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The breath of music

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Finally, at the concerts of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia, listening to a musical page so to speak fresh of ink, but it would be perhaps more correct instead to write fresh of electronic processing. The use of live electronics, in fact it is now long of decades. But here it is another one. However, we proceed with order. The concert is entitled Augmented Piano, and is the second of the chamber season.

“Electroacoustic incipit.

Johann Sebastian Bach, Prelude and escape in the minor (for organ) BWV 543, piano transcription by Franz Liszt.

Electroacoustic hyperlude.

Franz Liszt, Sonata in si minori S 178.

Electroacoustic hyperlude.

Jacopo Baboni Schilingi, Sonata per piano and live computer, first absolute / commission of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia”.

Daniele Spini completes the illustration of the program with a very interesting interview to Jacopo Baboni Schilingi. I would say that Liszt and Baboni Schilingi are the focal point of the concert. And not by chance. From Haydn to Beethoven, the sonata is an essentially harmonious construction of harmonic contrasts that can or may not be identified in individual themes. Romanticism shifts contrast from harmony to thematic invention, understood no longer as a rhythmic and harmonious complex, but as a melodic profile. Liszt attempts to build a synthesis of the two systems. Of course every musical form is set as if it were a sonata, even the short intermezzo of a Brahms or a Webern chant, a Klavierstück of Stockhausen. It is not the only music that is done in Europe and in the world, and it was not even at the time of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms. The pupils of a student of Beethoven like Czerny, who is Czech, are not by chance. As Liszt is Hungarian. This means that Liszt keeps his foot in several brackets. Only those who are misled by the romantic idea that a theme coincides with his melodic profile can continue to say, in fact, that the Sonata of Liszt mono is built on two themes (something more or more). Here is his futuristic genius on the one hand, and lucidly summarized by one tradition on the other. The Benethovenian perpetual variation of a original musical idea knows, in fact, here his most radical realization. But it was already prefigured especially in Haydn, and it is possible to find it also in many pages of Mozart. Corelli and Bach are, in some way, the suggesters, more than the precursors.

Jacopo Baboni Schilingi

The historical avant-gardes of the second twentieth century have exhausted their propulsive charge for a long time. But both anti-avant-garde polemics dreaming of a consoling re-exhumation of the

past and the repetitive epigonists of hysterical formulas are out of the way, they have not grasped the sense of what happened and that happens. The mazurke of Chopin, the Hungarian dances of Brahms, the last Dvořák, among the romantic and post-romantic, the urges of a Berio to explore territories not frequented by the "culta" music, among the avant-garde, are just some of the many examples that demonstrate how much the same tradition was actually very simple. But now there is a car that records the breath, invented by David Kuller and is called MyAir: the computer – artificial intelligence – realizes in real time sounds that pursue its becoming. Simultaneously they are projected on a screen images of the movements of the chest during the breath. The electronic perceptor of the piano sounds is also used among the songs of Bach and Liszt, and diffused as electroacoustic hyperlude between one piece and another. The singing melody that takes on the theme of sonata lisztiana becomes so, for example, an uninterrupted, acute melope, could be of violins, but unequivocally electronic systems, of a thin charm, At the end of the day, the piano is also a technological instrument, and perhaps Liszt meant it, which was proving its unexplored possibilities.

Simon Ghrauchy

The keyboard virtuosity of Bach and then Liszt is thus recast as a strangely contemporary virtuosity, with a clownish element – and why not? – that might have appealed to Picasso or Milhaud. It starts with the jacket, whose luminous embroidery conceals the breathing sensor. Tall and slender, Ghraichy can glide across the keys at supersonic speed or strike them with primal force. His performance is already musical theatre. His mass of curls covers his head like a vast helmet. He can play with languorous sweetness, as in the melodic transformation of the theme of Liszt’s sonata, or with Bartók-like percussive harshness. In one leap Bach and Liszt become composers of today. The devotees of historically informed performance might recoil, and they would have a point if the pianist intended to respect the historical character of the music he plays. But he does not. Ghraichy reads Bach and Liszt as though the ink on their staves were still wet and he were a magical tightrope walker turning them into sound. He was ready, then, for Baboni Schilingi’s Sonata for piano and live computer, the product of thirteen years of work. The other evening it received its first performance in the Sala Petrassi of Rome’s Auditorium Parco della Musica Ennio Morricone, as part of the 2023–2024 chamber music season of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, which commissioned it.

Schiling Babons and Ghraichy

The piano writing of Baboni Schilingi, like that of Liszt two centuries ago, stands as the result of that same tradition, but moving two centuries later. To the listening – that will be confirmed by the reading and analysis of the score – seem assumed the many ways of writing the music of the last two centuries, almost a review of what can be done with the piano. We had the piano prepared by Cage. But there are still many other ways to prepare a piano. Including that of using it as it is. But by bringing you simultaneously other ways. If there is something that in the tradition of human cultures has no limits, it is the imagination to modify them, violate them, transform them. I have strict rules, writes Boulez, for the pleasure of breaking them. The truth is that the lesson of the nineteenth century avant-gardes is still to be learned, we have not yet finished grasping its meaning, especially the fact that its lesson is not an invitation to forget the past and not even to close it with an insurmountable rule. Lesson, this, which is truly incomprehensible both to the epigones of the vanguard and to its opponents, who always dream of it, and have dreamed of it in every age, an impossible restoration of the consular order, which is for them the order of tradition. They forget that

tradition in time is consolidated in how far it does new things. As Karl Kraus writes (I quote in mind): “I have a catastrophilic news for all

Augmented piano

emotional intelligence vs artificial intelligence

Recital for piano and electronics

Simon Ghraichy, piano

Jacopo Baboni Schilingi, live computer

National Academy of Santa Cecilia

AuditoriumParco della Musica “Ennio Moricone”, Sala Petrassi

Rome, 7 November 2023