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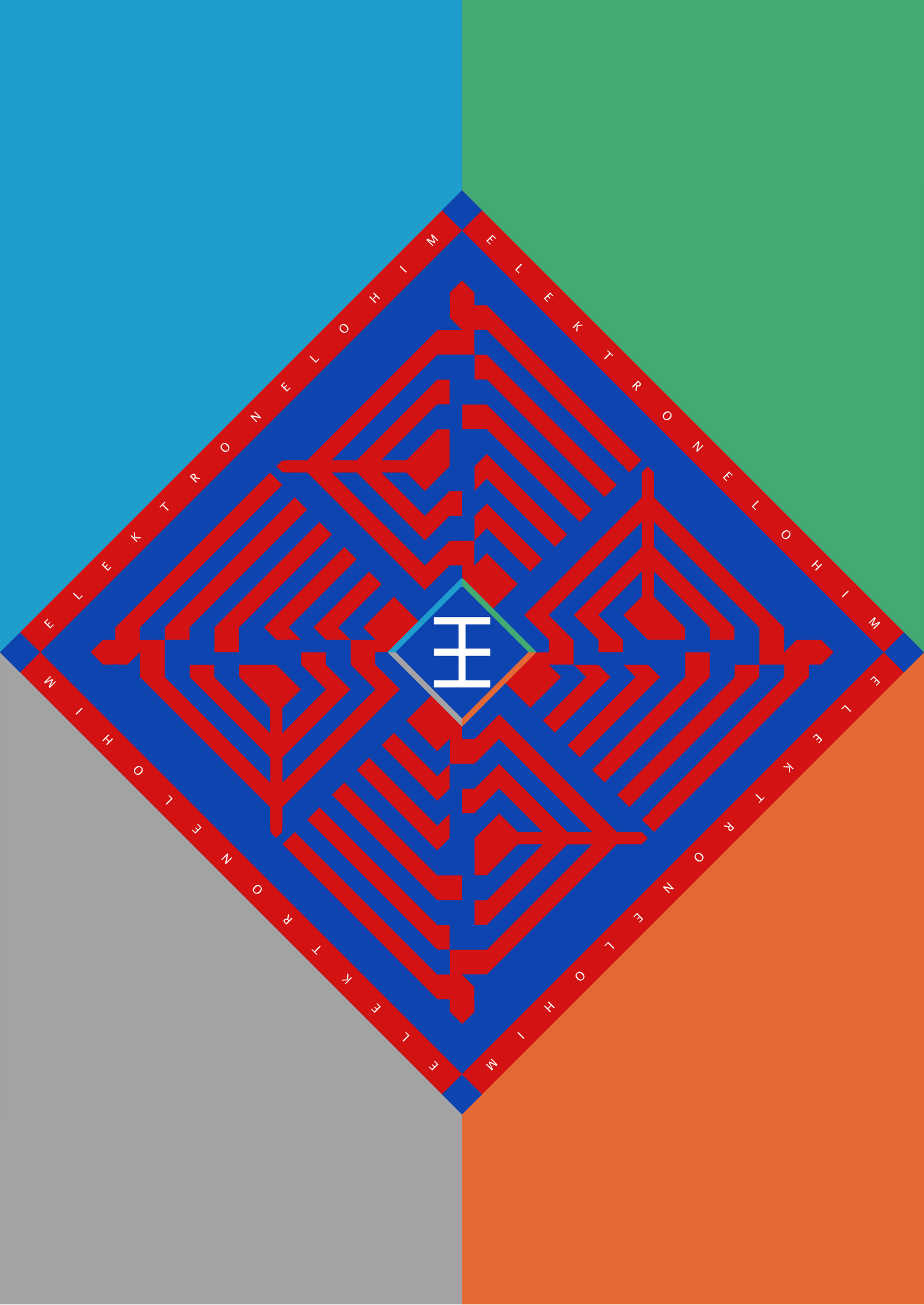
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DMus Composition Research Project

ELEKTRON ELOHIM
a cosmic oratorio

for soloists, chamber choir, electric guitars and keyboard synthesisers

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1. ABSTRACT

The doctoral composition concerned by this document is a contemporary oratorio of 95 minutes: it involves seven solo singers (two sopranos, a mezzo, two altos, a tenor and a bass), a polyphonic chamber choir (divided in three to sixteen parts) and an electro-acoustic quartet of guitars and synthesisers.

The title refers to the otherworldly guardians of the Jewish canon (*Tanakh*) and speculates on the energetic appearance of the Elohim, reflected by the timbral qualities of the electronic instruments.

The narrative, built around four angelic characters (Seraphim) and a female earthling counterpart, outlines in seven movements a fictional cosmogony, and the evolution of human society overseen by astral mentors.

The libretto has been written on purpose by the composer himself, mostly in Italian: some multi-linguistic fabrics blend poetry with Christian fragments in Greek and Latin.

2. CONVENTIONS AND TYPOGRAPHIC ABBREVIATIONS

- The composition is referred to in the text as EE (Elektron Elohim).
- Recurring foreign or specialised words are stated in *italic* font only at the first occurrence in the paragraph, after which they are restated in normal font.
- For reasons of intelligibility, sources from the Jewish bible (*Tanakh*) - psalms (*Tehillim*) and prophets (*Nevi'im*) - are quoted in the Latin translation of the *Biblia Sacra Vulgata* (IV century). Hebrew original expressions are provided for the key nouns, signalled by [H. orig.], and parallel sources in Hebrew and Latin are referenced. Sources from the Christian *Book of Revelation* are given in transliterated Greek. English translations are by the author.
- The words of the libretto appear in *italic* font; their English translations appear in regular font. English text printed in *italic* is part of the lyrics.
- In the paraphrase of the sixth movement narrative's, the Greek symbols Ξ and Θ stand for the interlocutors in a dialogue, respectively a celestial being (Ξ) and a woman (Θ).

3. THE SUBJECT AND THE TITLE

Elohim is, according to the *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* by K. van der Toorn (1998, p. 286-290), a plural for the Hebrew word *Eloah* (God) derived from the proto-Semitic *El*, whose overall meaning is describable as either "Gods" or "the high ones".

By extension, *Elohim* might thus designate "those proceeding from the high" or metaphorically "the judges/the princes". The term is widely used in the *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible) in a grammatically non consistent way, both as a plural and a singular noun, letting speculate about possible influences of polytheistic thought, of Babylonian and Egyptian origins, on early Jewish culture.

In this context, God is variously referred to as an individual or as a collective being (van der Toorn 1998, p. 287), and Elohim might equally denote either the *El Elyon* ("the highest one of the high") or an array of intermediate divinities acting as a concordant plurality.

In *Tehillim* 82:1/*Vulgata* 81:1 (BibleGateway 2015a; DailyTehillim 2015a) it is in fact explicitly reported that 'Deus [Elohim, H. orig.] stetit in synagoga Deorum [El, H. orig.] in medio autem Deus [Elohim, H. orig.] deiudicat'.

(Elohim was amongst the community of El, and there Elohim judges/judge).

Later, at *Tehillim* 82:6-7/*Vulgata* 81:6-7 (BibleGateway 2015a; DailyTehillim 2015a), God addresses directly his host with the following words:

Ego dixi dii [Elohim, H. orig.] estis et filii Excelsi [Elyon, H. orig.] omnes vos;
ergo quasi Adam moriemini et quasi unus de principibus cadetis.

(I said: you all are Elohim and the sons of Elyon, the Most High; nevertheless you will ultimately die as the sons of Adam do, and will fall almost as earthly rulers).

Elohim is mentioned instead as a singular concept in *Bereshit* (Genesis) 1:2/*Vulgata* 1:2, where the *Rûach* (living spirit) floats over the undifferentiated chaos of the pre-creation (BibleGateway 2015b; Leekeithfreeman 2015):

Terra autem erat inanis et vacua et tenebrae super faciem abyssi et spiritus
[Ruach, H. orig.] Dei [Elohim, H. orig.] ferebatur super aquas.

*(The earth was formless and empty, and darkness floated over the face of the abyss,
and the Ruach of Elohim moved upon the waters).*

Afterwards, at *Bereshit* 6:2/*Vulgata* 6:2 (BibleGateway 2015c; Leekeithfreeman 2015), and with a clear influence on the narrative of the EE libretto, the Elohim appear in plural form again, in a rather controversial remark hinting at a direct interaction between the primeval humanity and a cohort of heavenly guardians:

Videntes filii Dei [B'nai Elohim, H. orig.] filias eorum quod essent pulchrae
acceperunt uxores sibi ex omnibus quas elegerant.

*(the Bene Elohim, seeing how beautiful were the daughters of men,
took as their wives those who they had chosen among the multitude of women).*

There exist in the Torah several more mentions of a plural Elohim, as category of celestial aides, as in *Tehillim* 8:4-6/*Vulgata* 8:4-6 (BibleGateway 2015d; DailyTehillim 2015b):

Quoniam videbo caelos tuos; opera digitorum tuorum lunam et stellas quae tu
fundasti; quid est homo quod memor es eius aut filius hominis quoniam visitas
eum; minuisti eum paulo minus ab angelis [Elohim, H. orig.] gloria et honore
coronasti eum

(Because I see your heavens, and the work of your fingers, and the moon and the stars that you have established. What is man, what do you remember of him? And what of the son of man? Because you visit him. You have made him a little lower than the Elohim; you have crowned him with glory and honour).

In the EE tale I have chosen to identify a specific class of Elohim, the *Seraphim*, for their strong figurative connotation and their potential within the context of a musical narration. The Seraphim ("the burning ones") are the highest ranking angels in the *De Coelesti Hierarchia* (V century) of the Pseudo-Dionysius, also standing among the most powerful divine hosts in the *Mishneh Torah* by Moshe ben Maimon, a XII century Sephardic taxonomy of heavenly beings.

According to van der Toorn (1998, p. 742-743) they fly incessantly above and around the God's throne, singing the *Trisagion* (the "three times Holy") with semblance of six-winged fiery creatures, as it is described in Isaiah 6:1-3 (VIII century BCE), (BibleGateway 2015e; Qbible 2015):

In anno quo mortuus est rex Ozias vidi Dominum [*Adonäy* in H. orig.] sedentem super solium excelsum et elevatum et ea quae sub eo erant implebant templum; seraphin [*S'räfiym* in H. orig.] stabant super illud sex alae uni et sex alae alteri duabus velabant faciem eius et duabus velabant pedes eius et duabus volabant; et clamabant alter ad alterum et dicebant sanctus sanctus sanctus Dominus exercituum plena est omnis terra gloria eius.

*(In the year when King Uzzyah died I saw the Lord sitting on a high and soaring throne, and those who came under him filled the temple. Above him stood the Seraphim, and each of them had six wings: with two they concealed their faces and with two they covered their feet, and with two wings they flew. And they loudly called each other and said:
Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory).*

John of Patmos (I sec.) received and elaborated this vision in the only apocalyptic section of the New Testament, the *Book of Revelation*, which draws abundantly upon imagery from the *Ketuvim* (psalms) and *Nevi'im* (prophets) of the Tanakh.

From a suggestive passage in Apocalypse 4, that largely expands on the Isaiah's apparition of the temple, stems an important Christian tradition of seraphic iconography, depicting four figures enveloped by eye-dotted wings.

We read in fact in Apocalypse 4:8 (BibleGateway, 2015f; Biblehub, 2015):

Kai tessara zōa en kath eauto eichon ana pterugas ex kuklothen kai esōthen gemonta ophthalmōn kai anapausin ouk echousin ēmeras kai nuktos legonta agios agios kurios o theos o pantokratōr o ēn kai o ōn kai o erchomenos.

(and each of the four creatures had six wings, which were full of eyes around and inside, and they moved incessantly and said in the day and at night:

Holy, Holy, Holy the omnipotent God, who was, who is and who will come).

Both these fascinating accounts, of angelic voices engaged in the choral hymnody of the *Sanctus*, offer suggestions for a special relationship between the Seraphim and sacred polyphony. On this basis, I have decided to reflect the six-winged appearance of the four beings with the strings of the electric guitars that flank the choir.

As a whole, the electro-acoustic quartet is imagined as the Isaiah's and John's majestic creatures, somehow resembling in number, aspect and spatial disposition - with an appropriate dress for a staged performance - their hieratic representation in the dome's mosaic of the XII century Norman-Sicilian Cefalù cathedral (Fig. 1).

The etymology of Seraphim - whose radical *Sarap* means "serpent", as explained by van der Toorn (1998, 742)¹ - conjures something mutant and iridescent, as in the interpretation of a Seraph painted by Giotto in the 19th episode of the *Legend of St. Francis* (Fig. 2).

Its fire-like colours and metallic sheen have led me to associate the sentinel angel with a sort of electrical energy, emitted in arches of multicoloured light that resemble "wings".

Quite interestingly, the modern semantic inflexion of the adjective "seraphic" distorts the meaning in the sense of a poised and blissful attitude, obscuring the original connotation of a disquieting yet prepossessing foreignness, and maybe also an inflexible resolve in attending to humanly unfathomable tasks.

This intriguing duality in the apparent nature of the Seraphim, holy but terrible, adds to their alien remoteness and has contributed to shape the dramatic definition of their twofold nature in the EE fiction, as characters at once attentive and indifferent, reassuring and perturbing.

Such disconcerting presence of the Elohim, which Isaiah struggles to express with the vocabulary of his (essentially rural) experience, has suggested to qualify the instrumental forces of the oratorio as a small party of enigmatic and continually interacting musicians, who produce a wave of unearthly sounds - at times subtle and at times thundering - foreign to the context of the choir, just as the inexplicable swirling angels were to the ambience of the archaic Israelite temple.

Coincidentally, the technical artificiality of the synthesised sonorities and the energetically charged appearance of the Seraphim could be described by the same adjectives: *electric* and *electronic*. Both refer to the Greek root *elektron*, in an evocative phonetic symmetry with Elohim (each word is made of three syllables and together they amount to six, just like the wings of a Seraph).

Elektron is ancient Greek for "amber", "the colour of amber", "the colour of gold" or "shining light": being also the name for a beautiful alloy of gold and silver, it conveys the shifting colours in the semblance of the flying angels.

With further fitting correspondence, the words Elektron and Elohim contain the same radical *El*, which van der Toorn (1998, p. 287) informs us to also signify "heaven" in Sumerian, Akkadian and Greek. Therefore, *Elektron Elohim* symbolises on various planes both the four instrumentalists of the oratorio (with their otherworldly tones) and the four

¹ Apparently, the metaphor of the serpent is aimed at evoking a creature of undefinable shape and reddish colour, similar to the brilliance of copper.

protagonists of the libretto, who look at us with inscrutable gaze from the walls of the Sicilian Monreale cathedral (Fig. 3).

At graphical level, and with a preliminary concept in mind of the visual apparatus in performance, it is noteworthy that the two title's initials, mirrored along the spine, form the capital Greek letter Ξ (X: meaning symmetry and cardinal definition of space, as in the Seraphim's praesidium of the God's throne) and the Phoenician letter S (*Samekh*: "support", "grounding pillar"), which seems to allude to the foundational role of the Elohim narrated in the libretto.

4. ICONOGRAPHY

Fig. 1: Anonymous (XII cent.) *Seraphim* (Cefalù, Vault of the Transept) [Mosaic].

Fig. 2: Di Bondone, G. (c. 1300) *Legend of S. Francis*, n. 19 (Assisi, nave) [Fresco detail].

Fig. 3: Anonymous (XII - XIII cent.) *Seraph* (Monreale, nave) [Mosaic detail].

Fig. 4: Anonymous (XIV cent.) *Red Seraph* [Illuminated manuscript's detail].

Fig. 5: Blake, W. (c. 1800) *Elohim creating Adam* [Print and ink on paper].

Fig. 6: Calibas (2013) *Seraphim* [Computer generated fractal image].





5. THE LIBRETTO

Movement I. COALESCENCE

The universe is a conscious but still empty totality. Then, the void densifies itself, and time and space are put in motion. The Creator suddenly radiates from the galactic shades, as a bright pulse that erupts in every wavelength, and reality begins.

The material dimensions gradually coalesce from the primal flash of conscience, in the form of stars and nebulae, and later of galaxies and planets.

Movement II. QUATUOR SERAPHIM: THE ETERNAL GUARDIANS

The Elohim, the makers of creation emanated from El, supervise the design of the cosmos. From their arrays emerge four Seraphim, etheric individuals of neither female nor male nature. Fierce sentries of the Prime Radiant, they address the solar systems in a song of praise, while they encircle the crystal dome of Eloah with a blinding radiation.

They loudly chant in synchrony, with words simultaneously uttered in four idioms of the human history to come, since they have neither land, nor nation, nor root in time, nor allegiance to planetary rulers, and their meaning is universal:

- *Da Eoni, accarezziamo con lo sguardo, in cristallina misericordia,
la dolce infinita curvatura del Creatore;*

- *Since Aeons, we caress with the gaze, in crystalline mercy,
the gentle endless curvature of the Creator;*

- *Ab Aeones blandimur cum oculis, cristallina misericordia,
dulcem infinitam curvam Creatoris;*

- *Apò æðnes cheidèoun me to vlèmma, se kristallikì èleos,
tin apalì àpiri kampylòtita tou dimiòourgou;*

(Από αιώνες χαϊδεύουν με το βλέμμα, σε κρυσταλλική έλεος,
την απαλή άπειρη καμπυλότητα του δημιουργού).

The music of Creation grows wider and bolder, resounding across the universe when the entire host of the Elohim joins in the song.

The four Seraphim commanders harangue the space lands anew, seating at the flaming vertices of their armies, and before long the angelic legion voices with them:

Sumus Bene Elyon.

(we are the offspring of the Most High).

Movement III. SPECULUM MUNDI:
THE DOLPHIN, THE TREE, THE FOUNDRY, THE TELESCOPE

The cardinal Seraphim appease temporarily their deafening circular chant, detuning the carrier frequency of their wings to a gentler ratio, almost bearable even for corporeal senses. They confer in perfect agreement, as to how accomplish the celestial plan for life in several worlds:

*Conveniamo, Fratelli di Rotazione,
e vibriamo sincroni le forme transienti dei mondi.*
(Let's foregather, Brothers of Rotation;
and let us vibrate in synchrony the transient forms of the worlds.)

The foundational Elohim proclaim in turn their oath for the edification of humankind, according to the polarisations of their four elemental natures: water of comets, earth of planets, fire of stars and wind of radiation. *Mu-ῥδωρ* (Seraph of seamanship), *Ersetu-γῆ* (Seraph of agriculture), *Gibil-πῦρ* (Seraph of foundries) and *Im-αἰθήρ* (Seraph of astronomy) pronounce their respective programmes, concerning nutrition from fishing, nourishment from plants and trees, metallurgy and astral philosophy. They ratiocinate as a plural entity and also as seraphic individuals, since each of them governs an aspect of life:

Primo: all'Arte delle Acque.
"offro le creature gentili che abitano i liquidi, perché i viventi ne abbiano energia".
Secondo: all'Arte delle Terre.
"porto le verdi sostanze e il miracolo dei frutti, perché i viventi ne abbiano alimento".
Terzo: all'Arte dei Metalli.
"dispongo le materie incandescenti, immagini flesse in oggetti,
perché i viventi ne abbiano industria"
Quarto: all'Arte delle Stelle.
"ordino i quesiti dell'intelletto, che danno geometria al pensiero,
perché i viventi contemplino l'Origine".

(First: to the Art of Waters.
"I offer the kind creatures who dwell in liquids, for the living to have energy thereby".
Second: to the Art of Soils.
"I bring the green substances and the miracle of fruits,
for the living to have nourishment thereby".
Third: to the Art of Metals.
"I arrange the glowing matters, images flexed in objects,
for the living to have industry thereby".
Fourth: to the Art of Stars.
"I sort the questions of intellect, which provide thinking with geometry,
for the living to contemplate their Origin".)

The Seraphim channel their thoughts at the intrinsic speed of energy, and although there is adamantine resolve in their attitude, yet there is endearment - of a fatherly, motherly, brotherly and sisterly sort at once - for the fragile finiteness of the breathing creatures.

They determine to mould a primeval humanity in the land of Sumer, in the city of Eridu, and to present that candid denizens of Earth with the gifts of evolution and progress, through command of the coastal environment, ability in the cultivation of land, advancement in industry and intellectual development.

The Elohim seal their promise with a geometric song of accomplishment, on the image of their spinning quadrant.

*Ai primevi di Kiengir in Eridu, agli intatti figli di Enki,
daremo il delfino d'idrogeno e ossigeno, il profumo scarlatto dei pomi,
l'esatto bagliore del maglio e il cielo angolare del quadrante.*

(To the primal ones of Kiengir in Eridu, to the sons untouched of Enki,
we will bestow the hydrogen and oxygen dolphin, the scarlet scent of apples,
the exact gleam of the mallet and the angular sky of the quadrant.).

Movement IV. ELECTRIC TRISAGION: THE THRICE GLORIFIED FLAME

From the outskirts of the solar system, an observer watches the far depths of interstellar space, and sees on approach the beaming sphere which is at once El, his emanations and his own dwelling. From afar, inexorably oncoming at inconceivable speed, the orb of the Creator has the appearance of a sapphire and emerald kernel, immersed in a relentless cloud of ruby electrons: the Seraphim who dance their blissfully ruthless song around the centre. First, the vitreous fundamental of the whirling nucleus comes to the ears of the beholder, and then more harmonics reach, when the Elohim declare their eternal guardianship of the Radiant and wardship of the Creation.

While El nears at the superluminal pace of thought, it becomes audible the circular paeon of the Seraphim - the Trisagion -, originating from a point but resounding everywhere.

At last, the unspeakable wonder of the screaming wheels of Adonäy touches the boundaries of Sol, and the overwhelmed viewer glimpses for an instant the unendurable Glory of the Creator.

The God of the Hosts is then heralded by the Elohim, who unfurl their crimson blades with metallic clangours, showing their marvellous semblance of winged bronze serpents.

*A presidio del Primo Radiante, di ogni ramificazione,
Lodiamo da immemore tempo il candore minerale dei pianeti.
Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus; Agios o Theòs, Agios ischyròs, Agios athanatòs;
Dominus Deus Sabaoth: Relucet in excelsis.
Apriamo sestuplici ali di luce, ruotando attorno al Suo Asse;
Cantiamo arcobaleni furiosi, al cospetto della sua Luminanza: Relucet in excelsis.*

(In defense of the Prime Radiant, of every ramification,
we praise since time immemorial the mineral candour of the planets.
Holy, Holy, Holy; Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal;
God, Lord of the arrayed angels: He shines forth in the highest.
We unfurl sixfold wings of light, rotating around His Axis;
We sing fierce rainbows, in the presence of His Luminance: He shines forth in the highest.)

