was commissioned for an Einstein exhibition in Berlin celebrating the centenary of the theory of relativity. *Echo de Syrix* of 2009 is an homage to Debussy (a meditation in sound on that composer's famous piece for solo flute). The final piece on the CD is a transcription and paraphrase of a Bach chorale (2010)—a memorial to Uwe Opolka, a friend who had recently passed away. Life is present here as an expression of mourning and lament in the subtlest of nuances.

Jürgen Thym – 2017