

**I COLORI DELLA VIOLA**

**ALDO BENNICI**

ATOPOS



Photo: Jon Lawrence

*This is the first CD without Daniele Lombardi.  
We miss your guidance and friendship so much.*

*However, we worked for a long time on this project with our friend Aldo, with the usual passion and curiosity; having completed it, after so many hurdles, is also a way of paying tribute to his memory and his boundless love for music.*

*Fulvio Di Rosa*

Aldo Bennici has journeyed through half a century of Italian music with the fast and sometimes feverish pace of a protagonist, but also with the lively eye of the witness. He has been at the centre - as an interpreter - of that vortex of innovations, discoveries, and tensions that from the mid-1960s onwards changed the serious music scene forever. But he also observed those same events with a critical, disenchanted, and ironic eye. And now, having crossed the threshold of his splendid eighty years, he has decided to look at his past and that of Italian music, designing a sort of "sentimental diary", intimate and affectionate, bringing together some of the musical pages that have been crucial to his "life as an artist". Not a simple historical anthology, therefore, nor a definitive summa of his ars interpretandi, but a living testimonial, a key to a possibly unrepeatable era, but an era that still has a lot to say... "In these two recordings", Bennici said on a late autumn afternoon, inside his Florentine home, "I collected some of my 'first performances' and I wanted them all to be live recordings. A different choice, also with respect to the other recordings I've made. These are living documents, immediate, perhaps sometimes imperfect, of my direct relationship with sound. With the sound of my instrument".

The sound pages of these two recordings, however, also represent a map, a very precise geographical map, despite its incompleteness, and the multiple and sometimes contradictory trends that from the mid-1950s to the threshold of the 1980s gave birth to the season of the so-called New Music. Central to this experience is one instrument, the viola, which until then had not only not yet completely garnered the dignity of the solo voice, but which the music of the post-World War One era had basically ignored. "I began studying at the Conservatory at age eleven, in the violin class, and one of my classmates, by some quirk of fate, happened to be Sylvano Bussotti. Right from my young years, I played in the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Orchestra, but at the same time, thanks to an extraordinary teacher, Piero Farulli, I had also begun to play the viola. At a certain point I had to choose and I realized that my sound, my real sound, was the one that I could obtain with my new instrument. And from that moment on, I had no more doubts. We're talking about the early 1950s. The solo repertoire for the viola was really reduced to the bone. And then it happened that many composer friends had begun writing for me and my instrument even before I graduated. So, slowly, gradually, my repertoire was enhanced and my horizon rapidly expanded".

An interest in new music that was not simply born only within a small community of musicians "by trade", but that had a profoundly political motivation... "Yes, certainly. And therefore I wanted to be a different kind of musician. I wanted to study, perform, propose a music that was not just a background for the thoughts of the listeners, but, on the contrary, a music that required understanding, a rigorous commitment. And I found this tension, this commitment, not so much in Brahms or in Schumann, who I also adored and played, but in the music of the present, the music conceived and played in my time, the time in which I was living. Perhaps - looking at things over a great distance of time - I took the wrong road. Perhaps I didn't ultimately fulfil my goal, but I believed in this back then. Passionately and sincerely.

Once I had left the Maggio Orchestra, I joined the Conservatory, this time as a teacher, and then "I Musici", an ensemble that was very prestigious at that time. With them, I primarily played 18th-century music: a hundred, and sometimes more, concerts a year: a very tiring job that did however give me the chance to travel the world". And it was at this point, between the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, that Bennici began to have an ever more precise place in the history and geography of Italian music. And in a short space of time, he became a very special interpreter, even if not uncommon in the European scene. On the one hand, his explicit, spontaneous aptitude toward sound experimentation was a stimulus which many composers could use to measure themselves with the sound and resources, still largely unexplored, of the viola. Furthermore, he became become the essential point of reference for all musicians who took up this instrument that until then was considered purely "ancillary". It was back then that Aldo began to establish direct, musical and inevitably human relationships with some of the key composers of the time. Relationships of true complicity, when not a veritable creative sharing, which only grew stronger.