The Elohim sing with multiple voices each, of women and men likewise, delivering a gentle music of prophecy on the arrival of messengers. Their harmonious speech rises gradually in amplitude, but not as much in strength, until it replenishes the solar system. Finally, the inexpressible machine of Adonäy - the sundial of Elohim - begins to retreat, and the Seraphim revert to the Trisagion, attuning their symphonic cry to a millennial prayer of laud, for the generous valiancy of the Creation. Eventually, the Seraph of Divinity, the Seraph of Creation, the Seraph of Eternity and the Seraph of Compassion spin away the dome of El, and recede slowly in the vast oceans of space, with a lullaby of tenderness, care, empathy and deliverance for the living creatures. The peridot drop and its scarlet globe leave the speechless beholder: only the residual oscillation of the source remains, almost inaudible, in the liquid absolute silence.

Benedicti qui veniunt in nomine Radiantis: Relucet in excelsis.

(Blessed are those who come in the name of the Radiant: He shines forth in the highest.).

*Vasilev Ouranie, Paraklite, to Pnevma tis Alitheias;
Agios o Theòs, Agios ischyròs, Agios athanatòs, Eleìson imàs;
Primo Radiante... Ramificazione... Immemore Tempo... Candore Minerale....*

(O Lord of Heaven, O Defender, O Spirit of Truth;
Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have Mercy upon us.
Prime Radiant... Ramification... Time Immemorial... Mineral Candour...).

Movement V. SCINTILLA MUNDI: THE GIRL AND THE SHADOWS OF LIGHT

Planet Earth: near today. An unusually gifted little girl asks herself why - *praeter rerum seriem*, beyond the order of things - she can decipher the whispers that the trees of her wood address at her almost imperceptibly. Likewise, walking among plants in close connection with things natural, she wonders how possibly she can experience an emotive nexus with the meek animals of her farm, exchanging feelings with them. She is used by now to certain inexplicable shapes of brightness, glimpsed in the forest in broad daylight. However still disquieted by such visions, she has resolved to believe that those eerie optical perturbations are shadows of supernatural beings. Returning home to her family, after her usual solitary walk, she contents herself with the modest relativity of her nature, able to perceive seeds of conscience in the tiniest material phenomena.

Oh, mistero mirabile:

Perché sussurrano da nubi di foglia, filigrane viventi di linfa?

Perché leggo consenso e concetto, nel palpito puro dei quadrupedi?

Sagome di luce attraversano le ombre meridiane; profili parlanti di ali celesti.

Così, nella piccola unità del mio essere, enumero gli oggetti pensanti del mondo.

(Oh, wondrous mystery:

Why do the living filigrees of lymph whisper at me, from clouds of leaves?

Why do I read consent and concept, in the pure heartbeat of our brothers the quadrupeds?

Shapes of light traverse the afternoon shadows; speaking contours of celestial wings.

Thus, in the small unity of my being, I enumerate the thinking objects of the world.)

Movement VI. THE GOLDEN PNEUMA: DIALOGUS

Planet Earth: half a generation later, during an unspecified late afternoon.

A beautiful and sensitive young woman relishes her strolling, among lush mid-Spring grasses. She suddenly and distinctly sees a rippling swathe of light, almost a liquid beam, emerging faintly against some shadowy boughs. Soon, it takes the profile of a small and blinding six-pointed star, that shades in the surrounding air with a continuous shift of spectrum, from opal to ember. Meanwhile, she hears – or rather she feels - a circling sound in the deep of herself, like that of a bowed gamelan or a lamenting bell, oscillating in tone according to the change of hue in the vision. She instantly recognises the apparition of her childhood, and addresses it as to its nature and intentions.

He/Her/They respond in a warm and reassuring musical mind, with a cadenced pulse attuned to the vibration of Their body's colours. The light-being explains that He/Her/They have been guarding her since the early days of mankind, for she has lived as several female creatures across time.

Concerning His/Her/Their identity, about which the young lady enquires, They answer that They are a manifold ubiquitous being, who stretches across time: partly male and partly female, singular and plural, here and there, present and omnipresent.

He/Her/They deliver the announcement that she will commence and bring to life a new star-bound human breed, which will finally rejoin the universal family of its forgotten ancestors.

Now the evanescent messenger reveals sketchy handsome features from within the radiant image - of moving sweetness and dignified remoteness equally -, and seconds an unexpected surge of affection of His/Her/Their male aspect, reaching for the triumphant female glory of the woman, in a flash of complete and passionate mutual recognition.

Enclosed in amethyst waves, their corporeal and incorporeal bodies unite in a both material and immaterial embrace of luxurious chastity, in the closest angelical equivalence of human lovemaking. Feeling the unrestrained joy of that re-convergence, anticipated for aeons, their spirits engage in an intertwined song of celestial reunion.

Θ: *Cosa sei tu Eloah, che vibri come glifo acqueo, nella luce tangenziale dell'occidente?*

(What are you, Eloah? You who vibrate like a watery glyph,
in the tangential light of the West?)

Ξ: *Mi conosci, germoglio d'Universi:*

traslo in frazioni del tuo astro dall'età del primo stupore.

(You know me, bud of Universes:

I shift in fractions of your sun since the age of the first amazement.)

Θ: *Sei dunque il falco d'etere che progettavo su pagine di fronde?*

(Are you therefore the ether hawk which I designed on pages of foliage?)

Ξ: *Sono Uno e sono Molti: Sono Qui e sono Altrove: Sono un Messaggio:*

Sarai Dimora di una Stella, ed Araldo d'Eserciti di Sapienza.

(I am One and Many: I am Here and Elsewhere: I am a Message:

You will be Home to a Star, and Herald to an Army of Wisdom.)

ΞΘ: *Sia Lode all'Unificazione e alla Comunità dei Mondi,*

nel Tempo Sacro del Ritorno.

(be Praise to the Unification and the Community of the Worlds,

in the Holy Time of Reversion.)

Movement VII. REVERSIO: TO EXULTANT STARS

Planet Earth: a generation after the encounter between the girl and the golden messenger. The earthling chosen one, now a middle-aged woman and a mother, reconsiders the actions of her life with a justified sense of fulfilment, and understands how contrasting apexes of darkness and light - savagery and knowledge - constellate the path of mankind, toward the complete development of its spiritual and material potential.

She however foresees a luminous future for Earth and its denizens: at the reached stage of her life, she feels that a cycle of accomplishment has ended, having educated her sons and daughters as the seeds of a novel enlightened society. Now, she only lives in wait for the return of the cosmic architects of the original human stock. The world listens in wonder to her words, assimilating the magnitude of their implications.

"Considero il cammino con linee di pensiero retrogrado; e osservo portenti inumani di Guerra, e vedo prodigi valenti di Pace: deduco futuri..."

Attendendo gli architetti cardinali, inarco i miei figli nel tempo, coltivo le radici nel mondo."

Figli nel Tempo... Radici nel Mondo...

("I consider the path with lines of retrograde thinking; and observe inhuman portents of War, and see valiant prodigies of Peace: I deduce futures...
In wait for the cardinal architects, I arch my sons in the time, and cultivate the roots in the world." Sons in Time... Roots in the World...)

Proceeding in geometrical order, the cardinal Seraphim approach the astronomic surroundings of Earth. Each of them recapitulates in turn the mission, with a song of identity intoned by their angelic retinue. First the solar ones, under the ensign of the diamond, then the flaming ones, under the banner of the ruby, next the verdant ones, with the standard of the emerald, and finally the oceanic ones, under the sign of the sapphire.

*4. Dalla sorgente simmetrica dell'onnisciente fusione,
navighiamo su venti d'idrogeno, su fiati atomici di stella.
Lode al diamante solare!*

*3. Da turbinanti fornaci, da grembi metallici d'astri,
voliamo su arche di brace, su forge di liquido plasma.
Luce al rubino perpetuo!*

*2. Da selve abissali, da formidabili altopiani,
portiamo i giacimenti della vita, ingegneria di mattoni e tabernacoli.
Onore allo smeraldo vivente!*

*1. In cuori d'oceano, fra bastioni d'acqua antica,
viaggia l'umore dei pianeti, fermento liquido della casa originale.
Gloria allo zaffiro nebulare!*

(4. From the symmetrical source of the omniscient fusion,
we sail on hydrogen winds, on atomic breath of star.
Praise to the solar diamond!

3. From whirling furnaces, from metallic astral wombs,
we fly on ember arks, on forges of liquid plasma.
Light to the perpetual ruby!

2. From abysmal forests, from tremendous highlands,
we bring the goldmines of life, engineering of bricks and tabernacles.
Honour to the living emerald!

1. In ocean's hearts, among ramparts of ancient water,
the fluid of the planets fares, liquid ferment of the original house.
Glory to the nebular sapphire!)

Once the coruscating vessels of *Im-αἰθήρ*, *Gibil-πῶρ*, *Ersetu-γῆ* and *Mu-ὕδωρ* have attained the orbital periphery, they array themselves around the planet, floating in synchronous dance as a clockwork of light, from pole to pole and from dawn to occasum.

Their spinning beams excite the upper layers of the stratosphere, triggering rumbles and drones, continent-wide sirens and multicoloured auroras from horizon to horizon.

The returning founders join in a song of praise of the celestial unity:

*1.2.3.4. Sia Lode al numinoso sinfonico, e Luce al crisopale ubiquo,
e Onore al contrafforte dei mondi, e Gloria negli eoni all'ennuplice!*

(1.2.3.4. Be Praise to the symphonic numinous, and Light to the ubiquitous chrysopraxe, and Honour to the counterfort of the worlds, and Glory in the aeons to the ennuplice!).

The mother of the new humanity sees the burning arks of the angels, hovering in the four corners of the sky, and apprehends that the moment of journey has come.

She bids farewell to the people of Earth, the present time and her beloved family, announcing that an epoch of knowledge is imminent and that she will follow the *Elektron Elohim* back to the original land of man, where every individuality is bound to return after a cycle of finite lives. Her body dissolves into a bright vertical beam, and her transcended corporeality reaches the gleaming vessel-creatures.

"Acqua, Terra, Fuoco ed Etere mi chiamano al viaggio.

Mi congedo dal secolo e valedico la stirpe dell'uomo, perché un'era filosofica si annunzia.

Io vado con gli Altissimi d'Elettro alla nazione astrale, che ci attende alla fine dei cicli".

(Water, Earth, Fire and Ether call me to the travel. I take leave from the saeculum and address good omens to the offspring of man, since a philosophical age is coming.

I depart with the Electric High Ones toward the astral nation, which awaits us at the end of the cycles).

The dynamos inside the Ophanim recommence to spin, with a ringing of engine activation. From within the living starships a polyphony of glory emanates, exalting stars and nebulae for the greatness of their Intellect, and lauding the Infinite Music of Creation which expands across the Constellations. Eventually, the ablaze gyroscopes recede in the depths of space, and their trails fade while the world watches in silent amazement.

1.2.3.4. Canto d'ascesa delle ruote di Elohim:

Torniamo tra stelle esultanti, all'armonia di radianti regioni.

Splendore all'Intelletto, e Musica Infinita alle Costellazioni.

(1.2.3.4. Song of ascent of the wheels of Elohim:

We return to exultant stars, to the harmony of radiant regions.

Splendour to the Intellect, and Infinite Music to the Constellations.)

6. A LANDSCAPE OF MUSICAL REFERENCES

My musical language derives from a personal synthesis of Flemish imitative technique, early-Tudor choral sonority, progressive rock and ambient music, with elements of contemporary Scandinavian jazz.

The latter genre is broadly definable as a reception of B. Evans (cool jazz) and M. Davis (fusion) influenced by classical and folk music, with eminent representatives in A. Andersen (double bass), K. Bjørnstad (piano), J. Christensen (drums), J. Garbarek (saxophone), B. Stenson (piano) and T. Rypdal (electric guitar).

As a whole, this movement exploits trans-contextually a post-Hindemith harmony, based on triads extended by overtones, as clearly audible in a landmark piece of the ECM² style: the stretched reinvention of D. Cherry's *Desireless* recorded in *Witchi-Tai-To* (1974) by the Bobo Stenson Trio and J. Garbarek.

With this aesthetically heterogeneous horizon in mind, I aim at writing works provided with - at once - the rational grammar of polyphony, the expressive timbral gestures of fusion jazz, the continuous development of progressive rock and the soundscapes of electronic music.

Although my musical aesthetic is generally prone to structural and non-descriptive composition³, and my output displays overall a deliberate syntactical density, I also feel drawn to more emotionally straightforward compositional approaches.

In fact, an almost "pictorial" expressive attitude is a determining factor in both the latent impressionism of ECM jazz, as in M. Alperin's *First Impression* (1999), and the slow sonic layering of ambient works, epitomised by B. Eno's *Music for Airports* (1978).

These different stylistic spheres are however not irreconcilable, and I believe that through-composed counterpoint, modern jazz interplay, prog-rock suites and electronic sequences⁴ show specific properties in common:

- The inherent spirituality in transcending the ordinary experience through music.
(more on this in Par. 7)
- The fact of implementing a structure in development, with an abstract narrative of forms.
- The sculptural quality of an aural machinery in motion.

Examples of thus explainable inter-genre textures are substantially present in EE, for instance at b. 20-24 (arpeggiator⁵ that spreads a running harmony across the stereo field),

2 Editions of Contemporary Music, founded in Munich in 1969 by M. Eicher.

3 Non-descriptive: not aimed at directly relating existential events.

4 As in the pattern-based synthetic improvisations of Tangerine Dream. See *Phaedra* (1974).

5 An electronic or computer-generated device which transforms a triggering chord in an arpeggio, at the speed of the active performance tempo (clock) of the sequenced track, inside a hardware module, a sequencer software or a notation program. The resulting arpeggiation is controlled - since the advent of this musical tool in the 1970s - by a set of parameters, as also implemented in the Native Instruments

b. 101-116 (electric guitars over a stream of bass sequencer⁶), b. 141-149 and 754-757 (fusion-chamber music), b. 1035-1055 and 1328-1337 (step sequencer⁷ that transforms a chordal series into the acoustically immersive metaphor⁸ of a fictional landscape).

The map of my references in art-pop comprises predominantly rock acts of the 1970s and 1980s, beginning from the Berlin school and the English progressive scene, up to British-American ambient music and the English new wave/dream pop movement of the 1980s-1990s. To begin with, the German electronic group Tangerine Dream has exemplified the implementation of entire poetic panoramas with purely mechanical means (synthesizers and sequencers), devising a particular kind of cosmic psychedelia based on slow transformations of spare thematic material, abstract chordal waves and technological patterns. Significant works in this stylistic vein are *Rubycon* (1975), *Force Majeure* (1979) and *Hyperborea* (1983).

The 1980s dark-wave music of the Scottish band Cocteau Twins has awakened my engagement with Renaissance polyphony through the vocal style of natural soprano E. Fraser, who sang unfathomable words inside almost madrigalistic multi-track arrangements. Moreover, the innovative electric guitar technique of Robin Guthrie has exerted a lasting influence on my musical aesthetic, with its pensive added-third harmonies (7th, 9th and 11th chords) - more customarily heard in jazz music - spread across wide symphonic overdubs of electronically filtered sounds. This instrumental aesthetic is also shared by the group Slowdive, in albums like *Just for a Day* (1991) and *Pygmalion* (1995). Representative releases of the Cocteau Twins' meta-rock are *Victorialand*, *Love's Easy Tears* and *The Moon and the Melodies* (all released in 1986), whose pseudo-polyphonic employment of guitar has contributed to shape my ideas for the scoring of EE, together with the work of two equally unconventional instrumentalists:

R. Fripp and T. Rypdal.

Fripp has long experimented with the ambient territories of electric guitar, coining the term *soundscape* and devising with B. Eno in the 1970s a double tape equipment ironically called *Frippertronic*, for the real-time overdubbing of a single musician. The lush mantric

Retro Machines MK2 synthesiser library used in this oratorio: *divider ratio* (16 or 12 steps), *division multiplier* (it halves the length of the steps), *chord on/off* (it changes the arpeggio mode to beating chords), *arpeggio direction* (up, down, up-down, random, as played), *gate rate* (it controls whether the length of the steps is entirely or partially played), *step volume* (relative amplitude of each step) and *octave span* (number of octaves over which the arpeggio runs).

6 An electronic or computer-generated device that subdivides a triggering note in repeated shorter beats, following a proportional ratio (1/2, 1/4, 1/8, etc.). It is a common means in popular music for producing bass lines of rhythmic accompaniment, to a certain extent equivalent to the *walking bass* of bebop jazz.

7 An electronic or computer-generated device that works as a programmable arpeggiator, repeating a series of pre-set intervals (written in a linear matrix) over a pitch or chord, in the tempo of the performance track. Each step can be empty or filled with an event, of chosen length and semitonal distance from the triggering key/keys on a controlling keyboard: in automated fashion the process is activated by a sequencing or notation program. The harmonic independence of every component in a step-sequenced chord opens interesting possibilities, for the generation of complex polytonal beats.

8 In rhetoric, something which stands for something else by virtue of a common paradigmatic (qualitative) trait. Thus, doves and hawks stand respectively for pacifist (*mildness*) and warlike (*aggressiveness*) men.

textures thus obtained, which seem to recall certain Indian influences of Tangerine Dream, are noticeable in *God Save the Queen/Under Heavy Manners* (1980), in the intellectually engaged avant-rock of King Crimson (*Three of a perfect pair*, 1984) and in the poignant meditation *Love Cannot Bear* (2005), where the conjunct use of delayed layers and synthesised orchestral sounds, triggered through Midi guitars, has suggested possible instrumental strategies for EE.

In a way more actively involved with classical part-writing, and therefore meaningful for the interaction of polyphony and artificial tones in my oratorio, Rypdal has achieved a whole spectrum of expressive resources from the treated guitar, ranging from lyrical *obbligato* solos with sustained timbres to harmonic pads and icy soundscapes.

Among the various line-ups explored by Rypdal we find an ambient jazz quartet with piano and cello (*The Sea I and II*, 1995-1998), a chamber strings orchestra with electric guitar (*Q.E.D.*, 1991; *Lux Aeterna*, 2002), a hybrid acoustic and amplified consort (*Skywards*, 1997) and - exploring the complementary role of a vocal group - a collaboration with the Hilliard Ensemble in the paradoxically titled *Melodic Warrior* (2013), where the jarring noises of a modernist guitar are largely employed, in contrast with the harmonic properties of an a-cappella consort.

In terms of actual musical grammar, the main influence of Scandinavian modern jazz on my language concerns the use of modal scales in a contemporary context, and the employment of added notes⁹ and polychords¹⁰. Just a specific element of jazz-rock harmony is relatively recurrent in my style: a pattern that includes a descending major third, an ascending major second and a descending fourth, suitable for building concatenated modulations at the ascending fourth¹¹. In general, it is clear that ECM fusion music and my contemporary adaptation of counterpoint do essentially diverge for what regards the function of improvisation (constitutive in jazz but completely absent in my works) and the overall conception of the musical sign. In the pop area it is prevalently oriented toward the momentary acoustic surface, while in the classical tradition - and in my own compositions - it responds to a wider thematic strategy and gestural economy.

Furthermore, in the polyphonic genre with which my style is connected, the expressive factors stem from a rational control of the quantities and proportions, which in a sense constitute the true substance of the musical symbol. This kind of structural appraisal is foreign in tendency to the listening experience of popular music.

On the side of classical references, my background is mostly constituted by late Middle Ages and 20th-21st century music. N. Gombert (c. 1495-1560) and P. de Manchicourt (c. 1510-1564) - of the so called fourth Flemish generation surveyed by Reese (1959, p. 301 and 350) - may represent the stylistic seed of my preference for continuous imitation and

⁹ An added-note chord is a bichord or triad to which one or more components are attached, as in [c#-g#-a#-d#].

¹⁰ A polychord (particular case of added-note chords) is a harmony that outlines layered triads, like [c-e-g-a-c#-f#] equating C maj + F# min.

¹¹ In the oratorio, at b. 1439-1443, four cycles of this scheme ascend by fourths, implementing the following sequence of major chords: [Gb - Ab - Eb]; [Cb - Db - Ab/G#]; [E - F# - C#]; [A - B - F#].

texturally dense fabrics, as apparent in works like *Salve Regina* (12 v.) by Gombert and the *Missa Veni Sancte Spiritus* in six parts by Manchicourt.

In the polyphonic language of the extreme Middle Ages, just before the progressive "tonalisation" of the High Renaissance, the relative modal regularity of XV century is gradually surpassed, and the harmonic framework is enriched by false relations (subsequent notes with different chromatic inflexion) and implied polymodality¹².

The ambiguity between the Dorian and Aeolian variants of the tone G is a recurrent feature: this harmonic strategy is found, for instance, in *Reges Terrae* by Manchicourt, where an Aeolian D is nested inside a general oscillation of Dorian and Aeolian G.

Such an expressive search for unstable harmonic horizons is even more evident in another polyphonic tradition that has influenced my choral language: the music of early and mid-Tudor England, developed from the late XV century until the 1532-1553 Reformation and briefly re-adopted during the 1553-1559 Catholic reinstatement. Representative composers are H. Aston, J. Browne, W. Cornysh, R. Fayrfax, N. Ludford, J. Taverner, and later R. Parsons, R. White and the uncommonly longevous Th. Tallis, with J. Sheppard as a transitional figure between the two periods.

Overall, the works of these musicians seem to display an experimental ethos, in the handling of the phrase length (with syllables often extended for several *breves*), in the usage of vocal combinations and *tessituras* (at times persistently unusual, like in the Mass *Corona Spinea* by J. Taverner), and in the conception of music-to-text relationships, based on aural evocation rather than linguistic enunciation or narrative allegory (like instead in the motet and madrigal of the High Renaissance).

The pre-Reformation style, in particular, favours airy melodic contours, eccentric usage of cross-relations, thematically loose imitation, thick vocal textures (being SMsTTBarB the reference scoring), wide choral compasses (exceeding three octaves, up to E2-A5) and luminous harmony, afforded by abundant resort to parallel 3rds, 6ths and 10ths.

