

Sciarrino, Salvatore (1947-): Overview of his Writings

Salvatore Sciarrino (Palermo, 1947-) progressively constituted a body of writings over his career as a composer. Initially limited to short program notes accompanying his works from the beginning of the 1960s, it was only toward the end of the 1970s, and more regularly in the 1980s that his practice of writing—program notes, lectures, aesthetic essays, autobiographies, correspondence, teaching notes, notebooks, linter notes—intensified and came to represent a consequential part of his poetics.

The thirty or so manuscript notebooks kept in the archives of the Sciarrino Collection at the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel contain a considerable number of annotations, sketches, and texts that are sometimes taken up and worked out in different notebooks. A typical example of Sciarrino's practice of rewriting—down to changing the placement of a comma—is his [*Origine delle idee sottili*](#) (1984) [*Origine des idées subtiles. Réflexions sur la composition*, translated by Laurent Feneyrou and Grazia Giacco in 2012], conceived in the long process of transcribing the successive versions of his classes. In the Postface of this edition (p. 65-69), the reader can follow the conception of this singular piece of writing. *Origine delle idee sottili* is one of the rare texts by Sciarrino to be organized in numbered paragraphs (there are twenty-three in total in [*Carte da suono*](#) and its French translation). This is a text that took shape from the faithful transcription of recordings made during a composition seminar. All of the sketches, grouped into about fifty paragraphs, were subjected by Sciarrino to a long process of rewriting and reworking in which he merged paragraphs and assembled excerpts, resulting in the final version in twenty-three points. This long text summarizes the composer's aesthetic approach: compositional problems, the artist's worries, listening, and the act of composing are among the core concepts that his writings develop. Beyond the assertion of his theoretical will, in all of his writings, Sciarrino offers his reflections on the nature of sound, the ecological space of listening, and the relationship between creation and transmission. One of the composer's principal concerns remains his participation in an ethical reflection on our relationship with the world. In an article published in the journal *Musica Domani* (2001), [*"La forza creativa dell'esperienza educativa"*](#) (The Creative Force of the Educational Experience), Sciarrino reaffirms his position as a composer sensitive to the importance of a teaching that is committed to communicating key, archetypal models (in music, in the arts, and even in the natural world), which in turn allow for a fecund proximity with the formal organization of sonorous material. [*Le Figure della musica*](#) published a few years earlier, in 1998, was based on the transversality of the criteria for organizing musical form (see below), addressing questions related to learning about musical form and what Sciarrino calls the "structures of perception" (Giacco, 2001; 2013).

Drawings or sketches (often figurative), diagrams of compositions in progress, fill the composer's personal diaries and offer visual counterpoint to his written words. These notebooks—Skizzenbücher, Paul Sacher Foundation (PSS), Basel—offer an important basis for research on Sciarrino's theoretical works, but they are not the only sources available. For nearly fifty years, Sciarrino has also produced an inexhaustible quantity of texts—prefaces, program notes, writings on artists, interviews, teaching notes, essays, libretti for musical theater (Giuliani, 1999). Sciarrino only progressively developed a desire to sum up his theoretical work, formalizing it late, in 2001, in the collection [*Carte da suono*](#). His writings can be grouped into three main categories: his writings on works, those of an aesthetic character, and writings on teaching (Giacco, 2013).

There are also a number of texts that remain unpublished, and this despite the fact that Sciarrino's writings from before 1980 also contain a theoretical aspect that would become stronger in his later texts. Among them, [*"Sonata da camera"*](#) (1971), from the program for the concert Nuova Consonanza, Rome, 31 October 1971; [*"Introduzione e Aria 'Ancora il duplice,'"*](#) program for a concert at the Biennale di Venezia, 29 October 1976; [*"Di una musica d'oggi"*](#), *Rassegna annuale di studi musicologici*, 33 (1979); [*"L'isola silenziosa,"*](#) program note for *Un'immagine di Arpocrate*, Donaueschinger Musiktage, 19 October 1979; [*"Flos florum ovvero Le Trasformazione della materia sonora,"*](#) *Spirali*, II (1980, p. 11-12).

Sciarrino's writings have accompanied him since his early career, even though they remained sparse between 1960 and 1970. It was only later, in 1998, that Sciarrino published the content of his seminars given in Milan and Rome between 1994 and 1995 in [*Le Figure della musica*](#) (Sciarrino, 1998), thereby offering readers the possibility to enter his theoretical and aesthetic world. Laid out in five parts around the processes of accumulation, multiplication, the "Little Bang," genetic transformations, and "window form," the book includes two CDs of audio excerpts and is richly illustrated, offering one of the best expressions of the Sicilian composer's musical poetics which are marked by a transdisciplinary approach. In *Le Figure della musica*, Sciarrino's written style is increasingly refined and characterized by the interweaving of associations between distant concepts, a learned but oral style with no footnotes and only rare bibliographical references. Sciarrino published [*an official collection of his writings from 1981 and 2001*](#) a few years later in 2001, from which he deliberately excluded his writings before 1980. In an article I cowrote with conductor Marco Angius (Giacco and Angius, 2013), "Les écrits de Salvatore Sciarrino (1981-2001)," we analyze the nature of the composer's writings and propose some hypotheses regarding his choice to exclude a large part of his early output for this collection in seven sections: Lessons; Theater notes; Program notes; Articles; Writings on artists, Notes; Opera libretti.

Over the years Sciarrino has forged a very refined and personal writing style in which he often mixes several subjects within a single text (I, you, we...). The composer opens the doors of his workshop in his writings, inviting us to sit at his composition table. Sometimes he takes a more pedagogical position and pushes the limits of our beliefs. Sciarrino's writings voluntarily employ a voice that exhorts us to question ourselves, to destabilize ourselves, and to be sensitive to the creative power of the artistic imagination.

Grazia Giacco

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Trans. Christopher Murray

Further Reading:

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- (2013b). *...un cielo notturno dalle bianche veloci nuvolette...* : Sciarrino et ses lieux d'écoute. Dans L. Feneyrou (dir.), *Silences de l'oracle. Autour de l'œuvre de Salvatore Sciarrino* (p. 19-25). Paris : Centre de Documentation de la Musique Contemporaine.

- (2013c). « Les écrits de Salvatore Sciarrino (1981-2001) » (co-écrit avec Marco Angius). Dans M. Duchesneau, V. Dufour et M.-H. Benoit-Otis (dir.), *Écrits de compositeurs : Une autorité en questions (XIX^e et XX^e siècles)* (p. 217-228). Paris : Vrin.

- (2008). Le théâtre musical de Salvatore Sciarrino, de *Vanitas* à *Macbeth*. Autour d'une dramaturgie intime. *Dissonance / Dissonanz* (102), 20-25.

- (2001). *La notion de « figure » chez Salvatore Sciarrino*. Paris : L'Harmattan, collection Univers Musical (176 p.).

- (2000). Entre l'espace et le temps. Les figures de Sciarrino / Zwischen Raum und Zeit - Zu den " Figuren " von Salvatore Sciarrino (trad. de P. Müller). *Dissonance /Dissonanz*, (65), 20-25.

Giuliani, R. (1999). *Salvatore Sciarrino. Catalogo delle opere. Musiche e scritti. Discografia. Nastrografia. Videografia. Bibliografia*. Milan : Ricordi.

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- (2001). La forza creativa dell'esperienza educativa. *Musica Domani*, (118), 30-32.

- (1998). *Le Figure della Musica. Da Beethoven a oggi*. Milan : Ricordi (avec deux Cds d'extraits audio).

- <http://salvatoresciarrino.eu/php/ita/bibliography.html>

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