**Luigi Russolo**

Adrian Curtin

Luigi Russolo (b. Portogruaro, 1885-1947) – painter, inventor, and musician – was an Italian Futurist who responded to Filippo Marinetti’s call to revolutionize art and embrace the dynamism and affective power of modernity. Russolo, following Francesco Pratella, developed Futurist music by working to transform worldly noise and make it musically meaningful. In his 1913 manifesto L'arte dei rumori (*The Art of Noises*), Russolo argued that the sounds offered by a symphony orchestra were a poor match for the acoustic force and timbral complexities of a modern city. He proposed to transform noise using newly invented instruments, aestheticizing and spiritualizing it in the process. Russolo devised a system of enharmonic notation, and, with the help of the painter Ugo Piatti, constructed the *intonarumori* (noise intoners) that were to constitute the new Futurist orchestra.

Russolo intended audiences to recognize the aesthetic value of noise when specially composed and presented in a performance context. Alas, audiences, on the whole, seem to have been more nonplussed than impressed with Russolo’s music; they frequently made competing noise of their own. A critic in *The Times* wrote of a concert at the Coliseum Theatre in London in July 1914: “[It] rather resembled the sounds heard in the rigging of a channel-steamer during a bad crossing, and it was, perhaps, unwise of the players – or should we call them the ‘noisicians’? – to proceed with their second piece, ‘A Meeting of Motorcars and Aeroplanes’, after the pathetic cries of ‘No more!’ which greeted them from all the excited quarters of the auditorium.” Nevertheless, Russolo’s music was favourably received when presented in a series of concerts in Paris in June 1921, attracting the attention of Igor Stravinsky, Arthur Honneger, Maurice Ravel, and Edgard Varèse.

In the 1920s, Russolo invented other instruments, such as the *rumorarmonio* (noise harmonium), which he used to accompany avant-garde films in Paris, but he eventually refocused his attention on painting and on spiritual endeavours (which arguably inform his *oeuvre*, contra Futurism’s materialist bent). Mid-century, John Cage continued Russolo’s exploration of environmental sound as music, as did exponents of *musique concrète* (concrete music).

Selected works (not extant)

*Risveglio di una città* (*The Awakening of a City*) (1913-1914)

*Convegno di automobili e di aeroplani* (*A Meeting of Motorcars and Aeroplanes*) (1913-1914)

References and further reading

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Paratextual Material

1.

Source: *La Biennale di Venezia* 54 (September 1964) (copyright status unknown)

2. 

**Partial Score for *The Awakening of a City***

**Source: Luigi Russolo, *L’art dei Rumori* (1913)** (likely out of copyright)