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Bruno Maderna
Complete Works for Orchestra. Vol. 2

ORCHESTRAL WORKS. VOL. 2

The five orchestral works in this comprehensive anthology have a common nucleus pointing to the core interests which Bruno Maderna pursued from 1954 to 1966: experiments with a post-serial harmonic vocabulary, and a search for dramatic structures not necessarily intended for the stage.

Composizione in tre tempi was completed in 1954. It was prompted by Maderna's encounter as conductor with the North German Radio Symphony Orchestra in Hamburg, which, as shown by the work's large percussion section, influenced him in his choice of timbres. The formal design recalls the classical pattern of fast-slow-fast, with the final movement introduced by an extended *Andante-Più mosso*. However, Maderna reworks this pattern in a highly original way with regard both to the length of the movements and their internal subdivisions. The musical language is still strongly rooted in a tight structural organisation and a special form of rhythmic-melodic development. The latter draws on traditional melodies, including the Venetian song *La biondina in gondoleta* (The Blonde in the Gondola), which Maderna would later use again in his *Venetian Journal* of 1971-02, and whose notes serve the composition as a sort of hidden "skeleton".

Also dating from 1954 is the *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra*, one of a large number of concert pieces for flute written in the 1950s and 1960s by such composers as Luciano Berio, Luigi Nono and Goffredo Petrassi, usually for Severino Gazzelloni. Maderna had previously employed the flute as a solo instrument in *Divertimento in due tempi* (1953) and the first version of *Musica su due dimensioni* for flute, cymbal and magnetic tape (1952). Now, in this *Concerto*, he assigned it a role that radically discards its standard concerto function as a leader and source of contrast in the interplay between solo and tutti. The one-movement piece is enlivened by accelerandos and internal dilutions of the tempo, creating a dialectic between soloist and orchestra based not on opposition but on integration, reciprocity and mutual dependence. The subtle merging of these two dimensions forms a self-contained whole with a nervous energy tending toward a line of development that leaves little room for lyricism, even in the work's most relaxed sections. Yet this same merging entails an apotheosis and a release from a style of writing based entirely on number patterns and numeric grids.

Between 1962 and 1969 Maderna composed a cycle of works which he rearranged in ever-new combinations and employed in various stage performances and concert versions of his opera *Hyperion*. The première of *Hyperion*, which was inspired by Friedrich Hölderlin's like-named novel, took place at Venice's Teatro La Fenice in October 1964. Maderna designed the work as a multiplicity of sometimes dramatically and timbrally unrelated stage

situations. True, *Hyperion* is a staged opera, but it is an “opera in progress” capable at any time of accommodating suitable vocal or instrumental pieces. These pieces are conceived as parts of a whole that can be dissected and altered at will. The Venice première, for example, included among other things sections from *Dimensioni III* for flute and orchestra (1962–03) and lengthy excerpts from *Aria* for soprano and orchestra (1964). Only in a later performance did it come to include *Stele per Diotima* (1966), an orchestral piece with solo cadenzas for violin, clarinet, bass clarinet and horn. The fundamental coherence of these three works is deep-seated and embraces several levels: the choice of the same musical material, the use of similar compositional devices, and the affinity of their formal designs. But most of all they are infiltrated by an aleatoric freedom which would in time become a characteristic feature of Maderna’s compositions and performances.

Viewed from the vantage point of the first *Hyperion* project, *Dimensioni III* and *Aria* are two contrasting musical realisations of one and the same idea. The two soloists (flute and soprano) and the orchestra represent the antithetical and opposing viewpoints – individual and crowd – that constitute the underlying poetic substance Maderna discovered in Hölderlin’s novel. However, in this dual confrontation between solo and tutti, the soloist assumes an added meaning, which explains why both pieces found their way into the opera: compared to the orchestral crowd, the individual of *Dimensioni III* (the flute) expresses rebellion and active struggle, whereas the individual of *Aria* (the soprano) represents the exact opposite: resignation and defeat.

Both compositions begin with felicitous newly discovered timbres at a generally subdued dynamic level. The dynamics remain largely *pianissimo* but turn to languorous decrescendos jolted by sudden percussive effects (in *Aria*) or horizontal blocks of orchestral sound (in *Dimensioni III*). In *Aria* the vocal line proceeds step-by-step only to be interrupted by bolder sections and declaimed in *Sprechgesang* with lesser or greater dramatic import. The voice interprets the meaning of the text (taken from Hölderlin’s *Fragment von Hyperion* or *Thalia-Fragment*) with almost madrigalistic exactitude, draping its phrases over the sonic surface of the orchestra, which in turn constantly changes in timbre and register. Compared to *Dimensioni III* and *Aria*, the obvious peculiarity of *Stele per Diotima* is its massive use of percussion (some 40 instruments played by nine musicians). Emphasis is given to the ‘verticality’ of the harmonies, which are sometimes grouped into acrid chords that slice like knives through the increasingly *rubato* sonic surface. Between the tumbling sounds and pauses, the contrasting play of timbre and dynamics, the solo cadenzas and the dissolution of the timbral fabric in the final reverberations of the percussion – in short, throughout the entire variegated soundscape of *Stele* – we hear echoes of stray words from *Aria*: “I ask the stars ... the day and the night ... but they do not respond”. Here the response is hobbled by sounds from the pieces encircling *Hyperion*. A few years later Maderna would provide the response in one of his greatest masterpieces: *Ausstrahlung*.

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