Notable English works with these characteristics are *O Maria Salvatoris Mater* (Browne), *Aeterne Laudis Lilium* (Fayrfax), *Ave Dei Patris Filia* (Taverner), *Gaude Virgo Mater Christi* (Aston) and *Gaude Gloriosa Dei Mater* (Tallis)¹³.

12 Renaissance theorists, notably H. Glarean (1488-1563) in the 1547 *Dodekachordon*, called *permixtio* and *commixtio* the ambiguity between variants of the modes in real musical practice. While *permixtio* (use of the authentic and plagal scale concurrently) is implied by the imitation through the vocal ranges (as in the case of exposition in the *finalis* and response in the *repercussio*), *commixtio* is aesthetically deliberate, and usually affects the unstable alteration of the fourth (Lydian vs. Ionian), sixth (Dorian vs. Aeolian) and seventh degrees (mixolydian vs. Ionian). Josquin is polemically credited by Glarean for having first attempted more unorthodox polymodality - of the kind often found in XVI century English polyphony -, with the employment of Aeolian ("minor") and Ionian ("major") ambits together, in the *Agnus Dei II* of the *Missa Mater Patris*. See Maniates (1979, p. 154).

13 The common subject is not accidental, since the most elaborate polyphonic settings of XV-XVI century England were composed for the Marian antiphons sung at Evensong, a service regarded as a musical meditation. The antiphonal-responsorial structure of the Hebrew and Latin chanting is maintained as succession of contrasting sections, scored for different arrangements of the choral line-up. This syntactical opposition will be institutionalised in the mature Tudor style, as spatial division of facing vocal groups (*Chorus Decani* and *Chorus Cantoris*).

In the field of modern classical music, I appreciate compositions whose voice-leading maintains a vocal quality in the intervallic framework of the melodic contour. Since this requisite entails the keeping of a triadic core in extended modern harmony, O. Messiaen has been for me a seminal figure. He has demonstrated that it is possible to reinvent the melodic clarity of plainchant within an uncompromising musical modernity.

Albeit in most of his works he has used atonal harmony and even serial techniques - unlike myself -, his manner of handling them hints at the domain of modality.

This aspect of Messiaen's language is more evident in slow movements, like *Apparition de l'Eglise Eternelle* (1932), *Majeste du Christ demandant sa gloire a son Pere* and *Priere du Christ montant vers son Pere* (from *L'Ascension*, 1932), *Demeurer dans l'Amour* and *Le Christ, lumiere du Paradis* (from *Eclairs sur l'Au-dela*, 1991).

With the priority of vocal feasibility in mind, I have also found interesting certain aspects of the B. Britten's choral language, not only for the occasional tinge of XVI-XVII century Anglican music - obvious in *Hymn to St. Cecilia* (1942) - but even more for the occasional attempts at updating the polyphonic technique. In this respect, I regard the Sanctus from the *Missa Brevis* (1959) as a remarkably accomplished example of late-modern contrapuntal writing, with an assured integration of innovative melodic shaping, extended modality and contemporary harmonic content.

The post-1970s output of Arvo Pärt has considerably influenced my search for an extended diatonicism: although his mature style employs restrained compositional materials (whereas my approach is anything but musically ascetic), I consider very efficient his simplified modal technique, based on triadic arpeggiations over domains of "primeval" fifths and fourths. The resulting *Tintinnabuli*¹⁴ style, a mostly dyadic interplay reminiscent of medieval *organa* and *conductus*, produces bell-like overtones and cursory dissonances of second, as noticeable in *Summa* (1977-1991).

Solfeggio (1964) explores another modern application of diatonic scales, with a simple ascending profile (whence the title) whose pitches persist in length while migrate among the choral sections, thus determining transitory states of tension and release between consonance and dissonance. Two notable episodes of EE - the instrumental introduction of the Mov I and the choral onset of Mov IV - exploit a similar technique, inside respectively a polymodal and chromatic harmonic framework.

The expressive potential of melodic patterns shifting by seconds is also used to great poignancy in two major works by Pärt: the closing section of *Stabat Mater* (1985) and the orchestral lament *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten* (1977), whose mosaic of descending lines covers the whole range of orchestral strings, in a musical gesture that assimilates time to tonal space¹⁵.

14 Tintinnabulum (Latin): tinkling bell.

15 Surprisingly, we find an expressive atmosphere resembling the Pärt's *Cantus* in an experiment by B. Eno on the *Kanon und Gigue* by J. Pachelbel. In *French Catalogues*, variation n. 2 of *Discreet Music* (1975), is employed a procedure of non-tonal stratification of diatonic layers. The original piece is transfigured rearranging excerpts from the three canonic lines, by way of positional displacement and mensural alteration of the note lengths. Thus Eno obtains through a coincidental strategy of "material handling" what Pärt achieves with a predictive compositional design.

7. CRITICAL ANGLES ON BIBLICAL ANGELS

a] On the spiritual in contemporary music

a': The cultural context.

New spirituality in music is a significant cultural phenomenon of the late modern and contemporary world: it has received some critical attention, only scantily reviewed by these concise notes for the exclusive scope of a basic backcloth of knowledge, inside which my musical work is undoubtedly (although not completely consciously) framed.

The average mindset of educated thinkers in music, especially if trained within the intellectual *milieu* of XX century avant-garde, tends to be of overt suspicion when they are confronted with the current diffusion of spiritual (or spirituality-inspired) subjects in new classical music. R. Taruskin (2003, p. 115) frankly expresses this cultural bias in his vast article on *Sacred Entertainments*, remarking that - with antecedents in a growing 1970s cross-cultural taste (apparently initiated by two works by L. Bernstein: *Kaddish*-Third Symphony in 1963 and *Mass* in 1971) - there has been a steady growth in American production of spiritually nourished contemporary music, with a culmination in the 1990s, when 'classical music [...] was being marketed for its powers of "uplift" to a guiltily affluent audience [...] eager to depict itself as humane' (p. 112).

Taruskin, in provocatively stressing that there has not been a more lucrative professional arena in classical music for decades, points out (p. 112-113) that two generously funded musical projects of turn-of-the-century celebration have been particularly representative of this post-Cold War cultural mood: the Fifth Symphony by P. Glass (1999), whose inter-denominational subtitle is *Requiem, Bardo, Nirmanakaya*, and the *Passions Project* (1999) coordinated by the conductor H. Rilling, with the four evangelists assigned to W. Rihm, O. Golijov, T. Dun and S. Gubaidulina.

Taruskin polemically remarks that detectable features, of what he disparagingly deems a New Age approach to music, are generic religiosity, political disengagement and a culturally bland set of references, squarely dismissing the interest of contemporary music for spiritual subjects as a sort of cunning and self-consolatory marketing strategy.

He asserts with lapidary words: 'at the beginning of the third millennium spiritual or sacred entertainments have become the most marketable and profitable genre the literate (or "art") tradition of music can boast at a time when its end, for reasons both economic and technological, has become foreseeable' (p. 114).

Accordingly, he does not regard benevolently the generous media coverage and enthusiast audience reception of the "sacred minimalism", observing that 'The success of "Holy Minimalists" like Arvo Pärt, Henryk Gorecki and John Tavener in the 1980s was more specifically related to the coming [...] phenomenon. It already bespoke the desire for a way to return "aesthetically or "appreciatively" to a world of "spiritual burdens" of an actual religious commitment' (p. 115-116).

Taruskin - however evidently doubtful about the legitimacy of any postmodern approach - admits nevertheless that the late modernity has offered some worthy spiritual music.

He positively exemplifies this (p. 117-120) with the most recent output of O. Messiaen, whose testament opera on St. Francis deploys four hours of unmistakably modern language, boasting peaks of combined choral, vocal and orchestral scoring that reach seventy staves. According to Taruskin, Messiaen starkly contrasts with the nowadays triumphant spiritualistic banality, offering boldly sewn imagery of honestly naïve religiousness, expressed through stylistically hardcore and intellectually uncompromising music: 'No cute children's choirs here. No sexy Latin rhythm. Messiaen's spirituality was anything but warm and fuzzy, his style often the opposite of ingratiating' (p. 120).

A different report on recent artistic research in the spiritual is proposed by E. Ligan (2009), who reviews an undeniable increase of activity around the topic, noticing that 'In the fields of performance art, film, sculpture, video installation, multimedia performance, dance, music, and theatre, numerous contemporary artists are directly engaging with dimensions of the spiritual' (p. 38).

Ligan convincingly delves into various definitions of the much spoken of and rarely explained difference between "religious" and "spiritual", collecting scholarship views from various confessional and non-confessional perspectives. Thus we learn (p. 38) that the spiritual is a 'disposition' where religion is a prescription (or a 'diet'), the spiritual is a 'fondness for something' while religiosity is a set of rules (*religio* etymologically meaning "extreme diligence"). Finally, it is summarised (p. 39) that since religions expect their beliefs to answer ultimate questions (life, death, finality of existence), every interrogation on such matters which does not offer answers is the domain of the spiritual.

Ligan poignantly observes, with relevance for the idea of transcendence pervading my composition, that: 'The spiritual attitude does not presume to provide answers; instead, it seeks to contemplate' (p. 40). The composer Meredith Monk, cited by Ligan (p. 40), declares in fact: 'When you are working on a piece like *mercy* or *impermanence* you are contemplating something, and asking questions that you know you don't have answers for and you never will'. With regards to this, although the EE libretto seems to outline a complete understanding of the universe, it actually proposes a fictional reflection on its desired state: a plausible (in its own terms) view of heavenly things.

Whereas in the field of spirituality the exercise of creativity is required - since no institutional reading of the divine is already available - a certain degree of external reliance, entailing withdrawal from personal interpretation, seems unavoidable in matters of faith. Yet, an intellectually engaged religious belief should embrace productive interrogation, as S. Weil (1956, p. 459) deemed, in the context of an appreciation of the J.S. Bach's sacred output:

The mysteries of faith are degraded if they are made a subject of affirmation or negation, while in reality they should be a subject of contemplation.

In this perspective, the narrative of my oratorio (an array of poems and scattered biblical fragments, against a background of primordial sci-fi) is certainly non-religious, sounding Gnostic if not plainly heretic by conventional Christian standards. Still it invites to reflect with an open mind on subjects of undoubted spiritual nature, to contemplate (in Weil's

words) concepts like the structure of the cosmos, the origin of life, the development of conscience in the unconscious matter and the direction of progress in history.

Where religion understandably answers with a ritualised and culture-specific account of the human finality, the spiritual posture comes into play with the exact opposite of a canon, exploiting the vertiginous freedom of literature. From this standpoint, the religious narrative that broadly qualifies the so-called New Spiritual Music¹⁶ finds itself on the edge of contrary cultural tensions: on one side we have the reaffirmation of rite in contemporary life (with customary habits like reciting a Magnificat, Requiem or Mass), on the other side we see their redefinition, by an almost hallucinated sobriety and ascetic concentration. The musical approach of "sacred minimalism" appears to solve this inner contradiction, between resorting to historicised grammars and acting at the forefront of modernity, through an anti-constructivist aesthetic, which renders in latently pessimist terms the problematic relationship between the divine and the being-in-the-world.

Cobussen (2008) shows for this poetic posture a critically detached yet empathetically involved affinity, however valuing more the rarefied expressiveness and intrinsic cultural antagonism¹⁷ of New Spiritual Music than its supposed delimitation as a "school" (p. 29-33). He warns in fact about the cultural uncertainties in defining such a paradigm, observing that for marking a movement we need to 'create an ideology of exclusiveness', which establishes 'a consolidating identity, in order to maintain integrity' (p. 31).

What Cobussen seems actually to appraise in sacred minimalism - within a wider range of *de-facto* spiritual experiences in modern music - is the entailed renounce to modernist delusions of linguistic proficiency, with the openness of the listener to a loss of cultural control and abandonment of safe identitarian harbours, which recall the *a-topia* of Foucault and the *a-theology* of Bataille (p. 48), toward a form of 'mysticism that leaves the spiritual unnamed' (p. 49). In essence, this account of the spiritual in music appears to focus on the negotiations of a troubled conscience longing for relief¹⁸, echoing perhaps a notion of the encounter with divinity (as a trauma) and history (as flawed implementation of ideas) of Romantic ascendancy.

Cobussen advances repeatedly this view: for him a spiritual threshold is a 'stumbling block, a signal of discontinuity, a border, a checkpoint that not everybody can simply pass without a certain effort' (p. 8). He holds that an individuality crossing it is 'always detained, moving in a space between' (p. 9), and that the passage point which triggers the

16 An heterogeneous array of neo-tonal and post-serialist composers, specifically H. Gorecki (1933-2010), G. Kancheli (1935), A. Pärt (1935) and J. Taverner (1944-2013). As a group, they have come to be perceived, not altogether justifiably, as representatives of a common stylistic stance. See Cobussen (2008, p. 29-30).

17 As for this, it is noteworthy that some representatives of this aesthetic - the Estonian Pärt and Erkki-Sven Tüür, the Georgian Kancheli and in a way also the converted orthodox Christian J. Taverner - have partly worked in cultural environments where their professed Christianity was not institutional at all, being rather outmoded (at least) if not ideologically adversarial. In a context like the 1970s peripheral countries of the Soviet Union, the combined reference to (foreign) early European polyphony and (counter-revolutionary) Orthodox choral music, would have been perceived as a politically provocative posture, therefore anything but a culturally mainstream attitude.

18 Thus, the *daimon* haunting/tempting the sleeping girl in the *Nightmare* painting (1781) by H. Fuseli (1741-1825), and the convoluted chromatic writing in the first movement (*Inferno*) of Liszt's *Dante Symphonie* (1856).

experience of the numinous¹⁹ entails 'a permanent undermining and criticizing of the constructions with which we build our tower of Babel' (p. 60).

He reaches as far as to say that *Sarah was ninety years old* by Pärt 'is a hesitating play between presence and absence, an absence that can only be presented by a presence that negates this absence as absence' (p. 116). There is more than an apparent refusal of rationality, in this conception of the contact with the numinous through spiritual music: this assertion of programmatic uncertainty, as indispensable psychological condition for transcending the ordinary in the aesthetic experience, reveals a fundamental distrust of over-arching formal designs, perceived as enforcement of order where a turbulent derangement should reign, and to a certain extent as exertion of ideological power.

Cobussen affirms indeed, concurring with ideas of Attali (1985), that 'Primordially, music as well as religion has as its function the creation, legitimisation and maintenance of order. Its primary purpose is not to be sought in aesthetics, which is a modern invention, but in the effectiveness of its participation in social regulation' (p. 25). This understanding of the concealed purposes of music - that concerns particularly the sacred repertoire - seems to exclude that 'certain music can be adorned with the label "spiritual" on the basis of intrinsic qualities' (p. 23): Cobussen clarifies the concept stating that 'Spirituality should not [...] be situated in the object (music); instead [...] primarily [in] a rupture in our relation with the object, a break in our perception' (p. 20).

This hypothesis, that music can signify spirituality only insofar it is dramatised and restructured by perception, appears to rule out that this capacity may reside already in the relations of its grammatical construct, as instead evident in the abstract syntactics of the J.S. Bach's *Art of Fugue* (c. 1740-1750): a work of obvious metaphysical meaning and spiritual content, ostensibly bound to investigate a proportional and verbally non-detectable infrastructure of life, through the exercise of composition²⁰.

Another critical angle arises when Cobussen suggests that music would be intrinsically 'marked by subversion and ambivalence' (p. 26), and that 'It is in this realm of fantastic insecurity that music and spirituality meet', referring to Attali (1985, p. 146). This would explain the aesthetic variety - and in a sense the eclecticism - of the recent spiritual output through an essentially postmodern paradigm: linguistic hybridity opposed to the modernist ambition for intellectual unification and strict stylistic control, as traceable in the most uncompromising Darmstadt-influenced musical idioms²¹.

Cobussen justly senses that contemporary spiritual art represents the epitome of what Lyotard (1984) calls *the postmodern condition*, where the system (the institutional heritage of

19 Numinous = divine, from Latin *Numen* = godly entity.

20 The transcendent quality of abstract music seems to depend on the combinational handling of elementary musical cells, whose nearly autonomous development - akin to a natural process - is observed and admired by the regulating composer, within a cognitive quest that is intrinsically spiritual, because it concerns the experienceable reality of intangible things.

21 Nowadays the ambiguous adjective "post-Darmstadt" designates roughly the anti-tonal classicism of the late XX century: a dodecaphonic, structural and non-programmatic musical lexicon taught from 1948-1970 at the *Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik* in Darmstadt. The school's resident leading figures were L. Berio, P. Boulez, J. Cage and K. Stockhausen.

the Modern) and its contradiction (the reprise of pre-Modern aesthetics) must constitutively cooperate, for producing the necessary friction between the ruling cultural code of modernist classicism and its criticism.

Lyotard affirms in fact (1993, p. 79) that 'A work can only become modern if it is postmodern' [or rather, it can only express a contemporary engagement if it transcends the cultural ideology of the modern, being paradoxically anti-modern].

In this regard, Cobussen observes (2008, p. 35) that the postmodern artist invests the work with the task of discovering its own (new) rules, instead of applying an existing theoretical system, and that - in this particular sense - the postmodern has been a part of the modern project from the beginning, as unavoidable objection to the delusion of having finally reached a historical state of cultural universality.

As for this, Welsch (1988, p. 36) holds that the postmodern is ultimately identifiable as the 'twentieth-century scientific and artistic modernism' itself, and Peter Bannister, cited by Wheatley (2008, p. 60), seems to particularly locate in sacred music an inescapable self-contradiction of the modern. He in fact remarks that 'as the direct result of Stravinsky's Symphony of Psalms, most major religious works do, in fact, create their own rules', which interprets the provocative neoclassicism of Stravinsky in the 1930s - at the very onset of modernism - as a precociously contentious posture, adversarial to the ecumenism of methods and internationalist aesthetic of modernity.

If a postmodern approach to spiritual music may include an egalitarian spectrum of reworked aesthetic identities, open to heterogeneity, this attitude seems to characterise also the pan-cultural interbreeding of EE, and helps to frame correctly its linguistic transversality (fusion of polyphony and art-rock) and unashamedly fantastic narrative (Hebrew angelology, New Testament references and sci-fi literature).

Cobussen (2003, p. 34) suggests that similar cross-over aesthetics are characteristic of much contemporary spiritual music, representing a widespread cultural position that he calls *postexclusivism*, understood as regained availability of multi-cultural alternatives to the unified artistic ideology of the modern.

In the light of this, the manifest cultural fusion of the EE project not only displays a certain post-exclusivist "fantastic insecurity", but also entails some degree of positive subversion²², in the intermingling of diverse musical backgrounds and religious traditions.

The represented narrative universe is neither an affirmation nor an hypothesis about the order of things, but just an experiment and, maybe, a wish.

22 Interestingly, sub-vertere means in Latin "to rearrange from the bottom up", which describes quite well my syncretic usage of historically distant aesthetic and cultural resources.

a'': New Simplicity and Resistance of Complexity in contemporary spiritual music.

The mainstream spiritual repertoire of the late 20th and early 21st centuries (as for example in works of the late Kancheli and Pärt) has shown a certain tendency to grammatical essentiality and outright emotive import, unmediated by the primacy of linguistic experimentation, and often triggered exploiting contrasts of dynamic gestures²³ and a theatrically efficient use of silence²⁴.

It can be observed that, while this aesthetic stance probably derives from an oppositional reaction to the obligatory linguistic promise of the modernity, the related linguistic phenomenon is a recurring one in music history, when a conscious process of grammatical reduction - towards a more concentrated expressive economy – emerges after a period of strong technical expansion. Let us think, for example, to the mature Palestrina after the Flemish heyday of the early XVI century, to the late Desprez at the end of the XV century Burgundian and Lowlandish development of imitation, to the early-XVII century Byrd's output as rethought synthesis of the flamboyant Tudor style²⁵.

The apparent *rappel-a-l'ordre* of New Simplicity (NS) seems to draw incidentally upon the American and pop-influenced minimal music of the 1970s, owing to the employment of simple iterated patterns, chordal drones, plainchant-like melodies and harmony mostly based on triads. I believe that in reality the aesthetic of NS is only casually reminiscent of the slow developing textures of P. Glass, S. Reich, T. Riley, and L. M. Young, later adopted by European epigones like M. Nyman, G. Bryars and W. Mertens. Despite these probably unintentional convergences, the sacred music of NS is neither backward-looking nor grammatically bland, even in comparison with the gestural complexity and astringent dissonance of late modern works, like the Boulez's *Répons* (1981-1985) that could epitomise an advanced IRCAM²⁶ style.

The stance of NS, which still attracts sympathy among younger generations of composers (a notable example being E. Whitacre), actually shares with later modernism the culture of linguistic discontinuity, and the postmodern handling of historicised materials against the cultural consensus that surrounds the classicism of avant-garde.

23 As noticeable in Kancheli's *Midday Prayers* (1990), where at approximately half of the piece the full orchestra erupts as a noisy rumbling mountain, from a protracted textural landscape of bare-bones gestures in *pianissimo*.

24 An effective dramatic procedure, manifest in the *Miserere* (1989) by Pärt and much employed earlier, among many others, in the compositions of Beethoven, as maintained by Cooper (2001). The structural intermission of marked silences in the musical flux highlights the contrastive plastic relationship between full and empty masses, symbolically hinting, like in a sort of musical Op-Art, at the illusory relation between presence and absence of discourse, between existence and non-existence of the perceived world communicated by the music. McGilchrist (2012, cited by Arnold 2014, p. 72) summarises this affirming that 'The notes mean nothing in themselves: the tension between the notes and between the notes and the silence, with which they live in reciprocal indebtedness, are everything'.

25 This rationalisation of compositional means, also determined by the retrospective assessment of an artistic experience, is manifest in works like *Missa Pange Lingua* by J. Desprez (c. 1515), *Stabat Mater* by G.P. da Palestrina (c. 1590) and the last collection of motets by W. Byrd (*Gradualia II*, 1607).

26 Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique, founded by P. Boulez and L. Berio in Paris in 1977, as underground section of the Centre Pompidou building designed by R. Piano and R. Rogers.

