



A Conductor's Art

An interview with Adriano
by M. Gear

NB. This interview principally concerns Adriano's recording of Bernard Herrmann's Jane Eyre

(Photo by Bruno Arnold)

INTERVIEWER: Let's start at the beginning. What made you want to be a conductor, and tell me about your early musical discoveries?

ADRIANO: I actually never studied conducting and never finished any musical school with a diploma. I could never be patient enough to discover music. I wanted to hear the music I liked, and not only my teacher's music. Since in the sixties our conservatories over here in Switzerland were dreadfully old-fashioned, I could only endure regular studies for two years. Already at the beginning I was showing up with my own piano and chamber pieces and I was a fanatic of Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Respighi, Schreker, and Scriabin. I had a fight with the director and my teachers at the conservatory because I played music by Satie and had made an audiovisual portrait of Tchaikovsky.

The latter circumstance is curious since just two years ago I made a TV portrait of Tchaikovsky, which was shot in Russia and in Italy, called *Souvenir de Tchaikovsky*. I would never have dreamed in the sixties to be able to go over to Klin 30 years later to see and even touch all the things Tchaikovsky had had in his hands and put them in front of a camera.

My own script (and direction) follows the music, as if the images were inspired by it or the other way round. My early audiovisual experiments also made it possible for me to realize over a dozen classic music videos for Naxos about ten years ago. This is actually a product which I was the first one doing in Europe. Many of these films will soon be re-issued on DVD.

It was Ernest Ansermet, whom I had met in 1964 and in 1967 Joseph Keilberth who said that one day I would become a conductor, but I never dared to believe such a thing, seeing my unorthodox musical background. I could follow rehearsals by these conductors, who were also musical personalities, not just conductors.

I am not ashamed to tell that I came towards music by seeing Walt Disney's *Fantasia* and *Sleeping Beauty*. My parents tried with every means to hinder my musical interest so I had to wait until I was 20 years old to be allowed to follow my vocation. In the seventies I also studied singing and now I am quite active as a teacher of singing in various places. Of course, the most exciting place for holding singer's workshops is the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow: it looks as if you would meet the composer and his followers in those narrow corridors or little music rooms. Although I speak 4 languages without any difficulties, my Russian is not good at all, but I am still planning to learn this language as well, and since the younger Russian generation is aware that foreign languages bring them advantages, they all know more or less English or German or a little French or even Italian. Unfortunately the teaching methods over there are still old-fashioned and there is no intensive care about belcanto tradition, German or French singing style, so I am most welcome. I am also teaching singers from all around the world

at the International Opera Studio in Zurich.

What was your first contact with Bernard Herrmann's music, what was your initial reaction, and why were you so interested?

My first contact with BH's music was listening to the soundtrack of *Psycho*. That was in the year of the first release of this film, and this was to become the film which I have most frequently seen anyway. I had written down the name of the composer of this highly exciting and valuable music for strings and I eagerly wanted to study its score and wondered why it was unavailable on hire, on record and not played in the concert-hall.

After this I started to go to every movie that had music by BH and every time, it was a great event. I too had started to tape soundtracks from TV and collect them, and around here I had gained the reputation of being a crazy film music buff. Later in 1972, I had issued on my own LP label an album of a great romantic Swiss film score of the forties, which can be considered as the first Swiss classic soundtrack recording - in that time a pioneering enterprise.

You knew Bernard Herrmann personally. Tell me about your experiences with him. Are there any interesting anecdotes?

My last conversation with BH in London was in June 1972. I had planned a 2-hour German Radio transmission on this composer (including a portrait on his non-film conducting and recording activities) and proposed him an interview. Before all, Benny wanted to know how much money I would get for my work. After having told him that I would get no money at all and that it had been a miracle that the broadcasting responsables would accept this subject anyway, he asked how much he would finally get. Of course I could not answer this question without making Benny furious and telling me that I was crazy. My answer was, "I am crazy, I know, but the best ideas only come from crazy idealists anyway". Without knowing what had happened in the meantime between Benny and Hitch, I proudly announced him that in autumn I had already reserved a conversation with Hitch in Zurich, on the same subject....and that opened my eyes (and ears).

The conversation with Hitchcock took place and I consider this one of my most exciting afternoons of my life. Since I had the reputation of being a Hitchcock expert in Switzerland, Hitch himself was astonished at my knowledge and from then on, I always could get in touch with him and receive from his office whatever material I needed for lecturing etc. Needless to say, Hitch's comments on Benny were short and under the influence of the break after *Torn Curtain*.

The radio show finally never came to be realized since I could not have the interview with Benny and since I felt frustrated for having been practically thrown out.

You recorded the complete score Herrmann wrote for the 1944 film *Jane Eyre* in 1992 with the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra. When and how did you first experience this score and what attracted you to it?

