



Cristiano Porqueddu

REVIEW

Live at Carnegie Hall (New York)

October 7, 2022

On Friday, 7 October 2022, Sardinian based guitarist Cristiano Porqueddu performed a concert at Carnegie Hall in honor of the renowned Italian composer Angelo Gilardino (1941-2022) who passed away in January. Guitarists throughout the world will not be surprised at this gesture as both the performer and composer were well acquainted and Porqueddu's discography demonstrates his deep dedication to contemporary music, and in particular to Gilardino's music. American guitarists will be familiar with Gilardino's music, perhaps through the Guitar Foundation of America, which bestowed on him a prestigious Artistic Achievement Award in 2009, and Porqueddu's recent concert was both a reflection on Gilardino's important contributions to the guitar and to the performers exceptional abilities to interpret it.

Gilardino occupies a central place in the pantheon of 20th – 21st century guitar composers. His exclusive dedication to the guitar follows in the traditions of Chopin and the piano or Mahler and the symphony. Gilardino's reputation, and his significance, cannot be reduced to a singularity and similar to the aforementioned strong antecedents he manifested multiplicities throughout his diverse yet focused *oeuvre*. Each new work revealed previously undiscovered poeticisms and expanded the expressive vocabulary for the guitar. But if one had to identify a particular signature

feature of Gilardino's music it would almost certainly be counterpoint. Even the term counterpoint: *punctus contra punctum* ("point against point"), or in this particular case – note against note, cannot accurately describe the effects he achieved. Perhaps the more generic term polyphony might better describe the textures. In the 20th century new versions of polyphony were developed and consequently new definitions followed. For example, the complex webs of heterophony found in the music of Michael Tippett (Fourth and Fifth String Quartets, Triple Concerto, and in the opera *New Year*), derived from examples found in both Claude Debussy and in the ancient practices heard in gamelan music, or the micropolyphonie of György Ligeti (*Atmospheres*, and in the Books of Piano Etudes). Gilardino's polyphony is disciplined yet full of color, tinted carefully and deliberately by a string or position change. Gilardino was a capable guitarist himself and he was keenly aware of the comparatively limited range and capacities of the instrument. But this did not inhibit his inventiveness. His music could be very challenging but it was never outside the realm of possibility. That he continued to discover new textural combinations was his most exceptional ability and the consistency in which he accomplished it was truly profound.

Porqueddu's recital in Gilardino's honor began with Roberto Piana's five movement *Ritratti di Sardegna* based on five Italian

artists: Giuseppe Biasi (painter), Gavino Gabriel (composer and ethnomusicologist), Lao Silesu (composer), Annunzio Cervi (poet), and Grazia Deledda (novelist). These character pieces provided the perfect opportunity for Porqueddu to showcase the many sides of his seemingly limitless ability to move effortlessly through contrasting textures. These figures and this music are probably too little known in America and yet one of Porqueddu's most impressive capacities is to make the unfamiliar seem and sound so easily recognizable. In addition to the changes in character, Porqueddu's subtle changes in tone invited us into the intimate realm of traditional guitar playing that began with Segovia and Bream. Porqueddu is a most worthy successor of these master artists. I would be hard pressed to choose a favorite amongst the set because another aspect of Porqueddu's unique talents is to lead us from the first note to the last; to hear not a collection of individual movements compiled into a larger set but as an integrated group.

The second work on the first half was a virtual exhibition in tone painting. Kevin Swierkosz-Lenart's three movement *Suite omaggio a Giuseppe Biasi* depicts three paintings by the Sardinian artist. The first movement Piana's suite allowed for a nice connection between these two works. The composer describes the relationship of the painting to the instrument as: "the sound of the guitar works both as an evocative and allusive instrument, which continuously balances between Sardinian island's distinctive nature and mythical roots, where a universal beauty and knowledge resonate." The beauty of the music is immediately apparent in the recit-like opening of the first movement, Ballo, which begins at precisely the mid-point of the guitar: the octave B on the second string

(Porqueddu follows Gilardino's careful and deliberate methods by providing the perfect fingerings that lend Swierkosz-Lenart's music an added layer of poetry). The line that descends from it is both distinctly melodic and richly harmonic. Porqueddu excels at maintaining the independence of every line, however dense the textures, but his ability to bring out the separate voices implied in a compound line is unlike any other. As the line divides Porqueddu attends to every detail so that even the untrained ear can easily follow. The two movements that follow: Battesimo and Cavalieri Arabi, demonstrate Swierkosz-Lenart's elegant compositional craft that invokes original inventions inspired by the extra-musical allusions provided by the paintings.

Gilardino's five movement *Sardegna* (2019) opened the second half of the program. The composer described the music as an "evocation". It "tries to translate in music impression, feelings and memories" Gilardino had in his stays in Sardinia and functions as "a personal mirror of a world whose history, culture, tradition and landscape offer to the observer an immense spectacle, not to be romantically 'described', but elaborated in the deep of one's soul." I had the distinct pleasure of meeting Mr. Gilardino when he was given an Artistic Achievement Award in 2009 by the GFA. I enjoyed an extensive correspondence with him and even visited at his home in Vercelli. I found him to be one of the most 'soulful' composers I have ever known and the evocation of *his* spirit and the extension his rich legacy as a creative artist is now supremely represented by Cristiano Porqueddu. The styles and ideas in the music are unmistakably Gilardino's. Lateness has become of topic of tremendous interest in this post-historical era and what continues

to impress me about this particular phase of Gilardino's music, in addition to the polyphony, is his sense of form and proportion. Each idea is repeated, altered, or developed in perfect accordance to its potential. This music is more than just commissioned by and dedicated to Porqueddu. He is an essential component to these impressions; a medium by which these evocations require to fully embody.

Bach, Beethoven and Brahms represent the three B's in the classical canon. The Cuban composer Leo Brouwer certainly occupies ones of these positions in the canon of 20th century guitar music. His *Diálogo del Olivo y el Nuraga* closed the program and made for a most appropriate conclusion. Most guitarists will be all too familiar with Brouwer's music and this piece conforms to his recognizable style and confirms his status as one of the most widely celebrated contemporary composers for the guitar. Brouwer's music fits so comfortably on the guitar that many guitarists play only the figuration and miss the motivic interplay of the internal parts, reducing it to a mere technical display, turning it into a concert etude. Only a performer with the technical command that Porqueddu possesses could have performed *Diálogo* with such finesse. I would even risk expressing that his performance surpassed his recording of it as it gave a presence to the piece that can only be witnessed as an experience.

- Thomas Schuttenhelm, Oct 30, 2022

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