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## Adriano at 60

An Interview by Ian Lace

*This month, on July 10th, 2004, the conductor, composer musicologist, Adriano, celebrates his 60th birthday. He has many strings to his bow. He researches, edits, arranges, conducts and records a very broad range of Romantic classical music mostly by little known composers. He is probably best known as a keen champion of the Italian composer Ottorino Respighi but he has also recorded many albums of film music notably by French composers such as Georges Auric and Arthur Honegger. MusicWeb's editor, Rob Barnett recently extensively interviewed Adriano. A further interview for the U.S. magazine, Fanfare can also be read in their November/December 1998 edition. This latest interview is meant to be a 60th birthday updating of those interviews:*

*I understand that you are no longer recording for Marco Polo but I believe you are quite happy since you began recording for Sterling?*

Yes, I am now working for the Swedish recording company, Sterling with great satisfaction. Its owner, Bo Hyttner, had wanted me to record on his label even while I was still bound to Marco Polo. Bo has become a very good friend of mine. For me, he is the "dream recording boss", not only because he is a very sensitive man, but also because he is a committed promoter of unknown Romantic repertoire and finally because he really likes me as a person and appreciates me as an artist. He is a passionate music lover, and a friendly and spontaneous person. He will not hesitate to call me out of the blue, even while cruising or on holiday, to tell me that he is just re-listening to one of my recordings, and to observe that he finds it conducted beautifully and that he has been touched to his heart. At other times he will ask me about projects I am researching or if I know about this or that unknown composer. Since 2002, I have been able to record five CDs for Sterling; the sixth will be completed this summer. I can only conduct a limited repertoire for Sterling. This means, unfortunately, no film music, however, at last I have been able to realise a few of those projects that had been rejected by Marco Polo over the previous decade including the building up of a series of recordings of music by Romantic and post-Romantic Swiss composers, a series which has been well-received everywhere. Music by more composers of the same period from Austria and Germany will follow.

For the Swiss repertoire I have fortunately found sponsors here in Switzerland, but the begging around often consumes more time than the time needed to study the scores! For the Pierre Maurice and Emile Jaques-Dalcroze discs it is probable that I could have clinched even more generous sponsorship because the composer's heirs could raise funds from their own sources. As far as Jaques-Dalcroze is concerned, thanks to the joint support of the Dalcroze Institute and the city of Geneva, I will be able to record this composer's complete orchestral works on five CDs, a realisation of one of my most cherished dreams. Just a couple of weeks ago I received an invitation from a smaller American label (the proprietor seems to be another sincere music lover and a fan of mine) to record more unknown repertoire. For Sterling I will certainly try to continue

recording Fritz Brun's Symphonies (there are 10 in total). Brun was a Swiss composer who had a great affinity with Wilhelm Furtwängler, a musical style in which I also feel very much at home.

*But what about your Respighi recording ambitions?*

I had proposed both Respighi's operas "Marie Victoire" and "La campana sommersa" to Marco Polo long ago, but there was no chance of recording them since they involved two CDs each and major vocal forces. Regrettably Marco Polo also considered that these works were "too obscure". Fortunately, these two Respighi operas have now been performed and recorded: "La campana's" live CD was released very recently by the Accord label. "Marie Victoire" was beautifully staged at the Rome Opera in January (2004) and broadcast on various stations. I felt saddened though that the producers credited themselves with having rediscovered this work. The truth is that I had known it and struggled for it over ten years ago and I had convinced Elsa Respighi of its worth and persuaded her that she should give the score over to Ricordi. In my Respighi exhibition at the Lucerne Festival of 1979, the manuscript of "Marie Victoire" figured among its treasures. Sadly, my own Respighi series on Marc Polo was terminated after six CDs. It was claimed that they did not sell well enough. But I am delighted that other labels, like Chandos, continue to record Respighi, engaging splendid artists, great orchestras and superb sound engineers.