**Bruno Maderna** "I believe I've had, if not two patron saints, at least two guardian angels. The first, in order of time, was definitely Bruno Maderna. The first piece I played for him, in 1969, was *Serenata per un satellite*, in the version for viola d'amore that is included on the recording. He listened to it attentively, complimented me and probably decided that day to take me, in a certain sense, under his wing. He introduced me to an agent in Holland, who actually opened the way to the profession. He even put me in touch with Lukas Foss, a then very well known composer who wanted me with him in the United States. But I was already teaching at the conservatory, I'd taken a wife, and I didn't feel like taking the risk. The relationship with Maderna, however, did not grow weaker at all. On the contrary, I played the *Serenata per un satellite* an infinite number of times, in Fiesole too, I recall, with him present. Each performance was obviously different from the last, as always happens when we play an aleatoric piece. The choices of the moment depend on a very wide range of variables: the room in which you play, the acoustics, the type of audience before you. You have a basic scheme ready, but then it is you the performer who has to fill it with sound. In indeterminate music, the interpreter's vision inevitably prevails. He transforms himself, almost unintentionally, into a co-author. Perhaps this is why, for my ability to renew the sound while remaining faithful to the original text, Maderna always appreciated my different "visions" of the *Serenata*. So much so that two years later, in 1971, he wanted to give me a great gift: a piece conceived and written specially for me that is simply called *Viola* and has a dedication which I cherish greatly: "To my friend Aldo Bennici, affectionately dedicated". This is also an aleatoric piece, but of a completely different nature, at least the way I've always "experienced" it: while *Serenata per un satellite* for me is literally a "serenade", *Viola* is instead, in this recording, an intimate, almost silent dialogue between me and Bruno. A two-way conversation that is however full of empty spaces and silences, as when two friends look each other in the eye without having to say much. I can't deny that *Viola* was a turning point for me, however. In those years Maderna was one of the dominant personalities in the musical world and being able to play a piece written for and dedicated to me undoubtedly helped me make a qualitative leap to my position on the music scene. And I will always be grateful to him for this. My only regret is that I got to know him too late, because as we know, a few years later, in 1973, a terrible lung disease took him away".

**Luciano Berio** My second guardian angel was Luciano Berio. He was five years younger than Maderna and thirteen years older than me. And I always thought that Bruno had somehow entrusted Luciano with the task of protecting me... I first met Berio in Rovereto, when I played his Sequenza VI for viola. I had never performed it before in public and I was really nervous, even though I knew I'd studied it really carefully, as always. At the end of the concert I went to him and told him, "Maestro", - we still used the formal 'lei' with each other - "please tell me everything you didn't like, all the things that didn't work and that I have to change". He looked at me, patted me on the shoulder and didn't say a word. In that moment, I was really disappointed by his silence. He seemed cold and detached. But then, a few months later, he called me to Turin and asked me to play the Concerto for viola and string orchestra by **Ghedini**, his teacher; a "classic" Concerto, now in the viola repertoire, performed for the first time in December of 1953, directed by Herbert Von Karajan, with soloist B. Giuranna. We performed that piece many times over the years to follow. I found myself before a completely different man. Much friendlier, more helpful, open. He immediately told me to use the informal 'tu' and from then our friendship grew very strong, a special bond that lasted over time. We had a very intimate and playful relationship: I believe I was one of the few people who could really make him laugh. We spent most New Year's Eves together, not to mention birthday parties. But with Berio, I mainly talked about music and the conversation often turned to the Sequenza for viola. Once we were traveling by car, and we talked about whether the concept of "virtuosity" could also be applied to the Sequenza. Luciano said that, in his opinion, the virtuosity lay in a perfect knowledge of the instrument's resources. And, of course, he brought up the example of Paganini. I replied that Paganini, as a violist, was an outsider, far away, but that in my opinion the Sequenza had a much closer relationship with Bach, if anything, and in particular with the Chaconne in D minor. "Why?" Luciano asked me. Because we find the utopia of sound in both. The notes in the score of the Chaconne, for example, a long sound in the low register along with four short notes in the high register, can only be performed if you are able to imagine them first. To play them you have to think about them first. Exactly as with the Sequenza, which, not incidentally, has explicitly polyphonic scoring... Of course, Sequenza VI undoubtedly represented a right angle turn in the repertoire for the viola. First of all, it has removed that sense of sadness and melancholy from our instrument that so many, rightly or wrongly, have attributed to it. With this piece, the viola became a strong, virile instrument with a bold character. There's a violence in it, an aggressive sound that until then was unimaginable. And then it maintains, and demands, a "physical" tension so strong, from the first to the last note, that it literally takes your breath and strength away. Sounds are never isolated events, but sound masses in constant motion. If you lose this tension, even for a single second, the piece falls from your hands and you can't find it again.

