

## *ECLISSI D'UOMO – THE MUSIC*

The music in the program represents an investigation into the poetic-musical production in the years of the First World War, aimed in particular at works composed by musician-soldiers engaged directly on the front or forced into captivity. Music by A. Schoenberg, E. Elgar, L. Durosoir, I. Stravinsky, I. Novello, M. Ravel, C. Debussy will be presented alongside original music, composed for the occasion, by G. Di Giuseppe freely inspired by the theme of the great war.

The First World War went through, with all its violence, precisely that European society in which innovative and avant-garde experiences were born, but also late romantic, futurist and verist. The music on the program reflects, as in a sort of small survey sample, the variety of musical experiences taking place in those years. The singer and the musicians have the task of restoring the atmosphere of such a particular era, crossed by melodic songs and avant-garde notes.

### Program notes

#### **Giuliano Di Giuseppe** : *Gavotta for a New Year's Eve*

The Gavotte for a New Year's Eve, inspired by the 1913 book by Florian Illies, is the prologue to the opera *Eclissi D'uomo*. The scene is dominated by an atmosphere of light-heartedness and joy which still characterizes the last months before the great war. The dance develops in the traditional tripartite form complete with trio and closes on a suspended cadence; unnatural landing point, prelude to imminent tragedy.

#### **Ivor Novello**: *Keep the homefires burning – arr. G. Di Giuseppe*

It is good to remember that at the beginning of the last century, military and political propaganda was perhaps the only communication tool which, however highly flawed and partial, could reach the masses, otherwise totally unaware of what was happening on the front. After 1915 however, the terrifying number of casualties, the almost total loss of the entire professional army of the previous century, and the amount of mourning that affected even every small town in England, forced authors and composers to interpret in some thus also this "loss of innocence" and the common thought that the war would not end as soon as believed. Hymns to the distant homeland and family are therefore born, which perhaps the luckiest will be able to see again, as "Keep your home fires burning".

It is no coincidence that the soldiers marching towards the front sing only these last "musical exorcisms" against the certain death that awaits them, forgetting every false promise transmitted at the beginning of the war and lightheartedly intoned on board a train.

It should be noted however, that the theme of death, loss and sacrifice hardly ever appears until the end of the war - the British, always stubbornly conservative and proud of their privacy, prefer to believe in a positive resolution right up to the last minute. of four years of pain and sacrifice, rather than succumbing to the events and publicly allowing even a single cry of discouragement or despair.

#### **Edward William Elgar** : *Sighs op. 70 – arr.. G. Di Giuseppe*

E. Elgar was an English gentleman of the Victorian age, the son of a music dealer. He considered music a simple means of expressing emotions, like the painter with the colors of the palette. At the beginning of the 20th century he noted: «Music is written on the clouds of the sky, it is in the air all around us, just extend your hand and take as much as you want». This simple soul of his was overwhelmed by the outbreak of World War I. He was so impressed that for several months he was devoid of creative flashes.

What could a composer do in the face of such a state of mind? All the pain hidden in this question is poured into the piece *Sighs* op. 70, the work, written on the eve of the great war is the photograph of a sadness impressed on the stave.

**Igor Stravinsky** : *La Violin du soldat taken from the Histoire du soldat – arr. G. Di Giuseppe*

War as the destruction of an entire continent, but also as a metaphor for the decay of morals and values that should distinguish human beings. The one evoked by Igor Stravinsky's «*Histoire du soldat*» is a powerful theme. The work was born in 1918 as a chamber performance that goes against the sumptuous canons of the opera of the time. It is a story drawn from the Russian fairytale heritage, of a soldier who was a victim of the Great War, which destroyed Europe and with it every human and moral value. It tells of the impossibility for humanity to escape its destiny, a pessimistic vision of man who self-destructs by chasing vain material possessions.

**Giuliano Di Giuseppe**: *Terre di Nessuno*

Autumn 1917 heights of the seven municipalities. After the autumn offensive of 1917, the advance of the Austro-Hungarian troops had stopped. Now even the Belluno area was occupied by the imperial-royal army of the Danubian monarchy. On the heights of the Sette Comuni the bad weather was now raging; long snowfalls and torrential rains lashed the various military posts alternately. The depressions were increasingly filling up with snow and the sun was no longer able to cope with the first rigors of the imminent winter.

