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Improvising with Scelsi: Building a Creative Performance Practice in Dialogue with Giacinto Scelsi's Artefacts



Introduction¹

A very private figure, ritually practicing meditation and yoga in his apartments in Rome, Giacinto Scelsi was a believer in reincarnation and claimed to be aware of the circumstances of some of his previous lives.² His autobiography, *Il sogno 101*,³ is shaped in the form of a conversation with his Devas, spiritual entities that he held responsible for the genesis of his musical – and poetic – body of works, and for the composition of his memoir. In the only interview that he ever granted, Scelsi described himself as “only an intermediary [...]”. The things arrive when needed, at the moment where it is necessary that they are heard or not.”⁴ Scelsi was an educated European aristocrat. His reminiscences are filled with anecdotes and descriptions of exclusive gatherings in the Côte d’Azur and the Swiss Alps, as well as adventures in India, and as the guest of the Emir of Oman.⁵ The uncommon blend of exotic Oriental beliefs and European values and education laid the foundations for his singular creative routine, which combined the use of contemporary recording technologies and experimental electric instruments, with ritualistic practice of inspirational-seeking meditation and trance-induced musical improvisation sessions.

Musical improvisation was at the core of Scelsi’s artistic practice. He described his role in the creative process as the instrument through which superior entities revealed the “music of the gods”⁶ to this world. His first function was to establish a contact with these higher forces, through the use of different techniques of meditation. Through the initiated connection with his Devas, Scelsi begun to improvise on his keyboard instrument, under the direct authority of these spiritual guides, creating works that were, in his opinion, unlikely

1. This article offers further developments on material presented in an earlier version and published in Alessandro SBORDONI and Antonio ROSTAGNO (ed.), *Free Improvisation: History and Perspectives*, Lucca, Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2018, pp. 281-290.

2. See Giacinto SCELSI, *Les anges sont ailleurs...*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2006, p. 70.

3. Giacinto SCELSI, *Il sogno 101*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2010.

4. SCELSI, *Les anges sont ailleurs...*, p. 69: “Je suis un intermédiaire seulement [...]. Les choses arrivent au moment voulu, au moment où c’est nécessaire qu’elles soient entendues ou pas.”

5. See SCELSI, *Les anges sont ailleurs...*, pp. 66-69.

6. SCELSI, *Il sogno 101*, p. 265: “la musique des dieux”.

to be devised with the tools of conventional composition. A recording machine, taping the whole performance, was the tool that enabled Scelsi to subsequently identify, and possibly elaborate in rudimentary post-production, the audio material he considered apt to be transcribed into musical scores and later allocated by assistants to one or more specific instruments. Scelsi's interest for the spontaneous creation of music was a persistent trait in his life, from an early age. This is documented in several hundred hours of homemade recordings and is the primary source of the vast majority of his works.⁷

For Scelsi, improvisation was also the foundation in which he developed his very close relationship with performers. Direct contact with the composer has been the only acknowledged approach to the interpretation of his music, hence forming a circle of elite-performers, recipients of an understanding "beyond the written score";⁸ this knowledge was conveyed through extensive sessions of improvisation, where Scelsi and his performers interacted and reached a common purpose through the process of improvisation. Most of the instrumentalists that collaborated with Scelsi identified themselves as musical creators,⁹ as their approach to music performance was rooted in improvisation even before their association with the Scelsian repertoire. They shared with Scelsi the understanding of improvisation as a creative tool, a way in which extemporaneous sonic phenomena occur. These sessions of collective improvisation allowed for a direct contact with Scelsi's original source of inspiration.

This extemporaneous approach to sounds, as understood through collective improvisations, was then directed towards the performance of Scelsian scores, with the composer allowing and encouraging a liberal approach to the written text. The cellist and composer Frances-Marie Uitti describes the way Scelsi challenged her, pushing her to "go further and further to get a certain feeling or a certain meditative quality", until the point where "you found yourself stretching the rhythms until they almost become something different than what was written".¹⁰ Similarly, singer Michiko Hirayama, who was one of the closest collaborators of Scelsi for over two decades, recounts the freedom that was granted to her interpretation: "I change always. [...] 'I wish to sing this note this way or I wish to sing this note changing to that note' and always he would say, 'If you feel it inside, it's OK'. Always he would give me OK".¹¹

The inability to be exposed directly through contact and interaction with Scelsi and his improvisational abilities is an undeniable difficulty for today's performers. Nevertheless, an extensive collection of Scelsian documents is accessible at the Fondazione Isabella Scelsi in Rome, offering the performer-researcher the opportunity to better understand and actively interact with Scelsi's creative routine. In particular, three types of sources have considerable significance for the performer: a vast collection of original audio tapes; a comprehensive archive of written transcriptions, as edited by his collaborators and the fully functioning musical instruments used by Scelsi in the course of his improvisations.

