

LUTE MUSIC IN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURY By Gilbert Isbin

Interview with SILVIA AMATO, author of the excellent thesis
'LA MUSICA MODERNA E CONTEMPORANEA PER LIUTO'



Tell me something about your musical background

I started studying the lute and got involved into the repertoire quite late, but music has always been the passion of my life. I became fascinated with the lute when I was a young girl. I first noticed the instrument in the paintings of *Melozzo da Forli* (Italian early renaissance painter). However I had to wait a long time to realise my desire to learn to play the instrument..

How did you become interested in modern lute music ?

Currently I am studying at the Conservatory of Parma but I also attended an academic course at the Conservatory of Rome which allowed me to get more involved with contemporary music, something that was until then totally ignored by me. In fact, during a lesson on Cage, I became immediately fascinated by his composition "In a landscape": It seemed to me written for the lute. To me it fitted perfectly with the thin, ethereal sounds of the lute.(An arrangement by Gilbert Isbin of 'In A Landscape' is included in Silvia's thesis and can also be heard on YouTube)

From that moment on I started to ask myself questions. I started thinking about what I had learned up to that point about early music, about the role of the lute in the past and I was wondering if there would be a place for the lute into a contemporary context.

Tell me more about your thesis, the content, the different topics and your conclusions.

Curiosity pushed me to do my research and I discovered a world where, so far, little attention had been paid to it, although it turned out to be so particularly rich. So it was obvious to offer this research as a final project and I obtained an academic degree with the thesis. It was received with great enthusiasm by my professors and also by my classmates. With this thesis I wanted to introduce this too little-known instrument and refer to its place in the current zeitgeist.

After a short introduction about the purpose of my research, I explained the origin of the lute, its evolution and its fall into oblivion. I thought it was important to understand where it all started, what role it played in its glorious past and what the causes were for its temporary disappearance. Then I examined the reasons for its revival and I devoted attention to the people who were responsible for its rediscovery, to their first attempts to restore the music of the past and to the first instruments that were used today : how much the instruments we play now differ from the models of the past and finally the differences in playing techniques.

I then analysed the first approaches to modern and contemporary lute, the compositional results, the lost opportunities and the corresponding findings in the new musical context, in order to illustrate the profiles of three living composers, their styles, their musical background and the valuable messages that they want to express in their works.

Finally I briefly explored the immense number of transcriptions and underlined how it is possible, thanks to the extensive sonic capabilities of the various instruments within the lute family, possible to offer a much larger expressive capacity than instruments such as the guitar which replaced the lute for a long time in the performance of early works.

There is a big interest in your thesis!

Yes, I am particularly honored that I, initially, was invited to Orte by Evangelina Mascardi of the Italian Lute Society to give a masterclass about my research. Later on Peter Croton invited me to Basel. I paid attention to the various facets of my research and illustrated this with short musical fragments. I was very pleased with the interest in my work.

Could questions be asked and what were they about?

In particular, questions were asked about the minor presence of the lute in the current music scene, unlike other instruments such as the harpsichord.

What do you think is the reason for it?

The cause, in my opinion, can be found in the longer research time that was needed to design lutes that matched the authentic instruments in terms of construction and playability. The first lutes in the modern times were heavy and often adapted to meet the requirements for a today's concert environment.

I believe that a broader interest for the lute can only be achieved by getting the study material more accessible to the new generations.

Also, in the past there was a massive supply of lutes. The most famous builders of those times had real industries set up to meet the huge demand for instruments.

Because of the technological progress it should be possible to offer lutes at a reasonable price on a large scale.

But the programs of the conservatoires must also be reformed, based on the advice from important contemporary figures, be reformed. They are already too long anchored in old views. There should also be paid more attention to the contemporary works of lute composers, including Nepomuk David and Aldo Clementi, who have enriched the lute repertoire.

What is your opinion about the future of the lute?

I imagine the lutenist of the future as someone who also performs his own compositions and who is no stranger to the new musical language.