

Press review
on Giovanni Verrando's Cd
Dulle Griet
Æon AECD 1328

Giovanni Verrando

Dulle Griet

Mdi Ensemble · RepertorioZero · Pierre-André Valade



æon

Stefan Drees

Neue Zeitschrift für Musik

Musikalische Wertung: 5

Technische Wertung: 5

Das Schaffen des 1965 geborenen Italiener Giovanni Verrando scheint in der auf sich selbst fixierten deutschen Szene bislang keine Rolle zu spielen, obgleich es eine Bereicherung für die Diskussion um die Arbeit mit elektronischen Komponenten böte. Die vorliegende CD, Gegenstück zu einer 2011 bei Stradivarius erschienenen Produktion mit Orchesterstücken Verrandos, thematisiert anhand von Solowerken, Kammermusik und Ensemblestücken aus den Jahren 2001 bis 2010 den synthetisierenden Umgang mit Klangqualitäten unterschiedlicher Herkunft. Der Komponist führt dem Hörer Vorgänge der Überschreibung vor, die sich mit dem Verhältnis zwischen analog erzeugtem Instrumentalklang und digitaler Klangverarbeitung befassen. Das Ergebnis ist eine hybride, artifizielle Klanglichkeit, die auf unterschiedliche Weise die Nähe und Distanz zum jeweiligen Ausgangspunkt betont.

So erlebt der Hörer im eröffnenden Ensemblestück *Dulle Griet* palimpsestartige Überlagerungen von Klangzuständen, die sich aus instrumentalen Klangverfremdungen und den daran ansetzenden elektronischen Verdichtungsprozessen ergeben. Analog hierzu schließt die CD mit dem *Triptych #2* für elektrifiziertes Ensemble, in dem die elektronischen Klangkomponenten durch Anwendung unterschiedlicher Filterprozesse gestische Qualitäten gewinnen.

Neben den rahmenden Ensemblestücken beziehen zwei weitere Werke die Möglichkeiten elektronischer Überschreibung ein: So wird im Flötenstück *First Born Unicorn*, *remind me what we're fighting for* der Kontrast zwischen der Verstärkung geblasener und gesungener Klänge und den stilisierten, an Vogelstimmen gemahnenden Figurationen ausgetragen,

wogegen die an eine E-Gitarre erinnernden verzerrten Tremolotexturen des Violinstücks *Third Born Unicorn, remind me what we're fighting for* den musikalischen Diskurs im Übergangsfeld zur musikalischen Praxis der Rockmusik ansiedeln.

Diesen Stücken stehen mit dem Streichquartett Nr. 3, dem Klavierwerk *Second Born Unicorn, remind me what we're fighting for* und dem Ensemblestück *Il ruvido dettaglio celebrato da Aby Warburg* zwar drei Kompositionen gegenüber, die allein auf den Gegebenheiten instrumentaler Klangbehandlung basieren, dabei aber dennoch zugleich elektronische Komponenten klanglich simulieren. Das Streichquartett arbeitet etwa mit unterschiedlichen Texturdichten, die sich aus dem Gegeneinander von Einzelstimmen und Registerlagen ergeben, rekapituliert jedoch in Flageolettschichten die Klanglichkeit elektronischer Tonerzeugung. Die enorm beweglichen Texturen des Klavierstücks wiederum hinterlassen den Eindruck eines computergesteuerten Instruments, während sich im Ensemblewerk unterschiedliche Klangformungsprozesse zu artifiziellen Klangmischung einfügen.

Aufgrund der klug gewählten Abfolge aller sieben Kompositionen erweist sich die CD als abwechslungsreicher Hörparcours, dessen Einzelteile mitsamt der ihnen eingeschriebenen Irritationen geschickt aufeinander Bezug nehmen. Exzellent ist auch die musikalische Umsetzung durch Mitglieder des Mdi Ensemble und des Ensembles *RepertoireZero* unter Leitung von Pierre-André Valade, der sich hier zum zweiten Mal als erfahrener Spezialist für Verrandos Musik erweist.