However, perhaps the highest point of our musical complicity came with Voci, a concerto for viola and orchestra that Luciano wrote for me in 1984 and that I played more than seventy times all over the world. It's from the matrix of Voci that a piece destined for Aterballetto by Amedeo Amodio came into being the following year. Underlying these two works was our common passion for folklore and folk song. I often had Luciano read transcriptions I'd collected during my travels: Albanian songs, Sicilian songs, Sardinian songs. And once I brought him a series of work songs, love songs, lullabies I'd found in Sicily. That time I offered them to him in three different versions: one to be recited, one sung (by my voice, although I was slightly ashamed) and one transcribed for viola (one of these songs became Aldo in the Duetti series for two violins). In any case, this was the "preparatory cartoon" for Voci, a piece that marked a turning point in the relationships, still unresolved at that time, between serious music and popular music. Berio's music, in this as in other pieces, always has a great deal of gesture: it's not enough to simply play it. One must also, in a certain sense, stage it and perform it, and I've always had a certain leaning for gestures, for a more or less explicit theatricality in my way of playing\*.

**György Kurtág and Yannis Xenakis** "I've never had a stable relationship, so to speak, with the world of sound of these two great 20th-century masters. I performed and admired them, but without any great continuity. I played the Italian premiere of the Concerto for viola and orchestra by Kurtág, in Milan, I recall. Luciana Pestalozza asked me to do it for Milano Musica, and I studied it very willingly. There's a huge orchestra, with three trombones and four horns, and the viola doesn't appear to be able to sustain the sound above such an orchestral mass. But instead, the Concerto is so well written that the dialogue works perfectly. It seems as though it's telling a story without words: an instrument with a weak voice that is battling against an infinite mass of sound, but without ever losing its deeper character or the ability to sing. And in the second movement, in fact, there's a clear reference to a melodic element that belongs to the popular tradition. So when I played it, in a certain sense I felt "at home", as with Voci and Naturale, although Kurtág is almost certainly referring to Hungarian folklore.

The piece by Xenakis, Embellie, on the other hand, is terribly difficult to perform. Xenakis, as with many other compositions, frequently resorts to quarter tones. Which on the viola can be performed easily, but only in close succession, one after the other, and not by leaps. If you're searching on the fingerboard for "a quarter tone below C", isolated from the other sounds, you will never be able to perform it correctly, with the right intonation. I also premiered Embellie in Italy. I remember it well; I had studied it for a long time, for two months, and that day I played it, yes, but I didn't manage to get the intonation perfectly exact. In short, I had to arrive at a compromise for an essentially unplayable piece".

**Salvatore Sciarrino** "I met Salvatore by chance when he was still very young and doing his military service. And I was immediately fascinated, enchanted, by his infinite culture. Although he was little more than twenty, I think, he had vast notions of every field of knowledge: botany, animal behaviour, ancient art and of course, music. After some time, I asked him to write a piece for viola and orchestra: I had to do a concert at the Teatro Comunale in Florence, and I absolutely wanted him to be in the program too. And so Salvatore wrote a very demanding work for viola d'amore and large orchestra entitled Romanza. It wasn't a wild success, but at that moment a great friendship grew between us and we constantly saw each other. Salvatore often spent long periods at my house in Florence and all his pieces for viola came out of this closeness, including the ones I wanted to put on the recording: the Tre Notturni Brillanti and Al limite della notte. Obviously, he had a perfect knowledge of the mechanics, the organological properties and the resources of the viola and so he had no difficulty writing for an instrument that other composers knew only superficially. And so he didn't need my advice at all. His pieces played, and play, perfectly on my instrument. But what has always impressed me, and still impresses me about Sciarrino's writing is his total, absolute originality. He literally invented a new language, unheard of, which is not made up of notes, but of sounds: a language that nobody spoke then and that nobody is able to speak even today. And he invented this language by totally subverting the physiognomy of the musical instruments: strings, wind instruments, percussion. And yet its beauty lies precisely in the extreme nature of the sound. Playing Sciarrino's pieces is always a challenge: the harmonics he prescribes can only be achieved if you're perfectly in tune, otherwise absolutely nothing comes out of the instrument. And then there's another element that contributes to totally changing the tonal quality of the sound: the speed at which it is played. In certain passages the sounds are so rapid and so pressing that they almost transform into luminous points: you create a kind of play of lights that you must follow without reading the notes... The piece I feel is closest to me is perhaps Al limite della notte: Salvatore would certainly not agree - because he rejects any descriptive or naturalistic vision of his music - but I feel a very strong bond with nature in it. When I listen to it or play it I seem to hear the rustle of dry grass at the centre of a meadow, a very light breeze, the swarming of nocturnal animals. And in any case - however you see it - it's a piece that needs a total silence. The silence in the room, but also your inner silence. If you are not immersed in a perfect silence, you can't even begin the piece. You have to wait..."

