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| Luigi Nono (1924-1990) |
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| Luigi Nono stands out as one of the most uncompromising modernist composers of the Italian avant-garde. Together with Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez, Nono was one of the leading representatives of integral serialism in Europe after 1945. Nono is further known for his political music theatre, his innovative spatial use of electronic music and live-electronics, avant-garde and microtonal instrumental writing and an exceptionally lyric and communicative application of complex compositional procedures. Luigi Nono was born into a wealthy Venetian family just after Mussolini came to power. Towards the end of WWII, Nono began to study composition with G Fr Malipiero at the Venice conservatoire (1943-45) while completing a law degree at Padova University (1942-47). At the conservatoire, Bruno Maderna’s influential composition tutorials sparked a life-long interest in Renaissance polyphony and the works of the Second Viennese School. Equally fundamental was Hermann Scherchen’s conducting course (Venice, 1948). Luigi Dallapiccola’s lyric serialism was another formative influence at this time. Nono’s first major work, the *Variazioni canoniche sulla serie dell’op.41 di Arnold Schönberg*, was premiered under Scherchen at the Darmstadt New Music Courses in 1950. Together with Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez, Nono subsequently established himself as one of the leading composers of integral serialism. |
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Scherchen remained an important mentor, introducing Nono to Paul Dessau and the theatre of Bertolt Brecht in East Berlin, and to Karl Amadeus Hartmann’s Musica Viva in Munich. Through Scherchen, Nono was also involved in the preparation of several of Schoenberg’s scores, most notably for the Hamburg premiere of *Moses und Aron* (1954) where he met his future wife, Nuria Schoenberg.  Nono’s search for new means of expression in music was coupled with political ideals from the outset. Like many Italian intellectuals who experienced the *Resistenza*, Nono joined the Italian Communist Party (1952) and remained a life-long party-member. Anti-fascist concerns determine much of Nono’s early work and manifest themselves in the choice of material and text (the series of Schoenberg’s *Ode to Napoleon*; songs of the *Resistenza*; testimonies of European resistance fighters, poetry by Federico García Lorca and Paul Éluard). A masterpiece of the fifties is the anti-fascist cantata *Il canto sospeso* (1956). Final words of European resistance fighters are here set with the strictest of serial procedures and a vocal and instrumental lyricism that is entirely appropriate to the stark content of these texts (music ex.). Other major works of this period set poetry by Cesare Pavese and Guiseppe Ungaretti.  With a penchant for vocal writing and a strong interest in political theatre (Piscator, Brecht, Sartre, Mayakovsky and the Russian avant-garde), Nono was intuitively drawn to music theatre, the traditional boundaries of which he continuously sought to transcend. An early ballet, *The Red Cloak* (Berlin, 1954), already makes unconventional use of two vocal soloists and chorus. Politically engaged music theatre is realised with the two ‘scenic actions’, *Intolleranza 1960* (1960-61) and *Al gran sole carico d’amore* (1972-74). These montage works make use of a variety of literary and documentary texts to confront and engage the spectator with current political concerns in the light of historical precedents. In both works the solo vocal lines often branch out into the choral collective and dramatically contrast with dense orchestral textures. The first production of *Intolleranza 1960* (Venice, 1961) was devised in collaboration with Josef Svoboda (Laterna Magica, Prague) and the Venetian painter Emilio Vedova and much of *Al gran sole* was conceived together with the director of the Taganka Theatre Moscow, Yuri Ljubimov. On a smaller scale, *A floresta é jovem e cheja de vida* (1966), a collaboration with The Living Theatre, is perhaps the most radical realisation of Nono’s concept of engaged ‘scenic action’.  