7. Scelsian recordings are available for consultation at the archive of the Fondazione Isabella Scelsi, Rome.

8. William COLANGELO, "The Composer-Performer Paradigm in Giacinto Scelsi's Solo Works", Doctoral Thesis, New York City, New York University, 1996, p. 12.

9. See COLANGELO, "The Composer-Performer Paradigm", pp. 45-58.

10. Quoted in COLANGELO, "The Composer-Performer Paradigm", p. 53.

11. Quoted in COLANGELO, "The Composer-Performer Paradigm", p. 49.

1. Scelsian Artefacts

1.1 The Tapes

The collection of Scelsian original audio recordings, archived at the Fondazione Isabella Scelsi in Rome, is comprised of more than seven hundred magnetic tapes of various lengths. These original tapes are currently undergoing a process of digitisation, in collaboration with the Discoteca di Stato (Italian National Sound Archives) under the direction of Nicola Bernardini.¹² Presently, about 365 tapes have been converted into a high-quality digital form (96 kHz, 24-bit) and are available for the listener. The content of these recordings is highly composite and encompass a wide range of other musical materials. Representing the main body of his creative improvisations, the tapes also include complete performances of his own works, documentation of sessions of rehearsals with performers, and recordings of classical, contemporary and ethnic music from radio broadcasts. According to Bernardini, "with all probability, Scelsi considered tapes as sketchpads where anything valuable could be recorded for future memory".¹³ And indeed, the exploration of Scelsi's audio notebook is a path into his sound world. The attempts to capture the perfect improvisation on tape are witnessed here, not only by the successful results – the selected performances that were chosen to be transcribed – but also by a substantial amount of discarded material that Scelsi did not consider worth transferring into notation.



Fig. 1: Revox G36. [<https://www.revox.com/en/classics/reel-to-reel-machines.html>, accessed 06/04/2020.]

12. See Nicola BERNARDINI, "Recovering Giacinto Scelsi's Tapes", in *Proceedings of the International Computer Music Conference (ICMC) 2007*, Copenhagen, International Computer Music Association, 2007, pp. 169-172.

13. BERNARDINI, "Recovering Giacinto Scelsi's Tapes", p. 170.

In addition, the tapes are proof of Scelsi's technical experiments with his own recordings. Scelsi owned – and was operating simultaneously – a set of two rec-and-play machines: Revox A77 and G36 (Figure 1). In his compositional practice, he extensively explored the possibility of creating a complex and multi-layered audio file; this result was achieved by superimposing single recordings through the process of playing back one track while simultaneously performing a second line and recording the overall result. The creation of works such as *Xnoybis*, *Quattro pezzi su una nota sola* and *Manto* can be associated with this process of analogic multi-tracking, which allowed Scelsi to experiment with microtones, exploring frequency differences and beating. The experimental potential of the Revox machines appear to have been exploited in other ways; Revox allowed for a recorded tape to be played back in a reverse mode – from end to beginning – and on a different speed ratio, hence altering the duration and the pitches of the original material. Recordings have been found where it is apparent that Scelsi made use of these possibilities to the extreme, morphing existing material into remarkably different forms, to be then incorporated into the next step of the creative act

Scelsian scholar and composer Friedrich Jaecker has provided the community of researchers and performers with a tool to navigate the vast amount of digitised audio material covering several hundreds of hours of recordings.¹⁴ Through his meticulous work of listening and analysing files, he compiled a detailed description of the contents of each tape and indexed all the source-materials of the published compositions. The process of identification of the audio material is still ongoing, but the quantity of documents already classified, provides sufficient support for a comprehensive exploration of the original improvisations and for a comparison between these audio documents and the resulting transcriptions, as redacted by his collaborators. The analysis of the recordings of various discarded attempts offers an understanding of what the composer and performer judged to be not in line with his purpose, whether that be a momentary lack of inspiration, the breaking of meditative focus or the stumbling of the musical flow over a perceivable stereotypical element. Familiarity with the raw material of Scelsian performances could offer various clues to the rationale behind the selection of certain improvisations over others. The investigation of these primary sources can provide the performer with an understanding of what Scelsi considered to be desirable in a performance, and what was instead consequently dismissed as not artistically worthy of a transcription. Above all, the comparison between the audio material that Scelsi eventually selected for transcription and the written score produced by his collaborators is a crucial experience for performers.