Thus, we find traits of formal innovation also in the “sacred minimalism”: in the sonic conception (like the usage of bells over a dissonant background of blurred strings, in the first movement of the 1974 Kancheli's 4th symphony), in the harmonic expansion of the diatonic canvas (as in the choral onset of the 1989 *Passio* by Pärt and the 1984 *Phos I* from *Ikon of Light* by Tavener), and even in occasional suggestions for a new embodiment of imitative writing - otherwise prevalently absent from the syntax of NS - like in the busy polyphony of the J. Franssens' *Harmony of the Spheres* (1994-2001) third movement.

These examples seem to suggest that simplicity and complexity do always cohabit in reciprocal tension inside the aesthetic object, as it is detectable overall in the 20th century European art. While it has mainly proceeded in the direction of abstraction²⁷ and deconstruction, there has always been a dialectic between the *silence* of charged essentiality and the *noise* of complex interaction. These intrinsically coexisting poles are well represented by the puzzling grammatical absence in the cut canvases of L. Fontana (1899-1968) and the minutely engineered figurations of V. Kandinskij (1866-1944) and A. Pomodoro (1926)²⁸.

Likewise, also in recent spiritual music resist aesthetic postures, alongside NS, that seem to advocate a Resistance of Complexity, with examples detectable in the work of several composers active today. To name but a few, M. Lauridsen - almost in the manner of the Debussy's *Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orleans* - casts a retrospective glance at the French Middle Ages with the agile interplays of *Les Chansons de la Rose* (1993), after R.M. Rilke; E. S. Tüür offers a texturally complex version of the Estonian stately chant in his dramatic oratorio *Ante Finem Saeculi* (1985) and pantheist mystery *Ärkamine* (2011), while the Latvian E. Ešenvalds explores modern projections of a similarly mystical Baltic vocality, in a less rhythmically engaged yet harmonically effective way, enriching territories of neo-triadicism with the employment of almost synthetic acoustic colours, obtained by handheld chimes and tuned wine-glasses (*Northern Lights*, 2013).

In the modern British scene there is, understandably more than in other musical contexts, a certain resilience - together with elements of drone harmony and cluster writing - of multi-part concertato, deriving from the widespread cathedral practice of Renaissance counterpoint and connected with the elaborate style of the XV-XVI century national school²⁹. This is traceable in works like *Credo* (2013) - *confiteor* section - and Gloria from *Missa Dunelmi* (2011) by J. McMillan, and in a significant proportion of the G. Jackson's

27 The involved rhetorical procedure seems to be a kind of synecdoche specific of the syntactic objects, that is the intellectual artefacts - like music - whose meaning depends on the disposition (*taxis*) of plastic elements. The target of the figure is to signify the whole through a part, or with a superordinate general category. For example, in the G. Morandi's (1890-1964) abstract still-lives the subject of the representation is not the physical object at hand (the bottle), but its paradigmatic property (the "bottleness").

28 See works like Kandinskij's *Composition IX* (1936) and *Composition X* (1939), and Pomodoro's *Movimento in piena aria e nel profondo* (1996-1997).

29 A continued British grounding in the harmonic and linear styles of cathedral music (XVI century polyphony, Baroque repertoire and the peculiarly retrospective early-20th century music of British composers) is particularly evident in the output of K. Leighton (1929-1988). He managed to reconcile - in works of new counterpoint like the organ pieces *Fantasies on Hymn Tunes* (1975) and *Missa de Gloria* (1980) - the modern techniques of dissonant harmony with inherited forms of the tradition.

output, influenced by pre-Reformation music with his distinctive use of embellished medieval *discanti*, textured clusters and organ-like chords, in *Cecilia Virgo* (2000), *Hymn to the Trinity* (2000), *Ruchil Linn* (2010), *Winter Heavens* (2011) and *Choral Symphony* (2012).

F. Pott merges a comparable background in the music of the Cinquecento with a reception of early XX century avant-garde, for a densely-knit and harmonically challenging polyphony, enlivened by connections with Th. Tallis and W. Byrd: this is exemplified by works like *The Souls of the Righteous* (2000), *I sing of a Maiden* (2000), *My Song is Love Unknown* (2002) and the *Mass for eight parts* (2010-11).

T. O'Regan also expands on late medieval references, with a greater focus on the rhythmic intricacy of XV century Flemish music, as displayed by *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis* (2001), *Alleluia Laus et Gloria* (2004), *Tryptich* (2005), *The Ecstasies Above* (2006) and the musically twin pieces (one almost the *contrafactum* of the other) *I sleep but my heart waketh - Scattered Rhymes* (2006). Lastly, A. Pitts blends a chorally viable approach to modern dissonance with a conscious recall of concertato structures from XVI century British music, as noticeable in *The 'I AM' Sayings of Jesus* (1996-2007) and *XL* (2009), a *Spem In Alium*³⁰ companion piece.

A sharp opposition between simplicity and complexity is essentially inconceivable in the aesthetic field, albeit it appears that two definite positions (NS and RoC) exist today in spiritual music. Linearity and articulation, stasis and movement, enthalpy and entropy always complement each other, one tending to reach its structural counterpart.

There is therefore mutual indebtedness between NS and RoC, with harmonic and melodic features developed by sacred minimalism (like extended diatonicism and spectral usage of added seconds) now firmly established in the general compositional practice. Furthermore, it seems that contemporary musicians share somehow a defining spiritual poetic of the 21st century, based on the perceptual triggering of what is universal and indescribable, as Sholl (2012, p. 91) suggests, with a definition of the musically transcendent that reflects his involvement with the religious (but not tightly denominational) avant-garde of O. Messiaen:

The numinous can signify, rather idealistically, a contingent and temporal experience of the world beyond subjective apperception and the strictures of discourse.

I believe that this notion detects the presence of the mystery (etymologically, that which is closed and untold) whenever a musical absolutisation of the immanent world takes place, irrespective of the linguistic density of the expressive means. Therefore, the aesthetic experience of "spiritual otherness" can be equally initiated by the desolate chthonic solemnity of Pärt's *De Profundis* (1980) or by grammatically denser works, like the 16-voice

30 The famed 40-part motet by Th. Tallis, apparently composed in c. 1570 as a response to the 1567 English performance of the equally voiced *Missa sopra Ecco sì Beato Giorno* by A. Striggio. The Italian musician, a composer and ambassador of the Medici, carried a musical gift boasting a closing Agnus Dei for 60 parts. See Moroney (2007).

Lux Aeterna by G. Ligeti (1966) - with its evocation of remote alien divinities - and the *Éclairs sur l'au-delà* (1987-1991) by Messiaen, conjuring shimmers of heavenly abysses. Thus, the disquieting inrush of the sublime can certainly take the form of concentrated motions in the void, like in the poignant organ threnos *Pari Intervallo* (1976) by Pärt, but the same monumentalisation of a silent vastness can also manifest itself in gigantic sombre ramparts, as in the *adagio* of the G. Mahler's ninth symphony (1909).

The undermining contact with the immeasurable can be also evoked in a totally opposed way, through the holistic jubilation of the same Mahler's paean for universal erotic creation: the theosophic canvas of the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* in the first movement of the eighth symphony (1906). This superhumanly complex score seems to access the territory that Hölderlin believes is the domain of the spiritual, as Cobussen explains (2008, p. 10) with reference to Blanchot (1999, p. 343), mentioning a 'space between the human and the divine world, the pure place where these two are separated'.

Such a separation implies a tension for reunion, that music can either express with a more minimalist sentiment (somewhat accounting for the frustrating remoteness of divinity from life) or through a more constructivist attitude, pursuing the wonder of intellectual ingenuity (*maraviglia* in Italian Humanism³¹).

In both cases, it seems that the subject of spiritual art is ultimately the experience of a *distance*, rather than an *absence*, and therefore the inner dialectic does not really concern simplicity and complexity, which are never grammatically separated, but originates from a psychological difference between *longing* - a feeling of blurred images from afar, imbued with history and human drama - and *contemplation*, a state of mind that seeks to focus on the vision of the numinous, whose features defy articulation in words.

b] On the purpose of choral music: the Container and the Content, or the Absolute in the Relative and the Relative in the Absolute.

Absolute music, a cultural label coined by R. Wagner in 1846 in derogative sense (while aggressively reviewing the Beethoven's 9th symphony), is concisely defined by C. Dahlhaus (1991, p. 18) as a sonic art unrelated to 'concept, object, and purpose'.

The philosophical definition of this aesthetic model, seminal for the development of the ensuing XIX-XX century formalist thinking, comes from the 1854 essay *Vom Musikalisch Schönen* by E. Hanslick (1986). Music is there considered - in straight opposition with the XVII-XVIII century oratorical view theorised by Mattheson in 1739 (See Harriss 1981) - as a progress of sounds, motions and aurally compelling forms (chap. 3), as a harmony of collaborating parts that speaks to the listener like a sculpture or a natural form would to the beholder (chap. 3), and as the result of combined relationships and sounds whose meaning is those same relationships (chap. 7).

Such conceptions diverge evidently from the Baroque *Affektenlehre*, largely predominant during the Age of Enlightenment, which ascribed a clear primacy to vocal music, because it was perceived as "fabricated" with feelings and actually capable of signifying them.

Later, Hanslick and other German early Romantics (among them, W. H. Wackenroder and

31 See Evans and Marr (2006, p. 84)

E.T.A. Hoffmann) endorsed instead instrumental music for its intellectual purity, over the programmatic vocal repertoire, with the aim of asserting the independence of absolute composition (or, as we would say now, of abstract music). With regards to this, Chua (1999, p. 152) detects that the intrinsic agenda of absolute music is to liberate the aesthetic sphere from the obtrusive presence of society and context, and observes that - from this particular standpoint - the mythological opera of the late Renaissance and Baroque eras failed its Utopian nostalgia for a classical golden age, having assigned its message to a vocal medium which is not a timeless image of the cosmos, but the emanation of a historically-referenced human culture (p. 29).

Thus, the early-Romantic debate on the affirmation of instrumental abstractness seems somehow the reversal of the late XVI century theoretical confrontation, for the infusion of oratorical values in the constructive discourse of polyphony. This argument, construed by Reese (1959, p. 312), derived from Italian humanist thought and shaped a novel approach to composition, capable of greater consideration for the specificity of the text.

The wider cultural phenomenon, somehow heralded in 1525 by *Le prose della volgar lingua* (Vela 2001) of cardinal Pietro Bembo, stems from the affirmation of a Petrarchan taste in literature, which gave impetus to the European circulation of the madrigal and the vogue of Greek and Roman classicism.

Such a cultural atmosphere prepared in some ways the theoretical background for the Council of Trent (1545-1563), and for its theological rejection of abstract counterpoint (definitely a kind of absolute music), whose combinational techniques were under accusation of excess of objectivity, of indifference to the meaning of words.

To some extent, contemporary vocal and choral music is still affected by the old controversies about appropriate textual delivery (in the late Renaissance) and freedom of the musical forms from the narrative constraint of lyrics (in the early Romanticism). The question persists as to whether a fabric of words can attain a purely intellectual dimension, without being limited (and in a sense consumed) by the socio-historical connections and the program of representation enforced by the text.

My personal stance on this matter is that mirror-like relationships operate in choral music, between the text and the compositional construct which carries it. At one level, the music works as a plastic *container* of the textual *content*; at the other level the words act as a phonetic *container* of the musical *content*. In other words, the symbol in vocal music seems to function in two modalities of signification at once: while the forms to which the words are entrusted also possess an independent plastic value, the lyrics provide a source of phonetic raw material with which the sonic object is constructed.

Therefore, both the textual and musical layers of a choral work operate simultaneously in narrative and plastic spaces: what is told (narrative) and what is pronounced (plastic) for the lyrics, what is sung (narrative) and spatially arranged as polyphony³² (plastic) for the musical rendition. This appears to suggest that in vocal music the verbal sign of poetry is

32 This basic dichotomy obviously overlooks the syntactic narrative entailed by the progress of the polyphonic discourse (thickening and thinning of scoring, tensionally marked movement of the parts within their vocal ranges, implied or prescribed dynamics), but this further analytical consideration transcends the scope of this paragraph.

transformed into the acoustic symbol of a linguistic symbol, thus into the aural metaphor of a poetic metaphor³³.

The process triggers what is called *amplificatio* in rhetoric: an increase in authoritativeness of the discourse through figurative expansion of its delivery, resulting in greater logical and persuasive value. Since there is in imitative polyphony - in comparison with monody - a greater amount of figural relationships between words and musical medium, the plastic content of the spatialised textual enunciation prevails on the linguistic substratum, and the resulting sonic object approaches the absolute character of instrumental music.

This can be clearly heard at several points in EE: very obviously, in the 16-voice choral expansion of Mov IV (b. 695-708) and in the 12-part canon of Mov VII (b. 1444-1461). Several other episodes in the oratorio display an extensive polyphonic handling of limited phonetic material, treated as an acoustic resource inside a contrapuntal framework of abstract design: in Mov II at b. 53-75, in Mov IV at b. 562-591, b. 663-675 and b. 675-708, in Mov VII at b. 1431-1443 and b. 1453-1461. Nevertheless, just as many instances of declamatory treatment of the lyrics are detectable in the oratorio, for example in the eight arias of Mov III, V, VI and VII and in various passages of choral depiction of the text³⁴.

This oscillation of compositional strategy occurs naturally, with an alternation of plastic *concertato* (in a sense, a "3D" gesture) and "2D" homophonic *recitativo*, that serves a purpose of expressive balance: at times the textual material is dissolved into an abstract musical structure, at times the words are translated into a harmonically underpinned melodic sentence, which strengthens their meaning (as in EE at b. 431-482 and 615-632).

In comparison with the outermost polarities of a monodic aria (narrative) and an instrumental fugue (syntactical), choral music has thus constitutively a hybrid statute: combinational ingenuity and oratorical emphasis, instrumental in grammar and theatrical in poetic. This duplicity of formal nature is evident in the major mechanism of texture-building of the vocal counterpoint: the anaphoric iteration³⁵ of a statement in subsequent imitations, an architectural but deeply rhetorical device. This procedure permeates to some degree the choral *declamato* as well, bestowing something of *Absolute in the Relative*: correspondingly, even the rational construct of the canon aims at conveying an enclosed textual meaning (something of *Relative in the Absolute*), just in an eloquent sculptural manner and intellectually idealised way.

Ultimately, it seems then that no supremacy of context-related words or context-devoid musical forms is conceivable in vocal polyphony, as an *artificial* object ("made according to the rule of art") which is more than the sum of its parts: more poetic than mere words and more musical than mere melodies.

33 In other terms, the poetic word - whose sense is already diverted by the communicative attitude that Hjelmslev (1953) called "conception of operation" - appears to provide a pseudo-referential basis, for a further symbolic activation on the part of the musical forms. In this theoretical view, the textual sign of music is left empty and non-resonant, if separated from the augmentation of its attached aural structure.

34 See Par. 10 for an analytical survey of choral recitativos and episodes of word-painting in EE.

35 *Anaphora* is in rhetoric the repetition of the opening segment of a sentence, in subsequent statements. The resulting acoustic similarity of the symmetric points shifts the listener's focus from the meaning to the sound and back to the significance of the words, providing poetry with the plastic content that lacks in natural language. The overall import is semantic emphasis and augmented musicality of the speech.

c] The "fruitful mismatch" of classical polyphony and space-age rock:
another look at postmodern music as a *constellation* of cultural Utopias.

W. Benjamin theorised in the unfinished critical anthology *Passagen-Werk* (1927-1940), see Tiedemann and Eiland (2002), that chronologically disconnected events may suddenly make sense together, revealing their consistent affinity in a burst of comprehension if they are reorganised in a *constellation*.

Against the notion of a necessarily sequential progress in history, he argues that 'what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation', and advances that it would be necessary 'to root out every trace of "development" from the image of history and to represent becoming [...] as a constellation in being' (Tiedemann and Eiland 2002, p. 462 and p. 845). However Benjamin set to apply this idea of *constellar* knowledge to a pessimist social appraisal of XIX century history (and industrial revolution) - through the approach of Critical Theory of the 1930s Frankfurt philosophical school³⁶ -, there seem to be implications of the concept for understanding post-modern and cross-cultural aesthetic languages, like that employed in EE.

Its grammar connects transversally diverse stylistic references, unaligned in the timeline, and refuses to conform to any culturally consistent notion of 20th-century modernity, broadly represented by the artistic ideology of the post-WW2 Darmstadt school³⁷ (in general terms: the aesthetic dismissal of history, the engagement with musical language as an intrinsically problematic process, the poetic of fracture and fragment as answer to the uncertainty of contemporary world).

From the point of view of Benjamin's *constellar* idea, my compositional method entails a rearrangement of music history that links Renaissance with XX century music, synthesising different forms of musical Utopia removed in time: idiosyncratic aspects of XVI century polyphony, early-modern polytonal harmony, late XX century fusion jazz and art-rock.

This aesthetic *constellation* aims at conjugating the design-controlled rationality of the choral *structure* with the emotional immediacy of the electronic *surface*, besides reconciling the chordal sobriety of modal counterpoint with the wider harmony of polytonal music.

I believe that the unifying element between these cultural identities is their inherent "spirituality", a dimension of experience of thematic primacy in the oratorio's libretto.

With particular reference to the usage of artificial timbres, they seem to add a further preternatural character to the "otherworldly" nature of vocal counterpoint, since in a sense a choir is already an unnatural device, as an orchestra of perfectly synchronised human bodies. A mystical flair of pantheism appears to be connected with the ethos of synthesiser

36 The articulated theoretical trend called *Frankfurter Schule* developed in the namesake city from the 1920s until the late 1960s, gathering ideologically independent left-wing thinkers around the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (Institute for Social Research), founded in 1923 at the Goethe University. The shared interests of the foremost philosophers (among them M. Horkheimer, Th. W. Adorno, H. Marcuse and E. Fromm) focused on theories of social development and a dialectic method (Critical Theory) based on a Kant-Hegelian concept: the physiognomy of ideas is progressively revealed by contradiction, through continuous historical revision. See Wiggershaus (1995).

37 For a general survey, see Iddon (2015).

music, as Jonathan Harvey affirms about his opera *Wagner Dream* (2007, p. 60), quoted by Wheatly (2008), when he considers the 'inclusion of modern electronics and technical elements as a vibrant quest for spirit'.

This is patently traceable in the visual communication of electro-rock and progressive acts of the 1970s and early 1980s. Various album covers of the period can be appraised in this view, for instance *Irrlicht* by K. Schulze (1972), *The Dark Side of the Moon* by Pink Floyd (1973), *New Age of Earth* of Ash Ra Tempel (1976), *Stratosfear* (1976) by Tangerine Dream and *Eye in the Sky* of The Alan Parsons Project (1982).

See the following images in the up/left - down/right order.

Fig. 7: K. Schulze, *Irrlicht* album cover (1972).

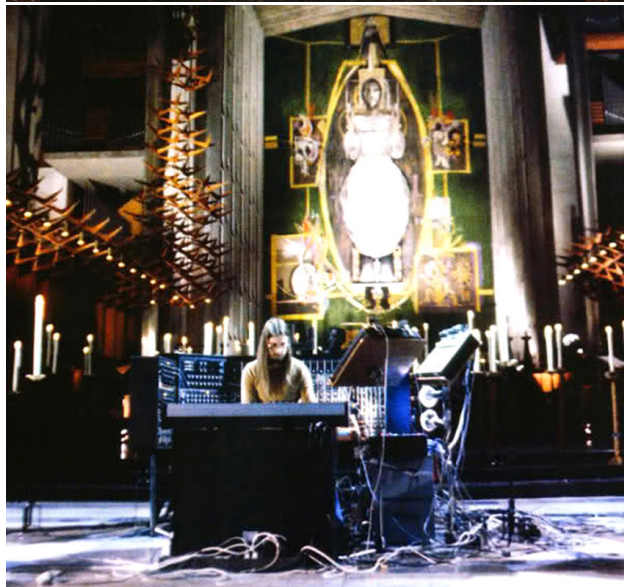
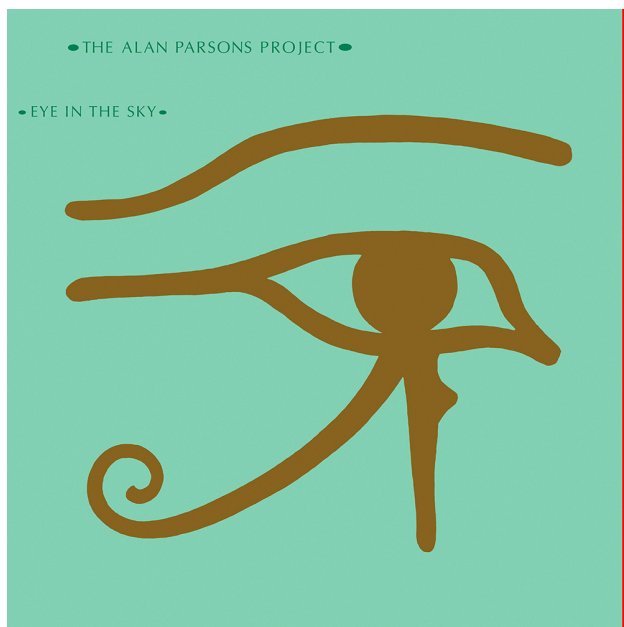
Fig. 8: Ash Ra Tempel and M. Götsching, *New Age of Earth* album cover (1976).

Fig. 9: Tangerine Dream, *Stratosfear* album cover (1976).

Fig. 10: The Alan Parsons Project, *Eye In The Sky* album cover (1982).

Fig. 11: C. Franke (Tangerine Dream) playing at the Coventry cathedral (1975).

Fig. 12: K. Schulze performing in Berlin Schöneberg (1976).



The appearance itself of analogue electronic equipment (blinking with lights, crowded with futuristic-looking controls and tangles of cables), together with the mantric³⁸ artificiality of the produced soundscapes, conjures an experience of cosmic mystery which already activates a state of amplified world's perception, of the kind that we have previously identified as the *spiritual* in music. This is manifest in the video of the performance by Schulze (1977) at the WDR television in Köln and in the BBC2 film edited by T. Palmer (1976), synchronising music from the *Ricochet* Tangerine Dream album (1975) with material shot at their 1975 Coventry cathedral concert.

In both cases, majestic altars of modular synthesisers are operated by nearly immovable celebrants, separated from silent listeners/worshippers in a clear fictional identification of the electronic musician with a messenger, partly technological priest (Fig. 11) and partly alien astronaut (Fig. 12).

