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Alessandra Salvati. Courtesy of the artist

BY CORINNE ARAZI

COMPOSER, 2013 WINNER OF "THE AMERICAN PRIZE"
ALESSANDRA SALVATI

Alessandra Salvati was born in Naples, Italy, where she was trained as a pianist and composer. Her repertoire includes works for symphonic orchestra, chamber ensembles and theater. Her music has been described as 'potent,' 'moving' and able to create 'a strong connection with the audience' (L. Budmen, South Florida Classical Review). Among her many accolades, she was the winner of The American Prize 2013 in composition with her symphonic cycle Tektosyne: Three Architectures for Orchestra.

You have been named the 2013 winner of "The American Prize" with your composition, Tektosyne: Three Architectures for Orchestra, a symphonic piece you have written for 100 musicians. The judges described your winning piece as a "monumental, richly orchestrated work, a sonic landscape, taking the listener on a journey of time and space". Can you tell us more about the creative process leading to a symphonic work?

The symphonic genre is the one I prefer and I feel more attracted to as a composer. The huge number of performers and the possibilities that the orchestra offers in terms of complexity, color, dynamics still allow the experimentation of new sonic horizons, after the masterpieces already composed, especially in the last decades. Talking about the creative process is challenging, since it is never linear or progressive and it unfolds at many different levels. In my experience, I often change my initial layout, as the work progresses, and in some cases the first materials I compose become the final part of my work. Sometimes intuition leads to organized, rational structures that I couldn't formulate by relying only on rational thinking, though the scientific approach and the adoption of mathematical procedures play an important role in my music. When I start a new work, my first notes are usually ideas about gestures, timbres, big spots of color, and only in a second time these ideas are translated in pitches, rhythmical structures and orchestral solutions. When I read the judges' comments on Tektosyne, I was particularly pleased by the emphasis they gave to the communicative aspects of my music. Actually my relationship with the audience is not confined in the public performance, but it is part of the creative process, that is itself a dialogue with the world and an attempt to offer new perspectives and interpretations of our time. I also believe that the audience always welcomes music that has communicative strength and clarity, even when it is extremely complex.

Your repertoire includes works for symphonic orchestra, chamber ensembles, theater and a short opera and you have received many awards since 1998. So much talent. Were you very musical as a child?

I started to listen to classical music and attend concerts from the first years. My grandmother gave me a piano when I was six. I used to spend long hours playing by ear all the songs I loved, and my parents decided to provide me with a teacher to study more seriously. I also used to play guitar, since my grandfather was a lute-maker and I had a beautiful classical guitar he made for me. I adored his studio, the smell of the glue and the wood, and I was enchanted by his ability to create musical instruments.

You recently earned a Doctorate in Music Theory and Composition from the University of Miami. After studying in Naples and in Rome, Italy, why did you choose Miami for your Doctorate?

After completing the long traditional training in Italian conservatories – that includes ten years for the piano diploma and ten years for the composition diploma – I dedicated some years to my specialization in composition and I worked as a music consultant and reviser of manuscripts. From Italy I often sent my music abroad and the positive feedback I received encouraged me to try an experience in a foreign academic environment. I had several interviews in the US, but the first contact with the faculty of the Frost School was certainly the most stimulating. They also offered me the financial support I needed to leave my country.

Few people know about Mozart's sister or Fanny Mendelsshon's talent. Women composers have always been underrepresented in many areas of classical music. Is it still true today?

In the last years the number women composers is growing fast, and in the US, in particular, I see a favorable environment to the intellectual work of women in general. When I work with my colleagues I only pay attention to the quality of the music and in a real community of scholars that is the only thing that really matters.

To pursue a career as a woman composer is daring to say the least. How do you intend to show your work and gain visibility for your creations?

Well, pursuing a career as a composer doesn't make life easy. I have been lucky because I received a strong support from my family and my husband, and we all made many sacrifices to achieve these results, but it was worthy. I keep working and studying much and my concern is creating good music, confident that the quality of my work will help me to gain visibility.

Would it be too early to share with us the details of an upcoming tour with the Israel Camerata of Jerusalem?

I consider this opportunity a big honor and I am working on a composition with a philosophical theme, in line with the other two pieces in program for the concert, Haydn's Symphony n.22, 'The Philosopher,' and Bernstein's Serenade after Plato's Symposium.

Do you have any other performances lined up in the US this year?

I received several requests of new compositions and I am in contact, for instance, with the German Dolch duo, with guitarist Marco Minà and others, but the performances are not scheduled yet.

The University of Miami Frost School of Music ranks among the most comprehensive and innovative in the nation. You received a scholarship from them, and worked as a teaching assistant while studying. The faculty believed in you and you certainly did not disappoint them. We consider bringing new talent to Miami as vital. Would you consider moving to Miami and being involved with the Frost School of Music should an opportunity arise?

The Frost School of music is a special place, where those who believe in their ideas and projects have a real possibility to emerge as world-class professionals. At the University of Miami the contact with colleagues and students coming from all over the world gave me the opportunity to start some of the most joyful and rewarding relationships of my life, and I would certainly welcome the possibility to be involved with the Frost School and to return to Miami.

<http://www.alessandrasalvati.com/>

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