**Franco Donatoni** and **Sylvano Bussotti** My relationships with Donatoni and Bussotti were more episodic and less intense than with Berio, Maderna and Sciarrino. But I always managed to establish a very fruitful dialogue with them. All for solo viola came into being on the occasion of a recording I had to make for Fonit Cetra and it was Sciarrino who asked Donatoni to write a piece for me. The result is an atypical piece with respect to Donatoni's style, but which is also very changeable: a piece in which, perhaps not by chance, there is a sort of contagion with Sciarrino's style. Even though the resulting sound is very different: while Salvatore's writing is stripped down, essential, Franco's writing, despite being meticulous, is rougher, made of flesh and blood. Not so far from Bussotti's, in a certain sense. Sylvano's writing too always has a very sensual, very carnal eroticism running through it, albeit sublimated in an almost exhausted, aestheticized gesture. Rara is a piece I played for the first time at the Maggio Musicale and also many times with Amedeo Amodio's Aterballetto. But at the time I didn't have any idea of the provocative charge of Bussotti's music. I only felt the paroxysmal gestures, the strong representative charge, and so I tried to translate it as faithfully as possible".

**Bruno Bartolozzi** "He was undoubtedly a very worthy and highly original composer. For example, he invented a scoring system, based on multiple sounds, which was completely new at the time. But I remember it with great gratitude because, for a couple of years, he was my composition teacher, even though I didn't continue along this road. From him I learned the techniques of polyphony, but above all he introduced me to a world of sound that I had yet to explore. For example, he helped me to understand the idea of the uniqueness of a sound: we're used to seeing sounds as a whole, in sequence or in layers. And instead Bartolozzi taught me the importance of isolating a sound from its context. A lesson that really helped me to tackle some of the pieces I've performed over my career. Thanks to him I realized, for example, that in Viola by Maderna, the fundamental relationships are not those between sounds, but between sounds and silences. And for this I will be forever grateful".

(Conversation compiled by Guido Barbieri)

Aldo Bennici was born in Palermo and studied in Florence with Piero Farulli.

He has played numerous recitals and performed as a soloist with the major Italian orchestras, including the Orchestras of Teatro alla Scala and the Accademia di Santa Cecilia; he has also been a soloist with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the London Philharmonic, the Israel Philharmonic, the Westdeutscher RundfunkKöln, the Bayerisches Rundfunk in Munich, the ORF - Symphonieorchester Wien, the Rotterdams Philharmonic Orkest, the London Sinfonietta, the Orchestre Philharmonique of Radio France, the Basler Kammerorchester, the Staatsorchester Stuttgart, and the Bamberger Symphoniker, etc.

He was Artistic Director of the Orchestra Regionale Toscana, the Associazione Musicale Giovane Orchestra Genovese (GOG), with which he won the Abbiati Critics' Award, with the following motivation: "...exemplary programme choices and innovative artistic initiatives". He was also the Artistic Director of the CIDIM in Rome, the Sagra Musicale Umbra and for many years, the Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena. He was awarded the special "Franco Abbiati" Italian music critics' award for Philemon und Baucis, oder auf die Erde Jupiters Reise.

