**Bruno Maderna**

Peter Roderick

Bruno Maderna (b. 1920, d. 1973) was an Italian composer and conductor, who made his name internationally at the Darmstadt Summer Courses in the 1950s and 60s.

Maderna was a musical prodigy almost from birth, touring around the Veneto with his family aged 10 and amazing audiences with his violin virtuosity and intuitive conducting skills. His unstable early life – he paternity was questioned and he lived with several guardians – was further disrupted by the second world war, and he had the misfortune to be conscription age during the conflict. His studies and burgeoning musical friendship with Luigi Nono was temporarily suspended, and a period in the Italian army was followed by involvement with the *resistenza* movement who opposed the Nazi occupiers in 1944; his membership of the *Fronte di Liberazione* led to his arrest in February 1945 by the S.S., and when he had escaped the Germans’ clutches, he joined with the Veronese partisans and fought the war of liberation in the Po valley.

Little is to be found of his music from before the end of war, but the extent to which Maderna was absorbing the influences of a diverse variety of musicians is clear: he had already spent a number of years in Rome studying with Turchi under Bustini before his formative compositional lessons with Gian-Francesco Malipiero in Venice alongside Nono. Conducting lessons with Guarnieri (and later the German maestro Hermann Scherchen) would also prove invaluable to his development. Having emerged from the war on the ‘correct’ side – as one of the opponents of fascism – Maderna was well placed to take the vanguard of young musical modernism, and at the reinstatement of the Venice Contemporary Music festivals in 1946 he conducted the penultimate night, given over to a group of chamber compositions that emanated (according to its title) from the *il giovane scuola* (the ‘young Italian school’). The programme included his *Serenata per Dodici Strumenti* (1946) as well as works by Togni, Bucchi, Turchi and Riccardo Malipiero, all of whom were to feature in future Italian musical history.

Towards the end of the 40s, Nono and Maderna had formed an intense musical friendship and began approaching music from a variety of novel fronts. Both venerated the works of the Second Viennese School (Nono married Schoenberg’s daughter) and both were fascinated by the canonic constructions of renaissance music and the possibilities of an anti-expressionist modernism that would encode extra-musica meaning onto a rigorously pursued serialism. The development of the *‘tecnica degli sposamenti’* (technique of displacements) approach to the serial method was one outcome of this period, and the ability to form robust and complex serial music devoid of pre-war sentimentalism (for instance, the *Composizione II per orchestra camera* 0f 1950 and the *Quartetto per archi in due Tempi* of 1955) ensured both a place at the top table at the Darmstadt Summer Courses which had started in 1948. Between 1949 and 1959, Maderna’s music was performed there every year. With his conducting skills and famously flamboyant lecture style, he quickly became the heart of this quintessentially modernist movement, and along with Boulez and Stockhausen his career and musical experimentations were played out at that same international festival until he died suddenly at the 1973 course. However Maderna never held as tightly to the dogma of musical rationalism as his contemporaries, and he rejected the extreme objectivist tendencies that removed music from its wider contextual and social field. The most obvious example of this is *Kranichsteiner Kammerkantate* from 1953, in which Maderna set unambiguously political texts: an anonymous letter which viciously satirizes a capitalist factory owner; a letter from the recently published *Lettere del Condannato della Resistenza* (‘Letters of those condemned during the resistenza’); and a prison letter by Antonio Gramsci. The work premiered at Darmstadt, showing that Maderna was thus not afraid of publicly displaying his links with the left-wing resistance movement in the GDR at the height of the Cold War.

A crucial development in Maderna’s career in the 1950s was his role as a pioneer of electronic music. Given that Luciano Berio’s more famous contribution to this emerging genre came in the late 50s (e.g. *Thema (Omaggio a Joyce)* from 1958) it may be surprising to learn that the earliest work of synthesised Italian music was Maderna’s *Musica su Due Dimensioni* (1952). Written for flute, cymbal and magnetic tape, it was a combination of studio produced sound and live performance with a rigorous serial underpinning. The next year, Maderna met Luciano Berio, and the two quickly joined forces with Luigi Rognoni to lobby for an electronic music studio to be set up in Milan to rival those of Paris and Cologne. Along with their writings in the newly established new music journal *Incontri Musicali* (Musical Meetings), they worked towards two new compositions: *Sequenze e Strutture* (entirely for electronics) and *Ritratto* *di Città*; by 1955, the Italian national radio station RAI had agreed to fund an electronic music studio titled the ‘Studio di Fonologia’, with a remit to both contribute to scientific acoustic research and develop the artistic field.

Into the 60s and 70s Maderna maintained his international conducting career (leading orchestras from Amsterdam, the BBC, Berlin and Milan) whilst writing a number of theatrical ‘open’ works which (along with Berio’s *Opera Aperta* and Nono’s huge political dramas) went some way to reviving the Italian operatic tradition. Maderna’s music owed much to Malipiero: some of it is of patchy quality, but he had a unique ability to both absorb new trends and create novel configurations of musical theatre, performance, technique and language. In fact, it is this breaking down of the categorical barriers between musical media – for example, electronics and live performance in *Musica su Due Dimensioni,* the use of ‘found’ texts and lettersin the *Kranichsteiner Kammerkantate,* radio broadcast as composition in *Don Perlimplin* (1961), the flute as the protagonist in the opera *Hyperion* (1964), the pastiche/collage effects of *Venetian Journal* (1972) – which constitutes one of Maderna’s signature legacies, his fundamentally modernist (post-modernist?) achievement. Without these works, the flamboyant music of Sylvano Busotti, whose music is considered an activity and a process as much as a concrete entity, is inconceivable, and in Maderna’s wake would come a generation of Italian composers: Donatoni, Sciarrino, Manzoni, Franco Evangelisti and Nicolò Castiglioni.

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