Matt Mendez

<http://www.icareifyoulisten.com/>

Mellifluous gondoliers, bloodthirsty La Scala patrons, and rotund Neapolitans belting "O sole mio": for too long, these conventional images have obscured Italy's considerable new music achievements. Sure, Nono, Berio, and Sciarrino are widely admired as modern masters and great innovators, but for every Scelsi out there you can find ten further Italians who have yet to receive their due. Per esempio: Busoni and Russolo, who virtually invented the concept of "experimental music"; the neoclassicism of Malipiero, Casella, and the *generazione dell'ottanta*; Dallapiccola and Petrassi, with their inventive, lyrical adaptations of the twelve-tone system; the internationalist visions of Maderna and Clementi; Bussotti and his wild neo-Dada extravagances; the quiet, inimitable alchemy of Castiglioni and Donatoni; and the diverse younger generation of Stroppa, Gervasoni, Billone, and Romitelli, the last of whom succeeded, almost impossibly, in marrying Bang on a Can with IRCAM. If there's a country out there with a more diverse cast of compositional characters, the UN forgot to make them a member state.

To this list should now most emphatically be added Giovanni Verrando, whose new *Æon* portrait disc *Dulle Griet* provides a bracing, scintillating introduction to a compositional sensibility refreshingly bold and probing. For sure, you could make the argument that Verrando takes up right where Romitelli left off, since the two share a good many of the same aesthetic genes. Thus, like his sadly missed colleague, Verrando allies a fundamentally French post-spectral sensibility (picked up from studies with Tristan Murail) with an abiding interest in the grittier edges of the popular music spectrum (the liner notes cite the Red Hot Chili Peppers' "Californication"). To these, in turn, is typically added a healthy dose of "Italianate" lyricism and levity. The balance is especially well-exemplified in the album's acoustic pieces, such as the colorful *Il ruvido dettaglio celebrato da Aby*

Warburg (2002), whose coruscating arpeggios put one in mind of Berio's "points on the curve to find...". Similarly, in the tantalizingly short *First Born Unicorn, remind me what we're fighting for* (2001), Verrando isn't afraid to let the solo flute warble and sing, breaking the intensely hushed atmosphere.

However, in the pieces for amplified instruments, such as *Triptych #2* (2008), performed here in a cameo appearance by RepertorioZero, the "electrified ensemble" Verrando helped found, the balance tips in favor of the more indefinite sounds of industrial rock and ambient music. Here, Verrando arguably goes farther than Romitelli, producing something like Lachenmann's *musique concrète instrumentale* with amplified instruments ("electric" strings, samplers, and guitars). In the title piece, *Dulle Griet* (2010), the result is somewhat vague, coming across at times like a taped "soundscape." Even here, though, one can't help but be impressed by composer's ability to conjure up all manner of quasi-synthesized, *musique concrète*-like timbres without recourse to electronic manipulation or Pro Tools fiddling. By way of contrast, *Triptych #2* takes a considerably more systematic approach, to greater effect. The focus is now on distortion, the archetypical sound of an overdriven guitar, which Verrando simulates with furious violin scratch tone tremolos. In the movement titled "*Harmonic domains #3*" all the lo-fi grit, fuzz, and "noise" of punk are translated into spectral terms – the concept of inharmonicity – the result being a striking etude exploring the various ways in which the direct perception of pitch can be obscured using rock instrumentation. In this regard, at least, *Third Born Unicorn, remind me what we're fighting for* (2009) is the most fully-realized work on the disc, completely transforming the timbre of the violin, that most respectable of classical instruments, into something utterly alien and abrasive. (However, Verrando "cheats" a bit in *Third Born Unicorn*, since it's the only piece on the album that calls for direct electronic manipulation.) Indeed, the work ends with a noise that sounds for all the world like the guitar flubs with which so many of the great punk songs end.

