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MUSIC

1. *SIMULTANEO ENSEMBLE* – BRINGING OUR HISTORY INTO THE FUTURE / A NEW PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH OF MUSIC-MAKING DEVELOPED FROM “BOTTEGA DELL'ARTE”

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Abstract: *How much can contemporary artists and audiences learn from the past? The mission and activity of Simultaneo Ensemble – SIM – is presented. How SIM laboratory, grouping performers from the seven Music Academies of Veneto, encourages musicians to explore, perform and promote Italian music composers and their works. This article will consider the relationship between research into historical concert programs and the creation of adventurous and compelling chamber music concerts for contemporary audiences. Learn how to enhance the position of chamber music activity through projects that have succeeded in bringing people together toward common goals via the arts.*

Key words: *Simultaneo Ensemble, Consorzio tra i Conservatori del Veneto, chamber music laboratory, Waiting for Expo 2017, Italian “La generazione dell’ottanta”*

1. Introduction

Young people who study and practice chamber music are our cultural ambassadors, advocates for a humane, civilized way of life – potential leaders of a generation, by virtue of their artistry and discipline. They carry the torch of culture, of tradition – and they are, as musicians, part of international community of artists who see the whole world as a family. These beliefs inspired me to build the Simultaneo Ensemble.

2. Discussions

SIMULTANEO ENSEMBLE (SIM) is a chamber music project founded by pianist Cecilia Franchini in 2003, initially to promote chamber music workshops, concerts and musical events among students and staff at Venice's “B. Marcello” Conservatory of Music, now a joint venture between the seven Music Conservatories in Veneto under the auspices of the Consorzio dei Conservatori del Veneto since 2013, in an effort to raise the performing profile of their members and to provide opportunities for students to play chamber music.

The project is particularly centred on the promotion of chamber music activity and education in the Veneto region. For this purpose, **SIM** runs and organizes workshops, educational events and conferences, and publishes pedagogical material in collaboration with music institutes. In addition, SIM has

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proposed a number of initiatives for the promotion of works by Italian composers of either regional and national significance, through research and chamber music activity. This project is also pedagogically driven. It seeks to raise the importance of better organized chamber music practices within the curriculum of each institute, to promote unusual and neglected repertoire and to highlight the importance of performing to uninformed audiences throughout the entire Veneto region.

In short, the success of the SIM project, in its 15th season in 2018, is based on three elements:

- an intense and high quality performing activity;
- an emphasis on local and national compositions for chamber music;
- a strong pedagogical component.

Those elements are critical in, respectively:

- bringing musicians together;
- disseminating and revitalizing our musical heritage;
- fostering chamber music making skills.

The following three sections give further details of the modus operandi of the project:

a) Simultaneo Ensemble as a pedagogical force

More can be accomplished in educating a musician, if instrumental studies include ensemble work. Instrumental, pedagogical and social skills improve through cooperation with other instrumentalists. Chamber music builds collaborative spirit between musicians, leads a person to acquire a sense of responsibility for his/her individual part, cultivates diplomatic problem-solving skills. All those skills visibly, as well as audibly, manifest themselves, in a highly functioning chamber group. One could add: in a highly-functioning work group. The SIM scientific committee is made up of seven chamber music teachers from the seven conservatories of the Veneto region. It is a strong team, with good experience in cooperating and working together, mostly thanks to the multiple years of experience gained with chamber music practice.

I can state that playing in an ensemble is an activity that covers practice skills necessary for all types of work. In fact, one can hardly overestimate the usefulness of studying chamber music in the young musician's overall education. It is much easier to explore different approaches – by trial and error if it needs to be – in a group rather than working alone. Even though practicing one's part and making music together may take up a lot of time, the very same issues can surface in chamber music just as in solo repertoire. For instance, the piano parts in the piano trios of Schubert or Beethoven are hardly any simpler or less challenging to learn than the solo piano works of the same composers. In the end, a sustained and consistent emphasis on chamber music is a powerful tool in helping the students build their instrumental skills.

