

Berio, Luciano (1925-2003): Overview of his Writings

Luciano Berio was a composer for whom critical reflection accompanied and supported musical creation. In his writings, Berio not only offered theoretical and aesthetic arguments for his compositional choices, he also took position, with great pertinence, in the major debates of his time, revealing a profound understanding of the artistic thinking as well as the philosophical and political currents that marked the twentieth century. His corpus includes over a hundred writings, published in different media and formats, not to mention a great many interviews.

Berio's reflections played a defining role during the first part of his career in the 1950s and 1960s in particular, the period during which his musical thought took form. It was notably during this time that he founded the journal *Incontri Musicali* (1956-1960) in connection with the eponymous concert series of contemporary music in Milan, the four issues of which offer precious evidence of these crucial years for music. Berio had a wide field of interests that extended from ethnomusicology to semiology, including theater, aesthetics, electroacoustic music, new composition techniques, and poetry. His thought was enriched by his contact with important figures: beyond musicians (notably Cage, Maderna, Pousseur, and Boulez), one might cite the ethnomusicologist Roberto Leydi, with whom Berio and Maderna cofounded the Studio di fonologia musicale di Radio Milano (RAI) in 1955, but especially Umberto Eco, with whom Berio was particularly close during the period when Eco was writing *The Open Work* (*Opera aperta*), and finally his collaboration with writers like Italo Calvino and Edoardo Sanguineti.

Berio's activity as an essayist resulted from his ongoing reflections and naturally continued into the final years of his life, drawing on public and private debates with intellectuals and important artists. It therefore varies in terms of form and media, ranging from interviews with musicologists and articles in collective volumes (1); articles in popular media (daily and weekly papers) as well as articles in literary, philosophical and musicological journals in Europe and America (*Cahiers Renaud-Barrault*, *Nuova Rivista Musicale Italiana*, *Opera News*, *Spirali*, *Diapason*, etc.) (2); lectures for prestigious universities and television (notably a series of twelve programs for the RAI in 1972, *C'è musica e musica*) (3).

During his lifetime, Berio never published any books or long essays, apart from a collection of interviews with Rossana Dalmonte ([*Intervista sulla musica*](#), Laterza, Rome, 1981; [translated to French](#) in 1983). He also had an unfinished project for an essay collection with the musicologist Francesco Degrada in 1979 (mentioned by Angela Ida De Benedictis in [*Scritti sulla musica*](#)). Since 2003, considerable work has been done to identify, collect, and create critical editions of Berio's writings and more generally of the various documents containing the composers critical and theoretical words. Talia Pecker Berio has published two editions of Berio's lectures at Harvard University from 1993-1994, one in English ([*Remembering the Future*](#), 2006), the other in Italian ([*Un ricordo al futuro. Lezione americane*](#), 2006). This project was the first in a three-part editorial project coordinated by Talia Pecker Berio. In 2013 there followed the above-cited anthology, [*Scritti sulla musica*](#), an annotated collection of writings under the direction of Angela Ida De Benedictis with a preface by Giorgio Pestelli, and in 2017, [*Interviste e colloqui*](#), directed by Vincenzina Caterina Ottomano with a preface by Paul Griffiths, both published by Einaudi in Turin. Contrechamps republished the interviews with Rossana Dalmonte in French in 2010, accompanied by a few essays by the composer in French. Finally, in 2013, there appeared a two-DVD collection of *C'è musica e musica* accompanied by a booklet including the transcription of the television programs and introductory articles by Umberto Eco, Michele Dall'Ongaro, and Ulrich Mosch (Feltrinelli, "Real Cinema") under the direction of Angela Ida De Benedictis.

Giordano Ferrari

13/06/2018

Trans. Christopher Murray

To quote this article: Giordano Ferrari (trans. Christopher Murray), "Berio, Luciano (1925–2003): Overview of his Writings", Dictionary of Composer's Writings, Dictéco [online], ed. E. Reibel, last edited: 04/10/2021, <https://preprod.dicteco2.ihrim.fr/person/40455>.