1.2 The Ondiola

After a first creative phase where the piano was the instrumental support for his creative inspirations, Scelsi's improvisations were produced by the means of a pioneering electronic instrument, the Ondiola,¹⁵ an ancestor of the modern synthesiser. Developed two decades

14. See Friedrich JAECKER, *Die Tonbände von Giacinto Scelsi*, Cologne, Giacinto Scelsis Tape Archive Privatdruck, 2018.

15. See Fabio CARBONI, "Abitare il suono: Giacinto Scelsi e l'ondiola", *i suoni, le onde...* 13 (2004), p. 14: The Ondiola is "an Italian re-branding of the clavioline, a portable keyboard invented in 1947 by the Frenchman Constant Martin. The name and basic structure of the Ondiola recall the Ondioline, an instrument similar to the Clavioline, made in the same year by [...] George Jenny, who developed this instrument in 1938." ("*una versione italiana del clavioline, una tastiera portatile inventata nel 1947 dal francese Constant Martin. L'ondiola richiama nel nome e nella struttura di base l'Ondioline, uno strumento del tutto simile al Clavioline, realizzato nello stesso anno [da] [...] George Jenny, che sviluppò questo strumento a partire dal 1938.*")



FIG. 2: Giacinto Scelsi's Ondiola. [Author's personal photo.]

after the invention of the Ondes Martenot, the Ondiola shares many similar constructive and performative traits with this earlier instrument, though presented in a more compact and portable frame. To the performer, the Ondiola resembles an interface structured like a piano keyboard, spanning over a range of three octaves – although an octave-transposer option extends the actual range to over five octaves. The simple sound quality of the instrument – a pure square wave – can be altered with a series of switches located below the keyboard, triggering rudimentary analogue filters. The performers can control the dynamics, by means of operating lever placed underneath the main frame of the instrument, using their left knee (Figure 2).

The Ondiola was equipped with tools for the modification of the pitch in two distinct ways. Firstly, a series of four switches in the front panel allows for the introduction of a vibrato-like effect that raises and lowers the frequency around the original pitch. Three of these switches control the speed of the vibrato, the fourth its amplitude. The combinatory possibilities of these four controllers result in an ample range of different qualities of vibrato. The accessibility of these buttons, placed just below the keyboard, allows the performer to operate fast modifications to the setup while performing, possibly without any interruption in the playing. In addition, two small wheels, housed in both sides of the instrument, modify the original pitch of the keys by raising or lowering the overall pitch by different intervals; the left one can alter the pitch by a major second, the right one by a quarter tone. Using these two knobs also means that a glissando can be produced and controlled – within the available range – with one hand, while holding the desired key with the other. The recorded tapes document the way these two pitch-control features were exhaustively investigated by Scelsi, and it is apparent that they contributed to the creation of several of his works. For an instrumentalist approaching the performance of the Scelsian opus, it is crucial to understand how vibrato and glissandi were not conceived as accessories to the performance, determined by the discretion of the interpreter, but as a crucial factor in the creation of the work; the knowledge of how specific amplitudes and speeds were conceived allows for a closer reproduction of the original sounds, bypassing the customary understanding of vibrato as an especially expressive tool of interpretation.

Another typical trait of the Ondiola is its quality as a monodic instrument. The technical and electrical construction of this early synthesizer does not allow for more than one key to be active at the same time. If two keys are held on the keyboard, only the highest one effectively produces sound while the lower pitch stays silent; once the highest key is released, the lower one starts to play; if any higher key is then pressed, the lower one is muted in favour of the higher one. This system of triggering sounds by pressing and by releasing the keys is radically different from the mechanics of a piano; it extends the digital possibilities of the improviser, granting his fingers an additional means to produce sounds and so enriching his gestures on the keyboard with a new range of actions. The distinctive possibilities of the Ondiola presented Scelsi with a new set of tools for his improvisations, and his physical interaction with this keyboard shows a different approach, compared with his previous experiments on the piano. The technical resources of the instrument appear to have affected Scelsi's performances and the introduction of the Ondiola can be recognised as one of the most important external elements that produced a strong artistic impact Scelsi's work.