After two controversial lectures in which Nono warned of un-reflected use of chance procedures (‘History and Present in the Music of Today’, 1959) and defended his layered and often highly abstract use of text (‘Music – Text – Song’, 1960), Nono left Darmstadt behind (1961). His overtly political works of the sixties and seventies involved prolonged periods of work at the RAI Studio di fonologia, Milan. Combining electronic materials and live performance, Nono primarily focussed on creating new performance and listening conditions, including working class audiences. Spatial use of electronics was first envisaged (but not immediately realised) for Nono’s *Composizione per orchestra n.2: Diario polacco ’58* (1959, rev. with tape 1965). For *Intolleranza 1960*, the chorus was recorded and transmitted through loudspeakers to liberate the musical action from the visual events on stage. Factory noises on four channel tape contrast with a lyric solo soprano part in *La fabbrica illuminata* (1964). The electronic music for Peter Weiss’s *The Investigation* (1965) was transmitted in complete darkness from above, below and all sides of the auditorium. During this period of intense political activism, Nono’s choice of subject matter was further influenced by several journeys to Latin America. As a composer, however, Nono often found himself isolated: deemed too ‘formalist’ in the East and too ‘socialist’ in the West.  Many of Nono’s technically most advanced works were conceived in collaboration with distinguished performers: Rudolf Kolisch (*Varianti*,1957), Carla Henius (*La fabbrica illuminata*), Maurizio Pollini (*Como una ola di fuerza e luz*, 1971; *.....sofferte onde serene.....*, 1975), the *LaSalle Quartet* (*Fragmente-Stille, an Diotima*, 1980), Gidon Kremer (*La lontananza nostalgica utopica future*, 1989). Throughout the eighties, Nono consistently explored the use of live-electronics in collaboration with Roberto Fabbriciani (fl), Ciro Scarponi (cl), Giancarlo Schiaffini (tb) and the newly founded Solistenchor at the Experimental Studio of the Heinrich Strobel Foundation Freiburg. The masterpiece of this period is the ‘tragedy of listening’ *Prometeo* (1975-85) with a libretto by the philosopher Massimo Cacciari. This fractured and highly philosophical reflection on the Prometheus myth reaches new heights of musical expression by taking the listener to the limits of audibility. Four orchestras and six groups of vocal and instrumental soloists are distributed around the audience and the drama unfolds entirely in sound and space. Microtonal processes, avant-garde techniques and dense instrumental textures are interwoven with vocal music of transparent purity. The focus on minute change as well as large-scale musical processes is enhanced by means of the live-electronics which transform and move the sound in real time. (Music clip) Cacciari’s *Prometeo* continued to inspire Nono up to his death in 1990, exploring the ‘infinite possibilities’ of this new sound world in a series of works entitled ‘Caminantes’ (after Machado and Nietzsche’s ‘Wanderer’).  Nono’s music is published by Schott and Ricordi. The Fondazione Archivio Luigi Nono in Venice (pres. Nuria Schoenberg-Nono, dir. Claudia Vincis) houses a comprehensive collection of Nono’s manuscripts, scores, audio materials and books. Selected WorksWorks up to *Intolleranza 1960* (1961) *La discesa di Cristo agli inferi* (1945) [lost]  *Due liriche greche* (1948-49) for chorus and instruments [unpublished; the Greek texts stem from the same collection (trans. Salvatore Quasimodo) as those of Dallapiccola’s *Liriche greche* (194?)]  *Variazioni canoniche sulla serie dell’op.41 di Arnold Schönberg* (1949-50) for orchestra  *Polifonica-Monodia-Ritmica* (1950-51) for six instruments and percussion  *Julius Fučik* (1951) for tenor, speaker and orchestra (text by the Czech communist resistance fighter Julius Fučik) [incomplete, 1st episode completed by Peter Hirsch]  *Composizione per orchestra* (1951)  *Epitaffio per Federico García Lorca* *n. 1: España en el corazón* (1952) for soprano, baritone, speaking chorus and instruments (text: F. G. Lorca, Pablo Neruda)  *Epitaffio per Federico García Lorca n. 2: Y su sangre ya viene cantando* (1952) for flute and small orchestra (Lorca’s text is written into the score but not performed)  *Epitaffio per Federico García Lorca n. 3: Memento. Romance de la Guardia Civil española* (1953) for speaker, speaking chorus and orchestra (text: F. G. Lorca)  *Due espressioni* (1953) for orchestra  *La victoire de Guernica* (1954) for mixed chorus and orchestra (text: Paul Éluard)  *Der rote Mantel* (1954) for soprano, baritone, chorus and orchestra [ballet for Tatjana Gsovsky based on Federico García Lorca’s *Don Perlimplin*; two concert suite arrangements (1954)]  Music for Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* (1954) for five instruments [unpublished]  *Liebeslied* (1954) for mixed chorus and instruments (text: Luigi Nono)  *Canti per 13* (1955) for thirteen instruments  *Incontri* (1955) for 24 instruments  *Il canto sospeso* (1955-56) for soprano, alto, tenor, chorus and orchestra (text: last letters of European resistance fighters, ed. Giovanni Pirelli)  *Varianti* (1957) for violin, strings and woodwind  *La terra e la compagna* (1957) for soprano, tenor, chorus and instruments (text: Cesare Pavese)  *Cori di Didone* (1958) for chorus and percussion (text: Giuseppe Ungaretti, *La terra promessa*)  *Composizione per orchestra n. 2 – Diario polacco ’58* (1959, revised version with tape 1965)  *Sarà dolce tacere* (1960) for eight female voices (text: Cesare Pavese, *La terra e la morte*)  *«Ha venido» Canciones para Silvia* (1960) for soprano and six female voices (text: Antonio Machado)  *Omaggio a Emilio Vedova* (1960) for magnetic tape  *Intolleranza 1960* (1960-61), ‘azione scenica’ based on an idea by Angelo Maria Ripellino for soloists, chorus, orchestra and magnetic tape (text: Henri Alleg, Bertolt Brecht, Paul Éluard, Julius Fučik, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Angelo Maria Ripellino, Jean-Paul Sartre) [concert suite arrangement for soprano, chorus and orchestra, 1969; rev. *Intolleranza 1970* with new text by Yaak Karsunke] Middle Period up to *Al gran sole carico d’amore* (1974) *Canti di vita e d’amore. Sul ponte di Hiroshima* (1962) for soprano, tenor and orchestra (text: Günther Anders, Jesus López Pacheco, Cesare Pavese)  *Canciones a Guiomar* (1963) for soprano, six female voices and instruments (text: Antonio Machado)  *Da un diario italiano* (1964) for two choruses [part of a larger, unfinished theatre project with Giuliano Scabia]  *La fabbrica illuminate* (1964) for female voice and magnetic tape (documentary text and fragments of poetry by Cesare Pavese compiled by Giuliano Scabia) [envisaged as part of *Un diario italiano*]  Music for Peter Weiss, *Die Ermittlung* (1965) for magnetic tape  *Ricorda cosa ti hanno fatto in Auschwitz* (1966) for magnetic tape  *A floresta é jovem e cheja de vida* (1966) for soprano, clarinet, three actors, metal plates and magnetic tape (documentary text compiled by Giovanni Pirelli)  *Per Bastiana – Tai-Yang Cheng* (1967) for orchestra and magnetic tape  *Contrappunto dialettico alla mente* (1968) for magnetic tape (text: Sonia Sanchez, Nanni Balestrini, documentary text)  *Musica-Manifesto n. 1* (1969): *Un volto, e del mare* for two female voices and magnetic tape (text: Cesare Pavese); *Non consumiamo Marx* for magnetic tape (documentary text: Paris, May 1968)  *Musiche per Manzú* (1969) for magnetic tape [for the film *Pace e guerra* produced for the charity ‘Raccolta amici di Manzú’)  *San Vittore* (1969), happening in collaboration with Mario Buffa Moncalvo  *Y entonces comprendió* (1969-70) for three sopranos, three actors, chorus and magnetic tape (text: Carlos Franqui, Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara)  *Voci destroying muros* (1970) for two sopranos, two female speakers, female chorus and orchestra (text: Rosa Lusemburg, Hannie Schaft, Riek Snel, Haydée Santamaría, Celia Sánchez, Cesare Pavese) [score withdrawn by the composer and partly reused for *Ein Gespenst geht um in der Welt*)  *Ein Gespenst geht um in der Welt* (1971) for soprano, chorus and orchestra (text: Karl Marx, Haydée Santamaría, Celia Sánchez; lyrics of the *Internationale*, *Bandiera rossa*, *March of 26 