McLeod (2003, p. 346) concurs about this initiatory and ritualistic interpretation of electronic music, as heard in English progressive textures, detecting - in relationship with the alternative to religion offered by a New Age vision of the space era - that 'Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* (1973) provides yet another use of space imagery from the early 1970s [...] Again, the primary means of sonically evoking this alienating experience is through synthesizers and the heavy use of electronic recording techniques'.

McLeod further expands on the messianic nature of 1970s synthesiser rock, drawing a direct connection between the popular fascination for the NASA space programme and a specific mystique of modernity, associated with electronic music gear:

the space imagery and associations manifest in the progressive rock of bands like Pink Floyd, Hawkwind (*In Search of Space*, 1971), King Crimson (*Earthbound*, 1972), and Yes (in songs like "Starship Trooper" from *Yessongs*, 1973), appears to stem from [...] the desire to master, to dominate and to, in effect, colonise new and uncharted realms of technology and musical experimentation. [...] The impressive banks of keyboards, the complex myriad of knobs and dials associated with the analogue synthesizers of 1970s progressive rock (not to mention the considerable programming skill needed to effectively control such machines), and the increasingly advanced and variegated number of electronic guitar effects, were roughly analogous to the advanced technology being developed and exploited in the real space programme.

McLeod (p. 347) highlights how the rhetoric of space age fostered a sort of musical spirituality based on technology - rooted perhaps in the search for intellectually developed alien civilisations of the 1950-1960s sci-fi³⁹ - remarking that 'Indeed, audiences from this era often even described the electronically created psychedelic effects of such music as "far out", "out of this world", or "spacey" [...]'.

38 A Mantra is, in Hinduist-Buddhist tradition, a sung utterance whose spiritual power lies in its sound.

39 See, for representative examples of mystical sci-fi: A. Clarke, *Childhood's end* (1953) and *2001 A Space Odyssey* (1968). See also the spiritual space-opera *Star Maker* (1937) by O. Stapledon.

Howard and Streck (1996) suggest that a similar kind of para-religious emancipation has been a constant current of the 1970-1980s art-rock scene, influencing also less esoteric kinds of popular music, committed howsoever to ethical subjects of social responsibility and individual advancement, that strayed from the paradigm of entertainment.

Seemingly, a vibrant experience of embedded spirituality developed in the "cultural periphery" of Evangelical communities in the US, with the phenomenon of Christian rock.

Howard and Streck note how that music was capable of vehiculating messages of universal spirituality in a not overtly denominational manner, adapting advanced forms inherited from progressive music to the transmission of sublimated religious appeals, instead of obvious prayers. They suggest that such a communicative attitude can promote faith under the form of "art for the sake of art", following the social-theological category which Niebuhr (1951) calls "Christ Reconciler of Culture".

8. QUESTIONS OF COMPOSITIONAL GRAMMAR

a] Modern reception of counterpoint: harmony and voice-leading.

A contemporary composer of choral music has to face a technical conundrum: since polyphony has been historically defined within triadic harmony (earlier modal and later tonal), which deflections from, exceptions to and extensions of the related tradition are admissible?

At the level of harmonic context, the employment of an integrally atonal chromaticism may lead to a demanding melodic shaping for voices - dotted with dissonant, augmented and diminished intervals -, which makes it rather difficult to write thematic imitations that can be pitched by singers, used to imagining their lines on the basis of what they hear around them.

In fact, the 20th-century contrapuntal rediscovery has really developed in the instrumental area, with a few exceptions in remarkable choral works that also comprise circumscribed episodes of imitative writing, in general dialectically opposed to passages with a more "symphonic" distribution of the thematic material, exposed in relief over the framework of a harmonic *concertato*.

Instances of this approach are present in the *Mass* (1926) by F. Martin and pieces by B. Britten (*Hymn to St. Peter*, 1955) and K. Leighton (*Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis - Magdalen Service*, 1959; *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis - Second Service*, 1971).

By comparison, the forays of advanced late-modern music into vocal counterpoint - as in Olivier Messiaen (*Cinq Rechants*, 1948) and G. Ligeti (*Ejszaka, Reggel*, 1955; *Magyar Etudok*, 1983) - border the strenuous in terms of technical demands on the performers, and, rather than really venturing into a contemporary reinvention of imitative polyphony, represent an attempt to impose the challenges of instrumental chamber writing on voices⁴⁰.

Apart from examples of masterly expressive control, such as the aforementioned works, the use of atonal writing in choral music may entail a communicative limit, due to the difficulty in expressing semantic gradations of the text, like sombreness/joy or doubt/certainty, through an implicit "linguistic agreement" with the listener (about what constitutes the musical fabric - as the tonal background in a chromatic madrigal - and what represents a "subversive" gesture that bears emergent musical meaning).

I therefore deem that the comprehensive usage of a dissonant and chromatic writing for voices, which lack the timbral and dynamic flexibility of instruments, can lead to a certain expressive uniformity of hermetic character, unless the composition is in the hands of someone with an exceptional poetic command in atonal purviews, as it is the case with *Friede auf Erden* Op. 13 (1907) by A. Schönberg.

Keeping this orientation as a general harmonic ethos, I still resort to the extended colours of modern chromaticism, polytonal chords and added notes, for the sake of particular expressive purposes and with the appropriate technical precautions.

40 It might be observed that the daring polyphony of J.S. Bach can be equally considered of instrumental nature. Nevertheless, the performance challenges posed by the tonal lexicon of XVIII century Germany are still relatively manageable, in comparison with the perceptual difficulties of atonal pitching.

Specifically, I tend to approach the components foreign to the triad either through preparation, stepwise motion or consonant leap not exceeding a fifth, in order to keep the singers' lines within an intelligible tonal reference. Occurrences of such controlled expansions of the modal canvas are abundantly detectable in EE, for instance at b. 150-151, 161-162 and 704-708.

Alongside this personal formulation of a contemporary harmonic grammar, my language mostly employs triads in "distorted tonal paths" of modulation, exploiting both traditional shifts of fourth (an extensive example of which is at b. 1425-1443) and adjacent intervals of second and third (like in the sequence of ascending seconds of b. 70-75), more prone to produce enharmonics and unrelated diatonicism⁴¹.

It is not only for reasons of harmonic ideology or feasibility of the voice-leading that I avoid a completely atonal technique, but also for what I believe is the further aesthetic advantage (in both the choral and instrumental genres) of a modality revisited in modern terms. Its harmonic content - more nuanced than in the major/minor tonal dualism⁴² - provides a perceptually "natural" chordal ground, over which the abstract quality of added notes can shine more explicitly than inside a dodecaphonic framework.

The bell-like spectral signature of overtones (9ths, 7ths, 6ths, 5ths, 4ths and maj/min 2nds) seems to remain distinguishable against a backcloth of triads, both in static writing (as in EE at b. 5-13, 519-528 and 748-753) and within more active polyphonic textures (see b. 510-518).

The engagement of extra-modal harmony relies in EE on two main syntactic strategies⁴³:

- Sudden switch of the harmonic horizon to a polychordal context, with the ringing colour of added "spikes" stratified over a triadic background (as at b. 510-518, 704-708, 1396-1407 and 1481-1484);
- Enhancement of the chordal content through progressive insertion of cadential overtones (like at b. 179-180, 237-238, 368-369, 655-662 and 717-718).

In the domain of revisited modality, my language treats the dissonance with either historically inherited devices [a] or extensions and variations of those procedures [b]:

a]

- Customary 4>3, 9>8, 2>1 and 6>5 suspension, with preparation on the unaccented beat followed by stepwise downwards resolution.
- Customary 4>3, 9>8, 2>1 and 6>5 *appoggiatura*, with direct percussion on the accented beat.
- Concurrency of 4>3 suspension or *appoggiatura* with a passing interference of its chromatically altered resolution (English Cadence). It highlights the ambivalence of the

41 As Eb-F#, an apparent second but actually a minor third.

42 Owing to the variety and contrasting expressive characters of the available diatonic scales.

43 More on these procedures in the compositional typology of par. 10.

seventh as a melodic or harmonic degree (Ex. S, T1 and Kb1, b. 596/1-2).

- 6/4 harmony prepared on the preceding beat (Ex. A2, B1 and B2, b. 1460/5-8).

b]

- Concurrency of suspension or *appoggiatura* with a passing anticipation of its resolution (Ex. S and B2: b. 72/1).

- Concurrency of fourth and third of the same triad (Ex. S and A, b. 127/3: G maj ₄₃; SATB, b. 476: F maj 6 4 ₄₃).

- Double suspension or *appoggiatura*, one resolving and the other avoiding resolution (Ex. S1 and Kb2, b. 1448/1-6: Db maj).

- Disjointed suspension or *appoggiatura*, with avoided resolution of the dissonance and resolution in a different voice (Ex. S2 and A1, b. 1450/1-6: F maj).

- 4>3 suspension or *appoggiatura* with dissonant augmented fourth (Ex. A solo, b. 1219/4 - 1220/1: f# over C maj).

- Unprepared 6/4 harmony taken through skip or stepwise (Ex. ATB, b. 494/4 - 495/1: A min > G maj 6 4; SATB, b. 502/2-3: G min 6 > C maj 6 4).

The melodic cross-relation plays a significant role in my musical language, as a modern interpretation of an unorthodox but widespread early-XVI century polyphonic gesture, aimed at dynamising and enriching the rigidity of the liturgical modes.

Aesthetically opposed instances of this procedure can be traced in the eccentric *xenoglossy*⁴⁴ of the Tallis' *Loquebantur Variis Linguis*⁴⁵ and in the otherwise straightforward harmony of the *Nesciens Mater Virgo Virum* by J. Mouton: see T2 at b. 52-53 in the edition curated by Symons (2012), where an E/Eb ambiguity of the part determines a sudden C maj/C min modal change through a direct ascending tritone.

Similar melodic incidents are capable of delivering unpredictable harmonic plasticity also in a modern musical grammar, enhancing the melodic autonomy of the lines and producing "acceptable musical contradictions" of a discreet elegance, with subtly paradoxical results.

Such devices also serve in my language a more structural purpose: activating a poly-modal system with two tonal pivots, partly reminiscent of a similar procedure in early XVI century music⁴⁶. Related poly-modal configurations utilise in my music the chromatic ambiguity of the mediant, subdominant and leading note, determining sort of hyper-modes which encompass simultaneous tonalities: major and minor tonic plus major and minor dominant.

44 Xenoglossy (from Greek) = alien utterance.

45 Tallis composed this responsory for the feast of Pentecost, which commemorates the Holy Spirit allowing the apostles to speak in different foreign languages. In this work the British armoury of false relations is employed to full extent and great textual coherency, symbolising a multi-linguistic confusion of concurring sentences through chromatic inflections of the thematic material.

46 A notable example of sustained - and aesthetically deliberate - modal ambiguity is in the closing *Amen* section of the Aston's *Gaude Virgo Mater Christi*, at b. 184-208 of the Antico Edition's transcription: see Sandon (2005). The modal framework oscillates insistently between Dorian D, Aeolian D and Phrygian A, finally resolving on a luminous Ionian D.

A typical occurrence of this harmonic strategy in EE is in the four-voice canon of b. 34-46, where the contrapuntal construct moves repeatedly between Dorian and Ionian D - with the related clashes of the f/f# mediant and c/c# leading notes -, until it departs towards a cadential modulation with a further switch to Aeolian D (b. 46).

Perceptually speaking, the transient passage of contrasting semitones across the same tonal domain seems to implement the sonic metaphor of multiplicity (and thus vastness), with a continuous change of viewpoint on a single musical concept, that I believe activates the visual allegory of a faceted crystal in rotation. Two striking instances of extreme modal instability - which I consider ingenious experiments in tonal dissonance, with an evident contemporary potential - are the extensive closing alleluias of the cognate early-Jacobean pieces *O sing unto the Lord a new song* by Th. Tomkins (1572-1656) and *O Lord Arise* by Th. Weelkes (1576-1623), both in seven parts.

As for the handling of parallelism, which is arguably the most problematic issue in a contemporary practice of counterpoint, I have come up with a "personal protocol of admissibility". The understandable reason behind the XV-XVI century prohibition of subsequent pure intervals⁴⁷ - as in *Practica Musicae* 1496 by F. Gaffurio⁴⁸ and *Institutioni Harmoniche* 1558 by G. Zarlino⁴⁹ - was to preserve the linear autonomy of voices in the two-part counterpoint of a *bicinium*, eschewing consecutive void bichords that could prejudice the perceptual separation of the lines.

Since some of these rules begin to lose reasonableness in 4 or 5-part polyphony already, where a chord-defining voice is likely to fill the "empty" parallel, I have considered that for the average choral forces of EE (6 parts, ranging from 3 to 16) the system of harmonic congruency needed to be "reformed".

I therefore decided to admit all kinds of hidden octaves and fifths in more than two parts, while I still consider consecutive octaves unacceptable in the writing of art music, unless implemented deliberately as expressive doublings.

I liberally allow the parts to form syncopated parallel fifths (as the Flemish and Bach consistently did) and, when they are protected inside the polyphonic fabric, I also permit de-aligned parallel octaves, providing that a compensatory interval occurs in between.

This updated approach to the horizontal conduct of counterpoint proved to be necessary, for two orders of reasons. On one hand, it allows for greater freedom of melodic contour and makes easier to maintain the primary device of imitative repetition (*anaphora*), also affording greater musical interest to the bass line, otherwise constrained by the avoidance of unprepared fourths and hidden octaves and fifths.

On the other hand, forbidding every type of parallel transition would have coerced the contrapuntal language within a conservative XVII century style. In fact, certain sequences that involve successions of pure bichords would be difficult to obtain within the scholastic

47 Parallel 5th and 8ves (by direct motion), "hidden" 5th and 8ves (proceeding from a different consonance by direct motion) and successive 5ths and 8ves by contrary motion, that determine implied parallelism.

48 See Young (1969) for a modern edition.

49 See Marco (1976) for a modern edition.

limits of the *species* counterpoint, generalised by J. J. Fux in the 1725 *Gradus ad Parnassum* - see Mann and Edmunds (1965), while the modern side of my harmonic idiom often exploits the metallic resonance, at once primordial and futuristic, of consecutive fourths and fifths (for instance, T and B at b. 164: e-b > c#-g#; S and T1 at b. 747: c-g > b-f#).

In general, I have kept valid this revised voice-leading inside each section of the EE score, since the choir and the electro-acoustic quartet form self-contained musical structures, besides being integrated in the same "orchestral" system. I have also taken care not to determine noticeable parallelisms of octave between the upper voices of the three timbral sections (voices, guitars, keyboards), conceding however occasional parallels between the block of the two vocal basses and the left hands of the synthesisers, as it would be completely acceptable in a homologous writing for orchestra.

For what finally concerns the approach to imitative textures, I believe that the true objective of counterpoint is to convey a sense of perceptual symmetry between thematically interrelated entries. To this end, a composer can resort either to ruled imitation (in the Flemish way, with added aesthetic import entailed by the proportional exactness), or to a more flexible correspondence of melodic profiles and rhythmic patterns (as in the English pre-Reformation polyphony), in order to achieve a general sense of identity without sacrificing melismatic invention and variety of the harmonic progress.

In my compositional practice I use both canonic writing⁵⁰, with identity of the subject reflected by his delayed replicas, and broader frameworks where the imitation is limited to the opening segment of the theme, or just to its melismatic and metric character, resulting in a "textural counterpoint" that fills the harmonic space with rhythmic cells of a certain mutual similarity.

b] A "dangerous" stylistic fusion.

Composing today a spiritual oratorio of classical music, with an almost science fiction subject and the inclusion of rock instrumentation, implies sensitive aesthetic choices and cultural awareness, for avoiding superficial eclecticism.

Taruskin (2003) warns about such perils of naivete, generally entailed by modern sacred music, pointing out - in the context of an otherwise complimentary review of Messiaen's *St. François d'Assise* - that the spiritual musician is somehow obliged to walk 'skirting on the borders of kitsch' (p. 120).

In this regard, there were certainly many moments in EE where the insertion of details from outside the prevailing style (revisited Renaissance polyphony) carried a risk that the listener would interpret them as stylistic equivocation. For that reason, these required a blending of opposing traits which was consistent enough to emerge as a plausible "grammar" in itself, despite the cultural foreignness of pop resources in a classical context.

⁵⁰ Examples of canons for various ensembles are found in EE at b. 34-46 (AAAAA + BBBB), b. 944-1013 (Ms and T) and b. 1444-1461 (SSAATTBB + Gt1Gt2Kb1Kb2).

I would individualise a few such specific cases in the score:

- b. 15-24: Use of bass sequencer beats (basically a dance-music styleme), for clearer acoustic definition of the running harmonic *continuo*.
- b. 92: Sudden appearance of a D+A strum of fifth in the distorted guitars.
- b. 95-100: Compound texture of jazzy and syncopated guitar's arpeggios, in prominence over the vocal parts.
- b. 101-119: Use of *concertato* distorted guitars for, subsequently, harmonic riffs under the choir, two rock leads in high range and a prog thematic reprise in parallel fifths.
- b. 1070-1081: Orchestral arrangement of the keyboards, for a quasi-baroque passage of extended tonal music that underpins a vocal soloist.
- b. 1097-1100: Guitar that plays a prog solo with a synthesised tone, within a rhythmic and harmonic frame of medieval flavour.
- b. 1170-1181: Surface mark of guitar riffs.
- b. 1314-1321: Sequence of space-rock, with sounds of electronic guitar over a dense "baroque" interplay of the keyboards.
- b. 1328-1337: Use of a pop-derived instrumental technique in the synthesisers, with pulsations of step sequencer sustained by a chordal pad.

The instrumental techniques devised for the composition of EE show that the stricter structural coherence of polyphony, as parent system, tends to annex and transform the expressive immediacy of modern instruments. In fact, as it widely occurs throughout the composition, electric guitars and synthesisers are involved in proper contrapuntal *concertatos* as separated *obbligato* lines, that interact with voices within a single through-composed polyphonic fabric.

Still, the instruments maintain a distinctive native character, of emotive enhancers that operate on the musical surface. This aesthetic tension between perceptual directness and formal design (in which more in par. 10) is of mutual benefit: on one hand, the expressive capacity of the timbrically limited choir is extended by artificial tones, on the other hand the rock instruments are linguistically emancipated from the "dictatorship of sensation" which affects much popular music, through richer harmonic resources and more efficient strategies of interplay.

Overall, a specific paradigm of symphonic texture and dynamic range seems to be attempted in EE, with a constantly evolving *wall of sound*⁵¹ whose timbral colour and plastic qualities are very specific, so that it would be practically unfeasible to obtain the same aural images through traditional acoustic means.

51 An arrangement and music production technique apparently developed by Phil Spector at the Los Angeles Gold Studios around the mid-1960s, calling for thick mixtures of audio-processed instruments, both acoustic and electric, merged into a continuum of sustained dynamic. The innovative sonic result, of unprecedented timbral density in popular music, imprinted widely the late 1960s experimental pop, giving rise - with a turning point represented by Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) - to the aural aesthetic of psychedelia (immersive perceptual experience conjuring a state of altered consciousness) that shaped the progressive and cosmic currents of 1970s art-rock.

9. GENERAL MAP OF THE ORATORIO

Mov 1. COALESCENCE.

This section is set in an undefined time window of the remote cosmic past, and describes the emergence (coalescence) of time and space from the universal void with a burst of energy.

[1-15]: Instrumental introduction that expands on the tonality of the creation's *Gamma-Ut* (Dorian G) in the “spiritual” time signature of 9/2 (*Tempus Perfectum cum Prolatione Perfecta*). Eventually, the complex of reality ignites itself at b. 13, with the subdivision of musical time delivered by an arpeggiator.

[15-25]: Instrumental concertato with imitation in the guitars, employing two themes that symbolise slow (water + earth) and fast (fire + wind) elemental matters, related to the specific properties of the four Elohim (Seraphim).

[25-33]: Simultaneous restatement of the two subjects and preparatory *coda* in 4/2, that represents a leap forward in the narrative timeline.

Mov II. QUATUOR SERAPHIM: THE ETERNAL GUARDIANS.

This section introduces the plural protagonists of the oratorio, the four Seraphim who encircle the throne of God praising endlessly His glory, as related by Isaiah 6:1-3 and Apocalypsis 4:8. The action is set in a cosmic era when the celestial bodies are formed but no life inhabits them yet, except for the living energy of the Creator and His Elohim.

The general formal articulation of the movement is: a series of dovetailed choral and instrumental episodes, that develop shared thematic material with various scorings and timbral combinations.

[33-53]: Presentation of the Seraphim as a four-voice canon (AAAABBBB) sung by androgynous creatures in parallel octaves. First appearance of the “crystalline mercy” subject (*leitmotiv* of the oratorio) at b. 39 (A1+B1).

[53-67]: Song of praise of the full angelic retinue (SATTBB). First exposition of the ascending “curvature” theme from b. 58 (guitar 1).

First exposition of the ascending “Creator” subject from b. 60-61 (bass 2).

[66-70]: Instrumental interlude, with imitation in guitars and keyboards on a derived ascending motif.

[70-75]: *Strettos* at the upper second on the “curvature” theme, symbolising the text as constant harmonic deflection.

[75-83]: Thorough imitation at the fourth on the “Creator” subject with modified coda, starting from T1 (b. 75).

[83-92]: Restatement in inversion of the “Creator” subject from guitar 1 (b. 83), with two series of *strettos* and first appearance of the distorted guitar on the cadence.

[92-94]: Brief restatement of the “curvature” theme in the electric guitars.

[94-101]: Choral *recitativo* surrounded by patterns in counter-rhythm of plucked guitars.

[101-116]: Choral *concertato* on the inversion of the “curvature” theme, with the word “Creator” attached (synthesis of the two concepts). First employment of a rock riff (guitar's accompaniment pattern) at b. 101-106, followed by alternate solos of electric guitars (b. 106-116), over-topping the choir with a variant of the “crystalline mercy” motif.

[116-119]: Reprise of the “curvature” subject in parallel fifths (prog-rock gesture), on the part of the distorted guitars.

[119-133]: Dynamic parenthesis in *mf* on a new descending motif (“we are of celestial origin”), with temporary abatement of the buoyancy of the movement.

Androgynous Seraphim represented as an antiphonal exchange between quartets of altos and basses (b. 119-124). A sustained crescendo for full SATTB choir follows.