What else can be learnt by playing together? Chamber ensemble discipline provides also opportunities to lead as well as to follow others. It increases the ability of balancing, because it's not only about playing in order to be heard, but also listening to those around us. Conversely, a lack of leadership also has

consequences. Without engagement from the whole group, the music just doesn't come to life. In a chamber group, one person has full responsibility for their part; there is no hiding behind a big orchestral section. If a player has trouble playing off the string, he/she plays with a weak tone or out of tune, or has any other deficiencies, in these cases, the motivation to impress peers – or at least to avoid embarrassment in front of them – can perform wonders. Information means much when it comes from another student rather than from a speaking teacher. Those little things like having a pencil, knowing the score, using the metronome and practicing before rehearsal, all lead to something bigger: professionalism.

My will to improve professionalism urged me to create a chamber music laboratory inspired by the examples of Renaissance's *Bottega dell'Arte*, where "*gli allievi*" (the students) learn by "*il maestro*" (the teacher) how to create an artistic masterwork working together. I believe in the opportunity to study music, taught by a qualified master teacher, as it opens mind and heart, and teaches the young musicians to think intuitively and with their ears. Even better if they can play together with the teacher, since healthy coping mechanisms are instilled, that way. Mixed ensembles (teachers/students) of SIM laboratory increase the opportunity and tools with which to achieve a student's best by increasing confidence and curiosity as they discover the glorious magic of music-making and overall freedom of creative, artistic, self-expression and the joy in sharing it in an atmosphere that is at once intimate and personal.

True happiness and artistic freedom can be achieved if the full spectrum of emotion is embraced; in this framework, failure is embraced as a rare opportunity to improve further, as a valuable learning tool rather than a source of disappointment or embarrassment. With the calming down of fear and frustration, calm and patience begins. When an attitude that allows success is learned, the joy of performing, of sharing with others what is meaningful to us, is born.

The consequence is the unleashing of our inner creative selves, the freedom to be individuals. This freedom allows the musician to collaborate better with each other and to eagerly learn from partners as they collectively pace each other on the road to excellence. SIM's teaching goal is achieving a positive and rewarding experience in music-making backed up by specific learning strategies:

- setting and sharing goals and expectations together (most conflicts arise from conflicting goals);
- easing clear goals and improving everyone's motivation and commitment to problem - solving;
- developing a concept of collaborative leadership that is transferable;
- discovering what works better for the chamber group; doing what they value most;
- discussing choices and the consequences of group decision-making;
- developing skills that create effective teaching artists;
- considering quality versus quantity of effort;

- improving communication techniques for rehearsal.

One can say that chamber music coaching is very similar to solo instrument teaching. They both involve listening to the same things: playing in tune, rhythm, sound-production on the specific instrument, fingering, bowings, and so on. Even the very concept of chamber music is not so different from that of solo or orchestral music. From a broader perspective, everything is chamber music, from the solo pieces by Bach to the huge symphonies by Mahler. However, assessing a chamber music performance is very different from assessing a solo performance. One should not assess only the performance in general, but also how the members of the ensemble handle their respective roles in it. This poses particular demands on the person doing the assessment stage, as one has to understand the psychology of chamber music and the dynamics of different ensembles, as well as the roles of the members in a group.

As a matter of fact one of the great rewards of playing chamber music is "when I get the sense I'm really locking in with the others in the group, it's that visceral connection to another human being." (Fry Quartet). In fact, chamber music is a conversation, and it's not too far from verbal communication. It's all about sharing a unified voice that communicates effectively with an audience. This begs the question: what do we want to communicate?

b) Simultaneo Ensemble as vocational research: bringing our history into the future

The SIM project is designed to give both the musician and the listener a broad range of experiences celebrating great music and music-making at its highest level. Human creativity in all its variety, originality and sparkle take centre stage. The players relate to each other like actors in a play... they invite the listener to enter their world. They are the story-tellers without words that are universally understood. They explore the relationship between research into historical concert programmes and the creation of adventurous and compelling chamber music concerts for contemporary audiences.

Concerts, lectures, workshops alongside recordings are the favourite means to go deep into the chamber music repertoire from the classical era to present times. SIM gave its premiere performance at the premiered in 2004 at the Salzburg Mozarteum's Wiener Saal, and throughout the years it has performed a variety of repertoire by different composers, from Messiaen (2005), Dalla Vecchia (2010) and Debussy (2012) to *Note venete: opere cameristiche delle scuole di composizione nei conservatori del Veneto* (2011), *Britten, Hindemith e Poulenc nel rapporto con la storia* (2013), *"In principio era il Lied"* (2014), *"Le metamorfosi della musica russa - da Michail Ivanovic Glinka a Sofia Gubaidulina"* (2015). SIM edition 2016, dedicated to "La Musica nella Grande Guerra", made a workshop possible on compositions written in Europe during the first war conflict. This project was awarded an official recognition from the Italian Government.

