

# America Oggi

March 26, 2005

## Una voce per la musica (A Voice For Music): Anthony de Mare

by Paolo Tartamella

NEW YORK. How much need is there for contemporary classical music? Let's look at contemporary art: we look for new films in movie theaters; we watch reruns of classics on TV. Among pop music, songs by the Beatles end up in the nostalgia section. American theater offers a large sampling of new writers. The visual arts share equally among the new and the classics, given that museums thrive on retrospectives of the masters. Opera has no history, since it is almost exclusively based on tradition.

And classical music? Tons of Beethoven, a significant amount of Shostakovich, moderate doses of Sibelius, minute amounts of Steve Reich, sporadic amounts of Del Tredici.

One is to ask oneself if this scarcity of choices has its origins in (presumably) modest commercialism. Along comes Anthony de Mare, who has studied Beethoven and Sibelius and who has gone beyond Steve Reich. His repertoire includes works by American composers unknown to most audiences, and familiar only to a restricted group of musicologists.

So we welcome Anthony de Mare. We welcome his sensibility and virtuosity, in which his repertoire makes room for the feet and speaking voice. To honor his origins, it should be mentioned that de Mare is third generation Italian. His first multi-media project "Playing with MySelf" provided a view of his repertoire and the many ways in which he makes music (very theatrical). But we are here to talk about the artist and a bit of the concert that de Mare gave at Zankel Hall on March 15.

De Mare had the sensibility of dedicating the evening to music written specifically about New York. The concert was loaded with energy and inspired music. De Mare presented first performances of many works (Meredith Monk, Jason Robert Brown, Paul Moravec, David Del Tredici, Fred Hersch and Frederic Rzewski).

I would begin here from the end, with "De Profundis", by Rzewski, in which de Mare recited some passages from the letter written by Oscar Wilde during the latter's days in prison. Persecuted for his homosexuality, Wilde shares his profound suffering with an acidic and honest analysis of the human soul. Composing with Wilde's texts in mind, Rzewski follows this path with a composition rich in self-thought and atmosphere, sensible and violent. But with one defect: the length.

The other works performed that evening, as is typical in contemporary music, have an intellectual reference. The execution (not the composition) of Del Tredici was snubbed by The New York Times, but it is difficult to agree with such criticism since it was a first performance. One thing for certain is the composer's affinity for romantic gestures through a series of movements (West Village Morning, Museum Piece, Missing Towers, Wollman Rink) that enchant via a crossing of tonalities. Del Tredici plays with the "Skater's Waltz" by Waldteufel, explores the borders of Chopin, and writes music that is nocturnal and shadowy. If I saw this piece on a CD, I would purchase it immediately.

"Isle of the Manhattoes" (Moravec) describes a long walk that starts downtown, crosses the west side, and ends in Morningside Heights (Columbia Univ.), with alternating periods of obsessive traffic, not even during rush hour.

For lovers of Italianism at all costs, the pianist states the following about his origins: "I believe both my grandparents came to America from Calabria between 1905 and 1911. My mother's side settled somewhere in Pennsylvania before settling in the western part of New York state, a small town in the suburbs of Rochester called East Rochester, that for decades was known as the "Little Italy" of Rochester. It was inhabited mostly by Sicilian and Calabrian families.

(continued)

Upon their arrival, my father's side settled directly in Rochester. The names of my maternal grandparents were Joseph and Mary Grano, while the names of my paternal grandparents were Antonio and Carmela De Mare. I'm actually named after both of my grandfathers (Anthony Joseph). One of my sisters has been living in Ascoli Piceno (a region of Marche, Italy) for the past 20 years. Also my father's father Antonio was a musician (by hobby); I believe he played the clarinet."

De Mare is a pianist because he is unconventional. I suggest you purchase his recordings, which do not upset the traditionalists, but suggest that contemporary classical music is often different from the styles that many associate with atonal timbres difficult to play and listen to.

De Mare is doing a great service to new music. His desire to explore intricate forms (at Zankel Hall, the Del Tredici performance was accompanied with a slightly banal video by Anney Bonney) and to vocalize sounds and recite while performing, has some valid and dangerous aspects. But on the other hand, what sense does art have, if it doesn't risk danger?

(translation: Alexis Rzewski)