I was first interested in this score after having seen the film and later on, when Benny made the Phase Four recording of the suite, which disappointed me terribly for the slowness of his tempi, but this, as everyone knows, was Benny's trademark in his later years. I could not imagine that the composer himself had written such passionate music and that he would conduct it so extensively slow and without pepper, although musically, the playing is very expressive and the orchestra excellent.

Did you use the original soundtrack recording as a reference, or did you allow for your own interpretation?

Well, if you do a Herrmann score and have studied or "lived with it" for years, as it was the case of *Jane Eyre*, it nearly becomes your own and I did not lose time by making long lectures to the orchestra. We just played it on a very instinctive basis and we managed to obtain the Herrmann style and sound. Incidentally, I am not promoting myself as a great intellectual and specialized conductor; I just make music from my heart, so there is not much I have to tell and to impress.

Although, for example, I have the reputation of being a Respighi expert, this is only a part of my personality. I know and love many other composers as much as Respighi, and the abovementioned ones. You may add Szmanovsky, Eisler and many others. The composer I have the greatest "respect" for, is Brahms. Since I am quite a temper and a very passionate character (my Italian mother's origin versus the Swiss German fatherly one) I have found a rather equilibrated compromise between the two extremes as an artist can and should reach, anywhere between heights and depths, peace and excitement, body and soul. Brahms' music reflects this equanimity marvellously.



That's why I cannot concentrate on one style, or one composer. I feel very near to some strong personalities like Herrmann, Respighi, Lazzari and George Templeton Strong (I have just recorded his huge Symphony No.2 *Sintram*, a CD which will be issued in April 1999), and I sometimes casually stumble over some more composers like this and discover that they are Cancerians like me, or that their were (or are) difficult characters, too sensitive, or too sincere. See for example Gustav Mahler, Ottorino Respighi, Leos Janacek, Laszlo Lajtha, Carl Orff, Hanns Eisler, Gian-Carlo Menotti, Harry Partch, Bernard Herrmann and Hans Werner Henze.

Can you discuss the preparation of the score for *Jane Eyre*?

To prepare the score I used a reduced, third generation photocopy of the manuscript which was in such a state that at first it almost made me decide to renounce to the project. As one can read in my liner notes to the CD, I edited the full score after these copies with computer software and prepared the orchestra material all by myself. I had received these photocopies from the BH Archive at the University of California, at the time when they still used to sometimes answer my letters. Of course the OST was consulted closely and many changes were made in the score referring to the recorded one. As I also tell in my liner notes, a re-recorded soundtrack disc should not be an archaeological enterprise, but a newly revived interpretation, as it is done with classical scores in the concert-hall. Finally (and fortunately) this recording was not destined to be reedited into the old movie...

Tell me about your impressions of the music in *Jane Eyre*?

Jane Eyre is, in my opinion, the film score which is the composer's most personally involved. All the changing moods and passionate situations of his life, his tender heart and his self-destructing or insulting attitudes can be felt by listening to this score. Many of his other scores are either congenially constructed works with all of his typical landmarks, others are purely experimental ones and others are but nothing else than regurgitations of previous patterns, which sometimes brings

nothing new. That is why I do not fully approve that every note by Herrmann is going to be recorded and re-recorded over again. If we go on like this, the music will lose its valour. Such a commercialisation of Benny's art makes me even shudder.

What is your opinion of the film itself?

Jane Eyre is a great and atmospheric film mainly to its camera, sets and lights, they really inspired Herrmann's music.

The Brontë sisters played a very important role in the works of Herrmann. He did spend years writing an opera based on *Wuthering Heights*. Why do you think that the Brontë's were so influential?

Thanks to Herrmann, I plunged myself into the world of the Brontë's and had a terrific experience. After having gone through a lot of Gothic romance by Ann Radcliffe, Sheridan Le Fanu, Mary Shelley and Matthey Lewis, I found another extremely original aspect of English literature, something really unique and daring for its time, especially if we think that they were written by young women! After having gone through this domain, I went into that of Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Brockden Brown, two Americans of great importance. I am sure BH liked the Brontës, since he was fond of English literature anyway and that particular case also matched to his own temper.



Herrmann was an individual among other Hollywood composers. Why do you think he was notoriously frustrated by the movie industry, and eventually left for England?

Well, I think at the time Herrmann wrote his earlier scores, there was no real appreciation of this kind of music, this came all much later - and that is why Benny felt so frustrated. An outsider composer like he was, and certainly a unique one in Hollywood, he did not match those standards, requirements and policies, so he had to go. Let me come back to the Cancerian type: such a reaction is typical, and I can tell you this of my own experience. Being also such an extremely sensitive nature, a small and often harmless thing can make you either furious or suffer terribly and you always think it's personally against you! So we may prefer to withdraw or to even attack with less diplomatic weapons!

