

## PROFILE: MARCO FUSI

Marco Fusi is a violinist and violist, and a passionate advocate for the music of our time. Among many collaborations with emerging and established composers, he has premiered works by Billone, Sciarrino, Eötvös, Cendo and Ferneyhough. Marco has performed under the batons of Pierre Boulez, Lorin Maazel, Alan Gilbert, Beat Furrer and David Robertson, and frequently plays with leading contemporary ensembles including Klangforum Wien, Musikfabrik, Meitar Ensemble, Mivos Quartet, Ensemble Linea, Interface (Frankfurt), Phoenix (Basel) and Handwerk (Cologne). Marco records for Kairos (Pierluigi Billone – ITI. KE. MI / Equilibrio. Cerchio), Stradivarius (Salvatore Sciarrino works for violin and for viola; John Cage, Freeman Etudes; Scelsi Collection Vol. 7), Col Legno and Geiger Grammofon.



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Marco also plays viola *d'amore*, commissioning new pieces and collaborating with composers to promote and expand existing repertoire for the instrument. A strong advocate and educator of contemporary music, he lectures and workshops at Columbia University, University of California – Berkeley, the Basel Musikhochschule, New York University, Boston University, the Royal Danish Academy of Music – Copenhagen, Cité de la Musique et de la Danse – Strasbourg, and at the University of Chicago. Marco teaches Contemporary Chamber Music at the Milano conservatory 'G. Verdi' and is Researcher in Performance at the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp.

### **Marco, let's start with an easy one: where did your interest in new music begin?**

While I was a student at the Conservatory of Milan, I was enrolled in both the performance and composition programmes. As the only violinist in the composition department, I quickly became the main reference for any composition student who wished to experiment with string instruments. I deeply enjoyed the process of learning about my instrument through these joint explorations, together with my composition classmates. These early experiences showed me the possibility of using the instruments as a means for the discovery of new perspectives and sounds (as opposed to training tools for virtuosic dexterity). In these school years I discovered the joy of being part of the creative momentum, which is something I still enjoy very much today.

### **It's thrilling that the collaborative aspect of new music making forms such a big part of your enjoyment of music making: can you describe one or two particularly enjoyable composer-collaborations in recent memory?**

Last year I was invited to be the artist in residence at the Music Department of Stanford University. Among the brilliant young

composers I met there, I started collaborating with Charlie Sdraulig on an intimate work, to be performed for one single audience member at a time. Sdraulig's *one to one* is a very challenging performative experience because the piece morphs and is shaped by the physical presence of the listener, by his/her reactions to my gestures and sounds. Working on this performance, thanks to Sdraulig's exhaustive indications and instructions, I developed much further the ability to interact with the audience, to 'read' their non-verbal messages, and to gently guide their listening experience. Furthermore, given the very nature of this piece (accessible only to one person at the time), it is not possible for Sdraulig to attend to my performances and to offer me further suggestions and remarks. The piece is entrusted to me, and it almost feels like a secret that I am only allowed to share with the person I am performing with. It is a big responsibility!

**I know you not only play violin, but also viola and the viola d'amore. What about this last instrument fascinates you so much?**

The viola d'amore is a truly inspiring instrument! Thanks to its existence at the margins of the mainstream repertoire, the instrument has been able to escape the standardisation that ultimately crystallised the building specifics and performing techniques of the violin. Violas (or violas) d'amore appear in different body shapes and sizes, number and length of strings and the existing repertoire showcase an incredible variety of tunings possibilities.

While commissioning new works, the composer and I always engage in a very extensive collaboration, in order to explore the possibilities of the instrument in accordance with their needs and desires. Each composer develops his or her own understanding of the instrument and the viola d'amore moulds in accordance, becoming a different instrument in each composer's mind and work. Thanks to this instrument, I have been lucky enough to engage in several precious collaborations, among others with Laura Steenberge, Christopher Trapani, Bára Gísladóttir, Ylva Lund Bergner, Julie Zhu, Zeno Baldi, Bergrún Snæbjörnsdóttir, Johan Svensson and Dominique Schafer. Each of these collaborations has resulted in a very personal exploration of this rather unknown instrument and with each work we discovered new sounds and possibilities for the viola d'amore. All these composers have coloured the instrument with their sonic imagination, deeply enriching my own understanding of it.

**Your CDs of Pierluigi Billone's and Salvatore Sciarrino's string works received great reviews in the pages of this publication; do you have plans to record more recent Italian music? Is it important for you to be connected to the music of Italian composers?**

Yes! This year I decided to approach the music of Luigi Nono, performing his work for violin and 8-channel tape, *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura*. This work grants a high degree of freedom to its performers (the violinist and the sound projectionist), allowing them to develop their dialogue through the open interaction between the violin part and the tapes. My first performance of this work, with Pierluigi Billone coordinating the sound projection, has been a truly exciting collaborative compositional and performative experiment for both of us. We aim to release our interpretation on CD, and we hope to do so at some point in the near future. The breakout

of the Covid-19 pandemic has postponed our plans for performance and recording to what I hope is a not too distant future.

I often perform Italian composers and recent repertoire. As Italy is the country where I grew up and studied, I certainly have several connections with composers of my age and younger, and I admire the more acknowledged ones, such as Sciarrino and Billone (and Scelsi, Donatoni, Castiglioni). When drafting my own concert programs, though, I am not aiming to privilege music from my own country. I believe programming is affirmative action, and I must do my best to allow for greater visibility of under-represented artists. Inclusivity and representation are way more important and challenging than nationalism, in music and anywhere else.

**Marco, when we started this interview, the Covid-19 crisis hadn't even begun in Europe. Now, all freelance musicians are stuck at home, all their gigs cancelled. How do you feel about it all? How are you filling your time?**

It is a very scary and difficult time. My home country has been hit very hard by this pandemic and I am deeply saddened and frightened by the death-toll that this virus is having on Italy, as well as in the rest of the world. I am processing the everyday shock of raising figures in the number of infected and deaths, and it is difficult to stay positive and keep working on future projects, in this situation.

I have not yet had the calm to rationally consider what this will imply for freelance artists and musicians. We all saw the concerts of the next months being cancelled one after another, often with the goal of rescheduling on a later date. I believe this is possibly the best approach from responsible organisations and promoters, and I hope fellow musicians will be able to manage these few months of financial difficulties, to get back on stage as soon as it will be safe.

In the meanwhile, I structure my days with a series of musical, academic and physical activities: instrumental warm-up, exploration of new repertoire, remote collaboration with composers, homemade recording sessions of solo works, readings and writing for my doctoral studies, yoga sessions, in-house workout. I am trying to keep myself busy and in good shape. I am looking forward to the moment we will walk back on stage for a public concert, after this all. That will be an incredibly emotional and symbolic moment, and I hold to that thought like a ray of hope.