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Elisabetta Brusa: Fables, Suite Grotesque, Requiescat, Adagio, Firelights

No.439

Born in Milan, Italy, in 1954, **Elisabetta Brusa** started composing before she was 5 and created over 30 piano pieces and a string quintet (kept by memory through the years) before starting Composition studies at the Conservatorio of Milan with Bruno Bettinelli, teacher of Claudio Abbado, Riccardo Muti, Riccardo Chailly, Maurizio Pollini, and Uto Ughi. She graduated with Azio Corghi in 1980 with a Diploma in Composition. From 1976 to 1981 she followed the composition courses at Dartington Hall, Great Britain, held by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, and from 1978 to 1985 she took periodic lessons from Hans Keller in London.

The composer reflects on her works:

"**Firelights** (1992-1993), for large orchestra, is a free fantasy inspired by various masterpieces written throughout the centuries for festive events such as fireworks, dances, mythological stories, chimerical and wild scenes and also phantasmagoric images and atmospheres. The work is dedicated to the conductor Fabio Mastrangelo.

Adagio (1996), for string orchestra, is a freely structured composition in a single movement inspired by well-known masterpieces such as those of Albinoni, Mahler (Adagietto), Rodrigo and Barber. Independent of a pre-established form (sonata or suite), it originated as an autonomous composition in which neo-tonal techniques are amalgamated with contrapuntal techniques, and yet it follows a certain formal tradition and an expressive style which have distinguished the numerous Adagios of the past.

Suite Grotesque (1986), for orchestra, consists of four free fantasy movements connected to one another by a grotesque atmosphere full of unexpected timbral and structural effects that create a phantasmagoric aura within a neo-tonal style. They vary in character, however, and reflect typical movements of other established musical forms. The first is a domineering and powerful Scherzo, the second a dark, sinister and evanescent Adagio, the third an Andante pervaded by an insinuatingly gentle and melodious atmosphere and the fourth is a vigorous and caricatural Finale. The first and third movements have similar themes, as do the second and the fourth. This last movement contains all the themes of the Suite, particularly in the final fugato, where they are presented in quadruple counterpoint. They have the same tonal centre - E - in common.

Favole (Fables) (1982-1983), for orchestra, is a work for young people and the not so young, with a little philosophy, some cultural tradition and a pinch of

ironic humour, but above all a great deal of fantasy and liberty in the wake of the literary texts that inspired them. The work was dedicated to my godson Matteo on the occasion of his birth!"



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Elisabetta
BRUSA

Orchestral Works

Firelights

Adagio

Wedding Song

Requiescat

Suite Grotesque

Favole

**National Symphony
Orchestra of Ukraine**

Fabio Mastrangelo

Music Composed by Elisabetta Brusa
Played by the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine
Conducted by Fabio Mastrangelo

"Elisabetta Brusa studied at the Milan Conservatory graduating in 1980. Later she followed composition courses at the Dartington Summer School of Music and at the Tanglewood Music Centre. She also studied with Hans Keller whom she considers her "spiritual enlightener and mentor" and to whose memory she dedicated her orchestral work Requiescat.

The earliest work here, Favole, completed in 1983, "is a work for young people, and the not so young". It is based on several well-known fables by Aesop, Andersen, La Fontaine and

Perrault. This suite of seven short, neatly characterised movements is a good example of Brusa's happy music making and remarkable orchestral mastery. Colourfully scored and superbly crafted music it is in turn serious and humorous, tender and mildly ironic, tuneful and mildly dissonant. This is the sort of work that could and should be as popular with young (and not so young) audiences as the celebrated Peter and the Wolf or L'Histoire de Babar.

Much of the same could be said of the Suite Grotesque of 1986, though the music is appropriately more ironic and whimsical. Firelights and Wedding Song are somewhat lighter in mood, and the former is again a brilliant orchestral showpiece in much the same vein as Stravinsky's Fireworks.

Both Adagio for strings completed in 1996 and Requiescat of 1994 are altogether more serious in intent. The beautiful Adagio is overtly a near-cousin of Barber's ubiquitous similarly titled piece. The writing for strings is again remarkably assured. As already mentioned, Requiescat is dedicated to the memory of Hans Keller. This is a deeply-felt, often moving elegy (it ends with a treble voice softly singing the words Requiescat in pace); and, no doubt, the major work here.

Elisabetta Brusa's music, which was new to me, is fairly traditional, colourfully scored, mildly dissonant, in a freely tonal manner. As such, it is quite accessible, often entertaining and often quite attractive. No great masterpieces here, maybe, but honest and sincere music making that repays repeated hearings, especially in fine performances and recording such as these."

Hubert Culot, Musicweb International



The Milanese composer, Elisabetta Brusa, has described her music as expressing "a multitude of widely differing musical and personal feelings and states of minds, with messages of faith and hope for a positive and peaceful future at a time of uncertainty and anxiety". Embodying a neo-tonal language and technique, the six compositions on this second disc of the orchestral works of Elisabetta Brusa once again demonstrate the composer's fascination with fabulistic literary texts as a source of inspiration, as in *Favole* (Fables), originally written for a young public but greatly enjoyed by all. Other highlights of this collection include *Requiescat*, a freely structured musical prayer inspired by the spiritual aura of many famous Requiems and a haunting *Adagio* for strings.

**Elisabetta
BRUSA**
(b. 1954)

1 Firelights	8:00	Favole	18:07
2 Adagio	13:19	9 The Donkey in the Lion's Skin	1:51
3 Wedding Song	4:42	10 The Real Nightingale and the Mechanical One	4:13
4 Requiescat	16:34	11 The Ant and the Grasshopper	2:13
Suite Grotesque	15:02	12 The Wolf and the Lamb	3:00
5 Scherzo	2:48	13 The Ugly Duckling	2:44
6 Adagio	4:11	14 The Philosophical Fly	1:22
7 Andante	3:44	15 Puss in Boots	2:45
8 Finale	4:19		

National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine
Fabio Mastrangelo

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 Producer: Alexander Hornostai • Engineer: Andrij Mokrytsky
 Editing: Viacheslav Zhdanov & Andrij Mokrytsky • Booklet Notes: Elisabetta Brusa
 Cover Picture: *The Four Seasons* by Ambrgio Brusa (pencil and ink on paper, 1981)

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