

The avantgarde in the chamber music of Ennio Morricone

Ennio Morricone, besides his most popular production of soundtracks and pop music, has a vast and interesting production of music as well. As a pupil of Goffredo Petrassi, Ennio Morricone was in contact with the highest musical production of the second half of the 1900s. Just as Goffredo Petrassi was a multifaceted and international figure and the backbone of all the musical evolution of the postwar period, so Ennio Morricone was strongly influenced by the personality of his teacher. Having participated in the Darmstadt International Courses in 1958, he came into direct contact with personalities such as Karl-Heinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez, Mauricio Kagel, and all those who in those years were part of the so-called musical avant-garde and who followed the impulses given by figures such as Bruno Maderna and Luigi Nono.

It is clear, in the analysis of his scores, that it is very difficult to enclose his music in a single and defined style.

Serialism, aleatory music, counterpoint and even traces of minimalism, while recognizable, are never unique features of his production. Music dominates. A compositional technique is always subordinate to the result.

Let's take for example the first bars of „Grido“ for soprano, strings and magnetic tape: The beginning of the strings can be seen in a structure of 3 + 3 bars, repeated in canon by several instruments. To these series are added from time to time cells performed by other instruments in a minimalistic style, but as an accompaniment to the textures of the soprano. The voice, as often happens in Morricone, has no text, but is used as a pure musical instrument in duo with the violin that makes a sort of counterpoint.

“A vocalization in a high register, as high are the screams that come out of the mouths of the characters of Guernica, for which Picasso made many preparatory drawings, in order to be able to express pain in a strong and effective way. Music, the energy of sound, approaches the strength of the drawing, underlining the emotional incisiveness of the pictorial material. The visual impression in Guernica and the perception of musical structures coexist with great intensity”.

Nothing better than this piece describes the parallelism between painting and music, in the deformation and decomposition of reality and in the search for the most extreme expressiveness.

Similarly we find aspects of seriality also in "Quattro Anacoluti per A.V.", inspired by Antonio Vivaldi and linked to him, in which we find the avant-garde reworking of the stylistic features of the Venetian composer.

On the contrary in „a L.P. 1928 “, for string quartet dedicated to Luigi Pestalozza, renowned musicologist very involved in the development and production of contemporary music, we find in an exemplary way a purely melodic figuration, in the romantic sense of the term.

Pleasantly lively in the true sense of the term the trio "Vivo" (either *lively* or *I live*, or both...) that in the sparkling structure of three instruments that seem to play with virtuosity and counterpoint in the Renaissance sense. A burst of vitality in the world of *isms* ...

And again wisely combined, in „if this is a man“ complex structures and melody.

And in this case, the solo soprano has a text, as if to affirm that the voice is not only a virtuoso musical instrument, but also rich in high content, as indeed in „Abenddämmerung“ on Heine's texts.

As you can see, music at 360 °, without limits. Often in contemporary practice, there is a tendency to classify a composer according to fixed structures, perhaps also due to a certain mental laziness. Ennio Morricone completely escapes this dimension, having had the considerable courage to get out of this system and write the music he liked best. In an interview with the Argentine composer Fernando Maglia, in recognizing the great vitality and innovative propulsion of contemporary South American music, he pointed out that this happens because having no producers and patrons, Latin American composers can simply write what they want, without regard for anyone. What is also strongly present in the music of Mauricio Kagel for example. Ennio Morricone falls into this category, of those who simply write what they want, be it a piece of pure music, a pop hit or a soundtrack. Only the technical quality of the work is essential.

And we come perhaps to the most interesting aspect of Morricone's production: the orchestration.

Morricone writes for everyone, and knows how to use all the tools with great care and taste. Surely the son of that treatise now obsolete in composition classes, the "Casella-Mortari" within which all the colors, areas and techniques that have served generations of composers were expertly described, Morricone makes wise and innovative use of every instrument and especially the voice. Also in his soundtracks this ability stands out, to combine special effects and new instrumental techniques in a very refined way.

An example is the piece for solo voice "Wow!", In which we see an almost goliardic use of new musical and expressive techniques combined with dramatic textures that we find in "Once Upon a Time in The West", famous soundtrack of the famous film by Sergio Leone.

The vocal technique of Morricone's compositions derives strictly from the operatic tradition of Italian bel canto. Refined, virtuous, elegant and expressive as one went and goes to learn in the Italian school from all over the world.

In turn, this bel canto technique can also be found in other pieces for instrument only such as "Elegy for Egisto", dedicated to Egisto Macchi, composer of the same age and esteemed author of music also for cinema. In this case, as in other examples, Morricone draws on the vast poetic and literary tradition of antiquity, where they lay the foundations of all Western culture. No mannerism and no complacency, simply the awareness of the depth of our origins.

Not the technique for the technique, but the technique for the expressiveness.

This avant-garde Morricone is certainly less known than the famous musician for the cinema, and perhaps his fame and his Oscars have overshadowed the rest of his production.

Following a series of concerts on this repertoire, MusicDesk will publish a collection of recordings to better focus these aspects and better represent a musical production that has not recently been taken into much consideration outside Italy.

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