

ANTONELLO MAIO IN CONCERT

By Michele Merenda

The premises of the Italian Cultural Institute hosted, on Thursday 8th March, a classic music concert by the pianist Antonello Maio. The event was organised by the Italian composer Dimitri Scarlato by whom Maio played one piece titled *Disease*. Born in Calabria but "adopted" by Rome, Antonello grew musically in Switzerland and in France, after graduating at the conservatory in 1993. Beyond participating at numerous musical festivals, the talented 35-year-old had the honour to play with the Ennio Morricone Orchestra during its Japanese tournée in 2005.

From this evening's schedule we can gather that, apart from the interest for the Russian and Italian composers of the first period of XX century, he is clearly focused on the execution of contemporary classic music.

The London one was an excellent test-bed. Maybe, as he admitted at the end, he was a little contracted at the beginning; a physical and emotional contraction that reached its top during the performance of the *Sonata Op. 35* by Chopin. But this composer, for his subtle interpretative nuances, has always been a hardcase. Perhaps, Rubinstein remains his only great performer.

After that, stop with the critics. The falls of notes by Prokofiev and Scriabin were performed with animosity and passion. The audience listened in religious silence and afterwards paid great compliments to Maestro Maio with a lot of claps.

Antonello, you are very interested to contemporary classic music. Let's start with a wicked question: contemporary composers, often, focus their attention on an avantgardistic research: do you not think that that, especially if we compare it with the big of the past, goes against the emotional factor?

It is true that an avantgardistic attitude takes away from the emotionalism. It has not been the case with the tracks of this evening, but anyhow this research on the technical structure of the piece, which precludes to itself many other important things, is typical of some contemporary music; I toiled with same pieces. It happened to me to use my hands improperly for a pianist, like

plucking directly the chords of a piano. Even though, with the new experimentations, this is something of obsolete. I repeat myself, it is typical of the avantgardistic composers to turn themselves away from particular emotions. They are only interested in expressing what they are feeling in a particular moment and have not any interest in what the others think. The worst is for the listeners. However, 20 years ago they experimented much more and in a more desecrating way.

Do you think the situation you describe is a problem of all contemporary art?

I am not sure. You know, I am a pianist and I search for communicating something to the listeners. I think that I am an artist and I see art, prevalently, in a communicative way. If we remain in the visual ambit, there are not really big problems. They start off when energy becomes sound and there are not any images to which we can refer to. Well, I think that this is the tougher hurdle to clear, the one that really creates major problems.

This evening you played some scores by Chopin which have transuded great emotions. Do you think that from the music of this composer we can infer his terrible pain of love?

Well, his life was not easy at all. He did not feel returned, had healthy problems... and he had a lot of fears. The biggest, incredible to tell, was to play in front of an audience. He was a perfectionist and his concerts, in a year, were three or four and always sold out. Usually, he started with some pieces by Bach. Few people know that Chopin used to write his music in one go, and he was able to do that as he transferred to the instrument everything he had inside. The drama was, later, to step back and retrieve exactly what he conceived before and, perhaps, to make an appropriate "filing job".

This evening you played a wonderful encore, a piece by Bach. This baroque composer is respected and studied by all the musicians: from the classic ones, through the jazz ones to end with the heavy metal ones. Why?

The reason is inside the structure of the compositions by Bach. His was a composition process totally timeless. A style based on the

counterpoint is something of absolute. There are some sound ways that, with their particular connections, sound as being out-of-history, they seem as being in no époque... and inside all at the same time. That is why many musicians drown from Bach: anyone can extrapolate the part which is better for his/her style, and it will be something of absolutely unique.

Do you listen to other music genres?

I listen to all the music genres. I like jazz very much. I love pianists such as Thelonious Monk, Michael Petrucciani and Keith Jarrett.

The latter has collaborated with Ennio Morricone. Please tell us about your experience with this famous Italian composer.

He is a clear-headed person with a big talent. As big as his severity. Morricone expects the maximum seriousness, concentration and precision, not just in concerts but in rehearsals, too. He is a great connoisseur of Music. Once he showed me that in one of his compositions he had inserted a little piece extrapolated from Bach. For him, the true musician is whom who can take something from others, develop and make it own.

Excuse me, but this way do we not risk falling into mystification?

(after a short pause) Maybe... I hope not! (general laughter).

At this point Antonello was "overbearingly" reclaimed from the guests who want to talk to him. It would have been nice to continue talking with such a competent and respectable person, but we preferred letting him savour his deserved moment of glory.