Translation: Elizabeth Burke

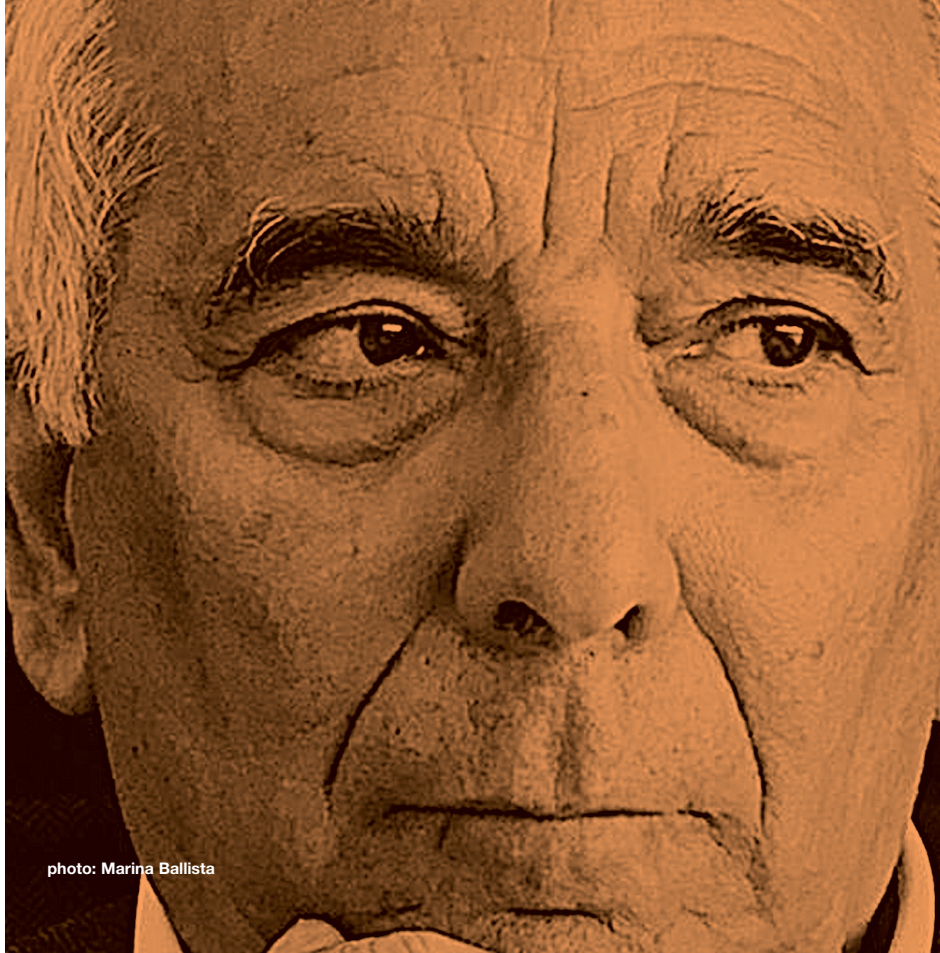


photo: Marina Ballista





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## I COLORI DELLA VIOLA

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LC-00129

## ALDO BENNICI

*Viola e Viola d'amore*

## CD 1

1	György Kurtág	Concerto per viola e orchestra - Orchestra RAI di Milano (dir. Lucas Uls)	1954	18:37
2	Bruno Maderna	Serenata per un satellite <i>per viola d'amore e nastro preregistrato</i>	1969	04:43
	Franco Donatoni	Alti <i>per viola</i>	1977	
3		I		06:32
4		II		05:45
5	Iannis Xenakis	Embellie <i>per viola</i>	1981	06:14
6	Luciano Berio	Naturale <i>per viola e voce registrata (cantastorie Peppino Celano)</i>	1985	19:34
			total time	62:00

## CD 2

1	G. Federico Ghedini	Musica da concerto per viola ed archi - Orchestra RAI di Torino (dir. Luciano Berio)	1953	20:03
	Salvatore Sciarrino	Tre notturni brillanti <i>per viola</i>	1975	
2		Di volo		02:27
3		Scorrevole e animato		03:03
4		Prestissimo precipitando		01:48
5	Bruno Maderna	Viola <i>per viola e viola d'amore</i>	1971	09:21
6	Silvano Bussotti	Rara (Eco siero ecologico) <i>versione per viola sola</i>	1967	08:42
7	Salvatore Sciarrino	Ai limiti della notte <i>per viola</i>	1979	06:02
8	Bruno Bartolozzi	Andamenti <i>per viola</i>	1967	06:07
9	Luciano Berio	Sequenza VI <i>per viola</i>	1967	07:47
			total time	66:12

Dedicato a Daniele Lombardi