The sonic and physical experience of playing and improvising on an Ondiola is a highly significant experience for today's performer of Scelsi. This direct and practical contact with the original instrument is a means to empirically understand and experience the physicality of the gestures that guided Scelsi into his extemporaneous process of creation, and to envisage the most effective adaptation of these tactile actions within the specific technical domains of their own musical instruments.

1.3 The Written Scores

It is a well-known fact that Scelsi did not notate his own scores and that various collaborators were involved in the process of transcribing the selected tapes.¹⁶ His indifference toward his published scores was openly declared in the first pages of his memoir: "There will be scores which will, unfortunately, more often than not be performed poorly. On the other hand, I should never have written them, they should have remained as they were, hidden. [...] To each his own truth."¹⁷ In Scelsi's output, "the score remains as a reminder",¹⁸ a mnemonic blueprint for re-enacting the extemporaneity of the original improvisation. Through a comparison of the scores with the recordings, we see that the written material indeed contains a detailed transcription of certain elements that exist within the original audio track as the indications of pitches and rhythms are accurate, and the definition of the dynamic profile is coherent with the source.

The assignment of the notated improvisation to a specific musical instrument was done at a later stage of the transcription, as it is apparent that the scores were initially not conceived for a specific instrument, and some of them received a different instrumental assignment over the course of their completion. An investigation of the draft and first

16. The complex and delicate interplay with his collaborators, as well as the artistic and philosophical implications of Scelsi's unusual *modus operandi*, have been thoroughly investigated in Sandro MARROCU, *Il Regista e il Demiurgo*, Doctoral Thesis, Rome, Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata, 2014.

17. Quoted in Frank MALLETT, "Il suono lontano: Conversazione con Giacinto Scelsi", in Pierre-Albert CASTANET and Nicola CISTERMINO (eds.), *Giacinto Scelsi: Viaggio al centro del suono*, La Spezia, Luna Editore, 2001, p. 22: "Rimarranno le partiture che saranno, sfortunatamente, eseguite male la maggior parte delle volte. D'altronde, non avrei mai dovuto scriverle, avrebbero dovuto rimanere com'erano, nascoste. [...] A ciascuno la sua verità."

18. Solange ANCONA, "Les Chants du Capricorne", in Pierre-Albert CASTANET (ed.), *Giacinto Scelsi Aujourd'hui*, Paris, Centre de Documentation de la Musique Contemporaine, 2008, p. 171: "La partitura rimane un sostegno mentale."

versions of the scores show that the instrumental attribution was a minor concern to Scelsi and that the process of fitting the transcription into the peculiar technique of a certain instrument was entrusted to his collaborators. Scelsi's indifference to the technical intricacies of musical instruments was experienced, together with the discomfort that arose from that indifference, by Uitti: "when I was first working on it, I thought 'it's not fair'. That was a bit my feeling, that's it not fair, it's much too hard because I had a cello and he had ten fingers on an organ to make that piece".¹⁹ Scelsi was "absolutely unconcerned"²⁰ about the technical limitations of the instrument, but for his collaborators, the need to frame the musical score within the borders of playability of a specific musical instrument was necessary to guarantee playability of the finished product. Hence, elements of specific instrumental techniques were introduced – such as double-stops, pizzicato and harmonics for string instruments, or the use of various kinds of mutes for the brass – in order to tailor the transcribed pitch and rhythmical structures to the possibilities of the instrument of choice. The adaptation was not directly overseen by Scelsi. The collaborators were required to adjust the original written material in accordance with their personal understanding of the expressive possibilities and technical resources of the designated instrument. For some transcribers, their perception of the technical potential of certain musical instruments did not include that of an experimental approach, resulting in a technical approach rooted in a traditional praxis of a late nineteenth-century performance style. The comparison between the improvisations and the published version of the same work allows us to recognise and identify the two creative individualities. Understanding the transcriber's knowledge of instrumentation displayed in the written score allows the performer to separate the late-romantic instrumental practice from the remarkably innovative musical intentions of Scelsi.

2. The Limitations of a Score-Based Approach: From Score-Based to a Process-Based Approach

The late discovery of Scelsi by the cultural institutions of contemporary music caused a widespread diffusion of his scores. Regrettably, the existence of an oral tradition, which is an essential guide for the interpretation of these scores, has not been disseminated to the same extent. Today's musicians are performing Scelsi's works without the possibility of receiving guidance on their interpretations by the composer himself and the approach to his music appears to be substantially score-based. This traditional trust in the written score as the one and only possible vehicle to carry the original and definitive idea of a sonic phenomenon – validated by the majority of the western repertoire – is, in Scelsi's case, neither sufficient nor appropriate.