[133-140]: Closure of the movement on an inverted variant of the “curvature” theme, in the “foundational” tonality of the oratorio (Ionian G). The passage is underpinned by an interplay of guitars and concluded by a G pedal (b. 138-140) that leads to a polychord.

Mov III. SPECULUM MUNDI:

THE DOLPHIN, THE TREE, THE FOUNDRY AND THE TELESCOPE.

This section entails a further step in the fictional time of the narration.

It relates about the task of mentors of the coming human civilisation entrusted by the Creator to the four Seraphim: *Mu-ῥδωρ* (soprano) for cometary water and seamanship, *Ersetu-γῆ* (alto) for planetary matter and agriculture, *Gibil-πῦρ* (tenor) for stellar nuclei and metallurgy, *Im-αἰθήρ* (bass) for solar wind and scientific knowledge.

The Seraphim gather and deliberate as to how accomplish their respective duties, each with a declaration of promise. Finally, they seal their allegiance to mankind with a collective declaration.

The general formal articulation of the movement is: an instrumental prelude and choral opening, four arias introduced by choral statements and a choral recapitulation.

[141-149]: Instrumental prelude that sets a more intimate expressive mood.

[149-181]: Gathering of the Seraphim as an SATB choral ensemble, with statement of their commitment in guiding the path of finite beings toward planetary civilizations.

[181-192]: Choral introduction of the first Seraph,
with embedded symbolisation of the number one as the note g.
Sentence divided in a 6/4 “numerical” opening and a 4/4 “elemental” closure (waters).

[193-228]: Aria of the Seraph of cometary water (soprano solo).
Recurrent prosodic pattern on “for the living” sung for the first time from b. 216.

[230-243]: Choral introduction of the second Seraph,
with embedded symbolisation of the number two as an interval.
Sentence divided in a 6/4 “numerical” opening and a 4/4 “elemental” closure (soils).

[244-290]: Aria of the Seraph of planetary matter (alto solo).
Recurrent prosodic pattern on “for the living” sung from b. 270.

[292-307]: Choral introduction of the third Seraph,
with embedded symbolisation of the number three as an interval.
Sentence divided in a 6/4 “numerical” opening and a 4/4 “elemental” closure (metals).

[309-357]: Aria of the Seraph of stellar furnaces (tenor solo).
Recurrent prosodic pattern on “for the living” sung from b. 342.

[359-369]: Choral introduction of the fourth Seraph,
with embedded symbolisation of the number four in melody and as imitative interval.
Sentence divided in a 6/4 “numerical” opening and a 4/4 “elemental” closure (stars).

[377-430]: Aria of the Seraph of solar wind (bass solo), in canon with instruments.
Recurrent prosodic pattern on “for the living” sung from b. 413.

[431-476]: Extended choral *recitativo* that brings the narrative action further onward, on planet Earth in the antediluvian period of the Sumerian culture. The Elohim mold the primeval humanity and sustain the first developed urban settlements: then, they gather again and recapitulate in allegorical words their promises to the humans.

[478-518]: Final SATB fugato on the words “and the angular sky of the quadrant”, as an allegory of astronomy. The guitars share the contrapuntal structure with modified shapes, and the closing cadence uses a tonic + supratonic polychord based on the *Gamma-Ut*.

MOV IV. ELECTRIC TRISAGION: THE THRICE GLORIFIED FLAME.

This section reverts to abstract depths of space, with another leap ahead in the narrative timeline, and focuses on an unspecified moment after the rise of the human civilisation.

The rotating Seraphim and the throne of the Creator travel from far cosmic regions in steady approach. They are seen by an earthly observer as a coloured sparkle of light, symbolised by a bare note. A long crescendo brings to a mid-movement climax, depicting the closest point to the beholder of the light machinery of the energy-winged Elohim. Next, ensue a choral digression and a gradual dynamic regression, to a single sound and to silence. The employed textual material intermingles fictional poetry with fragments from the *Sanctus* of the Latin ordinary and the *Trisagion* ("three times holy") of the Greek Divine Liturgy (daily service of the Orthodox church).

[519-528]: In the "creation's" time signature of 9/2 (*Tempus Perfectum cum Prolatione Perfecta*), polychordal compounds of fourths and fifths stem from a lonely C# synthesiser tone. Keyboard 1 outlines the "defense" motif at b. 525.

[528-532]: Atonal SATTBB recitativo, with entries layered along the ascending steps of an E maj hexachord.

[533-542]: Imitation on the "defense" subject, in both direct and augmented form, along the ascending steps of a [d-c] whole-tone scale. Resolution of the episode in a more luminous tonal purview on "Prime Radiant" (b. 539), with switch to 8/2 duple-time signature.

[542-546]: Contrapuntal *recitativo* of broken ascending shapes on "of every ramification".

[546-554]: Contrapuntal *recitativo* with imitations on the ascending "the candour" profile (T2, b. 548), inherited by guitars and synthesisers from b. 551.

[554-561]: Canonic imitation at the upper second, with free coda, on the "of the planets" motif, made of interlocked disjointed intervals that entail continuous harmonic progression by ascending fifths.

[561-566]: Choral *recitativo* with first statement of the Greek *Trisagion*.
Reversion to the triple time signature of 9/2.

[566-573]: ATTBB contrapuntal interplay, on the anticipation in augmented form (b. 566, B1) of the subsequent "Agios o Theòs" subject, with the text "Sanctus" attached.
Important rhythmic, timbral and textural function of the synthesised bass in keyboard 1.

[573-578]: SATT concertato on the bilingual "Sanctus" + "Agios o Theòs" sentence, with a TT canon at the upper third on the *Trisagion* text.

[578-587]: SATTB expansion of the bilingual framework of Latin and Greek, embedding an SA canon at the lower sixth on the “Agios o Theòs” theme.

[587-591]: Dynamic parenthesis in the *crescendo*, with temporary reduction of expressive tension. Imitations on the inversion (*anastrophe*) of the “Agios o Theòs” subject.

[591-598]: Final step in the dynamic progress of the movement, on a dancing tribrach meter for the words “Dominus Deus Sabaoth”, with ample usage of dissonance in English cadences. The guitars develop from b. 593 a triple-time version of the “crystalline mercy” motif (*leitmotiv*).

[598-607]: Switch to the time signature of 4/2 and first climactic point of the movement, on the words “Relucet in excelsis”, with a subject initiated by an ascending octave (from T1, b. 599). Sonorous timbral marks of synthetic bells on the aural surface.

[607-633]: Series of choral and instrumental *recitativos*, with expressive resort to the timbral properties of distorted guitars and synthesisers.

[633-646]: Episode of expanded modal polyphony, with explicit features of high Renaissance in the theme started by A at b. 635, and spread throughout choir and guitars.

[646-662]: Restatement of the “Relucet” motif with shorter starting interval, on the part of guitars, voices and occasionally keyboards. Closing G pedal from b. 655, marked by an added contrapuntal interplay of the guitars that leads to a polychordal cadence.

[663-675]: Eight-part SSSSAAAA *gimell* for female voices, in the “earthly” time signature of 8/2. The fictional Benedictus text reads: “Benedicti qui veniunt”.

[675-696]: Eight-part TTTTBBBB *gimell* for male voices, in the “heavenly” time signature of 6/2. The fictional Benedictus text reads: “in nomine radiantis”.

[695-708]: Second climactic point of the movement, on the words “in nomine radiantis”. Choral expansion to sixteen SATB parts, with polychordal cadence in G.

[709-718]: Second “Hosanna”, on the “Relucet in excelsis” text and motif.

[719-739]: Dynamic and expressive regression, on the extended “Vasilev Ouranie” invocations of the *Trisagion* (Divine Liturgy). The descending subject (from T2, b. 720) is treated in imitation across the SATTB ensemble, in both direct and augmented form, across the ample time signature of 4/1.

Starting from b. 730 (altos), the Greek words are layered in a multi-textual fabric with four Italian excerpts, taken from the first half of the movement and handled like fragments of *cantus firmi*.

The guitars employ synthesiser tones of plucked instruments (from b. 725), for conveying the gentle rotation of the thinking Seraphim as that of floating celestial bodies.

[739-747]: Stretched polytonal formula in general *diminuendo*, on the fourth statement of the *Trisagion* ("Eleison imàs"= have mercy upon us) overlaid with the third invocation of the "Vasilev Ouranie" ("to Pneuma tis Alitheias"= the spirit of truth). The cadence leading to a polychordal G (b. 745-747) hints at musical stylemes of Tudor England.

[748-753]: Instrumental postlude of electronic sounds, which progressively fade out until leaving only the same c# of the movement's beginning. The passage conveys the final distancing of the Elohim's arks from the watching earthling.

Mov V. SCINTILLA MUNDI: THE GIRL AND THE SHADOWS OF LIGHT.

In an approximately contemporary time window, this section depicts a female earthling in her childhood and her early encounters with the visiting Elohim, disguised as shadows of light in the woods.

[754-759]: Instrumental prelude of the electric guitar, with clean tone.

[759-816]: Aria, with instrumentation that comprises only a guitar and a synthesiser pad.

[816-826]: *Recitativo arioso* for voice and synthesiser.

[826-837]: Cadence with harmonic pedal in E and e vocal pedal, concluded by polychordal overtones in the high range of the keyboard.

Mov VI. THE GOLDEN PNEUMA: DIALOGUS.

This section (a Mezzo and Tenor duet) is slightly set in the future. It describes the encounter of the female earthling - now a young lady - with a visiting Eloah, who appears in the sunset light as a six-pointed geometry of colours, resembling a six-winged Seraph. The general formal articulation of the movement is: an instrumental prelude, a dialogue-aria of the alternate soloists and a closing *concertato* duet.

[838-854]: Instrumental introduction for synthesiser and electronic guitars, setting an atmosphere of mysterious expectation with articulated modulations on a walking bass, across a C min - C min circle of tonalities.

[854-883]: First question of the girl (Mezzo) to the Eloah, in the female, earthly and even time signature of 4/4. The visual vibration of the cosmic visitor is conjured by the synthesiser, with an abstract modulating arpeggio of semiquavers (b. 867-872).

[883-895]: First answer of the Eloah (Tenor) to the girl, in the androgynous, spiritual and odd time signatures of 6/4 and 9/4.

The stately melodic profile is reminiscent of a baroque *arioso*.

[895-909]: Second question of the girl (Mezzo) to the Eloah, in the female, earthly and even time signature of 4/4.

[909-941]: Second answer of the Eloah (Tenor) to the girl, in the androgynous, spiritual and odd time signatures of 6/4 and 12/8. The stately melodic profiles are reminiscent of a baroque *arioso*. The tenor's theme of b. 912 is first exposed in imitation by the guitars at b. 909. Later, the melodic material of the solo (b. 918-919) is echoed in interplay by the guitars at b. 921-925.

[942]: Closing duet sustained by an active keyboard's *continuo*. The series of vocal canons (at the lower third from b. 944, at the upper fourth from b. 957, at the upper third from b. 999) is complemented by episodes of strict imitation also in the guitars, with the canonic device expanded to four parts from b. 957.

After an elaborate cadential formula (b. 1024-1030), the first contrapuntal subject is restated in a brief instrumental recapitulation (b. 1031-1034).

Mov VII. REVERSIO: TO EXULTANT STARS.

This section relates a condensed timeline of events placed in the near future. First, the earthling woman (now a middle-aged mother and a contralto) declares her achieved awareness about the cosmic origin and destiny of mankind. In the meantime, the Elohim are making route for Earth, divided in four angelic retinues respectively led by the Seraph of solar wind, stellar furnaces, planetary matter and cometary water.

After a collective praise of the creation, the cohort of angels engages in the last stretch of interstellar travel. Then, the action switches back on Earth, where the female protagonist senses the arrival of the travelling “architects” and pronounces her farewell to the world, her family and the star-bound humanity to come. She dissolves in a ray of light, and ascends to the Elohim's arks which meanwhile have taken position in low planetary orbit. Once the energy drives of the *Ophanim* (wheels-angels) have been re-ignited, the host of Elohim projects a triumphant music of ascent, and sing their return to astral dwellings.

The general formal articulation of the movement is: a *recitativo arioso* for contralto and choir, four short arias (BTAS) preceded by an instrumental introduction and followed by an imitative episode for different choral combinations, a further *recitativo arioso* of the contralto and a sequence of choral-instrumental passages of increasing contrapuntal complexity (from 4 to 16 voices), interspersed by instrumental transitions.

[1035-1090]: *Recitativo arioso* of the earthling character (contralto), sustained by various choral and instrumental insertions. An electronic step-sequencer (programmable arpeggiator) delivers rhythmic polychords generated by patterns of tonics, fourths and

fifths, that define a futuristic mood within which the soloist and the choir interact (b. 1059-1060 and 1065-1066), in the manner of a character and a commenting *Khoros* (mankind) in a Greek tragedy.

The singer affirms her waiting for the cosmic founders with an impassioned melody, in a quasi-baroque *legato* style underpinned by the “virtual orchestra” of the keyboards (b. 1070-1084). The choir comments widely on the character's words (b. 1084-1090).

[b. 1092-1103]: Instrumental episode which depicts the progress in space of the Elohim's starships. The harmonic framework employs four eight-minim patterns of walking bass, modulating by ascending fifths from C# min to Bb min. An extrovert synth solo in prog-rock fashion qualifies the sci-fi atmosphere of the passage (b. 1097-1100), spiring over the electronic consort.

[b. 1103-1116]: Short aria of the Seraph of solar wind (bass), in the “heavenly” time-signature of 6/2, with ancillary choral harmony from a TT duet (b. 1107-1111) and thematic interplay from guitar 1.

[b. 1116-1134]: TTB choral trio that includes a B-T2 strict canon at the fourth, extended by theme-related interplays of T1 and guitar 2.

[b. 1134-1148]: Switch to 4/2 and imitation on a dactylic motif (long-short-short), that carries the *motto* of the seraphic retinue of the bass, under the allegorical sign of the “solar diamond” (=astral wind).

[b. 1149-1158]: Transitional episode for instruments, that introduces the Elohim of metallurgy. Four eight-minim patterns of walking bass underpin a clanging interplay of distorted guitars, on a profile of interlocked descending fourths.

[b. 1158-1189]: Short aria of the Seraph of stellar furnaces (tenor), in the time signature of 12/8. The keyboards mimic gestures of electronic sequencer, with an *arpeggio ostinato* of rich harmonic content. The textual enunciation is reinforced from b. 1167 by a TTBB quartet, that expands on the thematic material of the soloist.

The electric guitars support the aria with combined riffs (b. 1160-1170), conjuring an atmosphere of classically reworked English rock. From b. 1170 they exchange a pattern of interconnected fifths or fourths, vaguely resemblant of the Pink Floyd's *Shine on You Crazy Diamond* (1975) onset.

[1189-1206]: Imitation at the upper third within a polyphonic TTBB quartet, with change to the “heavenly” time-signature of 6/2. The text delivers the *motto* of the seraphic retinue of the tenor, under the allegorical sign of the “perpetual ruby” (=stellar fire).

The sentence is then restated in 4/2 with an exalted tone, over a guitar interplay of interlocked descending fourths (b. 1201-1206).

[1209-1221]: Short aria of the Seraph of planetary matter (alto), in the time signature of 6/2. The melody is sustained by keyboard profiles that hint at an electronic orchestra, with profiles of synthesised strings encircling the soloist in *concertato* manner.

[1221-1235]: SSA polyphonic *recitativo* in 4/2, made of brief imitative passages underpinned by the running harmony of a walking bass.

[1235-1250]: *Motto* of the seraphic retinue of the alto, under the allegorical sign of the “living emerald” (= planetary vegetation). The five part polyphony encompasses an SSA imitation at the lower second (from b. 1234, S) and a two-part guitar counterpoint related to the thematic material, with intense usage of the stylised device of English cadence.

[1252-1264]: Short aria of the Seraph of cometary water (soprano), in the time signature of 12/8. The melody is accompanied by patterns of duplets in the guitars and combinations of timbres and rhythmic modules in the keyboards, including *ostinato* harmonic arpeggios of semiquavers in synthesiser 2 (from b. 1257).

[1264-1281]: Polyphonic *recitativo* for soloist and SAA choral ensemble, comprising brief and dovetailed imitative sequences. From b. 1376 the consort is surrounded by ascending diminutions of electric guitars, which deliver a character of “medieval” angularity referred to the antiquity of the “original house” (as read by the sung words).

[1281-1299]: SSAA polyphonic hymn of the seraphic retinue of the soprano, under the allegorical sign of the “nebular sapphire” (= planetary waters). The passage runs in 6/4 on a tilting anacrusic subject, initiated by S1 at b. 1281, conjuring a female mood of “spiritual” dance. The imitation develops at the lower second and proceeds through two cycles, eventually reaching a euphonic cadential *concertato* of descending lines (b. 1293-1299).

[1299-1310]: Full-choir SATTBb recapitulation, intoned as a Seraphim's collective praise of creation. The time signature switches to a stately and wide 8/4, for a multi-textual imitation on four allegorical properties of the Creator (*symphonic numinous, ubiquitous chrysopraxe, counterfort of the worlds and ennuplice*), attached to a rhythmic-prosodic pattern first exposed by T1 at b. 1298-1299. The exuberant choral declamations are enhanced throughout by blazing surface-gestures of synthesised bells.

[1314-1321]: Transitional episode depicting the Elohim's last transfer in interstellar space. The dynamic interplay, built with timbral registrations of cosmic rock, involves free imitations of electronic guitars and exchanged patterns of *continuo concertato* in the synthesisers. The employed harmonic blocks bring the passage through a circular progression from Gb maj to Gb maj, that represents symbolically a superluminal journey through space.

[1321-1351]: *Recitativo arioso* and farewell address of the contralto (female earthling in her middle age). The last solo section of the oratorio exploits varied instrumental strategies of

word-painting. In particular: a stretch of fast harmonic arpeggios (b. 1232-1237) for the call to cosmic voyage of the Seraphim, a pulsating soundscape of synthesisers with orchestral gestures of guitars (b. 1327-1337) for the farewell to humankind, dissonant bichords of distorted guitar (b. 1341-1343) for the textual mention of the “Electric High Ones” (Elektron Elohim).

[1351-1356]: Interlocutory ambient passage with atonal and polychordal harmony, employing an “electronic orchestra” of synthesiser pads and E-bow guitars.

The episode depicts the de-materialisation of the earthling woman in a ray of energy, directed to the waiting spacecrafts of the Seraphim.

[1356-1371] Switch to a processional beat of a 4/2, for an instrumental representation of the ignition of the drives inside the Elohim's arks, in view of the imminent departure with their transcended human passenger. Assertive imitations between distorted guitars and synthesised brass draw energetic signs on the acoustic surface (guitar 2 + keyboard 1 from b. 1356 and keyboard 1 + guitar 1 from b. 1360).

[1371-1396]: SATB declaration of the departing angels who announce their ascension.

Over an active symphonic background, of synthesiser quavers in the Creator's G major, the basses expose an extended theme that contains a propulsive modulating hinge, of ascending major third (b. 1372-1373). Two rounds of imitation ensue.

[1396-1407]: Restatement of the “Song of Ascent” motif in polychordal harmony, on an instrumental bass proceeding by descending fourths.

The rhetorical import is a dialectic *diaphora* (comparison of variants) that entails logical assertion through contradiction (antilogy).

[1410-1415]: Transitional fanfare for synthesised brass in both keyboards.

The final choral theme of the oratorio, soon to be developed, is pre-emptively exposed and imitated in an upbeat variant (from b. 1410, keyboard 1). The time signature doubles to a spacious 8/2, apt for complex bar-unrelated contrapuntal combinations. The implied rhetorical strategy is *exordium* (preliminary statement of the subsequent logical argument).

[1415-1443]: SATB “distributed” canon (whose thematic segments are interspersed by free contrapuntal material) complemented by a further SATB quartet of *concertato* parts.

The imitation proceeds at the upper fourth (from b. 1415, S1) over the progress of a six-minim harmonic module also moving by ascending fourths. From b. 1425/5 the strict imitation passes to B2-T2-A2-S2 and the harmonic pattern proceeds by descending fourths. Starting from b. 1428/5 the guitars enter in the canonic scheme, providing two added voices. At b. 1431/4 (B2) the canon expands to eight vocal parts and two guitars, employing a *coda* in turn developed in imitation (from b. 1433/4, B2): the underlying harmonic pattern of six minims modulates by ascending fourths. At b. 1439/5 the contrapuntal geometry reverts to four voices (T2 – B2 – A2 – S2), for a transitional cadence.

[1444-1461]: Further increase of the canonic framework to twelve parts (eight choral voices plus two *bicinia* in the instruments). The harmonic pattern switches to a module of six semibreves in major tones: [F - C - A - E - Db - Ab].

[1462-1466]: Last interlude for distorted guitars and brass synthesisers, on the ensuing polyphonic subject broadly outlined. Cadence in the major tone of *Gamma-Ut* (G).

[1466-1481]: Final expansion of the vocal architecture to four SATB choirs, for a culminating episode of antiphonal counterpoint.

The descending subject and related counter-motif migrate across the cascaded entries of choirs 1, 2, 3 and 4 (b. 1466-1467), while the articulated orchestration of the keyboards exploits rapid changes of registration and significant gestures of surface expressiveness, afforded by an incisive tone of electronic bass and by bursts of synthesized bells.

The choral groups exchange thematic ideas, in variable spatial and rhythmic arrangements, up to an antiphonal peak of sixteen syncopated voices at b. 1476-1477.

From b. 1479 the vocal scoring is reorganised, as an eight-voice polyphony of octave doublings which delivers a massive C-G plagal cadence, underlined by bells and keyboards plunging to a contrabass C.

[1481-1484]: The closing act of EE is a slow counterpoint of inter-related shapes sung in octaves, over a slowly extinguishing tapestry of arpeggiator and synthesisers.

The *leitmotiv* of the oratorio (the “crystalline mercy” theme of b. 39) is stated for the last time with augmented values, in an imitation at the fourth between the guitars and the S4+T4 block (b. 1482). The work ends on a spacey open chord of G maj add 4 2, with the first five degrees of the tone resounding together.