An Alpine company from Kaiserschützen was located in the trenches of the front line. The monotonous daily service had by now forced her to undergo the apathetic stiffening of an exhausting war of position. The few hours of rest in the humidity of the caves was followed by a watch shift in the trenches. Among the sandbags, at an irregular distance were the protective shields with narrow slits that allowed the sharpshooters to spy on the enemy and to aim their rifles equipped with telescope aiming devices with maximum precision.

Then up to the Italian trenches there was no man's land: 20 – 30 meters in all. Even in the Italian sector sandbags and protective shields, covered however by a series of Friesland horses; the chaotic interweaving of the fences looked like an infinite rusty ribbon that wrapped up hills and valleys; the barrage, broken and torn by day, was repaired every night. *Wartime Borders!*

**Lucien Durosoir** : *Berceuse , from 5 Acquarelles – arr. G. Di Giuseppe*

“He had the utmost confidence in his music and wrote to me that, following Bach's example, he locked his works in a closet, because they would be discovered later”; so the pianist Paul Loyonnet wrote in his *Mémoires* about his friend Lucien Durosoir: a violinist who sees his career cut short by the war while the man, after having confronted the abysses of barbarism between 1914 and 1918, returns determined to break with the frivolous world heralded by the post-war period. The recent discovery of his work is indeed the fulfillment of his risky prophecy. Lucien Durosoir takes leave of the war in 1919, one of the few survivors of the French 5th division. Deeply traumatized by the barbarism of war, he retired to a small village in Belgium composing music until 1955. Among his various compositions, the *Berceuse* stands out, the fourth piece of the collection *5 Acquarelles*. The effect produced by listening to this simple passage is impressive. An authentic opening of memory and at the same time of imagination.

**Claude Debussy**: *Noel des enfants qui n'ont plus maisons – arr. G. Di Giuseppe*

In the years of transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, nationalisms strongly marked even the most critical composers of the tradition of their respective countries of origin. Even the anti-academic Claude Debussy took to signing himself, starting from 1915, "Debussy, musicien français" and,

in December of the same year, ill with cancer and on the eve of the surgery that would have extended his existence shortly more than two years, the composer wrote *Noel des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons*. The text is very sad: it appears as a prayer by French children left orphaned and homeless, who invoke the Child Jesus to avenge them and the Belgian, Polish and Serbian children, inflicting a severe punishment on the German invaders, namely that of not making he visits them, not only on Christmas Day, but afterwards as well. And for this Christmas, they are not asking for toys, but for bread to survive, as well as for France to win the war. A song that is a reflection on the cruelty of adults towards the little ones.

**Maurice Ravel:** *Nicolette from Trois Chansons – arr. G. Di Giuseppe*

While waiting to enlist, while praying to Saint Teresa for the grace to enter the air force, as he wrote to friends, Ravel composed the *Trois Chansons*: the second, *Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis*, is dated December 1914, while the first and third, *Nicolette* and *Ronde*, are from February 1915. The texts were by Ravel himself: *Nicolette*, dedicated to Tristan Klingsor, is a small ironic allegory, in which the girl, having escaped the snares of the wolf and the flattery of the page, falls into the arms of the old man but provided with money. The structure of the song repeats the forms of the ancient Renaissance chanson, to which the language and the topics of the text also allude. *Trois Chansons* belong to the small sector of Ravel's catalog dedicated to patriotism; if in *Le Tombeau de Couperin* the funeral homage assumed, after the war, the ritual tone of the harpsichord *ordre*, and if also in the 1914 *Trio* it is possible to see a reference to the nationalism of the Basque côté on the French side of the Pyrenees, the precise reference to Parisian school of Renaissance chanson sounds, again, patriotic.

