
INTERPRETATIONS - DUE 'SINTESI' FUTURISTI...

Article received on 30th September 2009

Article accepted on 2nd October 2009

UDC 7.037.3(0.034.4)(049.3)

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MUSICA FUTURISTA/THE ART OF NOISES SALON LTMCD 2401

The great exhibitions in Rome and Paris,² dedicated to the centenary of the first Futurist manifesto, left behind many valuable publications and reprints. Among them, a special place is occupied by discography editions which, by taking over archive recordings and/or by renewed readings of a handful of preserved sheet music copies, are trying to reconstruct the sound image of Futurism.

Pretentiously announced as 'audio anthology combining... key Futurist composers and theorists', the disc *Musica futurista/The art of noises* released by a British label summarizes and follows the history of the movement from 1909 to 1935, combining the remaining original recordings of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's speeches and the fragments of works of about a dozen composers with the reconstructed and recently recorded material. After their decades-long being perceived only through the 'acute phase' in the years before the First World War, as 'the avant-garde of avant-garde', and generally disapproved because of their glorification of war and approaching to Fascism, now Futurism and its protagonists, thanks to this disc, show twelve different episodes in the evolution of the movement and the individual composers and performers, which, in spite of manifestos usually being dominated by first person plural, had different artistic origins, careers and achievements. Also, the material on the disc is a part of the material valuable for estimating the Futurists' contribution to the musical avant-

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² Futurismo. AvanguardieAvanguardie, 20 February - 24 May 2009, Rome, Quirinale; *Le Futurisme à Paris*, 15 October 2008 - 26 January 2009, Paris, Centre Pompidou.

garde, but also reveals the remnants of the traditional musical procedures which are inversely proportional to uncompromisingly innovated verbal code. Great attention was paid to the *intonarumori*, the new Futurist instrumental set which on this occasion was recognized as a rudimentary ancestor of the synthesizer. Finally, the reduced amount of preserved sheet music and original recordings attests to the limited scope and significance of the Futurist music compared to the poetry and visual arts, as well as to its 'applied' and improvisatory part within the movement, at least in its initial stages, but also to the annunciations of liberating, explosive musical energy.

Considering that the greatest part of Futurist works and instruments vanished during the Second World War, this compilation, conceived with anthological ambitions, was preceded by serious research work, almost archaeological in nature, based on four different sources:

1. The oldest recording – a cylinder from 1922 – contains the percussive and striking piano composition *Pupazzeti* by Alfredo Casella, who, although never an official member of the movement, took part in the Futurist project *I balli plastici* in Rome in 1918.

2. Authentic archive documents are stored on three records, released in 1924 by *Società Nazionale del Gramofone*, which, apart from the fragments of Marinetti's verbal interventions (sort of art-actions: an unusual combination of rhythmic high-voice narration in the first person plural without punctuation, reminiscent of Hitler's and Mussolini's speeches, and onomatopoeic war-like theatrical effects), contain fragments of compositions and demonstrations of the possibilities of the *intonarumori*, noise generators activated by Antonio Russolo, brother of the Futurist music theoretician and the constructor of the new instrumental set, Luigi Russolo.

3. The second archive source is *Columbia label DQ3661*, a record from 1931, containing piano miniatures *Sintesi musicali futuristi* [*Futuristic Musical Syntheses*] by Aldo Guintini, apparently a skilled jazz pianist who often accompanied Marinetti's performances with improvisations enriched by post-impressionist harmonic turns and percussive-style 'stage' effects.

