

Luca Francesconi

Das Ding singt for cello e orchestra

The Magic of the Subconscious: Francesconi's Cello Concerto *Das Ding singt*

Out of nothingness, the solo cello emerges with a deep, fragile, naked note that seems unaware of its reason for being, unaware of a concrete musical function. Aroused by this primal sound, six cellos forming a semicircle around the solo cello take up the material, which oscillates between noise and music. Gradually, these events acquire a sense of direction and a pulse becomes tangible. Luca Francesconi describes the beginning of his new Concerto for Cello and Orchestra as a “Dionysian ritual” that mysteriously forms out of total emptiness and quickly manifests a certain order.

Titled *Das Ding singt* (“The Entity Sings”), the Concerto is a 20-minute narrative cast in three parts that flow without any major breaks. In the second part, which is subtitled “dreamy,” the work’s opening note is in a sense x-rayed, in that it is split up into its physical components as partials – which can be heard in the form of hallucinatory arpeggios: a hypnotic contemplation of sound. This central passage is distinguished by speed, virtuosity, levity, and a wealth of color.

The final part begins with an extensive cadenza that embodies a free fantasy on the *Chacona per basso solo* by Giuseppe Colombi (1635–1694), thus referring back to the very beginnings of the cello literature. Yet the soloist here does not present an “objet trouvé” but a bizarre material that is hard to classify and whose origins lie in the distant past. In the coda, the seven cellos play at their highest register and at the fastest possible speed, on the very edge of madness.

An “electronic insect” is the composer’s phrase for this vehement cello ensemble, which shortly after collapses into noise. Nothing in *Das Ding singt* suggest any basic theoretical formula.

Francesconi speaks of properties of sound that can be attributed to an enigmatic concept of philosophy and psychoanalysis: the Entity. However much Freud, Heidegger, and many others have pondered it, we know nothing concrete about this Entity. These external, mutable properties are the only thing tangible about it. The core of the Entity is by contrast impenetrable: a total emptiness, a simultaneous all-and-nothing that, says Francesconi, “conceals many dangers within itself.” It is the chaos full of glowing energy to which the composer both conceptually and emotionally tries to draw near. Art is possibly the only way to communicate directly with this mysterious Thing. Music makes audible what otherwise cannot be heard.

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N.B.

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