Jul*y, *The East is Red*) [partly reused for *Al gran sole carico d’amore*]  *Como una ola di fuerza y luz* (1971-72) for soprano, piano, orchestra and tape (text: Julio Huasi)  *Siamo la gioventù del Vietnam* (1973) for unison chorus (text: declaration of independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam) [unpublished]  *Für Paul Dessau* (1974) for magnetic tape (text: Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Patrice Lumumba, Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, Fidel Castro, Ernst Thälmann)  *Al gran sole carico d’amore* (1972-74), ‘azione scenica’ in two parts for soloists, small and large chorus, orchestra and magnetic tape (text compiled by L. Nono and Yuri Lyubimov: Bertolt Brecht, Tania Bunke, Fidel Castro, Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, M. Dimitrov, Maxim Gorky, Antonio Gramsci, Lenin, Marx, Louise Michel, Cesare Pavese, Arthur Rimbaud, Haydée Santamaría, Celia Sánchez) [final version 1977] Late Works (1975-1990) *.....sofferte onde serene…*(1976) for piano and tape  Music for Pier Paolo Pasolini, *I Turcs tal Friûl* (1976) for chorus and percussion [unpublished]  *Con Luigi Dallapiccola* (1979) for six percussionists and ring modulator  *Fragmente-Stille, an Diotima* (1979-80) for string quartet (unperformed text: Friedrich Hölderlin)  *Das atmende Klarsein* (1981) for bass flute, chorus and live electronics (text compiled by Massimo Cacciari: Rainer Maria Rilke, Greek funeral plates)  *Io, frammento dal Prometeo* (1981) for three sopranos, chorus, bass flute, contrabass clarinet and live electronics (text compiled by Massimo Cacciari: Aeschylus, Hölderlin)  *Quando stanno morendo. Diario polacco n. 2* (1982) for two sopranos, mezzo soprano, alto, bass flute, cello and live electronics (text compiled by Massimo Cacciari: Endre Ady, Aleksandr Blok, Velemir Chlebnikov, Cieslav Miłosz, Boris Pasternak)  *¿Donde estàs, hermano?* (1982) for four female voices  *Omaggio a György Kurtág* (1983, final version 1986) for alto, flute, clarinet, tuba and live electronics  *Guai ai gelidi mostri* (1983) for two altos, viola, cello, double bass, flute, clarinet, tuba and live electronics (text compiled by Cacciari: Gottfried Benn, Lucrez, Friedrich Nietzsche, Edgar Allan Poe, Rilke)  *Prometeo, tragedia dell’ascolto* (1975-1984) for vocal and instrumental soloists, chorus, four orchestral groups and live electronics (text compiled by Massimo Cacciari: primarily Aeschylus, Walter Benjamin, Hesiod, Hölderlin) [final version 1985]  *A Carlo Scarpa, architetto, ai suoi infiniti possibili* (1984) for orchestra  *A Pierre, dell’azzurro silenzio, inquietum* (1985) for contrabass flute, contrabass clarinet and live electronics  *Risonanze erranti. Liederzyklus a Massimo Cacciari* (1986) for mezzosoprano, flute, tuba, six percussionists and live electronics (text: Ingeborg Bachmann, Herman Melville)  *1o) Caminantes…Ayacucho* (1987) for alto, flute, small and large chorus, organ, three orchestral groups and live electronics [Caminantes series no. 1]  *Découvrir la subversion. Hommage à Edmond Jabès* (1987) for alto, speaker, flute, tuba, horn and live electronics (text: Jabès) [no final score]  *Post-Prae-Ludium per Donau* (1987) for tuba and live electronics  *2o) «No hay caminos. Hay que caminar»...Andrei Tarkowskij* (1987) for seven orchestral groups [Caminantes series no. 2]  *Post-Prae-Ludium BAAB-ARR* (1988) for piccolo [no final score]  *La lontananza nostalgica utopica future. Madrigale per più «caminantes» con Gidon Kremer* (1988-89) for violin and magnetic tapes  *«Hay que caminar» sognando* (1989) for two violins [Caminantes series no. 3]  For studies on individual works as well as journal articles refer to the web catalogue of the Fondazione Archivio Luigi Nono. |
| Further reading:  (Borio)  (Borio, La nuova ricerca sull’opera di Luigi Nono)  (de Carvalho)  (Cecchetto)  (Cresta)  (Davismoon, Luigi Nono (1924-1990): The Suspended Song)  (Davismoon, Luigi Nono (1924-1990): Fragments and Silence)  (Kolleritsch)  (Metzger)  (Mila)  (Morazzoni)  (Mosch)  (Nono, Écrits)  (Nono, Texte: Studien zu seiner Musik)  (Nono, Scritti e colloqui)  (Ramazotti)  (Restagno)  (Schäfer)  (Stenzl)  (Trudu)  (Wagner)  (Zattra) |