

Interviewer: Kristóf Weber

"BEING IS BEING PERCEIVED"

Prae's questions to the composers: Alessio Elia answers

I did not personally know Alessio Elia, an Italian composer living in Hungary, but I have felt his professional presence for years. Of the plenty of music I listened to during the pandemic, his *Octet* stood out to me, and it was actually for this work that I invited him to this round table.

PRAE.HU: What social music phenomena do you relate to, do you use the music of a people or the motifs of popular genres, or how do they affect you in any other way?

More than authentic popular motifs or quotes, I used stylistic features, sounds, characteristics, and musical forms from different musical traditions. I am thinking, for example, of the natural seventh, an interval typical of many popular traditions, which I used for example in the piece for a cappella choir of 16 soloists *Incantesimi di Merseburg*, commissioned to me by the Stuttgart Kammerchor conducted by Frieder Bernius.

A piece in which, for the first time in a choral piece, seven different intonation systems appear, a compositional tool that I have defined polysystemism, of which I have spoken in numerous conferences in Europe, including the one at the Cité de la Musique in Paris in 2014 and also in two conferences here in Budapest, at MMA (Hungarian Academy of Arts) and LFZE (Liszt Academy) in 2015 and 2019.

In the piece *Disappearing rainbows*, written for the 70th anniversary of Bartók's death, I used the acoustic scale instead, which is typical of the Romanian folk tradition for example. In *Octet*, commissioned by the Solisti della Scala di Milano, published by Universal Music Publishing - EMB and recorded on CD for Warner Classics, under the baton of Andrea Vitello, I used a writing in which the seventeenth-century toccatistic style is contaminated with styles typical of the jazz tradition 1920s in New York.

Influences of klezmer music can be heard in my *Implicate Inklings - Clarinet concerto*, which I wrote for clarinetist Csaba Klenyán and the Concerto Budapest Orchestra conducted by Zoltán Rác. Finally I used reiterative modules and acid sounds typical of death metal in the piece *Ekpyrotic Suicide*, commissioned by UMZE in 2019 and in *Traces from Nowhere* commissioned by Impronta ensemble conducted by Andreas Luca Beraldo, a piece written for the Oggimusic festival in Lugano.

PRAE.HU: What are the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to the Hungarian community? Have you used this identity in any of your works?

I became a Hungarian citizen starting from January 2021, but I have lived in Budapest since 2005, so for 17 years now. I believe I acquired this second nationality even before my arrival in Hungary. I have loved Hungarian culture since I was a teenager and I must say that the historicized cultural relations between Italy (my country of origin) and Hungary (my adopted country) have always been of great depth, especially in the 70s of the twentieth century.

Probably these relationships of closeness have diluted a bit over time also due to the harmful effects of globalization that seeks to cancel national identities in a *potpourri* made up of false ideals and insignificant rhetoric.

Moving on to talk about my Hungarian identity, I could say that if nothing else, Hungary has retained its characteristic identity in the forms of its culture and art. In a certain sense, this attachment to a tradition has helped to preserve the roots that guarantee the authenticity of thought. On the other hand, however, in many cases these roots have represented a brake on the development of an art that sought new forms of expression and therefore mostly, with the due exceptions, what we hear here always has a kind of conservative aura. Belonging *de facto* to both worlds I can say that I have tried to take the good of both cultures.

I continue the path inaugurated by Giacinto Scelsi with his music based on "spurious unisons", in the reinterpretation that Ligeti made through his "micropolyphony", in particular the testamentary one of the *Hamburg Concerto*, in which Ligeti experiments with the superimposition of two intonation systems, natural intonation and the 12-tone Equal Temperament.

And so I arrived at what I called "polysystemism", the simultaneous employment of different tuning systems (I use 8 of them) with the aim of integrating the physical-acoustic phenomena into the musical discourse, making Berkeley's expression my own, according to which "being is being perceived". In this sense, my belonging to the Hungarian nationality is concretized in the development of my musical language itself, in the desire to continue this path undertaken by the greatest Hungarian composer of the late twentieth century, Ligeti, who in turn had made his own an elaborative idea of one of the greatest Italian composers, Scelsi, a composer who *de facto* paved the way for one of the most original musical expressive forms, that of spectral music, of which Scelsi himself was to some extent a proto-exponent.

A specific example of the use of this "Hungarianicity" is present in my orchestral piece *Dimensioni nascoste* (Hidden dimensions) with which I won the 2013 UMZF competition, in the year dedicated to Ligeti. In this piece I have tried to create multidimensional sound spaces through the superimposition of different tuning systems, following the path of the admixture of temperaments indicated by Ligeti in his *Hamburg Concerto*.

PRAE.HU: Who do you compose for, do you have a target audience? Which social stratum or group is your music aimed at?

To answer the question in a coherent way, I would say that my audience is the human being, in the sense that my music is primarily intended for listening, that is, it is music written according to the hearing capacities of the human being, with its limitations and its qualities. It is a music that takes psycho-acoustic phenomena into consideration and integrates them into musical language. The simultaneous use of different tuning systems (the polysystemism mentioned above) serves precisely to create a series of physical-acoustic phenomena that the use of a single temperament is not able to achieve.

I can answer the question in another way too though. The audience that I take into consideration when I write is the music itself, in the sense that the music raises a series of questions that the composer is called to answer. The solutions that the composer finds to these questions are his expressive identity, his deepest being, his "style".

PRAE.HU: Are non-European music systems within your horizon of interest? In your opinion, could the use of musical systems coming from the so-called "third world" bring about a qualitative change?

I am interested in all musical cultures, both geographically and temporally. Non-Western music in particular offers hints that we do not find in our European tradition. Since non-tempered intervals are an essential part of my language, I cannot help but study musical systems distant in time and space. An example of extra-European sounds can be found in my orchestral piece *Trasparenze*, which I wrote on commission from

Bartók Radio in 2014. In this work I used Tibetan bells and Javanese gongs. I also delved into the music of Java and Bali for their non-tempered musical systems. At the time of my doctoral dissertation on Ligeti's *Hamburg Concerto*, I was also interested in the rhythmic structure of sub-Saharan music, elements that are found in the composer's work. But the rhythmic aspects that I use in my music have no relation to these models. Suggestions from distant cultures are welcome as long as we do not limit ourselves only to imitating them.

Implicate Inklings – Clarinet Concerto

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzC2F8rRCUc>

Rejtett dimenziók (Dimensioni nascoste)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_8sr-K8hQU

Trasparenze

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcEIyb9eAKU&feature=emb_imp_woyt

Octet

I movement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL6tHWHrBFs>

II movement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1IMwPQEbsk>

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