Curiously enough, while the role and the function of the score have been questioned by several fields of musicological studies, within the community of performers – and, specifically, within the new music circles of interpreters – criticism towards the written component of music has not been widely explored.²¹ Concepts such as faithfulness to the

19. Quoted in COLANGELO, "The Composer-Performer Paradigm", p. 51.

20. Quoted in COLANGELO, "The Composer-Performer Paradigm", p. 53.

21. Criticism towards the dogmatic role of the written score in contemporary music performance has been raised in Ian PACE, "Hierarchies in New Music: Composers, Performers, and 'Works'", *Desiring Progress*. [<https://ianpace.wordpress.com/2013/09/29/hierarchies-in-new-music-composersperformers-and-works/>, accessed 25/11/2019;

score, respect for the composer's intentions and subordination of the performer/reproducer to the composer/creator are deeply embedded in players of classical and modern western music today. There are several reasons for the performer's acceptance of this subordinate position towards the scores; the very process of learning how to play music – that is, to read and reproduce sounds on one's instrument – requires correcting rhythmical mistakes, wrong notes or imperfect tuning in relation to the musical text which is the object of performance. This is considered as the quintessence of the composer's intentions. Performers search for their freedom of interpretation within the limitations that are engraved on their scores, exploring all the possibilities of the non-written, devising their own sound qualities, special techniques and personal approaches, always within the frame of the notated score. Within this hierarchical structure, "the identification of musical substance with what can be notated" entails that "anything attributable only to the performer is insubstantial" and that the "performer's work becomes a supplement to the composer's".²²

The study of Scelsian artefacts offers considerable interpretative insights related to specific works. By listening to tapes which resulted in published scores and understanding the instrumental strategies adopted by Scelsi, performers can increase understanding of a specific improvisation, deriving technical insights from Scelsi's initial gestures, and effectively conceive a performance closely related to the original tapes. However, by substituting the written score with the corresponding Scelsian improvised tapes, this approach is still subject to the limitations arising from the presence of a strong work-based concept. Therefore, the need for performers to remain faithful to this new representation of the work is still unquestioned and their function is still confined within the limitations of the *Werktreue* paradigm.

By expanding the investigation beyond individual tapes and observing the similarities and recurrences within the entire body of Scelsian recordings, the performer is able to identify the various stages of Scelsi's creative process and to detect his *modus operandi*. Once the different phases of Scelsi's creative routine have been understood, performers can move from concentrating on specific works towards adapting the Scelsian *modus operandi* during their own practice for a more comprehensive way of performing Scelsi's works.

The last Scelsian creative period, when his improvisations focused on microtonal alterations of a single note, poses the most significant doubts and interpretative questions. Scelsi's creative process started from the improvisation of a single instrumental line, with a single held key on the Ondiola that was constantly modified in terms of timbre, volume and microtonal inflection. This first improvisation was recorded on a Revox and subsequently played back aloud, while Scelsi improvised a second line on top of it. The result of the playback and second live improvisation was then recorded on a second Revox and subsequently used as playback material for the improvisation of a third audio track, finally merging three layers of recorded material. The overlapping process of recorded and live improvisations was repeated as many times as he deemed necessary, before the final merged tape was delivered to the transcribers. The Scelsian scores that we encounter today as performers are the results of these transcribers' work.

There are multiple difficulties that the scores pose to today's performers. These scores show a poor understanding of the concrete instrumental possibilities required in reference

originally posted on 29/09/2013.]. See also Ian PACE, "Notation, Time and the Performer's Relationship to the Score in Contemporary Music", in Darla CRISPIN (ed.), *Unfolding Time*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2009, pp. 151-192.

22. Nicholas COOK, *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 10 and 17.

to the sounds in the original Scelsian recordings. The scores also contain contradictory indications or passages that are impossible to play. While many smaller doubts and specific technical constraints can be resolved by listening to the original tapes, a performer's participation in a re-enactment of the Scelsian creative process, his *modus operandi*, can be seen as a means to generate insights for a technical and performative approach to Scelsi's entire output.

3. Re-enacting the Improvisation

As part of the research carried out at the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp, aimed at establishing a performance practice of Scelsi's music, a pilot experiment has been undertaken, re-enacting Scelsi's creative process using his *modus operandi*, inferred from the documentation available at the Scelsi Foundation. This experiment assumes that through the re-enactment of the Scelsian creative process, performers can achieve a greater understanding of Scelsi's aesthetics and develop the appropriate technical-instrumental skills to express it. The experiment also aims to emphasise the limitations inherent in the traditional transcription of recordings and provide the performers, on their specific string instruments, with alternative forms of notation, resulting in different and more creative performing strategies. The experiment has been structured in three phases described below.

