
In memoriam

Luciano Berio: a testimony

FRANCESCO GIOMI

The day following Berio's death, his friend Umberto Eco expressed his sorrow saying that there are 'deaths that leave a crater'; music and culture of the world lost a great man, a real protagonist in all aspects of contemporaneity. Regardless of any aesthetic concerns they might have, people everywhere regard Berio's work, musical and intellectual, as extraordinary. Musicologists now have the task of investigating his historical profile and of analysing his prolific catalogue while, on the other hand, men of culture are left the challenge of trying to follow the indications he left behind and to try to understand his thoughts.

Luciano Berio's contribution to the development of electronic music was fundamental. You need only think of the hundreds of students who every year begin to acquaint themselves with this kind of repertoire by listening to *Thema-omaggio a Joyce* or *Visage*. Many texts and articles of music history recount the importance of these works and it is not necessary that I do so here. Berio worked at some of the most significant institutions, from the Studio di Fonologia Musicale of the RAI in Milan, to IRCAM in Paris. Then, in 1987, with the objective of creating a structure in which to investigate the possibilities of real-time interaction between live performance and digital systems, he founded the Tempo Reale centre in Florence. Tempo Reale is today a centre of musical production, research and education where many of the major Italian composers, including Berio himself, have created their music and where important works from the electro-acoustic repertoire are performed. In this context it was possible to create a permanent team of musicians with whom Berio revised and formalised his recent works involving live electronics (*Outis*, *Ofanim* and *Altra voce*, for example) and the continued existence of this specialised team is today an important aspect of the centre.

Many themes were recurrent in Berio's musical research, and the idea of space is certainly one of the most important. A fundamental aspect in the use of technology is what Berio himself defined as the

'adaptability of the musical thought to different spaces and listening situations'; computer technologies and those of sound diffusion allow the composer to inhabit new, unconventional acoustic spaces, as well as to render flexible and to open up spaces that are typically closed (such as traditional theatres) and often strongly linked to standard modes of music presentation. In his words:

Musical thought today must be able to interact with the new technologies and to adapt itself creatively to every kind of space, exploring its virtualities and reshaping it acoustically. The image of music as sound architecture is no longer a mere metaphor: it represents a concrete possibility, realizable in all its aspects. It is, of course, a mobile and flexible architecture, capable of adaptation to different situations and environments. (from Berio's *Ofanim* programme notes)

During the last years, Berio's strong attraction to the spatialisation of sound took shape in a particular interest for a new form of musical expression: big sound installations. Two of these were actually designed and produced with their realisation entrusted to Tempo Reale's musicians: the spatial sonorisation of the Italian Pavilion at the 2000 Hanover Expo and the multiform installation which accompanied the inauguration of Renzo Piano's new Auditorium in Rome (*discussed within – Ed.*). Others were thought of and designed without being actualised. This was the case, for example, for the expositive structure on the theme of the pianoforte that was intended for the large spaces of Santa Maria alla Scala in Siena and for the cycle of big installations linked to the theme of nature for the Parco di Celle in Pistoia and for Villa Faraggiana near Novara. In the latter cases, Berio imagined the distribution of a large series of loudspeakers over a great area suggesting a gentle and delicate (though sometimes surprising) perception of the naturalistic sound materials, never anything bulky or aggressive. This gives some sense of Berio's personality – ideas in constant transformation and renewal but always linked to musical considerations.

I would like to conclude with a very personal remark. To believe in the quality of work, to judge people for their results, to nourish a deep aversion for superficiality – these were some of the features that belied Berio's greatness. He was a man who became as irreplaceable in art as he was in all of our hearts.

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Francesco Gioni is Director of the Musical Production Department of the Tempo Reale Centre in Florence where he has led the live electronics equipe in important performances of Luciano Berio's recent works.