I consider myself to be akin to BH's character. I can feel and understand his frustrations and hard attitudes towards the musical world and the ignorance in this field which is still on today.

What is your personal favourite Bernard Herrmann movie score?

I could not tell you this offhand, I like quite a few, like *Jane Eyre*, *Psycho*, *Citizen Kane*, *Concerto Macabre* from *Hangover Square*, *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, *Beneath the Twelve Mile Reef*, *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*, *Obsession* and *Sisters*.

And your favourite concert work?

My favourite concert works are his *Symphony* and his *Sinfonietta*. But I adore *Echoes*, *Moby Dick* and an absolute favourite is *Wuthering Heights*, a work which has won the race over *Tristan und Isolde* in my favourite list of operas, but the top favourite remains Schreker's *Der Ferne Klang*, an opera for which I could die and

which has become a really important part of my own artistic personality. After a long conversation with Thomas Hampson I had proposed already 8 years ago a new recording of *Wuthering Heights* to Marco Polo, but, of course, this was considered as an impossible and too expensive project. At that time, Marco Polo still did not yet believe too earnestly in my conducting skills. Unfortunately I am not famous and influential enough to be able to peddle with this project at other record companies and I feel very sad that surely someone will precede me, now Herrmann has become so commercial.

Why do you think that his music has become so commercial?

To answer this question is difficult: I think this is mainly because some labels started recording Herrmann and one of them was Decca, an international company. The name of Hitchcock associated with Herrmann surely also helped to increase the sales of the Phase Four Series, although I remember quite well that the people at Decca were not too enthusiastic about it... I contacted them since they were actually doing the pressings of my own label. The fact that they were being done of a high technology label could also promote Benny's colorful orchestrations, but everyone knows (and should actually not forget) that Benny himself was very reticent about re-recording his film music! Still, these Phase Four recordings with Benny are as important as Charles Gerhardt's magnificent (and unsurpassable) Film Music Series on RCA, a really pioneering enterprise in music history.

In addition to Herrmann, you have also recorded film works by Khachaturian, Honegger, Bliss, Waxman, and Auric. Why does film music interest you? And what are some of your favourite pieces of film music aside from Bernard Herrmann?

Film music first interests me since there are good music pieces in it. I look at them first from a purely musical aspect and that's why I am quite selective. I realize that many pieces do not match the film or are better than the film (or the contrary) and many of them were never used, but I still play them. There is another aspect: In old films you could not properly hear the music since it was badly edited. My recordings have also a musicologist's point of view, although, as said above, not a really archaeological one. That's why, original soundtrack releases are also a good thing, and sometimes a better one, if the original is good music-making and a good orchestra. This is often not the case in old European films, that is why I re-recorded many French scores.



Bernard Herrmann conducting the London Symphony Orchestra in Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (Paramount Pictures, 1956).
(Photo by Robert Burks)

There is another reason why I prefer recording European film scores (except some very few American favourites of mine, like *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*): most European composers were not typical film composers, but came from the theatre and the concert-hall, in other words their works were more original and musically even valuable. They did not have a great experience in film scoring, but this is just the point, which makes their scores more interesting. You know, I prefer a good music piece which often had been edited by pure casualty to a certain scene and brought a great effect than a cue which had been composed (this is an extreme example, of course) as a mickeymousing chromatic sequence à la Max Steiner, and written with the stopwatch in the composer's hands. European cinema has this

landmark also in many other domains of this business, that's why the real "cinéma d'auteur" and highly artistic filmmaking à la Hitchcock, Eisenstein, Bergman, Rossellini, Clair, Renoir, Carné, Vigo, Cocteau, Ophüls, Murnau and Pabst (which just make up the list of my favourite directors) is actually coming from Europe and not from Hollywood.

You may laugh, or think I am crazy, but my favourite Hollywood films are the silent pictures by Griffiths and Stroheim...

I also consider European film composers generally more individualistic (and less professionally Hollywood-like, but therefore more original) since they mostly did their own orchestrations and that in particular the French, the English and the Russian have done truly important contribution to this field which in specialized literature still has not been explored enough.

As "true American" film composers (those who were not European emigrants), besides Herrmann I particularly like Leonard Rosenman, Aaron Copland, Alfred Newman, Alex North and Jerome Moross: they had a musical background which was also coming from the serious, or classical domain, they were stronger personalities who could manage to bring more artistic and experimental elements into the domain of film scoring. Benny is the most extreme example of such a musician, but he had to succumb and leave Hollywood, and he was right to do so, even if that costed him quite a lot. In Europe there is less money around for movies than in Hollywood, unfortunately, and this will never change and continue making of the commercial film industry a totally Hollywood-oriented form of art for the masses. Fortunately there is still TV showing the old movies late at night and fortunately they can be bought on video...

