

About *After The Future*

The history books mostly claim that the so-called emancipation of dissonance in music happened in several places, roughly around the same time, during events now shrouded in myths. In Paris, shocked audiences allegedly rioted during the premiere of Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* on May 29, 1913. In Vienna, during the slightly earlier "Skandalkonzert" of March 13, 1913 conducted by Arnold Schoenberg (which featured his own music and that of other composers who would later be lumped together as the Second Viennese School), operetta composer Oscar Straus is purported to have claimed that the sound of the concert organizer slapping the face of a rowdy audience member was the most musical sound of the evening. More enlightened historians acknowledge that this emancipation had already happened nearly a decade earlier in pieces that American insurance salesman Charles Ives was composing after work, but most of this music would not be heard until decades later. And in Mexico, where Julián Carrillo began promulgating his theory of a 13th sound beyond the 12 pitches of equal temperament as early as 1895 (although he didn't start composing with an expanded range of intervals until the early 1920s).

Contemporaneous with all these other attempts to make a break with the past and embark on a totally new world of sound was an even more radical approach. In 1913 (that year again), the Italian futurist Luigi Russolo, who up to that point had been a painter, wrote a manifesto called *The Art of Noises* in which he outlined and thereafter devoted himself to musical composition for instruments of his own design, which he called "intonarumori" (noise intoners). All that survives of his music are the first two pages from the score of his contemporaneous composition *Risveglio di una città* for an orchestra of 16 intonarumori. During the Second World War, a bomb destroyed every one of the instruments he created, though luckily photos survive as well as instructions for building them. As a result, there have been several attempts to recreate these intonarumori, largely to perform the less than half-minute fragment of Russolo's music. But the Italian-born composer/pianist/conductor/musicologist Luciano Chessa (a friend who gave the west coast premiere of my *Palindrome* for solo piano) has taken this revival further than anyone else. Chessa not only rebuilt all of the intonarumori and performed Russolo's fragment, but has also composed original works for them as well as commissioned and conducted numerous works from other composers expressly created for this extraordinary ensemble. Hearing Chessa conduct a live concert of some of these compositions at New York's Town Hall over a decade ago completely blew my mind. I told him at the time that if he ever considered doing subsequent concerts and commissioning additional works for these instruments I'd love to attempt to come up with something for them. So when he called me in mid-September 2021 to ask if I would be interested in writing a piece for the intonarumori, but I'd need to have it ready in less than a month's time for a performance in late October, I jumped at the offer.

Then came the hard part: what to write? Although the intonarumori were designed to represent the sounds of a future music, now, more than one hundred years later, these instruments are relics of a past that contemplated a future that never quite happened. So what happens after such a future? While all these instruments were intentionally designed to subvert any possible conventional "musical" sonorities and instead replicate the industrial noises of modern life, in the century since they were first conceived, music has embraced all of these noises and so much more. So, in creating *After The Future*, I was instead hoping to showcase the inherent musicality of each of the various instruments in the intonarumori orchestra--the tricklers, howlers, cracklers, hisser, buzzer, roarers, rumblers, and scrapers.

I wanted each one to have a chance to sing and to be heard. So I attempted to create something for these instruments like what Béla Bartók and Benjamin Britten had done for the standard orchestra instruments in their Concerto for Orchestra and *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* (two pieces that didn't yet exist when Russolo first built these instruments). Each of the intonarumori has its own magic and when they blend in various combinations with each other, other forms of magic arise.

And then there is silence, something that took me a long time to embrace in my own music, but which has become more and more a part of my vocabulary. In my 2020 orchestral composition *Already Yesterday or Still Tomorrow*, there are many sudden long silences, creating a sonic phenomenon which I call a "loud silence." Even longer silences occur in *After The Future*. Are they supposed to be a reprieve from all the noise? Or do they perhaps allow us to listen to the music in other noises all around us as John Cage taught us to do nearly sixty years ago? And what do we hear when there is enough time given to all of these sounds for us to deeply listen each to them, as Pauline Oliveros taught us to do shortly thereafter? *After The Future* is designed to create such a listening space, as well as to somehow evoke--in so far as such a musically impossible thing is possible--a world that is beyond time, which is, after all, the only thing there could be *after* the future.

Much has changed since the intonarumori were first conceived, but indeed much has also changed since that 2009 Town Hall Concert when I first heard these instruments in live performance and dreamt one day of composing something for them. We have all lived through a truly horrific and unprecedented couple of years: a global pandemic that is still with us; a heightened awareness of many social injustices that is a terrible reminder of how powerless most of us are; and an overdue reckoning with the fragility of the planet we all live on which many people are still not willing to acknowledge. It was not lost on me while composing this music that in this strange malaise we are living through the present tense often feels like it is somehow occurring after the future. That, as well as a more personal annoying reality. During the course of the last few months--as a result of a huge water leak in the apartment I live in--demolition crews have been banging on walls to chip away damaged sections and, in between their visits, industrial fans and dehumidifiers have blown incessantly to dry the areas of the walls that had been deemed salvageable. The only thing that has kept me from going completely insane has been to hear it all as music.

After The Future received its world premiere on October 20, 2021 as part of the Performa 2021 Biennial in a performance by The Orchestra of Futurist Noise Intoners conducted by Luciano Chessa at the site of a former Topshop near Rockefeller Center in New York City which was streamed worldwide online.

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