

by Marino Mora

Even the listener approaching for the very first time the extremely special music signed by Michael Nyman, needs only a few moments of contemplation to reach the composer's same wavelength, as if attracted by a vortex of powerful beauty. The sound stands out because of the path it chooses: it is direct, limpid, its line is extremely precise, its flavour strong, and it flows over essential phraseological structures. Its gait, unusual in its rhythmic variations, is coherent and essential in its melodic structure. Nyman points directly to the heart of those who listen, enchanting their imagination. «My music», he explains, «is power, passion, pulse and pain... my sounds are born because of a mortal anguish, a musical anguish which is very personal... My compositions often inspire onirical, profound and unconscious images». For this music, "around" this music, Nyman has created his Michael Nyman Band, an extraordinary orchestra (or also known as the «noisiest street acoustic band ») that puts together strings, winds and piano. It presents rich timbric scenarios and a limpid, harsh sound, that could be defined "typically English". During the performance we shall be surprised by the sound, made up of a dense and magmatic fabric, a piroclastic group of striking, powerful, insinuating melodies with a strong and original rhythmical character. The listener will be nearly unaware, of the musical rapture in which he will be snatched. Music will capture him, will inebriate him while phrases repeat and intertwine as if they were recalling the clean cut and airy lines of Baroque music (one of the passions of Nyman as musicologist). As they condense one into the other, they create magnificent harmonic and melodic progressions. During their gait they grow and become more important, creating true cathedrals of sound, while harmony becomes transparent in the horizon, bodiless as a retractable shadow. The stylistic amalgam created is an successful example of synthesis between classicism and modern composition; jazz, pop, folk and minimalism put together. The collaboration with the English director Peter Greenaway has brought Nyman, in the field of soundtracks, to an historical union with extraordinary results. In the film *The Draughtman's Contract* (1982), music flows limpid and is pervaded by a sense of magic and arcane. In

Sheperds

Chasing Sheep Is Best Left To

, we are conquered by the rhythmical clearness of the main theme, that affirms its own unique form in the never-ending game of repetition in sequence. In

Queen of the Night

the gait of winds and strings creates the principal nucleus of the sound in the repetitive flow of harmonic progression. In the end, it creates an hypnotic effect and the listener loses his sense of reality in polling and screeching sounds. The bright mechanic musicality of

An Eye for Optycal Theory

illuminates the scene as a penetrating ray of light, then we remain enchanted by the power of sound, by the beauty of high notes and of Baroque splendour in

Prospero's Magic

from the soundtrack of

Prospero's Books

(1991). Again from

Prospero's Books

, a movie dense of enchanted and raving themes, we cite the boiling and overwhelming

Prospero's Curse

, the emotionally stirring Miranda, the wide, calm, bucolic

Yellow Cornfields

. But now we shall get to know one of the most important masterpieces of Nyman, the composition Memorial, used – after its first edition – also in the soundtrack of the movie

The Cook, the Thief, his wife & her Lover

, (1989): it was originally written with a touching, clean, emotionally awakening sound in memory of the dramatic events of Heysel Stadium in 1985. It is in fact a true Requiem, with its hammering introduction with palpitating characters and the main theme, sombre and circular, of epic accents, that proceeds drawing a solemn line, pushed on heavily by the obstinate insistence of low notes. About this composition Nyman said: «

Memorial

is an extremely special composition for me, very personal... a way to remember the absurd tragedy of that night... I consider Requiem masses as one of the highest expressions of music in relation to death during the past centuries...». Is it possible not to mention, looking at the remaining compositions, the soundtrack of Jane Campion's masterpiece,

The Piano

(1993), with the sweet ballad

The heart asks the pleasure first

, in which the piano draws delicate melodies inside the magical game of shining chords? Or again the pearly, almost Impressionistic B

ig My Secret

and the rhythmical

Silver Fingered Fling

? Besides soundtracks, another of composer Nyman's passions has always been analyzing the style of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Mozart 252

is the result of a research and elaboration of earlier works by Nyman inspired by the great Salzburgian composer. These works have been put together and designed to celebrate the 250th

anniversary of the birth of Mozart in 2006. They are entirely arranged for orchestra, thanks to a Bbc request in 2006. Two main bodies of inspiration are presented in

Mozart 252

. The first is the soundtrack to the movie

Drowning by Numbers

(1988) by Peter Greenaway, an exploration of rhythmic, melodic and harmonic qualities that Nyman found extremely attractive in the slow movement of

Sinfonia Concertante for violin and viola K. 364

. Greenaway had strictly wanted the soundtrack to derive entirely from this score. The second is made up of the songs and duets of Letters,

Riddles and Writs

(1991), a Bbc Tv film which marked the 200th

th

anniversary of Mozart's death. In the end the result is extraordinary: the production, two years

after the anniversary, of the Cd

Mozart 252

, rich in musical gems with extremely captivating titles such as

In Re Don Giovanni

and

Revisiting The Don

. Which music by Mozart has Nyman selected for his elaboration? Mozart appears to be modified by a filter of sheer rhythmical accents that Nyman imposes. These compositions are brilliant, rich in counterpoint, with a precise role given to each instrument, melody is transparent, the orchestration limpid, rational, mental, using the most coherent minimalistic technique.

Structures are proposed again and again and developed in this repetition, as appears in

In Re Don Giovanni

, the concrete elaboration of

Aria del Catalogo

, part of the popular opera by Mozart. It gives us, in Nyman's brilliant version, traits that Mozart probably would have liked: the characteristic of being uncatchable, the repetition of loving acts, of lightness, of extreme vacuity. These traits are very well evidenced by Nyman's mechanic and assertive reinterpretation.