3.1 Phase One: Improvisation/Recording and Playback/Overlapping

In keeping with Scelsi's own creative process, which was to first improvise and record on the one hand and then move onto playback and overlap on the other, this experiment also followed his method. The experiment's first improvisation was based on a single note, whose timbre, volume and microtonal inflections were constantly altered over the course of the performance, and further processed through the use of digital plug-ins. Subsequently, this first improvisation was reproduced through a headset, while the same performer superimposed a second improvisation. This process was repeated up to a total of three distinct mono audio tracks.

The feedback provided by the performers involved – students and doctoral researchers using various monodic instruments – highlighted the performers' enhanced ability to listen and react instantly to the sonic environment heard in the headset. The modifications of the played held note were executed in reaction to the inputs from the previously recorded tracks. Each performer described greater instrumental awareness, particularly in relation to timbre and dynamic variations implemented through instantaneous modifications of the instrumental technique.

3.2 Phase Two: Transcription

Once the recording of the improvisations was completed, the experiment was faced with the need to transcribe the sound material into notation, which would be useful for reproduction by any other performer. Preliminary attempts at transcription in western European traditional notation proved to be inadequate because of their unavoidable return to the reproductive perspective imposed on the performer by the score. The research was

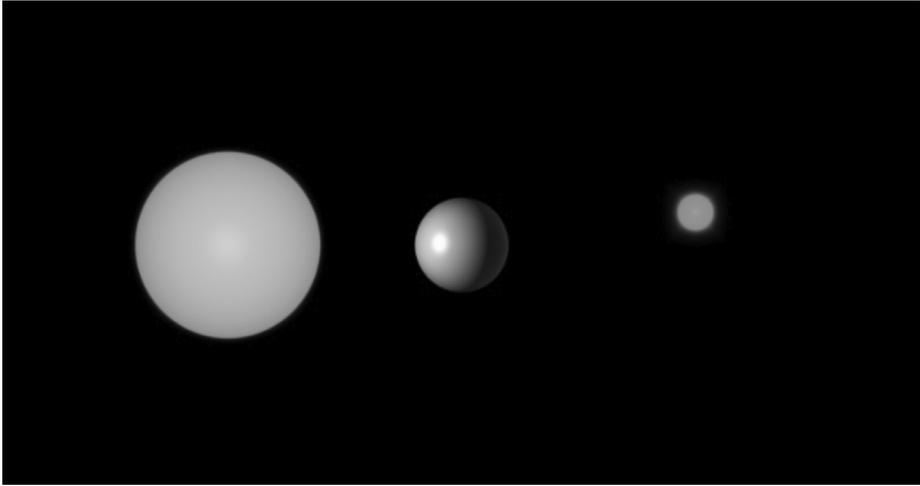


FIG. 3: Animated score of the three improvised audio tracks, adopted for the final performance of the project at the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp, 17 December 2019 ; Melanie Gruwez, Farinha Sara Fernandes de Carvalho, Irene Vilanova Domínguez, violins. [<https://youtu.be/xmx0S-RwmYk>, accessed 3/05/2020.]

therefore focused on other forms of notation, in particular the use of graphic and animated notation.

Since the 1950s, various types of unconventional musical notation have been developed, in particular the use of graphic scores. Composers such as Cage, Cardew, Berberian, Feldman and Stockhausen have afforded their performers more creative freedom, offering the opportunity to interpret graphic scores in more personal and creative ways. Performers establish their own reading code, taking greater artistic responsibility for the final sonic result of the scores. A recent evolution of alternative notations involves the use of animated scores, a subcategory of graphic scores that relies on the use of dynamic video to convey a limited amount of information in real time via the use of a screen. The use of animated scores “enforces a replacement of reading with automatic physical reflex”,²³ requiring reactivity and instant adaptation to external stimuli, an inherent feature of the mental state of musical improvisation. This research has therefore assumed that unconventional representations of Scelsian improvisations through the use of animated scores could afford a greater creative role to the performer, translating the information transmitted from the screen into sounds.