18 75 of the Creator

va-tu-ra del Cre-a-to-re del Cre-a-to-re

va-ture of the Cre-a-tor of the Cre-

vam Cre-a-to-ris Cre-a-to-ris Cre-a-to-ris

cur vam Cre-a-to-ris

ti-ta tou Di-mi-our gou tou Di-mi-our

py-lo ti-ta tou Di-mi-our gou tou Di-mi-our

3: Mov 2, b. 88-92. *Stretto* built on the inversion of the preceding "Creator" subject, over a D pedal concluded by an extra-tonal D 7maj 5 4 chord. The polytonal framework determined in the process reinforces the demonstrative import of antithesis, *diaphora* (comparison of variants) and *peroratio* (recapitulation), which add on a logical level to the grammatical value of the device of inversion (*anastrophe*).

of the Creator

re del Cre-a-to-re

tor of the Cre-a-tor Cre-a-tor

Cre-a-to-ris Cre-a-to-ris

Cre-a-to-ris

our gou tou Di-mi-our gou

Di-mi-our gou

4: Mov 3, b. 478-510. An instrumental introduction (b. 478-482) presents preemptively the subject of the third movement's finale, in both direct (keyboard 1, guitar 2) and inverted form (guitar 1, keyboard 2), within an implied argumentative process of *exordium* (statement). Next, the motif is exposed by B-T-A-S, complemented by a *coda* divided in two added musical cells, with subsequent imitative relationships of fifth, fifth and octave. The underlying rhetorical strategy comprises *narratio* (exposition of the imitative framework) and *partitio* (account of supplementary statements). The guitars take part in the same thematic development, occasionally expanding the contrapuntal structure to six parts. The episode then proceeds across two further imitative rounds: B-A-T-S-G2-G1 (b. 491-501, with octave relationship in TS) and B-A-T-S-G2 (b. 501-510, with octave relationship in BT and AS).

478 $\text{♩} = 50$ S and the angular sky of the quadrant. *f espress.* e il cie - - - lo an - go - la - re del qua - dran -

A *f espress.* e il cie - - - lo an - go - la - re del

T *f espress.* e il cie - - - lo an - go - la - re del

B *f espress.* e il cie - - - lo an - go - la - re del qua - dran -

59

5: Mov 4, b. 591-598. The *Domine Deus Sabaoth* is rendered with a tilting section in triple time, that employs a polyphonic language consciously reminiscent of mid-XVI century Tudor music. The melodic shaping is punctuated throughout by the harmonic paradoxes of English cadences, built by voices and keyboards: at b. 595 in A+T1 and A+Kb1; at b. 596 in S+T1+Kb1+Kb2 and T+B1+Kb2; at b. 597 in T1+S and T2+S+A.

A personal reception of the historical device - sort of *inverted English cadence* - is deployed at b. 597 by T2+A+Kb1, with cross relations between the resolution on a minor mediant and its chromatically raised anticipations. The guitars resume in a separate counterpoint the "crystalline mercy" *leitmotif* - translated in ternary time signature - and an arpeggiator enhances from b. 595 the dynamic drive, towards a D maj - A maj plagal cadence as climactic point of the protracted *crescendo*.

This passage is designed to convey the might of the irrepressible *Ophanin* ("wheels"), one aspect of the angels in the Hebrew tradition and arguably some kind of rotating creatures escorting the God's chariot, as in Enoch 61:10 and 71:7. See van der Toorn (1999).

occurrence of *cambiata*s (upper or lower auxiliary dissonances, a third or a fourth away from the target note), the shortening of dissonant values through embellishments and a melismatic contour defined by clusters of joint notes, separated by larger intervals.

664

Blessed are

S 1 *mp* *mf* Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti

S 2 *mp* *mf* Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti

S 3 *mp* *mf* Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti

S 4 *mp* Be - ne - dic - ti

A 1 *mp* *mf* Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti

A 2 *mp* *mf* Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti

A 3 *mp* *mf* Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti

A 4 *mp* *mf* Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti

S 1 *mp* *mf* Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti

S 2 *mp* *mf* Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti Be - ne - dic - ti

b) CANONIC WRITING

The Flemish technique of strict canonic writing is used at special points in the oratorio, where semantic values of intellectual promise and musical abstraction are demanded by the text. The constrained relationships of identity at given vertical intervals, between the *dux*-leader and its *comites*-followers, and the consistent pattern of their horizontal combinations provide the resulting musical object with an emerging architectural content. The implicit meaning of such syntactic constructs, added to the specific narrative of the text in the case of vocal canons, is a harmonious hierarchy and completeness of things.

1: Mov 2, b. 34-39. Four-voice multilingual canon at the unison, sung in octaves by altos and basses over a [B-D-C-A] harmonic *ostinato*. The adopted musical form represents the clockwork-like rotation of four androgynous and identical Seraphim, who deliver their musical speech in a multiple and thus universal idiom.

10 II - QUATUOR SERAPHIM: THE ETERNAL GUARDIANS Since Aeon, we caress

33

♩ = 60

A1 Da E-o - - ni B ac - ca- rez-zia - - mo con lo

A2 Since Ae - - ons B we ca -

A3 (1) (2) A Ab Ae o - - nes

A4 (3) A A - pò Ae-ò - -

B1 Da E-o - - ni B ac - ca- rez-zia - - (4) - - mo con lo

B2 Since Ae - - ons B we ca -

B3 A Ab Ae o - - nes

B4 A A - pò Ae-ò - -

[Bmin Dmin Cmaj Amaj]

Synth 1

Synth 2

2: Mov 2, b. 39-47. Imitation at the octave on an ascending subject (“in crystalline mercy”), destined to become the Seraphim’s theme and a variously re-employed *leitmotiv* in the Oratorio. The underlying [G-D-A-E] harmonic round is a sequence of descending fourths, that conjures a sense of endless axial rotation.

39 *in crystalline mercy,*

do in cris-tal-li - na mi - se - ri - cor - di - a la dol -
the ga - ze in crys-tal-line mer - cy
di - mur cum o - cu-lis crys - tal-li - na mi - se - ri - cor -
che i - dè - voun me to vlèm ma se krys - tal - li - ki - è -
do in cris-tal-li - na mi - se - ri - cor - di - a la dol -
the ga - ze in crys-tal-line mer - cy
di - mur cum o - cu-lis crys - tal-li - na mi - se - ri - cor -
che i - dè - voun me to vlèm ma se krys - tal - li - ki - è -

[Gmin Dmaj Amaj Emaj]

3: Mov 3, b. 377-430. Canonic aria for bass in the purview of C maj, modelled as a modern synthesis of Tudor consort-song and early XVII century Italian accompanied monody.

The constant geometric relationship (with occasional corrections) at the fourth and octave - respectively with guitar 2 and keyboard 2 - symbolises the authority and intellectual promise of the fourth Eloah, committed to the diffusion of knowledge.

The quartet is completed by a guitar part of contrapuntal embellishment, almost a *vagans* fifth voice as in the late XV century Flemish school. The episode ends with a c pedal of the singer (b. 425-430), determining in the exhaustion of the canonic device a [C min 6 - Db maj - Ab maj - F maj - C 9 5 - C 9 4augm - C maj 9 7maj] cadence, concluded by a polychordal harmony that comprises C maj and G maj.

52 *I sort the questions*

377 CANON

BASS SOLO

or di - no or di - no i que - si - ti i que - si -

RESOLUTIO 1

RESOLUTIO 2

4: Mov 6, b. 957-974. In the fugal closure of the sixth movement, the second enunciation of the text is a four-voice strict canon at the fourth, which implements a symbology of the number four (the Seraphim) in both the number of voices and the imitative intervals. The evenly spaced entries (Ms - T - G1 -G2) entail a continuous modulation of tonal ambit, transiting from C maj (b. 957) to Eb maj (b. 974), where the exposition of the passage is completed by guitar 2 and dovetailed inside the ensuing canonic episode (b. 972-980).

5: Mov 7, b. 1431-1439. The fourth sentence of the oratorio's final section ("and Infinite Music to the Constellations") follows the general numeric scheme of the entire episode, employing six-minims long harmonic modules separated by ascending fourths.

This specific passage is constructed as a canon at the fourth for ten voices (SSAATTBB and two guitars), with the peculiarity that the *coda* allows for further restatements of the *dux*-canon, so that two diagonal webs of imitation run simultaneously, delivering the two halves of the text in parallel. This contrapuntal framework has a strong rhetorical effect of logical assertion through grammatical expansion (*amplificatio* through *accumulatio*), while at perceptual level it projects the sung sentence in a continuous circulation across the choral space. Once the imitative device is set (b. 1433-1434), it develops underpinned by a [I - V6 - II maj - I - V - I] harmonic pattern, veering through the major tonalities of A, D, G, C, F, Bb and Eb. A sub-motif derived from the subject is stated first by T1 (b. 1432) and later carried by B1, T2, B2 and S2 (b. 1435-1438).

fifths exclusively, in order to adapt its pulse to the continuous engagement of mediant in 4>3 dissonances, on the part of the choral counterpoint.

The steady migration of the thematic cells through eight parts produces *de facto* a sort of multi-textual enunciation, where the phonetic content of the words is disseminated "in surround" across a 360 degrees aural space, thus implementing an acoustic symbol of the ubiquity of the Seraphim's song, and a metaphor of the "endless music" mentioned by the lyrics. Furthermore, the combined imitative devices of voices and instruments evoke at perceptual level some kind of large circular machine, set in motion like a complex clockwork somehow similar to the *Ophanim* (wheels-angels) of the Hebrew tradition.

A significant influence on the compositional ethos of this episode can be traced in my lasting fascination for the 36-part canon attributed to J. Ockeghem (14*?-1497), that shares with my twelve-voice writing the constant oscillation between I and V degrees, although in my case the continuous shift of fifths in the chordal framework entails a wider and non-modal harmonic palette.

We return to exultant stars, to the harmony of radiant regions, Splendour to the Intellect, and Infinite Music to the Constellations.

Canon 3rd

1443

♩ = 100

Tor-nia - mo tra stele sul tan - ti, all' ar - monia di ra-dian - ti re - gio - ni, Splen-do - re all' In - tel - let - to, e Mu - si ca In-fi - ni -

Tor-nia - mo tra stele sul tan - ti, all' ar - monia di ra-dian - ti re - gio - ni, Splen-do - re all' In - tel - let - to, e Mu - si

Tor-nia - mo tra stele sul tan - ti, all' ar - monia di ra-dian - ti re - gio - ni, Splen-do - re all' In - tel - let - to, e Mu - si

Tor-nia - mo tra stele sul tan - ti, all' ar - monia di ra-dian - ti re - gio - ni, Splen-do - re all' In - tel - let - to, e Mu - si

Tor-nia - mo tra stele sul tan - ti, all' ar - monia di ra-dian - ti re - gio - ni, Splen-do - re all' In - tel - let - to, e Mu - si

Tor-nia - mo tra stele sul tan - ti, all' ar - monia di ra-dian - ti re - gio - ni, Splen-do - re all' In - tel - let - to, e Mu - si

Tor-nia - mo tra stele sul tan - ti, all' ar - monia di ra-dian - ti re - gio - ni, Splen-do - re all' In - tel - let - to, e Mu - si

Tor-nia - mo tra stele sul tan - ti, all' ar - monia di ra-dian - ti re - gio - ni, Splen-do - re all' In - tel - let - to, e Mu - si

TO BRASS

TO BRASS

F C A E C#/Db Ab F C A E C#/Db Ab F C A E C#/Db Ab F C A E

c] POLYCHORDAL PASSAGES

This category indicates those situations in the musical progress where the harmonic grammar departs consistently from the surrounding context of extended modality, using polytonal and added-note harmony for an entire passage.

This occurs either as self-contained episodes or as restated imitations, with the thematic material projected into a modern chordal landscape, somehow texting the musical potential and vocal viability of the subject inside a contrapuntal design that involves direct dissonance and non-tonal harmony.

The process is obtained keeping a melodic profile essentially inherited from Renaissance polyphony, although used admitting dissonant intervals at the thematic entries (if the texture is imitative) or on the accented beats of the interacting voices (in passages focused on harmonic content). The resulting chordal gamut oversteps the domain of triadicism with polychordal aggregates, coloured by overtones cumulated over a reference degree in the bass, while instances of straight atonality are relatively rare in EE.

Sometimes, a textual sentence is rendered directly with a “modern” attitude, employing open chords as the result of disjointed consonant intervals, often interlocked, in the melodic shape. In this case the overall rhetorical import is a sort of *elliptical* (ambiguous) statement, that either implements an *appeal to logos* (display of intellectual value) or an aesthetic *parekbasis* (digression) from the use of expanded modality.

When instead a non-tonal/a-tonal moment stems from the reprise of a modal counterpoint, it seems to determine a *diaphora*, presenting a comparison of two meanings of the same statement in different contexts. The rhetorical device induces reflection on the musical medium (highlighted in the sculptural value of its melodic, rhythmic and harmonic morphology) and a deeper appreciation of the conveyed verbal concept, just as the refractions of an image through a prism acquire various figural meanings on the background surfaces, but still pertain to the same visual paradigm, more clearly asserted by the series of refracted replicas. Likewise, the historically rooted and harmonically modern variants of a musical-textual motif may constitute a *micro-constellation* (in Benjamin's terms, see Par. 7.c), connecting aesthetically divergent yet culturally contiguous phenomena, that reinforce their shared identity reflecting in one another.

1: Mov 3, b. 510-518. The textual material of the third movement's final *fugato* is refashioned as a four-note “cruciform” subject (asc. 5th - desc. 4th - desc. 4th), which metaphorically outlines a NESW geographical rhombus, representing the “quadrant” related by the sung words.

The theme moves from C min 7min, migrating among choral parts (S-B-A-T-S-B) and stringed instruments (G2-G1-G2-G1) - with unison imitations in the guitars -, while the keyboards deliver a pensive mood with chordal steps that relocate the previous counterpoint in a modern harmonic purview. The cadence of the episode projects a non-tonal C maj 9 6 4. The rhetorical function of this passage is *peroratio* (recapitulation), effected through *diaphora* (comparison of variants) and *supplementum* [cadential pedal according to Burmeister (Rivera 1993)].

3: Mov 4, b. 738-745. On the invocation of mercy "Eleison imàs", that complements a recessional *Trisagion* at the end of the fourth movement, the choral-instrumental complex delivers a contemplative moment, of caring angelical attitude towards mankind.

The vocal ensemble builds a softly dissonant landscape, through diatonic steps perturbed by slowly transiting added notes. The harmonic framework is generated by a contrapuntal construct of interlocked melodic profiles: A and B1 carry the subject with a pattern broadly imitated at the unison (b. 739), while T2 and T1 sing the augmented motif in another imitation at the fifth (b. 738). Concurrently, S and B2 integrate the rhythmic and harmonic texture with, respectively, a contour in free counterpoint (b. 739) and a metric variation on the main thematic shape (b. 740). The chordal sequence progresses by descending fourths, in a circle from D min to D min (b. 739-745), with tighter E - Bb and D - Bb transitions in between (b. 740 and 742-743).

This gently polytonal episode, with the steady shift of fourths in the underlying keyboards, aims at depicting the floating Seraphim in merciful meditation.

4: Mov 7, b. 1396-1407. With a procedure of linguistic displacement - whose rhetorical analogy is an affirmative antithesis (antilogy) obtained through comparison of variants (*diaphora*) - the "ascension" motif of Mov VII is restated within a polychordal context.

The passage inherits truthfully the profile of the original theme (interlocked ascending fourths separated by descending thirds) and reprises its contrapuntal coda using altered intervals. The imitative series starts in the tenors (b. 1396) and migrates evenly to sopranos (b. 1397), basses (b. 1398) and altos (b. 1399), with guitars echoing the same thematic design at b. 1400-1401.

The non-interrelated pitches of choral entry (a for T, b for S, d for B and f# for A) produce a shifting polytonal spectrum, with equidistant points of harmonic interest arising at the engagement of the second fourth in the subject, where the instrumental bass changes position proceeding by descending fourths (G - D - A - E - B).

The harmonic sequence thus determined is: G maj 6 4 add 6 (G to D, b. 1397); D maj 6 4 add 7min (D to A, b. 1398); E 5 + D maj (A to E, b. 1399); B 9 5 + E maj (E to B, b. 1400).

At b. 1403 the tenors draw the last restatement of the subject, while the keyboards resume an active orchestral movement with combined arpeggios of quavers, and the episode settles on an extended G pedal.

1396 *Song of ascent of the wheels of Elohim:*

d] POLYCHORDAL CADENCES

Cadential and transitional points in the oratorio are often resolved using polychords (different harmonic degrees resounding in the components of the same chord) and added-note harmony (compound over-tones superimposed on a grounding note).

They tend to effect a "concordant oxymoron" and an "affirmative antithesis" in the logical flux of the composition. The procedure implements a sort of "contradiction in agreement", between aesthetically conflicting but logically connected elements, in a manner similar to the polychordal passages but limited to a circumscribed musical gesture.

1: Mov 3, b. 515-518. The contrapuntal development of a "cruciform" quadrant-like motif ends on a C maj add 11 9 6 chord, which comprises the major tonic (C) and minor supratonic (D), also outlining the second inversion of the subdominant F (c+a+f).

3: Mov 7, b. 1243-1250. The five-part contrapuntal episode, on the allegorical motto of the Seraphim of vegetation ("Honour to the living Emerald!"), settles on a series of plagal iterations (b. 1244-1249) which repeatedly exploits the decorative paradox of English cadence, also in inverted form (on minor chords).

The harmonic progress runs through Bb maj 4>3 (Db false relation in guitar 1), Eb min 7min, Bb min 4>3 (D false relation in guitar 2), Eb min, Bb maj 4>3 (Db false relation in synth 1), Eb maj 4>3 (*appoggiatura* in A and Gb false relation in synth 2), Bb maj 4>3 (Db false relation in S2), Eb maj 4>3 (Gb false relation in guitar 2) and Bb maj 9>8 and Eb maj.

The polyphonic interplay is finally deflected outside the modal boundaries, by intervening non-triadic overtones (b. 1249-1250), and implements a cadence that lands on a polychord [Bb maj 9 - Bb min 11 7 min - Bb maj 9 7maj - Bb maj 9 7maj 6].

The closing harmony - built by the SSA trio, the two guitars and the combined keyboards - is a Bb 5 + F maj + G 3min compound chord, that is the addition of the tonic's empty fifth, the major dominant and the sixth with its minor third.

1243 Honour to the living emerald! rall.

vi - ven - - - te, vi - ven - - - te, vi - ven - - - tel

- te, vi - ven - - - ven - te, vi - ven - - - te, vi - ven - - - tel

- ven - - - te, vi - ve - - - te, vi - ven - - - te, vi - ven - - - tel

Bb maj 4>3 Eb min 7 min Bb min 4>3 Eb min Bb maj 4>3 Eb maj 4>3 Bb maj 4>3 Eb maj 4>3 Bb maj 9>8 Eb maj Bb maj 9 Bb min 11 7 min Bb maj 9 7maj Bb maj 9 7maj 6

e] WORD-PAINTING EPISODES AND RECITATIVOS

As discussed in Par. 7.b, the musical rendition of an extended text requires a balance, between the geometric density of *concertato*/imitative episodes and the prosodic enunciation of solo singing and choral *recitativos*.

The strategy adopted in EE for the latter compositional circumstances exploits the expressive resources of extra-triadic harmony and artificial timbral registrations, for delivering the textual content in a descriptive and sometimes even theatrical manner, according to a process called *hypotyposis* in poetic rhetoric.

At times, the same purpose of vivid narration is implemented through vocal counterpoint as well, with concise polyphonic statements - more evocative than structural in character - permeated by quantitative symbolism and numeric analogies with the lyrics.

1: Mov 3, b.163-167. Tilting tread of continually modulating triplets, spread in the SATB choir across non-tonal transitions from G 11 augm 7maj 3 to Ab maj 6 add 9th.

The oscillating pattern renders to music the words "let us vibrate".

36
163

let us vibrate

e vi - bria - - - - - mo vi - bria - - - - - mo vi - bria - - - - - mo

e vi - bria - - - - - mo vi - bria - - - - - mo

e vi - bria - - - - - mo e vi - bria - - - - - mo

e vi - bria - - - - - mo e vi - bria - - - - - mo

2: Mov 3, b. 181-187. Statement of mission on the part of the Seraph of cometary water, first of four invocations in 6/4 treated like the heading letters of a set of Jeremiah's Lamentations (in Renaissance polyphony, after Ieremias 52 - Baruch 1, relating the 587 BC fall of Jerusalem under the Assyrians).

The foundational *Gamma-Ut* is employed at both symbolical and musical levels.

It is first initiated as a bare G by the basses, over synthesiser filigrees that conjure remote landscapes, and is then projected in the instrumental harmony, which underpins clearly embossed imitative points, aimed at representing the essentiality of origin.

38 181 First: to the Art of Waters.

This musical score is for a vocal ensemble and piano. It features five staves. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) are written in a 4-part setting. The lyrics are 'Pri - mo Prim - - - mo Pri - mo: all''. The piano accompaniment is in the bottom two staves. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and accidentals. There are several green highlights in the vocal parts and orange highlights in the piano accompaniment.

3: Mov 3, b. 230-238. Statement of mission of the part of the Seraph of planetary matter (soils and vegetation). The word "second" is musically embedded in the contrapuntal encounters between choral parts, both in the initial a+g and d+c clashes (of the SA and TB pairs) and in further ensuing dissonances, distributed along the imitative thread of a short ascending motif. The harmonic symbolisation of the text is strikingly re-asserted as a diminished octave (minor second) in the cadential D min/maj chord, with a piercing F+F# mixed third sung by S and T.

42 231 Second:

This musical score is for a vocal ensemble and piano. It features five staves. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) are written in a 4-part setting. The lyrics are 'Se - - - con - do Se - con - do Se - con - do:'. The piano accompaniment is in the bottom two staves. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and accidentals. There are several blue highlights in the vocal parts and orange highlights in the piano accompaniment.

4: Mov 3, b. 370-376. The mission of the fourth Seraph (solar wind and astronomy) is rendered with an SAT imitation, on an angular rising profile [5th - maj 3rd - maj 3rd] that outlines a rhetorical gesture of *anabasis* (ascent), also determining cursory dissonances on the peak notes ("stars"). In the process, a [B min - A maj - G maj 7maj] chordal sequence is produced, leading to a polychordal harmony of interlocked fifths [D + A + E + B].

The 6>5 suspension of the altos (b. 631), combined with the 4augm>3 *appoggiatura* in the soprano part, produces a transitory yet particularly vibrant diminished octave.