Music from the eastern Europe is the Leit-Motiv of SIM Ensemble 2017; this project started three years ago focusing on Russian works and was later devoted to those countries whose music was both inspired by the Eastern culture

and the 19th century's sonata-form. In 2018 Festival, SIM will perform a repertoire of music written from the late-1880s (“Italian generation of the 80s”) onwards. The Piano Quintet (1917) by Guido Alberto Fano – an active and interesting composer in Padua's musical scenario – will be presented together with Alfred Schnittke's Piano quintet (1972-76) as an example of a compelling programming. Also the Violin Sonata and the Divertimento for Clarinet and Piano by Silvio Omizzolo – friend of many composers of his period, among whom Malipiero, Dallapiccola and Ghedini, a professor in different music academies and director of Padua's Conservatory – will be proposed together with the writings of Mario Rigoni Stern – a soldier involved in the catastrophic withdrawal of the Italian army from Russia in 1943.

The “generation of the 80s” – *la generazione dell'ottanta* – was indeed the very Italian instrumental music renewal; Guido Alberto Fano was born in 1875, Ottorino Respighi in 1879, Ildebrando Pizzetti in 1880, Gian Francesco Malipiero in 1882 and Alfredo Casella in 1883. Ferruccio Busoni was born in 1866, not so close to the others by birth, but close to them – and maybe beyond – owing to his spirituality. Pianists and composers such as Golinelli, Sgambati, Martucci, Bossi, Fano and Omizzolo, among others, helped the Italian musical tradition to flourish with an intense activity of music education and interpretative tradition. They took inspiration from the German Romantic tradition and its most representative figures, such as Mendelssohn, Schumann, Liszt, Brahms and Wagner.

They were looking ahead at the times to come and were not interested in searching back, in order to attain the past values inherent symphonic romanticism; their purpose was getting in touch with the most recent innovations, as a starting point for new writing. This is the real basis for the rebirth of Italian instrumental music in the 19th century.

c) Simultaneo Ensemble as an intense and high-quality performing activity

The SIM project also solicits new ways to support and strengthen its chamber music ensembles, offering opportunities for networking and discussion on:

- developing and promoting projects;
- diversifying a musical career;
- organizing concert series and ensemble start-ups;
- collaborating with other art-forms and partnering organizations;
- budgeting and fundraising.

SIM Ensemble 2017 engaged strategies to connect with local communities and with international partners starting a significant partnership with Kazakhstan Republic, special guests with some performers from Astana University of Arts. Kazakh musicians and the Laboratory worked together under the project “Waiting for Expo 2017”, an international cooperation among the seven music academies in the Veneto region and the Astana University of Arts in Kazakhstan. Using SIM's pilot programme, namely *Waiting for Expo 2017*, musicians and their placemaking partners explain the placemaking's basic principles, discuss

its benefits for the community and the artists, explore other projects that have succeeded in bringing people together towards common goals via the arts.

SIM – section of Padua and Venice – also collaborates with two important festivals in the Veneto region, the *Campus delle Arti (Bassano)* directed by Angela Chiofalo and the *Asiago Festival*, directed by the Brazzale family, taking part in masterclass given by K. Bogino and his assistant C. Franchini, by Julius Berger, Claudio Pasceri and Ilya Grubert. SIM's high qualified chamber groups won competitions and concerts around Italy and abroad.

3. Results and Conclusions

SIMULTANEO ENSEMBLE involves a team of more than 100 musicians throughout the festival season and the year. These artists are representatives of the seven music academies of the Veneto region as a true cross section of the community, increasing the project's visibility to wide demographics. Its activity contributes to inspiring individuals – who might not otherwise attend concerts and cultural events – to feel invested on, love musicians and music, become lifelong followers of the project.

This shows the ability of the arts to activate public spaces, engage resident people, and transform cultural entities into something the community reckons with. In chamber music, musicians do not play their part not to show off, to control, or to dominate, but to *contribute*. Chamber musicians see themselves as responsible citizens of an ensemble, working together to realize an artistic vision. Chamber music is an important metaphor for living. Many in power in the world today could greatly benefit from contact with and contemplation of this metaphor.

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