

"A NEW BEGGAR'S OPERA"

Sparsely illuminated stage. Squalid surroundings, almost a smoky garret (please don't "tell" too much the story of the shabby garret - the audience should be free to read other meanings from that scenery).

The "beggars", some seated, either isolated or assembled in small groups, are standing motionless at various points of the stage. In the middle, but slightly tending towards its left side, a heap of trash a couple of meters high consisting of worthless material, broken furniture, musical instruments (a broken guitar, a bugle), lying one on another in desolate abandon.

One of the actors would approach the heap and start ransacking unwillingly the remains, trying to put together again parts of an instrument.

The first few sounds break the silence. Hearing this, his colleagues ^{begin to} start showing a faded spark of interest and ^{try to} even begin imitating him in order to kill the time and thus partially dissolve the thick layer of boredom that burdens them.

The game seems to be more and more entertaining; but together with that fresh discovery and the interest issued from the attempt of getting increasingly "present" sounds out of those improvised instruments, a vehement desire to possess takes place, producing at the same time a compulsory drive to prevail over the others.

There is the "better", the "harder-working", the cunning, the clever one, the one who tries ruling (= conducting) the others, etc. Finally - and very quickly indeed - the beggars end up contending for such miserable left-overs of a fallen musical civilization.

Their chaotic activity, increasingly violent, growing in total parallelism with an extremely intense musical climax, along with a phonic crescendo provokes also a disaster: the heap of rubbish, thoroughly plundered, under the impetuous

pressure of the strongest contestants crashes with a huge puff of dust (a sulphureous cloud maybe?...), provoking a short-circuit: black out.

After a short time, recovering from astonishment, a voice (belonging to the "Scrupulous" character) utters apathetically but with a slightly reproving tone: "... Short circuit!..."- Movements in the darkness. Someone lights a match: the "Virtuoso" is standing motionless. Questions. Short calls. The "Inventive" one, without saying a word, in a moment fixes the damage. Light.

After having dusted his impeccable tail-coat, the "Virtuoso" bows to the public then, with a hint of command, orders two attendants to push a shiny brand-new Steinway grand. Then he starts playing. The crystal-clear constellations of tones, issued from the golden age of serialism, pervade both the audience and the astonished bunch of improvised musicians, more "beggar" than ever in comparison, showing them how music to-day should sound like.

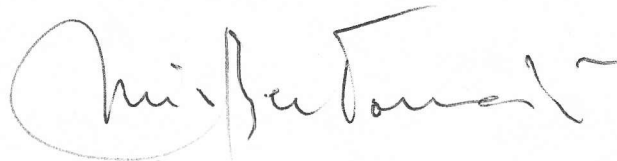
But curiosity is stronger than respect or fear. One after the other the beggars come closer to the piano and the most brave among them would even dare to play with such a new toy (= to prepare the piano strings). His example encourages the others. Gradually, to the Virtuoso's horror, "his" sounds do not correspond to the keys that the perfect action of his fingers is pressing frantically. Although he is not aware of the beggar's presence, the disruptive result of their action drives him crazy. Horrified by the unwanted "new" sounds, he would limit his activity to those keys that still sound "natural": aestetically speaking, the result of this would produce a reference to a new form of academicism, the use of the iterative patterns of Minimal Music of the sixties and seventies.

He is sweating. His make-up is dripping disastrously over his face and the starched breast of his shirt. His wig is hanging aside. His white tie is loose.

The beggars are triumphant now. The ^{inside} of the piano looks both like a hardware and a musical instruments store. All over the body, bunch^{es} of bow-hairs inserted between the strings and slid back-and-forth by vigorous action produce sustained sounds that transform the piano into a huge string apparatus. The strings that are still free are scratched, plucked, beaten and tortured in all possible ways and with all sorts of instruments. From the resonating body of the piano long lines, stretched over the stage and attached to the side walls, make the whole space resonate like a gigantic instrument itself.

The beggars begin feeling more confident. They are aware that their installation sounds "different" from any other music, but as acceptable. While they are playing, they would listen to each other more carefully: their action, no longer a negative one, allows them to create an extremely subtle counterpoint, a complex texture of microtonal frequencies relying upon nuances more than on gross contrasts.

The Virtuoso is sacked, his game is over. Like the empty dummy of himself, he is seated in a corner now - beggar among others: they don't admire him any more, they just ignore him. After having finished their piece quietly, as quietly they leave him alone.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Chris Burt". The signature is written in dark ink and is centered at the bottom of the page.