
July 24, 2006

CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEW

Frances-Marie Uitti Interprets Giacinto Scelsi's 'Trilogy'

By STEVE SMITH

Among the impulses that stir composers to create, an encounter with an exceptional performer ranks high. But the relationship between the Italian maverick Giacinto Scelsi and the American-born Dutch cellist Frances-Marie Uitti went beyond simple inspiration. After an initial encounter in 1974, Ms. Uitti worked closely with the reclusive, eccentric Scelsi until his death in 1988, her prodigious technique enabling him to refine his demanding scores.

That period, filled as much with philosophical discussion and meditation as with musical collaboration, made Ms. Uitti a singularly persuasive advocate for Scelsi's unorthodox music and one of its most authoritative interpreters. On Friday at the Italian Academy at [Columbia University](#), she performed "Trilogy," an elaborate, extensive solo work that Scelsi had entrusted to her care and allowed her to edit.

Running just short of an hour, "Trilogy" comprises two triptychs flanking an arc-shaped centerpiece.

"Triphon" (1956) opens with bold, annunciatory single notes bowed on one string and repeated on another as dim echoes. Using a limited tonal range, Scelsi concentrated on continually varying timbre and density. Still, shards of melody and martial rhythms suggest the sort of abstract-expressionist language that he had abandoned. Ms. Uitti underscored the startlingly abrupt endings of the second and third sections with dramatic sweeps of her bow.

"Dithome" (1957), the centerpiece, is more concentrated. Tonal qualities of a given pitch change as it relocates from one string to another, while exaggerated vibrato and more unorthodox techniques produce even finer gradations. The piece rises from near silence to frenetic outburst; a brief, plain-spoken melody offers repose; then "Dithome" reverses course in a glassy retreat to stillness.

Despite its seeming spontaneity, "Ygghur" (1965) is precisely calculated. The cello is retuned so that the performer can play a unison across all four strings, each notated on a separate staff; with a central pitch meandering through neighboring microtones. But for all the control Scelsi exerted, "Ygghur" ("Catharsis" in Sanskrit) sounds primal, its variegated drones quietly sublime in cumulative effect.

Ms. Uitti's new recording of "Ygghur," issued recently by ECM, situates her within a resonant, churchlike ambience. In the dry acoustics of the Italian Academy's concert hall, the music seemed more introverted, less a public performance than a private reverie. The audience — silent and rapt throughout the concert, which was presented without pause — provided another sort of catharsis with its explosive ovation.

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