

SERGIO CALLIGARIS

Few contemporary composers are equally appreciated by the critics and by the public and the Argentine-born Sergio Calligaris must be counted among these. Never attracted by the so-called avant-garde in the 60s and 70s, he doesn't feel himself to be a neo-romantic. Rather, the composer feels at ease if described as neo-classical musician. His music is, in fact, often rich in lyrical outbursts; it doesn't abdicate the formal rigor and the art of counterpoint, a sign of a youth Hindemithian heritage. In 2004, he was named as 'International Musician of the Year' by the International Biographical Centre of Cambridge (UK).

I decided to get in touch with the composer after listening to his Piano Concerto Op. 29 and the 2nd Suite of Symphonic Dances Op. 27, recorded in 1996. Excerpts from this CD can be heard by browsing the site <http://calligaris.carisch.it>. Calligaris has never hidden his admiration for SVR, and approached the interviewed enthusiastically. I met him in his house in Rome, where he has lived since 1974.

- Maestro, could you please tell us your first encounter with Rachmaninoff's music?

- I'd already played some of his music when I was twelve. At fourteen, one year after my debut as a performer, I played for the first of many times his 2nd Piano Concerto. When I first approached the score, I wanted to hear

Rachmaninoff himself playing the piece, and I purchased the disc. It was one of the first LPs circulating in Argentina (this was in 1955). My surprise was great, when I realized that sometimes Rachmaninoff didn't respect his own dynamic signs on the score. Thus, I learned once and for all that a performer can take some liberties without betraying the author. My scores are rich in dynamic signs; nevertheless I tell my performers: 'Don't feel enslaved! Only if you perform the music as if it were born from yourselves will it succeed in being convincing and communicative'.

- Did SVR take similar liberties in performing other people's music?

*- Let me give you just one example. Look how Rachmaninoff played the Carnival Op. 9 by Schumann, who is by far my favourite composer. You find there a richness not shared with other 'philologist' interpretations. Note, in particular, the unusual decision to play the breves of *Sphinxes*, and to add at that point a *tremolo* and a *vibrato*: the emotional effect is somewhat miraculous, and Schumann himself would be favourably surprised!*

- As a composer, do you acknowledge any author as a source of inspiration?

-No, I don't. Surely there exist composers to whom I'm spiritually close, and it is quite natural that sometimes such

affinity crystallizes in thematic cells, in harmonic cues or rhythmic solutions. Such reminiscences spring from an unconscious love for what arouses a strong emotion inside me.

Someone has compared the architectural solidity, the piano virtuosity and the symphonic grandeur of my Concerto Op. 29 to the 4th Rachmaninoff Concerto, and the pianist Irina Osipova has once described the spirit of my Concerto for two pianos Op. 41 as linked to the Russian soul.

Nevertheless, if you listen the tracks of those works on my site, you will come across a harmonic world that takes into account Hindemith before all, French impressionism, and Berg. I frequently use fourths and altered fourths chords. The so-called Scriabin 'mystical chord' (C, F#, B flat, E, A,D) appears in the great Fugue with double subject in the Sonata for clarinet and piano Op. 38 dedicated to Vladimir Ashkenazy and to his son Dimitri. It's an atonal piece structured, however, in such a way that the dissonance doesn't vex or disorientate the listener.

- You also have personally known Victor Babin and Vitya Vronsky...

Yes, Victor was the Director of the Cleveland Institute at the time and, with his wife Vitya, formed an exceptional piano duo. Both had been intimate Rachmaninoff friends. To them, who played both his Suites for two pi-

anos, the composer dedicated the two-piano version of the *Symphonic Dances*. The expressive abilities of two pianos constitute for me a strong source of inspiration, in fact I've inserted them in several works. I've also composed two sets of *Choreographic Scenes* and two suites of *Symphonic Dances*, to which the public has always reacted warmly. I've a great passion for the ballet. Even my first composition *The Eternal Fight*, that I composed at ten, is a ballet for piano and orchestra...



Sergio Calligaris, whose aim was to offer me a highly gratifying musical experience, invited me to listen to a passage of the Sonata Op. 38 recorded live at its premiere on 30th June 2001 and interpreted by Vladimir and Dimitri Ashkenazy. Together, we heard a few minutes from the first movement, a demanding piece of almost 600 bars!

Maurizio Brunetti