4. The greatest space is occupied by the recordings of preserved and reconstructed piano works, made in 1978 thanks to Daniele Lombardi, pianist, composer and multimedia artist: *La Guerra* [*War*] from 1913, by Francesco Balilla Pratella; fragments of Franco Casavola's stage music for Marinetti's play *Prigionieri* [*Prisoners*], from 1927; or *Aeroduello* [*Air Duel*] for piano and orchestra, dedicated to Marinetti, by Luigi Grandi in 1935. All of these distinct works, which mostly remain within the percussive piano procedure and club jazz, current at the time and coloured by the commonplace impressionist harmonies, are not convincing

representatives of 'Futurist music'. For example, after the first two tracks – Marinetti's hyperbolic *Definizione di Futurismo* [*Definition of Futurism*] and *La Battaglia di Adrianopoli* [*Battle for Hadrianopolis*] recorded in 1924 – the conventional triptych *La Guerra – Three dances for orchestra* op. 32 by Balilla Pratella, with its modest variation principle does not exceed the scope of a march-like, naïve paraphrase of an innocent French folk tune. Composed in 1913 on Marinetti's request, this work by the main champion of Futurist music and the author of papers *Manifesto of Futurist Composers*, *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Music* and *Distruzione della Quadratura* [*Destruction of Squaring*], and not only from the present point of view, sounds like a denial of theoretic assumptions upon which it is based. Especially in the light of the fact that Pratella, Pietro Mascagni's pupil, later in his life turned to writing down the folk melodies of Romagna province.

Thanks to Lombardi, one of the inheritors of the Futurist adventure who lately released several discs with Italian and Russian Futurist music, 'the anthology' sheds light to the concrete application of apology of noise, one of the main requests in Russolo's manifesto, exemplified by the preserved fragment of the composition *Risveglio di una Città* [*The Awakening of a City*] and sound samples produced on four *intonarumori*, constructed in 1977 for the purposes of the Venice Biennale. In spite of undoubtedly intriguing onomatopoeias of hisses and noises produced, from gurgling, to buzzing and roaring, to screeching (*Gorgogliatore*, *Ronzatore*, *Ullulatore*, *Crepitatore*)³, these mechanical noise generators, as well as the great part of Futurist repertoire, by their technological limitations actually betray one of the main principles of the movement: speed. The noise of industrialized cities at the beginning of the last century, which we today perceive as an ecological disaster, but which, as a metaphor of energy, speed and power, fascinated the Futurists and stipulated Russolo's utopian and anticipatory 'une association fantastique de ces timbres variés' ['fantastic synthesis of these diverse timbres'],⁴ found its complete acoustic match only after the conception of *musique concrète*.

Going ahead of their time, the Futurist composers crossed ways with the new audio and visual media, above all the radio as their instrument *par excellence*. Judging by the content of the eponymous disc, the Futurist music reached its highest peaks exactly in the field of radio-art, which opened the possibilities of writing by sound, its amplification and deformation, the procedures of editing and deconstruction, combining most diverse sound sources... The ascending dramaturgy of this discographic release is concluded by *Cinque sintesi Radiofonici* [*Five Radio-Art Syntheses*] signed by Marinetti, in the same year when he wrote his *Manifesto futurista della Radia* [*Futurist Manifesto of Radio*]. Exalted, in his own

³ Gurgler, Buzzer, Howler, Crackler.

⁴ Russolo, 11th March 1903, in: Giovanni Lista, *Le futurisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 2008, 73.

admission, by 'pure organism of radiophonic sensations',⁵ he left very precise instructions for 'programmatic' miniatures bearing evocative titles: *Un paesaggio udito* [A Landscape Heard], *Dramma di distanze* [Drama of Distances], *I silenzi parlano fra loro* [Silences Speak Among Themselves], *Battaglia di ritmi* [Battle of Rhythms] and *La costruzione di un silenzio* [Construction of Silence]. Again in Lombardi's performance, this work, populated by the author's precise instructions on the relationship between sound and silence, which were given the dominant role in the two numbers, although opposed to the radical art of noises, does not speak of the end of Futurism but of the leap into the new radicalism.

The importance of re-releasing of *Musica futurista* (first released in 2004) is greatly contributed to by thorough, documentarily precise and critically intoned comments by James Hayward, British writer and passionate expert on artistic trends and movements which marked the beginning of the 20th century. Equally significant as the disc itself and inseparable from it, this accompanying booklet sheds light on the Futurists' passing through the context of their time, projecting their most successful modernist and avant-garde achievements as the present time of music.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović

⁵ James Hayward, *Musica futurista*, Salon LTMCD 2401, the accompanying booklet.