Like Berio, Verrando's music also reflects interdisciplinary concerns and the latest developments in humanities research. In the program notes for the pieces included on this disc alone, Verrando alludes to the ideas of economist Jacques Attali, literary theorist Roland Barthes, and philosopher Michel Serres. Most pertinent in this context is Serres, whose definition of noise (in the information theory sense of the word) Verrando quotes: "How much noise must be made to silence noise?" Serres' essential point is that distortion and disruption are endemic to the transmission of any message. This idea has fascinating consequences for Verrando's compositional practice: if "noise" ("inharmonicity") is inevitable, the opposite ("harmonicity") cannot be in any sense thought of as normative. Consequently, if the "threshold state" (as Gérard Grisey was wont to put it) is the basic condition of all music, then a black-and-white dichotomy between refractory distortion and a message well-received cannot be maintained. Verrando brings this insight to bear on the second movement of the solo piano *Second Born Unicorn, remind me what we're fighting for* (2002). The short piece slowly and methodically outlines a basic generative chord, one of those highly-resonant, sort-of-consonant-sort-of-dissonant chords the spectral composers were so fond of. Though the chord is finally allowed to ring in all its sonorous finery, a niggling percussive sound, achieved by preparing the piano's very highest key, is continually butting in, disrupting the sense of fulfillment.

For all that, I'm firmly convinced that Verrando's best work is still ahead of him. The two varieties of piece on display in *Dulle Griet*, the acoustic harmonic and "noisy" electric, sit uneasily next to one another. The true achievement would be to synthesize the fine-grained harmonic sensibility of the earlier works with the electro-Lachenmannian

soundscapes of the newer ones. Whatever the case, it's clear Verrando's not one for sitting on his laurels; he's not afraid to court the anomalous. This comes across well in the *Third String Quartet* (2003), ostensibly the most traditional piece on the album. Though its simple harmonies and nervous minimalist twittering make it the odd man out in Verrando's oeuvre, the Quartet's engrossing shifts and understated mastery make it a worthy contribution to the *con fragilità* aesthetic pioneered by Sciarrino.

This is music that demands total commitment, and in the Mdi Ensemble Verrando has found a talented band of performers who can give just that. In sum: an unusual disc that will appeal to all manner of new music lover.

Cesare Fertonani

Amadeus

Giudizio Artistico: 5

Giudizio Tecnico: 5

Questo cd comprende sette lavori da camera o per ensemble di Giovanni Verrando, risalenti agli anni 2001-2010, cioè al periodo che ha visto il passaggio fra quelle che il compositore stesso definisce le 'due fasi' della sua esperienza creativa.

Mentre la prima delle due fasi si è estesa fino al 2005, caratterizzandosi per un sottile lavoro sui campi armonici, la seconda, che ha preso avvio a partire da quella data, si è concentrata invece sulla ricerca della parte inarmonica dello spettro acustico, sullo studio delle proprietà infinitesimali del suono, sulla saturazione e sul rumore.

Questa seconda fase, che si pone in relazione organica con un'elaborazione teorica confluita in un volume intitolato *La nuova liuteria: orchestrazione, grammatica, estetica* (2012), è tutt'ora in corso, aperta a un immaginario sonoro utopico e in continua trasformazione, proiettata verso una continua estensione del linguaggio. A ben ascoltare, si possono comunque scorgere già in alcuni dei pezzi precedenti al 2005 i prodromi della seconda fase, che appare perciò lineare e conseguente rispetto alla prima.

Formano il programma *Dulle Griet* (2010), il trittico *Born Unicorn, remind me what we're fighting for* (2001-09), *Quartetto n. 3* (2003), *Il ruvido dettaglio* celebrato da Aby Warburg (2002) e *Triptych 2* (2008).

Ammirevoli, da ogni punto di vista, le esecuzioni affidate allo Mdi Ensemble a RepertorioZero, con la limpida direzione di Pierre-André Valade.