88 626

mf *ff* *espress.* *fierce rainbows* *ff* *f*

ar - co - ba - le - ni ar - co - ba - le - ni fu - rio - - - - si

ar - co - ba - le - ni fu - rio - - - - si

mo ar - co - ba - le - ni fu - rio - - - - si

ar - co - ba - le - ni ar - co - ba - le - ni fu - rio - - - - si

ar - co - ba - le - - - - ni fu - rio - - - - si

ar - co - ba - le - - - - ni fu - rio - si al

mf *f* *f*

The major part of the sentence ("Thus, in the small unity of my being I enumerate the

thinking objects") is sustained by a steady chordal descent of thirds [F#min - D maj - B min - G maj - E maj - C maj], which conveys an expressive atmosphere of speculation and awareness, eventually settling on an A pedal [A min - A + B min - D maj 6 4 - A min 7min 4 - A min 9 - A min 9 7min].

At b. 826 a theatrically effective *fermata* (the rhetorical figure of *aposiopesis*) lets resonate the ninth of A minor on the adjective "pensanti" (thinking). Next, the strategically delayed closure of the statement ("of the world") is marked by a descending fifth and the weakly assertive gesture of an A - E plagal transition, toward a cadential formula centred on E maj. Its encompassed harmonies [E maj - A maj 6 4 - E min - E min 9 - E maj 9>8 - E maj 7maj] underpin a vocal pedal in *diminuendo*, embellished by a guitar line with Tudor aspects in the melodic shaping and rhythmic pattern (see b. 828-828).

A particularly stylised device is the "broken" English cadence of b. 829-830, where the synthesiser suspends A over E maj while a passing dissonant G resounds in the guitar, with the resolution to G# postponed through the interposition of B in the guitar and F# in the keyboard.

The final chord is held and develops into an E maj 7maj 2 synthesiser drone, on the top of which an added F# min 6 trichord is stratified, forming a polytonal harmony with the compound ambits of the major tonic and minor supratonic.

816 $\text{♩} = 68$ *mp* *recitando...* Thus, in the small unity of my being, I enumerate the thinking objects
Co - sì, nel-la pic - co-la u-ni - tà del mio es - se - re, e - nu - me-ro gli og - get-ti pen-san - ti

826 *p* *ppp* *rall.* of the world.
del mon - do.
pp *mf* *mp* *ppp* *Red.* *8^{bb}*

8: Mov 7, b. 1055-1067. The combined forces of alto solo, choir, guitars and keyboards collaborate in constructing an episode of theatrical rendition of the text ["and (I) observe inhuman portents of War, and see valiant prodigies of Peace"], articulated in two symmetrical statements of opposite semantic value (War against Peace).

Both sentences comprise a solo declaration, enunciated on a repeated pattern of dotted

E 6min 5 9min (suspended singer's C clashes against the B+F tritone of guitar and synth 1)
- C# min 7min - E 5 4 - E 5 4augm - E 7maj 5 4augm 2maj - E 7maj 6maj 4augm 2maj.

The passage terminates in an effusive euphonic manner, with an [Ab maj 4>3 - Eb maj 6 - Bb maj 4>3] formula (b. 1065-1066), enriched by chromatic false-relations drawn by T1 and Guitar 2 (b. 1066). Alternate keyboard registrations throughout the episode - synthesiser pad and step sequencer (programmable arpeggiator) - help in conveying a sense of intellectual measurement of time, on the part of the singing character while she retrospectively assesses the human history, as if it were a landscape of memories.

[illegible]

f] SURFACE-STRUCTURE RELATIONSHIPS

The peculiar instrumentation employed in the oratorio tends to define a dialectic tension, between the emotive import of electronic instruments, whose expressive contribution acts prevalently on the musical surface, and the rationally ruled construct of the vocal ensemble's imitative polyphony, whose development remains at the core of the "orchestral" complex as a primary engine, gaining less frequently the perceptual primacy in the interaction with guitars and synthesisers.

The semantic function of *surface signal* is prevalently performed in EE by the guitars - for their inherent sonic weight also in the electronic embodiment of Midi controllers -, but is taken more occasionally by the keyboards as well, which in general provide instead the fundamental harmonic and rhythmic texture of the musical discourse.

1: Mov 2, b. 106-115. The guitars emerge over the polyphonic architecture, with alternate solo reprises of the "crystalline mercy" theme of b. 39: the resulting harmonic progress traverses a path of descending fourths [Bb > F > C > G > D > A].

The meaning of the musical structure is *amplificatio* (logical enhancement) of the concept of creation, through the hyperbole (morphological emphasis) of a marked surface gesture.

The musical score for measures 106-115 of Movement 2 shows a vocal ensemble (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a guitar. The vocal parts are in a polyphonic texture, with the lyrics 'Cre-a-to-re' repeated. The guitar part is highlighted in green, showing a series of descending fourths. The keyboard part is highlighted in orange, providing a harmonic foundation. The score is numbered 106 at the beginning and 23 at the end.

2: Mov 2, b. 133-140. A series of I-V-I and I-IV-I cadences, on the inverted "curvature" motif of b. 70, unfolds in the purview of G maj with the word "Elyon" (celestial) attached.

The guitars develop a separate interplay of melodic-harmonic riffs, in contrary motion relative to the choir and in surface position at perceptual level, while the keyboards sustain the process with a quasi-baroque *continuo* of combined arpeggios. Rhetorically, the episode functions as a final *peroratio* (recapitulation) of the second movement, effected as a cadential *coda* of contrapuntal and textural digressions on previous musical material.

4: Mov 7, b. 1356-1371. A fanfare announces the ignition of the motors in the Elohim's arks, introducing the final section of the oratorio with a double duet of distorted guitars and synthesised brass, engaged in alternate surface-signals.

An affirmative thematic onset with interconnected fifths (D-A and E-B) is stated by guitar 2 (b. 1356) in the "ceremonial" tone of D maj, and is imitated straight by keyboard 1 (b. 1357) across a propulsive switch of tempo from 70 to 100 minims.

The high-range *codas* of the motif project strong plastic signs on top of the aural scene, with eloquent pointed minims and descending crotchets.

Next, it ensues an imitation between keyboard 1 and guitar 1 (b. 1360-1368), on a version of the "crystalline mercy" *leitmotiv* of b. 39. While keyboard 2 provides a robust *continuo concertato* and guitar 2 draws a theme-related interplay (with a soaring surface mark at b. 1366-1368), the episode reaches a cadential module (b. 1369-1370: Bb maj - Gb min 6 - C maj 4>3) which leads to a C-G plagal movement, in preparation for the subsequent polyphonic episode. A stylised device of English cadence is passingly constructed by the guitars, on the 4>3 suspension over C maj at b. 1370.

The image displays a musical score for measures 1356-1371. It is divided into two systems. The first system starts at measure 1356 with a tempo marking of 70 minims, which changes to 100 minims at measure 1357. The score features four staves: Guitar 1 (top), Guitar 2 (second), Keyboard 1 (third), and Keyboard 2 (bottom). Dynamics include *mf* and *f*. A 'TO BRASS' instruction is present in the Keyboard 2 staff at measure 1357. The second system starts at measure 1364. It continues with the same instrumentation and includes a 'b:col' instruction in the Keyboard 2 staff at measure 1370. The score is written in 4/4 time and includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, accidentals, and slurs.

g] INSTRUMENTAL CONCERTATOS

The electro-acoustic quartet is generally destined in EE to the supporting role of virtual ensemble with two soloists. In this capacity, it provides a gamut of pseudo-orchestral tones that fulfill the various roles of harmonic section (like, by analogy, strings, reeds and brass), rhythmic-chordal texture and *continuo* consort with *concertanti* instruments.

Nevertheless, important and specific passages are reserved to instruments in the oratorio, either as interludes between vocal episodes, setting an expressive atmosphere and a narrative mood, or at the liminal points (beginning/end) of a movement.

This serves the purpose of highlighting every now and then the specific idiomatic and timbral qualities of the instruments, besides affording a better dynamic balance to the musical development of the work, and some respite from the vocal promise to the singers.

1: Mov 1, b. 5-9. Guitar lines emerge over a keyboard progress, based on a Dorian G scale starting from the *Gamma-Ut*. The steps of the combined guitar parts outline themselves a [g-g] Dorian mode, through clashing seconds that produce growth of expressive tension.

The musical score for Mov 1, b. 5-9, is presented in four staves. The top two staves are for Guitar 1 and Guitar 2, both in treble clef. The bottom two staves are for Synth 1 and Synth 2, both in bass clef. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The guitar parts feature melodic lines with some notes marked in red. The synth parts provide a harmonic and rhythmic foundation, with Synth 1 including a section marked *8va* (octave up). Dynamics include *mf* (mezzo-forte) for the guitars. The score shows a progression of chords and melodic fragments across the measures.

2: Mov 1, b. 15-22. Imitative counterpoint of the guitars on two contrasting modal subjects, within a chromatic framework.

The musical structure implements a dialectic between slower and faster cosmic substances, respectively cometary water + planetary matter and stellar plasma + solar wind, represented by the different metric and motional qualities of themes 1 and 2.

15 Seq. Bass 2 stops 5

Guitar 1 *f* A

Guitar 2 *f* A

Synth 2 *mf*

18 B Synt Arp. starts B

3: Mov 1, b. 27-28: modern variant of a XIV century cadence, with double leading tone on the IV and VII degrees, constructed through parallel fourths (C#-F#; D#-G#; E-A). The device aims at conjuring “primordality” in a contemporary musical context.

4: Mov 4, b. 519-528. The opening of the fourth movement employs instrumental registrations of artificial character: in keyboard 1 a vitreous timbre (with the amplitude envelope of an organ), in keyboard 2 a pseudo-vocal pad (with enhancement of vowels-related spectral regions, through formant filtering), in the guitars synthesiser solo tones.

The approach of the Elohim from deep space is conjured by the glassy quality of superimposed fifths and fourths. Building up from the lonely ringing of a C#, in the "spiritual" time signature of 9/2 (*Tempus Perfectum cum Prolatione Perfecta*), the aural signature of the creation unfurls abstract harmonics at b. 522, as a seven-fold chain of fifths based on *Gamma-Ut* [G#D+A+E+B+F#+G#].

The guitars contribute to the soundscape with an interplay of slow sustained lines, and the chordal framework moves through bell-sounding aggregates, intermingling series of fifths and fourths: [A+E+B+F#+C#]+[A+D+G+] at b. 524 and [D+A+E+B+F#+A+D+G] at b. 526.

The electronic consort delivers overall a colour of resonating metal (alien and otherworldly), exploiting a synergy of musical grammar and sonic resources for transcending the boundaries of harmony, in the domain of timbral expression.

Synth 1 implements a rhetorical process of *exordium* (opening) at b. 525, sketching a motif soon to be developed by the choir.

519 $\text{♩} = 90$

Gt 1

Gt 2

Sy 1

Sy 2

pp *p* *mf* *p*

E+B+F#+C# (5+5+5)

G#D+A+E+B+F#+C#+G# (5+5+5+5+5+5+5: seven 5ths)

A+E+B+F#+C# (5+5+5+5: four 5ths) and A+D+G (4+4: two fourths)

D+A+E+B+F# (5+5+5+5: four 5ths) and A+D+G (4+4: two fourths)

5: Mov 7, b. 1314-1321. The transitional episode before the final farewell of the female character is a tight *concertato*, of complementary melodic shapes and rhythmic patterns from the two pairs that form the electro-acoustic quartet. The passage conveys a sense of spacious flight and fast changing starscapes, from the viewpoint of the four Seraphim approaching planet Earth. The dynamic effect of ramping progression is afforded by antiphonal responses of the guitars, over two modulating patterns and two larger cadential formulas, that bring to the starting Gb maj chord of the subsequent aria.

The harmonic framework is thus organised:

- b. 1314-1316. I maj - Vmaj 6 - VII mel maj - Vmin 6 (in Gb, Ab and Bb);
- b. 1317-1318. I maj - IV min 6 - V 7dom - III min 6 (in C and Bb);
- b. 1319. Ab maj 4>3 - Fb/E maj - Gb maj 4>3 - Db maj 4>3;
- b. 1320. A maj 7maj - C# min - G# min 6 - B maj 4>3 (leading to F# maj).

1314

Chord chart below the score:

Gb maj V maj 6 Ab maj Bb maj C maj IV min 6 Bb maj Ab maj 4>3 Fb/E maj 4>3 Gb maj 4>3 Db maj 4>3 Amaj 7maj C# min G# min 6 B maj 4>3
 VII mel maj V min 6 V 7dom III min 6
 -----> F#/Gb maj

11. LOGISTIC AND TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR PERFORMANCE

EE involves a SATTB vocal ensemble with *divisi* (up to 16-part SATB₁₂₃₄), of 32 mixed singers, with either male or female altos (possibly a mixture of the two, which has proven to be optimal in tone and volume). Seven SS, Ms, AA, T and B soloists, who also sing in the choir, are necessary for the arias and *ariosos* of Mov III, V, VI and VII.

In detail, the choral line-up consists of:

8 sopranos + 8 altos + 4 first tenors + 4 second tenors + 4 first basses + 4 second basses = 32

Undersizing or exceeding this geometry of singing personnel is neither recommendable nor technically possible, due to the numbers implied by the score, the substantial intellectual and vocal commitment required, and the overall balance of the ensemble in relationship with the electro-acoustic quartet.

The instrumental electronic consort comprises:

- Two keyboardists playing computer-generated virtual synthesizers (on a laptop or desktop unit) through Midi master-keyboards. The synthesiser engines and related sound patches are surveyed in detail in the following paragraph, and consist mainly of algorithmic replicas of analogue sonorities, chosen for their earnestly artificial and dynamically responsive quality, with respect to other methods of digital synthesis.

- Two guitarists playing a Roland GR-55 guitar synthesizer interface, through an electric instrument equipped with an hexaphonic Midi pick-up (like Roland GK-3).

This arrangement affords the control of a dedicated synthesizer module through a conventional electric guitar. The instrumental techniques and timbral possibilities range from overtly synthetic sonorities to more conventional sounds of treated guitar (like feedback/distortion and equalised natural tone with sound effects).

The suggested GR-55 patches are listed in the following paragraph.

With regards to the employment of the e-bow tool, the considerable technical promise entailed by changes of string might be overcome with an alternative solution, depending on the abilities and preferences of the guitarist. In fact, a convincing and sonically equivalent result can be obtained driving the Soniccouture *eBOW Guitar* (sampled library that runs in NI Kontakt) through the GR-55 Midi Out.

The same connection must be used to control the Camel Audio *Alchemy* plucked tones, used in the last section of Mov IV.

The technological and logistic resources for the performance further entail:

32 audio-quality headset microphones with radio receivers and pre-amplifiers, a mixing console with at least 4 stereo outputs and 40 mono tracks (4 stereo inputs for the instruments and 32 mono inputs for the choir), a 40 inputs AD/DA audio converters

system (in case of digital live recording) and eight full-range 3-way/5-way loudspeakers of appropriate power, for surround sound diffusion in four stereo pairs.

For a non-live recording session, the taking of the vocal sound could be made either through individual microphones, as proposed for the performance, or - in a more traditional fashion - with 8 stereo condenser mics, like Shure KSM 137 or KSM 141 (2 of general acoustic perspective and 6 for the SATTB sections).

Regarding the stage dress of the performance, it would be visually effective to have the four ranges of the choir (SATB) wearing a unified clothing model for man and women (respectively trousers with mandarin-collared shirt and trousers with blouse), with a colour scheme related to the elemental nature of the four seraphim, as in the oratorio's general graphic code.

In this way - with sopranos in light blue, altos in sage green, tenors in orange and basses in pearl grey (for respectively comets/water, planets/earth, stars/fire and solar wind/air) -, there would be a further symbolical relationship between the visual layout of the vocal ensemble and the content of the music.

Moreover, this kind of attire would avoid that the soloists, detached from the choir at given moments, be dressed in an optically discordant fashion while they perform in the ensemble. A simple and practical clothing accessory for the seven characters might include coloured spectacles for the men (of modern minimalist shape) and a silk foulard for the women, in both cases with the same shade of their dress.

As for the other musicians on stage, the four Seraphim-instrumentalists could wear the same model as the singers but in a vivid crimson red, while the conductor would be similarly dressed in bright blue (symbolising the background sky, and thus the unifying element), with jacket over the shirt.

12. SUMMARY OF GUITAR, SYNTHESIZER AND SEQUENCER TONES

12.a: Guitar tones. The Midi registrations comprise Camel Audio *Alchemy* (*Guitar Mutations* library presets showed here) and the following Roland GR-55 patches, to be assigned by the composer. Category Lead: 01-3, 03-01, 03-2, 03-3, 05-2, 05-3, 06-01, 14-1, 14-3.

Guitar Synthesiser arpeggio 1: A



Guitar Synthesiser arpeggio 2: A



12.b: Synthesiser tones

V = Native Instruments *Vintage Machines MKII* (Kontakt 5). **W** = *SuperWave P8* (freeware VST).

P = U.he *Podolski* (freeware VST). **R** = Native Instruments *Prism* (Reaktor 5).

S = *Synth 1* (freeware VST). **F** = *Tone2 Firebird 2* (freeware VST).

Synth 1 Patch 1 - Layer 1: V



Synth 1 Patch 1 - Layer 2: V



Synth 2 Patch 1 - Layer 1: V



Synth 2 Patch 1 - Layer 2: V



Synth 1 Patch 2: W



Synth 2 Patch 2: W



Synth 1 Patch 3: V



Synth 2 Patch 3: V



Synth 1 Patch 5: V



Synth 2 Patch 5: V



Synth 1 Patch 6: V



Synth 2 Patch 6: V



Synth 1 Patch 7: P - sound



Synth 1 Patch 7: P - arpeggio [a sine curve modulates phase distortion and FM amount]



Synth 2 Patch 7: P - sound



Synth 2 Patch 7: P - arpeggio [a sine curve modulates phase distortion and FM amount]



Note length for 16 steps ($q = 1/8$; $sq = 1/16$):

Synth 1 [sq q q sq; q q sq sq; sq sq sq q; sq sq sq sq]. Synth 2 [sq for all 16 steps]

Gate time (played proportion of the note length, 0-5):

Synth 1 [2 3 3 2; 3 3 2 2; 2 2 2 3; 2 2 2 2]. Synth 2 [3 for all 16 steps]

Individual Transposition of the steps (in semitones):

Synth 1 [12 5 7 5; 0 -7 -5 -7; -12 -5 -7 -12; 0 5 7 5]

Synth 2 [-12 -7 -5 -7; 0 5 7 0; 12 5 7 5; 0 -7 -5 0]

Absolute intervals of the steps, relative to the (s) gate note (u=upper and d=lower octaves):

Synth 1 [u8 u4 u5 u4; s d4 d5 d4; d8 d5 d4 d8; s u4 u5 u5]

Synth 2 [d8 d4 d5 d4; s u4 u5 s; u8 u4 u5 u4; s d4 d5 s]

Synth 1 Patch 8: V



Synth 2 Patch 8: V



Synth 1 Patch 9: V



Synth 1 Brass: V



Synth 2 Brass: V



Synth Solo 1: V



Synth Solo 2: V



Synth Bells 1: R



Synth Bells 2: R

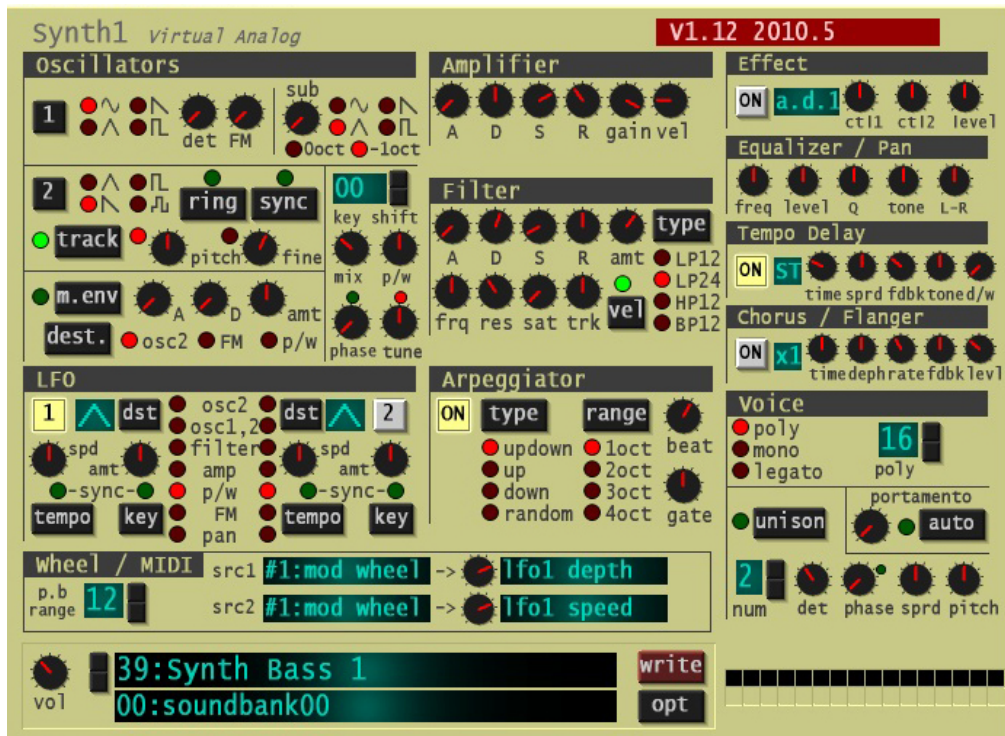


12.c: Sequenced bass tones

S = *Synth 1* (freeware VST)

V = Native Instruments *Vintage Machines MKII* (Kontakt 5)

Bass Seq. 1: S



Bass Seq. 2: F



Bass Seq. 3: V – sound



Bass Seq. 3: V – arp.



Bass Seq. 4: V – sound



Bass Seq. 4: V – arp



12.d: Arpeggiator tones

V = Native Instruments *Vintage Machines MKII* (Kontakt 5)

Arpeggiator 1: V – sound



Arpeggiator 1: V – arp.



Arpeggiator 2 - Layer 1: V – sound



Arpeggiator 2 - Layer 1: V – arp.



Arpeggiator 2 - Layer 2: V – sound



Arpeggiator 2 - Layer 2: V – arp.



Arpeggiator 3: V – sound



Arpeggiator 3: V – arp.



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