*What about your own compositions. Will we have the chance to hear any – will you be recording some?*

In this year of my 60th birthday, I hoped that it could be eventually possible to make a recording of my three latest orchestral works: two "Concertinos" for Celesta and Piano both with strings and the latter with strings and percussion, and the "Obscure Saraband" for organ, strings, timpani and tubular bells, together with some chamber pieces. I would have recorded them in Bratislava or in Moscow and had thought I would find some sponsorship here in Switzerland, a country with seemingly plenty of money and a reputation of being generous in promoting its home artists. In any case the orchestration of these works would not have required a big budget. We have two cultural institutes with considerable budgets for music sponsorship: Pro Helvetia and the Communauté de Travail. I first submitted my project to Pro Helvetia but they replied that they were not supporting CDs anymore which was strange because I knew they were not restricted in any way as to what they could support. For years, Pro Helvetia has suffered organisation crises and its main difficulty seems to be to define itself anew. At Pro Helvetia they seem unable to resolve their internal problems and we Swiss artists suffer accordingly. Communauté, another rich organisation that supports a CD portrait series of contemporary Swiss composers, among many projects, was equally discouraging. I was told that my musical style actually did not match the style of the Swiss composer's series. This saddened me because they even admitted they had not heard any of my compositions anyway. It seems to me you have to be a great international star to impress them!

*What compositions have you been working on recently?*

My latest completed work is the incidental music for a free and modernised stage adaptation of “The Invasion of the Body Snatchers”, performed by a Zurich theatre company of students. As usual, it’s a score conceived for a realistic instrumental ensemble (its suite could be performed in concert), but for budget reasons I recorded it with quite similar-sounding synthetic sounds. The score for last year’s production (a piece called “The Island”, based on themes taken from Robinson Crusoe and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”) was performed exceptionally by a live ensemble conducted by myself. This sort of performance will be repeated next year.

*And what about your chamber music?*

Yes, I have written some chamber pieces like a Wind Quintet and a Brass Quintet. This autumn I will start composing a piece for the great harpsichordist Jory Vinikour. It is a great honour that he has asked a piece of mine after having listened to my works. To complete my series of “Concertinos” with strings, I envisage that I will compose one for harpsichord and another for Ondes Martenot. One of my incidental suites on Russian themes, for a smaller ensemble, has even been performed in a matinée concert at the Zurich Opera, where, on another occasion, both my Mussorgsky adaptations were also performed. Other of my chamber works are based on earlier incidental suites and some of them are quite funny, nevertheless, I write them with the same engaged seriousness as writing concert pieces. Sketches of a Chamber Symphony and a Chamber Opera also lie in my drawer, but I reckon I will only find time for these after my 65th year, when I officially become a pensioner.

*Are there any other compositions of yours that you would like to mention?*

A: Among my various orchestrations and transcriptions, there are two cycles of songs by Mussorgsky (“Songs and Dances of Death” and “Sunless”), arranged for two different kinds of chamber groups), four cycles of songs by Respighi (also for various ensembles) and a small-orchestra version of a series of four-hand piano pieces by Respighi, which will be issued soon on the Italian label Inedita, conducted by Maestro Roberto Diem Tigani. There is also a string quartet adaptation of a cycle of songs by Hugo Wolf and Othmar Schoeck and, recently, a String sextet version of Brahms’ “Vier ernste Gesänge”.

*Finally what music do you like to listen to?*

I listen to many recordings. Since I collect them I am aware that one can learn more about music history and stylistics than studying at Conservatories. At present I am listen-

ing to a splendid CD reissue of Elvis Presley's masters of the 1950s and 1960s. For me, he is one of the 20th Century's vocal giants like Maria Callas, Ima Sumac and Edith Piaf. Let me also add Marilyn Monroe, even though she has not made such a great quantity of recordings.

*Following the above interview, Adriano sent me a copy of his stage music suite, The Body Snatchers, scored in eight short movements, for voices, percussion, keyboards and strings. Inspired by the film, the Invasion of the Body Snatchers it is quite clearly cinematic and the composer cleverly achieves a big cinematic sound from quite limited forces. The names of the movements are suggestive enough: Prelude, Neurosis, Symbiosis, Vision, Panic in the Tunnel, Survivor's Waltz, The Deed, and Finale. The influence of Bernard Herrmann, Franz Waxman and all the old Universal horror movies is obvious as well as Adriano's own original voice. Much is written and performed with tongue-firmly-in-cheek.*

*Ian Lace*