Peter Margasak

<http://www.chicagoreader.com/>

This collection of recent music by Paris-based Italian composer Giovanni Verrando is a brain-rattling ride through extreme harmonies and visceral noise that sometimes rivals the eardrum-destroying fury of Merzbow. The title composition is named for a figure from Flemish folklore known in English as "Mad Meg," depicted in a Bruegel painting as an angry, shrewish woman attempting to pillage hell; it's a dazzling electroacoustic work in which delicate coloristic passages for bass flute, clarinets, percussion, violin, and cello are alternately pulverized by screaming white noise and caressed by soft, frictive sounds made with rubber bands and cardboard. Nothing else on the disc is quite as powerful, but everything is just as rigorous and provocative—though Verrando offers esoteric academic explanations for the processes behind his writing, you don't need to understand that stuff to feel the results.

Michele Coralli

Altremusiche

[...] The *Quartetto n.3*, which we already had the chance to hear in a recording by the Arditti at the [Festival] Milano Musica of 2003. It is, in my opinion, one of the best compositions of recent times and maybe one that will leave its small mark on a pale and inconsistent era such as that of the start of the new millennium. In extreme synthesis it is a great work. [...] These are gloomy times and composers who wish to express "that sensorial excitement triggered by the encounter with "difference" can not afford to yield to a compromise, but must make the contradictions literally explode. Those who move in that direction will be remembered, the others not. Verrando may well be one of those belonging to the first category.

Pierre Rigaudière

Diapason

We had already hailed, from these columns, the very subtle orchestral universe of Giovanni Verrando. [...] The new album reveals a broadened acoustic palette, in which the inharmonic sounds have conquered a considerable space. Typically of this recent orientation, *Dulle Griet* alternates a thin breath, barely perceptible, with extremely intense and saturated sounds. [...] *Il ruvido dettaglio celebrato da Aby Warburg* is a piece that does justice to the Ensemble Mdi: combining a mastery of detail with a control of the overall balance, the musicians help to highlight the fine sense of construction, in both the composer and the conductor.

Ettore Garzia

Percorsi Musicali, ettoregarzia.blogspot.it

At the Biennale di Venezia in 2011 the composer Giovanni Verrando proposed a highly praiseworthy electro-acoustic combination, where all the current directions of sonic research are merged, as well as some of the future [...] but in general his outlook is extremely interesting and worth listening to very carefully. After the *Orchestral Works*, a magnificent recording featuring the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della Rai, Verrando now appears on the Æon label with a second volume of his works. [...] The outcome is a sort of new musical representation of sounds, in which amplified flutes and an anxious piano, and acoustic violins highly spiced with dynamics at times vivid at others barely audible, and their combination, lay down the necessary conditions to introduce a new version of *Triptych* for electric ensemble featuring RepertorioZero, in which there is an overwhelming return to the concepts of colouring sound, heterophony, and the extension of the dynamics of the spectra.

www.frekcencemusic.com

Il ruvido dettaglio celebrato da Aby Warburg [...] music made up of timbres in a highly refined writing, the second panel is based on repeated ideas and oscillates between violence and extreme fragility. The exemplary impact of the sound here depends on the precision and effort of each player. [...] As in most of the instrumental pieces on this album, the writing of the *Quartetto n. 3* for string quartet (2003) derives from electronic thought and frees itself from the tradition of the genre. In this very unique diptych, the second movement sets up a theatre of extraneous sounds, whose fantastic trajectory

leads to an extraordinary and highly plastic work exploiting the material, often noise-based, of the sixteen strings of the quartet.

Koen Van Meel

Kwadratuur

Componist werken niet in een vacuüm. Kinderen van hun tijd en traditie, nemen ze op wat er rond hen gebeurt en het kan dan ook niet verbazen dat de muziek van Giovanni Verrando, hoewel alles behalve duidelijk, eclectisch verwijst naar collega's uit heden en verleden. Verwijzingen naar de Red Hot Chili Peppers in de titels van zijn werken zijn daar nog het minst overtuigende bewijs van.

Op deze cd zijn akoestische en elektroakoestische werken voor solisten of kleine ensembles samengebracht, die gespreid over een klein decennium een duidelijke evolutie in de muziek van Verrando laten horen. In de oudere stukken (2001-2003) domineren de harmonische velden. Dit impliceert echter geen statische klank, want binnen eenzelfde harmonisch domein kan de muziek enorm beweeglijk klinken, alsof de instrumenten hun best doen om met arpeggio's en vooral tremolo's uit het harmonisch kader te breken.