The animated scores created represented each audio track through the visual of a sphere – a geometrical figure often used by Scelsi himself to describe the nature of sound –,²⁴ whose appearance – size, screen positioning, colour and edge flanging – was connected to the many parameters of the audio tracks – volume, pitch, harmonic spectrum and noise component, respectively (Figure 3). The process of creating the animated scores from the initial recordings was carried out by means of software-based audio analysis, in connection with graphic animation software. The use of technology-based supports has

23. Vickery LINDSAY, “The Limitations of Representing Sound and Notation on Screen”, *Organised Sound* 19/3 (2014), pp. 215-227.

24. See SCELSI, *Les anges sont ailleurs...*, p. 75.

ensured a direct correspondence between the original audio materials and the resulting animated scores.

3.3 Phase Three: Experimentation and Findings

The experiment subsequently tested the efficacy of animated scores as a notational medium through the involvement of ten master's level music students at the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp, who, after having been provided with a brief contextualisation of Scelsian aesthetics, were presented with fragments of written scores by Scelsi and requested to detect instrumental issues, identifying possible technical solutions. Successively, the students were invited to perform different versions of the animated score, first paired with the corresponding audio material, then only with the video. The resulting recordings of the students' performances were examined and a high degree of similarity was found in relation to the original audio tracks made during phase one, notably with regard to dynamic and pitch modifications.²⁵ The correlation between the visual representation of the harmonic or noise dimension was initially less intuitive. However, following my verbal clarification of the relationship between the sound component and the visual component, the correspondence was considerably improved. After the first performance of the animated score, the performers were again presented with the fragments of printed scores previously examined, inviting them to find further solutions to the difficulties highlighted. The analysis of the solutions adopted at this stage showed a tendency to a greater elasticity in the performance of written rhythmic structures in favour of technical and instrumental feasibility, and a lower adherence to the reproduction of microtonal intervals indicated in the score, resulting in a more expressive use of the variations in pitch.

The feedback spontaneously provided in the course of the performance by the players showed how the use of animated scores, combined with a knowledge of Scelsi's compositional process and aesthetic approach, has led to the development of a more creative approach to performance, contributing to overcoming the dogmatic and prescriptive role of the score, establishing a direct and immediate relationship with the instrumental possibilities of sound production. Through the performers' experimental experiences in the different phases of Scelsi's creative process, they were encouraged to develop instrumental skills intimately related to improvisation, focusing their attention on more active listening and a more creative and personal participation in the sound production.

The primary aim of the experiment was to understand what artistic, technical and instrumental insights can be gained through the re-enactment of Scelsi's improvisational approach to musical creation, and which forms of alternative representation of the original tapes can provide the performer with greater creative participation in performance, while remaining closely related to original audio material. The experiment highlights how the performers' active participation in the creative process can provide performative references and develop instrumental capabilities that are central to Scelsi's interpretational concepts and consistent with the results achieved by Scelsi's personal collaborative methods, used during his rehearsal sessions with performers.

25. Note that the performers involved in phase 3 were the same students as in phase 1, but who were given different audio material, in different working sessions, weeks apart.

Conclusion

The considerable amount of primary sources that document the different stages of the creative process are fundamental resources for the performer-researcher. Investigation and creative interaction with Scelsian artefacts are crucial to shaping an informed performance practice. Scelsi's constant commitment to the close collaboration with a circle of selected players is a sign of how important it was for him to draw them into his artistic practice. His creative method steps away from musical performance as "a one-way system of communication, running from composer to individual listener through the medium of the performer"²⁶ and actively involves the players in the process of creating his music. In this sense, his approach to music-making dismantles the strict top-down structure of the composer-performer binary, asking the player to actively engage with the process of *musicking*, interacting as an inventive and creative agent, intertwining and fabricating connections between instrumental, musical and cultural materials.

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Titre de l'article – Article Title

Improviser avec Scelsi : élaborer une interprétation créative
en dialogue avec les artefacts de Giacinto Scelsi
*Improvising with Scelsi: Building a Creative Performance Practice
in Dialogue with Giacinto Scelsi's Artefacts*

Résumé – Abstract

Cet article s'intéresse à l'interprétation de la musique de Giacinto Scelsi, en focalisant sur le développement du rôle créatif des interprètes. Il examine les routines d'improvisation créative de Scelsi, décrit son utilisation d'appareils d'enregistrement, de cassettes audio et d'instruments de musique, et précise certains éléments relatifs à l'interprétation instrumentale déduits de la compréhension de ces artefacts. Il explore également les attentes de Scelsi s'agissant de la créativité d'un musicien dans l'élaboration d'interprétations de ses œuvres et souligne son manque d'intérêt pour les transcriptions exactes, par une tierce personne, de ses propres improvisations. Enfin, cet article interroge le rôle de la partition écrite dans le développement d'une pratique d'interprétation par Scelsi lui-même.

