

Claudio Abbado: My quiet friend - some recollections of Luigi Nono

When I first met Luigi Nono - it was in the sixties - I immediately sensed our inner agreement on many questions concerning life and art. Without having to say anything there was an intimate, mutual understanding.

It was a quiet friendship with a form of communication in which Gigi and I had no real need for words. Our personal friendship soon extended to our families.

No need for words doesn't mean that we didn't have any discussions together. Gigi and I held long conversations about literature, and time and again Hölderlin cropped up, probably as a counterpart to the political writers Gigi was often concerned with.

I can sense his home town of Venice so well in his compositions. Deep down, his bond with the long tradition of Venetian music was never severed. It is recognizable in his infallible perception of spacial sound, such as that displayed by Gabrieli in San Marco. Also, Gigi's feeling for espressi violins, for cantability in fact, is deeply rooted in the past. All this has probably contributed to the fact that his music, in my opinion, reaches the height of beauty when the human voice is at the centre, as a solo or in choir.

His knowledge of Schoenberg's music was equally important to him because it sharpened his sense of equilibrium between expression and constructive thought.

We first worked together when he was composing *Como una de fuerza y luz* for soprano, piano, orchestra and tape recorder. We rehearsed at La Scala; Pollini worked out the piano part. In June 1972, I conducted the première in Milan.

Afterwards we immediately started work on the combined project "azione scenica" *Al gran sole carico d'amore*; Yuri Lyubimov was there as well, right from the start. We altered quite a bit during rehearsals. Gigi was always open to practical suggestions. The première of this work, dedicated to Polloni and myself, was in May 1975 at La Scala. Gigi then wrote a suite from it, at my suggestion, and I conducted the première in Cologne.

The last time we worked together was on another major composition, "Prometeo", which had its première in 1984 in the ruins of San Lorenzo church in Venice. The church had been specially fitted with an accoustic dish for the occasion. Two conductors were needed; I shared my role with Ceconi. Gigi's music displayed all the aspects of his future works: many islands of peace, wonderfully wandering sounds in space, the clever use of live electronics, the tracings of individual notes. We talked a lot about the work after the première. I suggested various condensations and expansions to improve the proportions, and Gigi made many changes. He also found more practical solutions to a number of complexly noted details. I then presented this second version at La Scala.

He was a friend with whom I also worked together a great deal. So that's why my memories of Gigi are closely intermingled with those of the relationship between musicians - our mutual subject matter.

There's just one thing I'd like to add: Gigi was a generous, compassionate, determined man who fought tenaciously against all kinds of injustice, and he was an open-minded person, open to other composers too, such as Kurtág or Rihm - and they're not the only ones to have gained many new experiences through him in working with music.

Translation: Ann Robertson