Dit is het duidelijkst in de akoestische composities, zoals in het eerste deel van het derde strijkkwartet. De nerveus bewegende strijkers zorgen hier voor een weefsel dat ruimte laat voor polyfonie, waarbij de muziek net binnen de harmonische krijtlijnen blijft. Een gelijkaardige opbouw is terug te vinden in 'Second Born Unicorn, Remind Me What We're Fighting For' voor piano. Opnieuw is het eerste deel onstuimig, maar nu wordt de energie van de arpeggio's overgenomen in de tremolo's van het tweede deel. Naar het einde van het stuk volgende harmonische overgangen elkaar wat sneller op, waardoor Verrando langs de wereld van het impressionisme scheert. Dat is niet de enige echo die op te vangen valt. In het eerste deel van 'Il Ruvido Dettaglio Celebrato' lijken in het kamerorkest zelfs even de romantische harmonieën van Grieg of Tsjajkovsky op te duiken, terwijl de grote dynamische contrasten van het tweede deel voor een filmische spanning zorgen, waarna het geluid mag verdampen tot ritmisch ruisen en tikken.

De verwijzingen maken duidelijk dat de hedendaagse taal van Verrando de toegankelijkheid van zijn muziek niet in de weg staat. Temeer daar hij vaak kiest voor een vormelijke eenvoud die zelfs voor een onge oefende herkenbaar blijft klinken. Zo ook in 'First Born Unicorn, Remind Me What We're Fighting For' voor versterkte dwarsfluit, al laat Verrando hier ook niet na om de luisteraar te desoriënteren. Verantwoordelijk hiervoor is niet alleen het tegelijkertijd zingen en spelen van de fluitist (het lijkt soms wel jazzfluitist Magic Malik), maar ook het feit dat rammelende kleppen een aparte laag in het geluid vormen die los lijkt te staan van de geblazen partij.

In de recentere stukken maakt Verrando steevast gebruik van elektronica en verkent hij de gebieden buiten de afgebakende toonhoogtes met ruis die sterk varieert qua dikte, scherpte en korrel. Hij lijkt wel een eindeloze variatie achter de hand te hebben die hij bovendien snel laat afwisselen, waardoor de luisteraar gedwongen wordt om te blijven luisteren. Dit is het meest prominent hoorbaar in 'Dulle Griet'. Hier lopen het elektronische en het akoestische onophoudelijk dooreen en in elkaar over. Bij momenten lijkt het ruisen wel een gecomponeerde natuuroopname, zeker wanneer er vogelachtige fluitpartijen boven geplaatst worden. De impact van de mens wordt echter maar al te snel duidelijk door de elkaar snel afwisselende ruispassages, als een tv-toestel dat snel van kanaal wisselt, maar dat op elke zender niets anders dan een nieuwe, witte ruis geeft.

Dit effect is ook duidelijk hoorbaar in 'Third Born Unicorn, Remind Me What We're Fighting For' voor elektrische viool en elektronica, waarbij het live gespeelde instrument bovendien

bij momenten klinkt als een elektrische gitaar. Een moeilijker geval is 'Triptych #2', waarin Verrando speelt met toonloze klanken van een elektronisch ensemble, tot hij in het middendeel plots ruimte laat voor geluiden die meer in zijn eerste periode thuis horen: een ensemble dat aanzwelt als een zwerm muggen, strijkers die klinken alsof ze door oude radio geperst worden en harmonische velden gevolgd door ritmisch hakken versus tremolo's. De muziek van Verrando laat zich dus duidelijk niet zomaar in vakjes en periodes wringen.

Dat maakt die er uiteraard niet minder boeiend op, zeker wanneer die te horen is uitmuntende uitvoeringen zoals op deze cd. De nauwkeurigheid die het Mdi Ensemble en RepertorioZero hier aan de dag leggen, klinkt zo speels en natuurlijk dat de luisteraar snel de uitvoerders vergeet en alle aandacht op de muziek kan richten. En die is dat meer dan waard.