La seconde partie de l'article consiste en la description d'une expérience impliquant des interprètes au sein d'une approche créative, au travers de la reconstitution de trois phases du processus créatif de Scelsi : l'improvisation et son enregistrement, la transcription, et l'utilisation de ces transcriptions dans le cadre d'une interprétation. Ces transcriptions expérimentales utilisent une forme alternative de notation musicale – des partitions animées – qui font appel à l'apport créatif des interprètes. Cette expérience de partitions animées permet aux interprètes de développer des compétences instrumentales, à la fois fondamentales au sein de la conception interprétative de Scelsi et conformes aux résultats obtenus avec la méthode collaborative personnelle développée par ce dernier.

This article suggests a performing practice of Giacinto Scelsi's music, focusing on the enhancement of the creative role of performers. The article examines Scelsi's improvisational creative routine through the description of his use of recording machines, audio tapes and musical instruments, and details on performative insights made through the understanding of these artefacts. It also explores Scelsi's expectations regarding the participation of a creative performer in shaping the interpretations of his works and emphasizes his lack of interest in the precise third-person transcriptions of his original improvisations. Ultimately, the article questions the role of the written score in establishing Scelsi's performative practice.

The second part of the article describes an experiment that aims to involve the creative approach of performers through the re-enactment of the three phases of Scelsi's creative process: improvisation and recording, transcription, and use of these transcriptions for performance. These experimental transcriptions use an alternative form of musical notation – animated scores – which calls for the creative input of the performers. The experience of animated scores allows performers to develop instrumental skills that are central to Scelsi's interpretative concepts and consistent with the results obtained with Scelsi's personal collaborative method.

Auteur – Author

Violoniste et violiste, Marco Fusi est un fervent défenseur de la musique contemporaine. Dans le cadre de ses nombreux projets en collaboration avec des compositeurs émergents ou établis, il a assuré la création d'œuvres de Pierluigi Billone, Salvatore Sciarrino, Péter Eötvös et Brian Ferneyhough. Marco Fusi a également joué sous la direction de Pierre Boulez, Lorin Maazel et Alan Gilbert. Il se produit fréquemment avec des ensembles de musique contemporaine tels que Klangforum, MusikFabrik, Meitar Ensemble et Mivos Quartet, et enregistre pour les labels Kairos, Stradivarius, Col Legno et Geiger Grammofon. Marco Fusi pratique également la viole d'amour, encourage la commande de nouvelles pièces et collabore avec des compositeurs afin de promouvoir et développer le répertoire de cet instrument. Enseignant de musique contemporaine, il assure des cours et des ateliers à l'Université Stanford, l'Université Columbia, l'Université de Boston, l'Université Tres de Febrero de Buenos Aires et l'Université de Chicago. Marco Fusi enseigne la musique de chambre contemporaine au Conservatoire Giuseppe-Verdi de Milan et est également chercheur dans le domaine de l'interprétation au Conservatoire royal d'Anvers. (Voir marcofusi.net.)

Marco Fusi is a violinist and violist, and a committed supporter of contemporary music. Among his numerous projects with emerging and established composers, he has premiered works by Pierluigi Billone, Salvatore Sciarrino, Péter Eötvös and Brian Ferneyhough. Marco Fusi has also performed with Pierre Boulez, Lorin Maazel and Alan Gilbert. He frequently performs with leading contemporary ensembles including Klangforum, MusikFabrik, Meitar Ensemble and Mivos Quartet, and records for Kairos, Stradivarius, Col Legno and Geiger Grammofon. Marco Fusi also plays the viola d'amore, and has commissioned new pieces and collaborated with composers to promote and expand the existing repertoire for the instrument. As a strong supporter and educator of contemporary music, he has lectured and held workshops at Stanford University, Columbia University, Boston University, the Universidad Tres de Febrero Buenos Aires and the University of Chicago. Marco Fusi teaches Contemporary Chamber Music at the Giuseppe-Verdi Conservatory of Milan and is Researcher in Performance at the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp. (See marcofusi.net.)

Mots clés – Keywords

Giacinto Scelsi – Interprète créatif – Partitions animées – Improvisation – Notation alternative
Giacinto Scelsi – Creative Performer – Animated Scores – Improvisation – Alternative Notation