The new turn of all this is that now the great black-and-white classics, after they had been tinted to colours (*Metropolis*, *Casablanca*) now others are being totally remade. No better proof that Hollywood is running totally out sense, of respect for the arts, of ideas and of style. I had nothing against sequels like those to *Psycho* (they were entertaining and had new scripts) but now that this, one of the greatest classics of world cinema is being remade (I hear this will be the case of *Rear Window* as well!!) let me predict this as the beginning of the Twilight of Hollywood.

How did you first come to work with the Marco Polo label, and discuss your subsequent relationship with the company.

That started with my proposal to record the *Napoléon* Suite by Arthur Honegger. Luckily enough I was also allowed to do some non-film music, which for me is more important, if not I would not have liked me to be typecast as a film music conductor.

Unfortunately, the music business is in the hand of a few very mighty amateurs and art-killers. As far as my own conducting ambitions are concerned (I have no great compositorial ambitions, fortunately), I can be very happy to have been allowed to realize 23 CD's on the Marco Polo label. I owe Klaus Heymann to having been discovered as a conductor of special and unusual repertoire. The Marco Polo Film Music Classics series is actually my own idea. One should realize that these recordings I make are not just a podium performance. Most of the scores have to be edited, reconstructed, and, before all, searched and found!

Incidentally, the 23 CD's I have done have not helped to promote myself as a concert conductor, mainly due to the fact that I am working for an alternative and "price-dumping" company and some agents have refused to take me also since I adore unusual repertoire, so they do not trust me as a conductor of mainstream

repertoire!

Tell me about the history of your own recording label and your first recordings.

My own label is dead now, after having released 9 LP's and 3 CD's. It only cost me, it brought no money, since I also wanted to produce unknown music.

An early Herrmann project of mine was a recording on my own label of his *String Quartet* and his *Sinfonietta for Strings*, but I could not receive permission from the publishers since I was not well-known enough. Another great surprise was BH's recording of Joachim Raff's *Lenore* Symphony on the Unicorn label: it is thanks to this that I started to interest myself for this composer (A Swiss!), who was totally forgotten in the seventies. That made me decide to produce a recording of Raff's *Piano Quintet* on my own label.

Do you see yourself recording Herrmann music in the future?

Since as far as Herrmann is concerned there are more profiled conductors than I am and since I have not the necessary connections in the USA, I have resigned. I think I am not wanted as a Herrmann conductor. The Stromberg-Morgan team are now doing Herrmann recordings so I have nothing to say anymore in this domain, even though I had proposed more Herrmann recordings before the abovementioned team had joined Marco Polo.

If money were no object, what Herrmann music would you record or perform?

Wuthering Heights and the *Symphony*!!!!

You are also a composer. Can you tell me any information about your recent compositions, and if there is any Herrmann influence?

As a composer myself, Herrmann has given me the courage to even more break with the rules of traditional harmony and counterpoint than I had dared to do before. I have written a few short and unpretentious chamber pieces, a documentary film and a short feature score, many pieces of stage music and one day I will find the time and money, I will finish my *Concertino for Celesta and Strings* since the Bratislava Orchestra would like to play it after I have shown them a first version. I also have sketches for a Symphony and an Opera (based on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, in English), but who is going to pay or to commission this?? In the seventies I had started to compose an short opera on Eugene O'Neill's play *Before Breakfast*, but the rights were taken away from me after Thomas Pasatieri had a commission for the same title.

I would say that in retrospect, Herrmann was a very innovative and influential 20th century composer. If you look at music from *Vertigo* (e.g. *Carlotta's Portrait*) or *Psycho*, you can see techniques that predate the minimalist school of the 1960s. Do you think that Herrmann will be remembered as one of the great composers?

I am not so sure. Last year, for example I discovered minimalistic techniques in an unknown Swiss composer of symphonic poems (which I have now finished editing and which I will record next year) from the time of Wagner. Bruckner also did unconsciously write minimalistic sequences, but we can find such in earlier music by Vivaldi and others as well. For me, Herrmann is a great composer, from the inspirational and emotional side, especially in his *Symphony* and his opera. Then come those filmscores I listed as my favourites. I think Benny would also have loved to hear me saying this.

What are your future recording projects for Marco Polo?

At the moment I am working on a series of recordings including the complete orchestral works by George Templeton Strong, an American (1856-1948) who lived mostly in Switzerland and who has written some really splendid music, including a heroic 60-minutes Symphony in the style of Mahler's First and Tchaikovsky's "Manfred" and an extended symphonic poem inspired by the legends on King Arthur. This is, incidentally, my conducting début on the Naxos label.

As far as film music is concerned, the fourth volume of Georges Auric's scores (with suites from some famous French classics) will be recorded in the summer of 1999 and my reconstruction of the complete and original version of Dmitri Shostakovich's "The Fall of Berlin" will be finally realised next year.

More film scores by Aram Khachaturyan are also in preparation.

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