

Giacomo Manzoni (1932-): Overview of Writings

Composer, teacher, critic, and translator, Giacomo Manzoni is the author of four books and several hundred articles principally published in the Italian newspapers and magazines (among others [*Il diapason*](#), [*Musica d'oggi*](#), [*Presenza*](#), [*Discoteca*](#), [*Prisma*](#), and [*Musica/Realtà*](#)) which have been collected in four non-exhaustive anthologies. During the most violent years of ideological debate from 1958 to 1966, he was a critic for the daily newspaper of the Italian Communist Party, *L'Unità*, voicing his opposition to socialist realism and transforming the paper into the "official organ of new music." These activist articles, partly gathered in [*Musica e progetto civile. Scritti e interviste \(1956-2007\)*](#) (Lucca, LIM, 2009), are reviews of works, concerts, records, and books; portraits of composers and musicians; but also strongly worded statements calling for the introduction of musical education in nursery schools and denouncing dilettantism in conservatories, the shortfalls of institutions faced with major works of musical modernism, and the concentration of theaters and concert halls in city centers. Manzoni has also written about music as a public good that contributes toward the education and emancipation of citizens; the anonymous masses possibly treated as an object, but never as the subject of programming; and the anti-globalization of Naomi Klein. His aims are therefore artistic, social, and political.

For Manzoni, in a mass society that aims to be truly democratic, it is the musician's duty to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of his craft and works. He ceaselessly affirms his confidence in art, the instrument of this knowledge and understanding, through which people realize they are more than raw material and modify their very nature, an anthropological change capable of bringing about a new reign of justice. This is the reason he wrote [*Guida all'ascolto della musica sinfonica*](#) in 1961 (Milan, Feltrinelli, 1967), a book which has gone through more than twenty editions in which Manzoni introduces the masters of the orchestral tradition and musical modernism to a non-specialist readership. In particular, he defines a critical relationship between artistic advances and democratic movements, between the way classes have struggled historically for their liberation and the way in which composers seek to resolve the tensions of their art. This position assumes a certain autonomy of music or the acceptance of the specificity of its laws and forms. Taking this angle, Manzoni collaborated with the musicologist Luigi Pestalozza and the stage director Virginio Puecher to publish [*Per Massimiliano Robespierre. Testo e materiali per le scene musicali*](#) (Bari, De Donato, 1975), devoted their stage work premiered in the same year at the Teatro Comunale of Bologna in which Robespierre, the historical figure of the French Revolution engages with the present day.

There are four anthologies of Manzoni's writings. Three are in Italian—*Scritti*, (Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1991), *Tradizione e utopia* (Milan, Feltrinelli, 1994), and the last section of the collective volume *Giacomo Manzoni. Pensare attraverso il suono* (Milan, Mudima, 2016)—and the fourth is in French—*Écrits* (Paris, Basalte, 2006). His writings can be understood in terms of two dominant themes.

The first is that of musical *ratio* since the Renaissance. There is Monteverdi as the first universal musician, a contemporary of the birth of modern science; Haydn, master of the Enlightenment addressing the citizen of the late eighteenth century and then the bourgeois of the early nineteenth century; Mozart, blending the craftsmanship of the classical age in the daily exercise of prolific writing with an awareness of the artist's freedom which he inaugurated; Beethoven, marking music in our faculties of knowledge and judgment with "a language that, for the first time in musical history, seeks to address everybody, fleeing the putrescent atmosphere of the Court's salons and the palaces of the high nobility, and making place, in music, for other sentiments, not only accessible to the man of the street, but also sublimated by a severe and uncompromising artistic self-consciousness" (*Écrits*, p. 30); Mahler and Ives, in which relics of tradition, respectively Viennese and American, rub shoulders, in a critical manner, with the varied materials of popular origin (marches, brass bands, songs and refrains, etc.); Varèse who ceaselessly sought the unheard through the logic of physics and acoustics, building the structural and existential reasons of each new work. This genealogy extends to Manzoni's friends Bruno Maderna and Luigi Nono.

The peak of this history is unquestionably Schoenberg. Manzoni devotes several articles to the composer, a book (*A. Schoenberg, l'uomo, l'opera, i testi musicati*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1975) in which he takes the reader through the stages of the composer's existence, discussing multiple aspects of cultural life (music, painting, literature, theology, politics, philosophy...), as well as the translations *Manuale di armonia* (Milan, Il Saggiatore, 1963), *Funzioni strutturali dell'armonia* (Milan, Il Saggiatore, 1967), *Elementi di composizione musicale* (Milan, Suvini Zerboni, 1969), *Esercizi preliminary di contrappunto* (Milan, Suvini Zerboni, 1970), and the collection of articles *Analisi e pratica musicale* (Turin, Einaudi, 1974). For Manzoni, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire mirrored the exhaustion of tonality and the suspension of its forces of attraction, leading to the emancipation of dissonance and the move to freedom. With the row, Schoenberg aspired to a new, streamlined order. In the article "Social and Economic Considerations" (1931), Manzoni recalls that Schoenberg, while not inclined to communism, nevertheless evokes mechanization, condemns the assembly line, and affirms the need for a better organization of work. But the composer's political discourse is less important than the political interpretation of his music, which can be aligned behind those who fight: "Here lies Schoenberg's ethical strength, his awareness of having to work *hic et nunc*, refusing to escape into mystical subjectivism by confronting, in the first person, the commitment to live as an individual within a community of men with whom he shares concrete fears and hopes." (*A. Schoenberg*, p. 88)

Although he wrote the preface to the Italian edition of Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1980, he had exchanged with Mann in the early 1950s), and articles on Goethe, Hölderlin, Artaud, Canetti, and Bachmann, Manzoni interprets

Schoenbergian rationality with Adorno, on whom he extensively commented and translated (*Dissonanze*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1959; *Filosofia della musica moderna*, Turin, Einaudi, 1959; *Mahler*, Turin, Einaudi, 1966; *Il fido maestro sostituto*, Turin, Einaudi, 1969; *Introduzione alla sociologia della musica*, Turin, Einaudi, 1971; as well as several essays). According to Manzoni, by adopting dialectical tools in the analysis of the social and sociological implications of music, Adorno marks Western art with the seal of the negative. Faced with capitalism and consumer society, the musical work must be resolutely modern, always oppositional, calling for meditation on its ends and on the world in general. Knowledge of Adorno's texts brought about developments in Italian criticism which had long been dominated by a positivist or idealist tradition that cultivated a literary and even impressionist reading of music. A conceptual revolution, Adorno's thought as mediated by Manzoni would in turn influence many Italian composers including Aldo Clementi, Franco Donatoni, and Sylvano Bussotti.

The second dominant theme of Manzoni's writings, apart from the texts and interviews about his own music, focuses on aspects of composition. Manzoni approaches sound, silence, material, micro-intervals, the spatialization of sources, the writing of time, notation, quotation (literal or elaborate, as the construction of material), and the libretto, explaining the choices of all of the texts he set to music in *Parole per musica* (Palermo, L'Epos, 2007). Manzoni exalts in a multiplicity of poetics and languages which results not only from a suspension of teleology or a linearity of history, but also from an increased knowledge of music from around the world, from a broadening of the geographical zone beyond Europe, including a strict deconstruction of Western musical ratios.

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