**Giuliano Di Giuseppe:** *Interlude I, Il Sorriso dell'Obice, Interlude II*

*Interlude one, two and the Il Sorriso dell'Obice*, represent the leitmotif, the thin red line that permeates *Eclissi d'uomo*. They are compositions conceived in a cyclical form in order to provide organicity and unity to the entire work. The main theme always reappears in a new guise to highlight and complete the meaning of the dramaturgical situations required by the script and the projected images. The formal arc is tripartite and presents a growing emotional conduction which reaches its climax in the last measures of *interlude II*.

**Anonymous:** *Gorizia tu sei Maledetta – arr. G. Di Giuseppe*

The nationalistic exaltation for such a hard-fought victory was soon replaced by a feeling of horror for the tragic human costs of that war story: about 50,000 soldiers and 1,759 fallen officers on the Italian side, 40,000 and 862 officers for the Austrians. A carnage, which favored the birth and circulation of a widespread and shared state of mind of repugnance for the war, testified by some protest songs. Among the most beautiful, widespread and significant of the entire 1915-18 conflict is the song *O Gorizia, you are cursed*, in whose verses we find the violence, the futility and pain of war, the affections that are lost, the discrimination of class between soldiers and officers, the dead who do not return.

The original version was collected by Cesare Bermani, in Novara, from a witness who claimed to have heard it from the infantrymen who conquered Gorizia on 10 August 1916.

**Giuliano Di Giuseppe:** *Conduce il Prode*

In the first months of the war D'Annunzio, enlisted as a volunteer, enthusiastically advocated aviation actions. As an observer, on 7 August he flew over Trieste together with Giuseppe Miraglia, dropping countless leaflets from above with his heartfelt message:

*Coraggio, fratelli! Coraggio e costanza!*

*Per liberarvi più presto combattiamo senza respiro. Nel Trentino, nel Cadore, nella Carnia, su l'Isonzo. Conquistiamo terreno ogni giorno. Non v'è sforzo del nemico che non sia rotto dal valore dei nostri. Abbiamo già fatto più di ventimila prigionieri. In breve tutto il Carso sarà espugnato. Io ve lo dico, io ve lo giuro, fratelli: la nostra vittoria è certa.*

*La bandiera d'Italia sarà piantata sul grande Arsenale e sul colle di San Giusto. Coraggio e costanza! La fine del vostro martirio è prossima.*

*L'alba della nostra allegrezza è imminente.*

*Dall'alto di queste ali italiane, che conduce il prode Miraglia, a voi getto per pegno questo messaggio e il mio cuore io*

*Gabriele d'Annunzio*

*Nel cielo della Patria, 7 agosto 1915.*

Conduce il Prode, freely inspired by the Nocturne by G. D'Annunzio, aims to be a tribute to the figure of G. Miraglia on the occasion of the centenary of the Great War. The association of some words, freely taken from the text, and the sound they evoke takes on the value and significance of vision, night dreams and obsessive imagination. And musical writing, pursuing the involuntary associations of reality and memory, of life and dreams, also becomes obsessive, full of repetitions, returns and references. The poetic assumption is absorbed by a timbral and rhythmically very varied but tendentially static music; it is certainly not the agogic impulse that determines the sound configuration, which escapes any rhythmic motor activity to fluctuate with a wealth of movements in a space free from regular metric predeterminations. The serial writing of the instrumental part avoids any reconciliation with tonal stylistic features, while the vocal part tends to reconstruct a "melos" that emerges from the instrumental pulverizations with its plastic evidence, with a more determined and perceptible melodic and rhythmic scansion in the individual intervals.

**Arnold Schoenberg:** *Die Eiserne Brigade* – arr. G. Di Giuseppe

There is no doubt that music is a source and instrument of joy, of the most exciting and profound quality, even when it becomes the expressive vehicle of the most complex moods. However, we often forget about it, even though we know well that in the now millennial course of the history of this sublime art, the material has always been spontaneously adapted to the sphere of jokes, games, satires, the most ferocious jokes. Characteristic of the freest genius is self-irony, the innate ability not to take oneself too seriously, even to desecrate one's work. From the earliest times, the greatest composers have pleasantly practiced this difficult art, often with surprising results. This is the case of Arnold Schoenberg in *Die Eiserne Brigade*, a sinister march suggested by the tragic military events of the First World War.

